

[166: Dr. Jill interviews Dr. Emily Jamea on Sexual Intimacy & Flow States for Optimizing your Health](#)

Dr. Jill Carnahan 0:12

Well, hello, everybody. Welcome to another episode of Dr. Jill Live. As always, you're in for a real treat today. I have a guest. I met Emily in Costa Rica, where we were both speaking to an amazing group of individuals down there. One of the things we really, really connected on was flow states. But today, you're in for an extra special treat because we're going to dive into sexual relationships, intimacy, and flow states and how this is so critical—as we were just talking before we got on—to your overall health.

Dr. Jill Carnahan 0:43

I just want to mention that if you're a mom and you have little kids around, we're talking about sex today so you might want to put on your headphones or listen to this privately. I'm not sure where we'll go but I just want to give that warning in case you're the mom in the kitchen with all your little kids listening as well today. Emily, let me introduce Dr. Emily. And let me make sure I say your last name correctly.

Dr. Emily Jamea 1:03

Jamea.

Dr. Jill Carnahan 1:04

Okay, Jamea. Dr. Emily Jamea is a sex and relationship therapist based in Houston, Texas. With over 15 years of experience, she's helped thousands of people create connection and cultivate passion. When she's not seeing clients, Emily conducts academic research in the area of optimal sexual experiences and serves as an expert speaker for both public and private events. Her expertise has been featured in Oprah Magazine, CNN, USA Today, the BBC, NBC, CBS, Men's Fitness, Women's Health, and more. She hosts the popular *Love & Libido* podcast, writes a column for Healthy Women and Psychology Today, and posts all across the social media channels—@DrEmilyJamea. So be sure to follow her on social media. Wherever you're listening to this, you'll find links to her website and everything else. Welcome, Emily. I am so excited about our topic today!

Dr. Emily Jamea 1:51

Thank you, Dr. Jill. I'm so thrilled to be here with you today and to connect after seeing you in Costa Rica! It feels like it's been ages ago, but it was only a few months back. I feel we connected and bonded over flow state, and I cannot wait to talk to you about that more today.

Dr. Jill Carnahan 2:08

Yes, thank you for taking your time and for your expertise. I really feel what I told you right before we got started—whether people know it or not—intimacy and sexual connection is a foundation of health. My book was about environmental toxicity and I was like, "Wait, relationships are critical to overall health," and I actually started talking about relational toxicity. It's one of those environmental toxins. So I want to frame this today because, no matter who you are, whether you're single in a partnership or in a long-term committed relationship, this topic does matter to your overall health. And whether it's actual intimacy in friendships or sexual health in your partnership, these interactions, of which Dr. Emily is an absolute expert, are critical to your health. Before we dive into that, I want to know your background. How did you get into this work? Give us a little bit about your story.

Dr. Emily Jamea 2:59

Sure. So there's actually a little bit of a medical component to this story. My dad is an OB-GYN. So growing up for us, sex was never taboo. It was not a big deal. I learned about how babies were made at a very young age. However, I was growing up in Southeast Tennessee in a small town [that was] very conservative. It quickly became apparent to me that it was a taboo topic for a lot of my friends. So from a very young age, I realized that I was the person that they would come to to maybe confess something or ask a question. It was just something I was always comfortable talking about, and it saddened me that most people felt differently. So I do feel like getting into this field was more of a calling; I felt called to it.

Dr. Emily Jamea 3:52

Fast forward: I was studying at the University of Texas. I was majoring in psychology, and I took a human sexuality elective. I knew I wanted to specialize in something. But as soon as I took that class, I was like, "This is it." I just see sexuality as such an interesting window into the psyche. You can learn so much about a person and their relationship by finding out about how they express themselves

sexually. And then I found out that there was a huge need for it. By then, I had moved back to Houston, which is a city of 4 million people. And there were like three certified sex therapists in Houston. And they were busy; they were booked. So I was like, "Okay, there's a market for this. I love it."

Dr. Jill Carnahan 4:39

People don't want to talk about it, but they do want to talk about it.

Dr. Emily Jamea 4:41

Exactly. They need help with it. So that's really how I got into it. And I feel so lucky to do this work. I find it so fulfilling and meaningful to help people discover this part of themselves that I see as being so foundationally human and natural. But people still struggle with feeling like it's wrong, dirty, or bad. Or they just don't prioritize it; they don't see the value in it. So to help people get in touch with that elemental part of themselves, I think, is really cool. So I feel very lucky.

Dr. Jill 5:19

I love that. And we need people like you, Dr. Emily. Like I said, what I realized in a lot of my patients [is that] I can do the environmental toxic load, the infectious burden, and the autoimmunity. And we're doing all this work. This parallels with my own life because I did all that work, but then I was in a toxic relationship for quite a few years. What I realized is that looking back over my cancer and Crohn's and some of those things, some of those pieces had way more to do with my relationships and my difficulty with expressing my needs or intimacy or even asking for what I needed, which is a lot about sexual expression. Can we express to our partner, "This is what I need from you"?—whether it's just helping with dishes or in the bedroom.

Dr. Jill 6:01

So let's dive into what you see. And like I told you before, my audience is mostly women, but I have a lot of men listening too so we can talk to both sides. But what are the most common things that you see people asking about that they want to know for deeper connection and intimacy?

Dr. Emily Jamea 6:16

Yes. I'll start by echoing your point that the health of our relationship has a direct impact on our physical health. We have robust research looking at the link between healthy relationships and not only feeling like one's life is meaningful and fulfilling but also our physical health. If you take couples—where maybe half of the group is in unhealthy relationships or single and the other half is in healthy, loving relationships—and you spray the cold virus into their noses, the people who are in unhealthy relationships have a way higher chance of actually catching the cold compared with people who are in healthy relationships. So it's good for our immune system—feeling loved and connected and having a secure attachment with our partner. We have a lower risk of cardiovascular disease. We tend to live longer. We have stronger immune systems. So it is really, really important.

Dr. Emily Jamea 7:19

I think that we live in a world that, despite all the social connections, is more disconnected than ever before. A lot of people can't even count on one hand how many close friendships they have, let alone romantic relationships. So it's super important. It's something that we are hardwired to have. And we know from the research that feeling sexually fulfilled and connected is an essential component of romantic relationships. The two go hand in hand. In fact, how sexually satisfied you are in your relationship can be a stronger predictor of how happy you are on the romantic emotional side than the reverse. So a lot of times, people think that you have to have a great relationship in order to have a great sex life. And there's truth in that statement. But if the sex is bad, your relationship is definitely going to suffer too. So I think it's an aspect of relationships that people don't pay enough attention to.

Dr. Emily Jamea 8:27

So to answer your question about what kinds of things I see, I would say the majority of the clients I work with are couples dealing with a discrepancy in sexual desire or maybe just a lost sexual connection altogether. Maybe one person wants sex more than the other or there's someone in the relationship who just feels disconnected from their sexuality; they're struggling to connect. And they realize that it's not just sexual; it's emotional too. The two go hand in hand. So that's primarily what I see. I also work with couples who are dealing with different kinds of sexual problems. Maybe they have difficulty having an orgasm or have erectile

dysfunction or I help couples recover from things like relationship betrayal and fidelity, and those sorts of things. So I'm all over the place.

Dr. Jill 9:13

Well, let's start with some of the first things you mentioned, which I think are so practical with differences in sexual desire between partners. The second thing you mentioned is a lack of desire in general, like a lack of libido. I think that relates to our crazy modern world. So we can go into that. But maybe we can touch on both topics. Where would you start with the partners in counseling them about what kinds of things they could start to do differently or think differently?

Dr. Emily Jamea 9:38

Yes. Well, I always like to look at what's going into one person feeling disconnected from their sexuality and what's going into another person feeling like they have a robust sexual appetite. A lot of times, people are quick to pathologize their lower-desire partner. But on the flip side, someone may have a really high desire because they're over-relying on sex as a coping skill, as an outlet, or to feel secure in their relationship. So I'm always playing detective at first to see what's going on in the relationship dynamic. Obviously, if there is relationship conflict or something like that, that has to be addressed.

Dr. Emily Jamea 10:18

But I think for women in particular, there is this idea that women just want emotional connection and men just want a sexual connection. From a very early age, we split sex and emotion. And the truth is, they are one and the same. I think that sexual connection is the ultimate form of romantic and emotional connection. In the majority of couples who come in with a discrepancy in desire, it's the male partner who has a higher desire. Not as much as people think. I would say it's maybe like a 60/40 split.

Dr. Emily Jamea 11:02

I talk to him about his higher desire and I have never heard someone say, "I just want to have sex with my partner to get off." It's not just about the physical release. They see sex as an opportunity for emotional intimacy, but they don't know how to communicate that so their partner doesn't hear it. They assume they just want to get laid, but that's not what it's about. So to answer your question a bit more

succinctly, a lot of times it starts with a reframing of what the sexual experience is meant to be and helping them understand that yes, there is a physical element to it, but it is by and large an emotional and relational experience as well.

Dr. Jill 11:51

Yes, that makes a lot of sense. One thing I'm hearing as you're talking—you didn't say outright, but I'm sure it's there—it feels like in my experience talking to clients and patients as well, that foundation of trust is such a core thing, right? Which is why you have to deal with it if there has been a betrayal or whatever. And just in my experience—I've been married, single, and everything in between—that trust is the core. I can be completely sexually free, but only when there's massive trust between my partner and me. Would you say that's a piece that comes up?—because that feels like one of the underlying things.

Dr. Emily Jamea 12:25

Totally, totally. I think this is where attachment theory comes into play. For anyone listening who hasn't heard about that, it's not really a theory anymore. This is backed up by a ton of hard evidence. But we can attach or relate to our partners in a few different ways. If we have a secure attachment, it means that we feel safe and have healthy intimacy. We trust that they love us and we love them. We can open up to them about things. If we have an anxious style of attachment, that means we may feel insecure in our relationship; we don't believe that our partner may love us as much as we love them.

Dr. Emily Jamea 13:04

People who have a more avoidant style of attachment have a hard time with emotional intimacy and closeness so there's a lot of distance in the relationship. And people who have the greatest levels of sexual satisfaction are those who have a really secure attachment. I always give the analogy that it's only when you trust that you're securely strapped into the rollercoaster that you can let go and enjoy the ride. If you feel insecure, if there is a lack of trust, if there's instability or relationship conflict, if there's resentment, those sorts of things are going to take a toll on how fully you can express yourself in the bedroom, for sure.

Dr. Jill 13:46

Oh, I love attachment work. That was profound. I went through a divorce. My ex-husband and I are now friends. We talk openly about what we did well and what we didn't do well. We are both fairly avoidant, so we lived separate lives. We didn't really know how to express our needs, like we were saying. So speaking of that again, just from my experience, expressing needs for men and women can be difficult. Deep down, some people don't know what they need. But many people know what they might want or need. But the difficulty comes in expressing a need, right? Where do you go with that question with your clients, as far as how do you practice expressing those needs in the bedroom?

Dr. Emily Jamea 14:27

I'm going to take a step back. I think that for women in particular—since you said the majority of your listeners are women, I want to make sure that they hear this message—you ask a woman what she needs and she can probably tell you what everybody else needs. And I'm not talking about a sexual need. I'm just talking about life and emotional—

Dr. Jill 14:47

Baby, the dog, and...

Dr. Emily Jamea 14:27

Exactly, yes. But you ask her what she needs, let alone what she wants, she probably can't even identify that. What I always tell people is that you cannot separate your sexuality from your individuality. Everything that makes you who you are is going to come out in the way you express yourself sexually. I say that because I think a lot of women, especially through motherhood, kind of disconnect from themselves. There's such a shift in identity and almost a loss of sense of self. So I think it's important to take a more holistic look at: Who am I and what do I want outside the bedroom? Once I have a clear picture of that, I can identify and express what I want inside the bedroom.

Dr. Emily Jamea 15:42

Sometimes you don't know what you don't know. So I think that it's important to go into sexual experiences with a growth-oriented mindset, a sense of almost childlike wonderment, and a willingness to play. A lot of times people are like, "Well, how do I do" this, that, or the other "without it feeling awkward?" And I'm like: "You don't.

You just push through the awkwardness and you keep doing it until it doesn't feel awkward anymore." But for some reason, people think that great sex should happen right off the bat. And I'm like, "We don't think that way about anything else in life." But we have this idea that sex should be picture-perfect without any effort, and it just doesn't work like that.

Dr. Emily Jamea 16:28

So there's a lot of trial and error that comes with great sexual experiences. And when you talk to couples who've sustained high levels of satisfaction over the course of long-term relationships, they talk about how they're experimental, and they don't let little hiccups or snafus totally derail them. They see it as an opportunity to make adjustments or try something new. So I do think that mindset is a big piece of the puzzle.

Dr. Jill (pre-recording) 16:58

Hey, everybody. I just stopped by to let you know that my new book, *Unexpected: Finding Resilience through Functional Medicine, Science, and Faith*, is now available for order wherever you purchase books. In this book, I share my own journey of overcoming a life-threatening illness and the tools, tips, tricks, hope, and resilience I found along the way. This book includes practical advice for things like cancer and Crohn's disease and other autoimmune conditions, infections like Lyme or Epstein-Barr, and mold- and biotoxin-related illnesses. What I really hope is that as you read this book, you find transformational wisdom for health and healing. If you want to get your own copy, stop by ReadUnexpected.com. There, you can also collect your free bonuses. So grab your copy today and begin your own transformational journey through functional medicine and finding resilience.

Dr. Jill 17:54

I love that you mention play. To me, it's the play, the creativity, and all of that goes together. In my mind, sexual energy—I'm not talking [about] sexual expression in the bedroom; my sexual energy, your sexual energy—is part of our creativity. It's part of a force in the world to be a light, to be a driving force, and to be passionate about what we do. To me, they're all completely intertwined, which is why I love talking about this today. So [inaudible]. And we can talk about flow in a minute. But it all makes sense because I've learned in writing my book—I know you're writing

yours now and I can't wait till it comes out so we can share it—that creativity and stuff come from the same energy. Doesn't it?

Dr. Emily Jamea 18:34

Absolutely. And I'll say to kind of step back a little bit on the point I just made: While I don't think that great sex is going to happen automatically, I do believe that we have all the tools innate within us. You look at any child and they are very much embodied, they are curious, they are playful, they push the boundaries, they explore, and they do all of those things. But as soon as we start growing and maturing, I think just due to our educational system and the influence of society and culture, we kind of lose touch with all of that and become indoctrinated. What I always tell my clients is that I'm not trying to change who you are essentially or to make you something that you're not. I'm trying to help you get back in touch with things that are already there inside that you've just become disconnected with over the years.

Dr. Jill 19:29

Yes, gosh, I love that because it's so true. Even children are sexually exploratory, right? It's only the parents, the grandparents, and the people around them who are like: "Oh, don't do that. That's wrong." They label them, and they're just curious about their bodies.

Dr. Emily Jamea 19:42

Yes. And gender socialization from such an early age. When a little boy touches his penis, it's like: "Oh, how cute! He found his penis." But then a little girl touches herself and it's like, "Don't touch yourself there." It's like, "What is the difference?" So I think we have to be very mindful that a lot of times we socialize women to feel ashamed about their bodies and bad about sex and men are celebrated for it, and that creates a lot of problems for people.

Dr. Jill 20:11

I love that you share that because, medically, it's so true. And I love your background. It makes so much sense in how it frames you. You'll be like, "This is just biology," right? And I feel the same way, which is why I'm talking [about it] on my show because my show is mostly about health. This is such a core part of your

health—your relationships, your intimacy, and your ability to express yourself sexually.

Dr. Jill 20:33

Let's shift to flow, because that was where we really connected. I love flow. I'd love to hear your definition—people have heard me talk about it a lot—and why it's integral to sexual expression and why you can experience flow through sex. Let's talk a little bit about flow. What is it?

Dr. Emily Jamea 20:48

I would love to. So I'll tell you a little bit about how I connected the dots with flow and sex. I've been working as a sex and relationship therapist for over 15 years. As I said, a lot of times couples come in with low desire, ED, or things like that, and I was able to help them get better. I could help someone learn how to get an erection again, learn how to have more regular orgasms or boost their desire. But I noticed that after a while, couples would come back and they'd be kind of like: "What more? Like, what else can we do? How can we take things to the next level?"

Dr. Emily Jamea 21:25

They would say things like, "I want to have sex like I see in the movies." And I was always so quick to say: "Those are just actors. It's Hollywood. It's scripted." But on the other hand, I kind of knew what they meant. They wanted sex that felt effortless, that put them in the zone, and that they felt totally absorbed and connected. I kind of had a lightbulb moment. I was like: "What they're wanting is to experience a flow state during sex. That's what they're describing."

Dr. Emily Jamea 21:55

At first, I was like: "I feel like that kind of connection is just something some people are lucky to have, and either you have it or you don't. Maybe these people should just be happy with the good enough sex they have and not necessarily want for more." So I turned to the academic literature, and I could not find a single article that looked at the relationship between flow state and sex. I was like: "What?! How is there nothing here?" I mean, people talk about transcendence and things like that, but no quantitative empirical data was looking specifically at the components of flow state and how that related to sex.

Dr. Emily Jamea 22:39

So despite not being in academia, I took it upon myself to initiate a research study that looked at the relationship between flow state and sexual satisfaction. So I got 100 participants. Not surprisingly, I found a really strong correlation between people who experienced high, high levels of satisfaction and who were experiencing what we describe as a flow state during sex. So what a flow state is is when you're engaged in an activity where there is full concentration, total absorption, almost a loss of sense of self, and a loss of space and time. There's kind of a distortion. All the chitter-chatter in your brain goes quiet, and you're able to fully immerse yourself in the experience.

Dr. Emily Jamea 23:30

A lot of the literature on flow looks at people who experience that during athletics and sports. They talk about it like an athlete getting in the zone, an artist, a jazz ensemble, or a musician. But I went and looked at Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's book and he did write a little bit about flow and sex, but there wasn't even a ton there. So I'm like, "We need to start talking about this." So I saw an opportunity to kind of use flow state science to teach people how to take their sexual experience to the next level and how they don't necessarily have to settle for just good enough sex. I think everyone with the right mindset can have optimal flow-state sex.

Dr. Jill 24:20

I love that. I love that you did the study to talk about it and to show it, because that's what I came upon. Again, that's why we connected. And the same thing with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's work. [inaudible]. And Steve Kotler. A lot of times they do talk about music, creativity, and flow. And for me, it was like, "Oh, I can take this for health," because after the rehab and the switch in your health, you can find flow. You and I know it's the optimal state of neurotransmitters. So you have [inaudible], dopamine, and norepinephrine. So you feel really good, and you want that state again. Again, you can do it in many different ways. But that actually has health benefits. So no wonder.

Dr. Emily Jamea 25:05

Yes. Stephen Kotler talks about how getting into surfing again and finding flow cured him of his Lyme disease, I think it was. So yes, I think there is enormous benefit to flow. Not everyone is going to be a surfer, an artist, or learn how to be in

a jazz band or something like that. But like most people are having sex. So why don't we use sex as a place to experience flow and see what happens then?

Dr. Jill 25:36

So I love it. And in your research, how did you actually determine who was in flow? Was it just descriptions of that? What were the criteria for that in the sexual arena?

Dr. Emily Jamea 25:46

Sure. There is a flow-state questionnaire. I asked people to think back on one of their really great sexual experiences and then answer whether those qualities were there. Obviously, every study has some flaws. This was self-report. It was asking them to reflect back on a prior sexual experience as opposed to studying anything at the moment. But I have a ton more research I want to do to get a closer look at that.

Dr. Jill 26:16

Oh, yes. Hook them up to electrodes and see how much dopamine they produce.

Dr. Emily Jamea 26:19

Exactly, exactly. So I have tons of ideas, but I think it was a really good jumping-off point because the language about flow state didn't exist in the questionnaires that we currently use to assess sexual satisfaction. So I think that my findings can hopefully also go towards the development of a new sexual satisfaction questionnaire that looks at whether or not people aren't just having good sex, but if they're having really extraordinary sex.

Dr. Jill 26:50

Wow. And if Stephen's, mine, and your theory are the same, then that means this flow state sex is actually really good for your health. Surprise, surprise!

Dr. Emily Jamea 26:57

Oh, yes. Yes, exactly. It's like two birds with one stone. We know there are a ton of health benefits to sex. And we know there's a ton of health benefits for flow. So if you can get both at the same time, you're practically superhuman.

Dr. Jill 27:14

You know what's so beautiful? If we take this to a deeper level—maybe a spiritual, non-religious level, but a spiritual level—that desire to be loved, to love and to be connected and belong is really at the core of humanity. We all have this innate desire to belong, to be loved, and to love. And when you're truly at the core of these flow states—and they describe again, whether it's a surfer, a musician, or in sex—it's this oneness that people experience. So it's no wonder that's so fulfilling.

Dr. Jill 27:47

And again, whether we take it with the sexual flow or outside of sex with sports, music or any of that, people who experience flow want more. And I'll just be honest: I love flow. I use my motorcycle and do rock climbing, and I want more too. That's why I love talking about it to share with patients. When you get that state incorporated into your life, there really is a connection with happiness, satisfaction, overall health, and all these things. It's really so much bigger than any of these categories.

Dr. Emily Jamea 28:18

I wholeheartedly agree. There's literature looking at people who have high levels of sexual satisfaction and who do feel like their lives are more meaningful. They feel more connected. So yes, the benefits are just across the board.

Dr. Jill 28:34

So we kind of talked about trust. But what would you say are the core components in a romantic relationship to have good sex? What are the foundational components that someone needs in order to even get to that point?

Dr. Emily Jamea 28:48

With trust comes the security and freedom that you can explore. I think that is where a lot of people shy away when it comes to sex and get stuck in this monotonous... And look, there is nothing wrong with slow, tender, vanilla sex—I think it's wonderful and very exciting and fulfilling in its own way—but we also know that sexual novelty is really important. Trying new things is important. We look at couples who sustain high levels of sexual satisfaction; they mix things up every now and then. So if we look at flow science, one of the core elements of flow is what they refer to as this balance between challenge and skills. That means that

the challenge of what you're doing only has to be about 4% greater than your skillset, as you know.

Dr. Emily Jamea 29:44

A lot of times when I talk to couples about mixing things up, they think they have to dive into the deep end and like pull out the Fifty Shades of Grey type of stuff. And I'm like: "No, no, no, no." Like, if you get there, that's fine. Whatever, more power to you. But sometimes it's making just really small changes, striking that 4%, because if they dive in too hard too fast, then the challenge is going to be way too high above their skill set and they're going to feel anxious, insecure and scared and not want to do it again. So sexual novelty, I think, is looking for the more subtle nuance of how you can change things up in a way that still feels not just fun and exciting and different, but also safe and makes you feel connected and those sorts of things. So I think that is important to keep in mind when you're trying new things in bed.

Dr. Jill 30:39

Yes. So one thought as you're talking is that fear is obviously an inhibitor to great sexual expression, right? So on many levels, you probably have to deal with different people's—men's and women's—fears around these things. You mentioned when there's betrayal. So many women that I see have had past abuse or trauma. And it's so sad, the numbers. It's probably one in three. I don't know exactly, but I'm guessing. How do you help them to heal? Obviously, you have this incredible expertise, but you and I both know there are other somatic therapists or other... What other tools or resources—or even within your own practice, maybe programs or protocols—do you use for the woman or man who has had abuse, pain, or suffering that has marred their experience of sex?

Dr. Emily Jamea 31:28

Well, I'll say the trauma protocol that I fall back on the most is EMDR. EMDR stands for eye movement desensitization and reprocessing and it's a really amazing way of helping process stuck feelings and helping change negative, inhibiting thoughts that you may have that are holding you back from reclaiming yourself and from healing. But I am also such a believer that we can heal through a loving relationship. I think there's this idea, especially here in the West, that you have to heal yourself first before you get into a relationship and I just don't think that's true. I think that intimacy can be a really beautiful way of healing trauma. So I would say that in

addition to maybe working with an individual therapist who is trained in trauma protocols to heal some of those trauma wounds, also partnering up with someone who is patient, tender, kind, and available, I think, is probably the most profound when it comes to healing trauma.

Dr. Jill 32:42

Oh, Emily, I love, love where you're going. I will say I believe so strongly for myself and my patients, the people we come in contact with—whether it's friends, even family, and definitely intimate partners; intimate partners the most because we have the most contact and the deepest kinds of connections—I really believe they're all teachers. Like, our soul's journey is to meet these people [and have] these different experiences. Our soul grinds against the rub as far as usually, they bring up the traumas. So we should not expect to go through and have this perfect relationship. First of all, who does have the perfect relationship? I don't know anyone who does. So we come against those rubs, those little triggers in our own souls and ourselves.

Dr. Jill 33:30

To me, it's still hard; I'm not saying I'm perfect at it. But if they shift the view instead of being like, "Oh my gosh, my partner is terrible," or does this or does that, or "my ex-husband"—even friends, right? But when you do that, [say to yourself]: "Oh wait, why am I being triggered? Maybe just maybe this person is in my life so that I can work on my stuff," right?

Dr. Emily Jamea 33:48

Totally!

Dr. Jill 32:49

And I love that you say that because it's so easy when life is hard or a partnership, a relationship, or even a friendship is hard, it's easy to pull back and be like: "Oh, I don't want to be with that person anymore. I'm going to break up." Or even a friendship. And even family—people can kind of go away from family. Now I'm not saying to stay in something toxic or abusive. But what I'm saying is sometimes there are pieces and usually there are pieces that bring out the pieces that we need to work on or that we have the opportunity to love into healing, right? And I love thinking of it that way because then it's not so much like: "Oh, it's your fault. Your

fault." It's like, "Oh, what is this teacher here to help me grow and how is my soul going to change?"

Dr. Emily Jamea 34:30

I totally agree. I just did this big rant on my Instagram page about how I feel like these days there's too much emphasis on boundaries and self-care. And I'm like: "Okay, yes, we need these things. But humans are social and relational first and foremost." I think the word toxic is overused. I even think the words 'abuse' and 'trauma' are overused. I had someone reply just in a private message, like: "Thank you so much for saying this because I was legitimately traumatized as a kid. And when I hear people say that they have emotional trauma from something so silly, in my opinion, it kind of delegitimizes my experience." So yes, I am such a believer that we need to see conflict, even in relationships, as an opportunity to grow and to learn something new about ourselves, rather than just cut that person out of our lives right away. Obviously, don't stay in a truly abusive relationship. But I think we need to cut people a little bit of slack.

Dr. Jill 35:45

I really, really love that because, like you said, you're not hearing that. In my experience, again, I see patients. I'm not a therapist so I know my limitations, but because I'm in an intimate, very sacred relationship with patients, I hear a lot of things, including difficulty in relationships and sexual problems—some of the same things you do. Because of that, what I see sometimes is that it's very easy to be like, "Oh, this is the first problem, three years in"—boom—"Let's break up."

Dr. Jill 36:10

The people who tend to stick it out—and I'd love to know your opinion—say people who are 15, 20, or 25 years together have had some really rocky times when they thought they wanted to give up, and they stuck it out. All of a sudden they learned, and it's almost like they got to this new level. Like, if you're climbing a mountain, there's this fog over the trees. All of a sudden you come out and you're like: "Oh my gosh, the view is amazing!" The same [is true] with relationships. Again, there are times and places where it is truly unhealthy and you need to leave—that's different. But there are times when it feels so difficult, but you break through and create this whole new level of trust and intimacy in a relationship. And I'm sure you've seen that as well with those people.

Dr. Emily Jamea 36:51

Oh, yes. I think we have such short attention spans. We live in a society that is all about instant gratification, which is why a lot of times when the honeymoon phase of the relationship wears off and that intensity transitions into intimacy, people jump ship. They're ill-equipped to really understand or navigate what intimacy is about, which is this process of individuating while also maintaining a connection to another person. So when we're in the honeymoon stage of the relationship, we have so much dopamine surging through our brains. It's as if we're high on cocaine. Like, you've got the rose-colored glasses. They can do no wrong. It's this whole "two become one" thing.

Dr. Emily Jamea 37:42

Eventually, those chemicals come down because if they stayed at that level, we wouldn't get anything done. That happens at about 6 to 18 months in a relationship. That's where suddenly the sex might not feel as exciting. Or suddenly, the way that they chew irritates you. That gives us an opportunity to differentiate, which is all about figuring out who you are in relation to another person. And inherent in that process is going to be some conflict. If you can brave the waters, roll your sleeves up, stick it out, and get your head above the clouds, I think the view, as you said, can be truly magnificent.

Dr. Jill 38:27

Yes, gosh. In our last few minutes, let's talk to that woman or man out there—probably have more women than men, but either one—who's been in a relationship for some years, and they're right now today feeling so discouraged. It's not abusive. It's not like something where they need to run today. But it's hard, it's painful, and it's causing maybe even health-related issues—lack of sleep or [inaudible] or whatever. And they're feeling incredibly, incredibly discouraged, because I know there are people out there feeling that and maybe they're not having sex with their partner because of conflict. Where do they start? What kind of hope can you give this woman?

Dr. Emily Jamea 39:05

My advice would be to sit down with your partner and reassess what your vision is for your relationship. I think a lot of times we are so bogged down. What's the

saying? You can't see the forest for the trees or something. You're so in the middle of it that you forget to take a step back and look at your relationship more holistically. And part of that is identifying not just what your goals are, but what kind of meaning you want your relationship to have. What do you want it to give to you and what can you do for your partner? It's kind of like the gestalt of your relationship. It's bigger than just each piece. It's like the sum is greater than the parts. I think that is sometimes a better place to start than in the minutiae of like, "When you said this, it made me feel..." That's all fine and good. But I think sometimes it's good to take a step back and look at the bigger picture. Then you can go back and talk about how you can get to a place where you can hopefully reach some of those goals.

Dr. Emily Jamea 40:18

The other thing I'll say to people who are really sexually disconnected and haven't had sex in a long time is to expect that it's going to feel awkward when you start doing it again. A lot of times people are like: "Oh, well, I don't want it to feel awkward" or "What can I do so it won't feel awkward?" Or just because it felt awkward one time, they're totally discouraged and don't want to do it again. And I'm like: "This is the only thing in life we think about that way. Anything you haven't done in a long time is going to feel awkward at first. It's going to take some getting used to."

Dr. Emily Jamea 40:50

So I just remind people that when you're making love, you can't go wrong. If it's coming from a loving place, it's okay if it feels a little awkward or uncomfortable at first; you just have to keep going and keep trying. Good sex isn't rare. People who have great sex are pretty regular about it. And I think, again, it's one of those things we know about for just about everything else in life. But for some reason, when it comes to sex, we think about it differently. But we can't think about it differently. It's really the same.

Dr. Jill 41:22

Great, great advice. This was so full of good pearls. Thank you so much. My last thought is where you ended on love. So often we're like, "How can I be loved? How can I get my needs met? How can I..." and all those things. When we have this energy of like, "How can I love the people around me?"—my partner, my family—and

we shift to "How can I be that love that I wish to receive?" there's something really powerful about that that transforms. And we usually end up receiving the love right back.

Dr. Emily Jamea 41:52

Exactly. I'm all about an abundance mindset. And this is just human nature; we're primed to look at what's going wrong. But sometimes starting by looking at what's going right and then building off of that is going to give you a lot more leverage to reconnect.

Dr. Jill 42:10

Awesome. Well, I think we mentioned it in the beginning, but where can people find you?

Dr. Emily Jamea 42:14

Sure. I'm across all the social media channels: @DrEmilyJamea. My website is EmilyJamea.com and I've got tons of online learning material there and workshops you can do if you're feeling emotionally and sexually disconnected. And I'm happy to give your listeners a code for half off they can use for my six-week workshop. So if you're interested, definitely check it out.

Dr. Jill 42:39

We will, definitely. So wherever you're listening, you will find below the links to all of Dr. Emily's websites and programs. I'm so excited to have you. Thank you again for taking the time and thank you for making this the area of your expertise and really changing the world one couple at a time.

Dr. Emily Jamea 42:56

Thank you so much! I'm so happy to be here and have this conversation with you. It's great to reconnect.