



# STORIES TO ACTION

Amplifying voices for change

## Episode 1: Pleasure

- Kwem:** Today we have a pleasure packed episode ready for you. We've invited three pleasure activists who share with us what their experience of the pandemic has been for them, and those around them. We talk cliteracy, explore the tantalizing Kunyaza pleasure practice. We are called to attention to witness our bodies and how our pleasure based approach is necessary and urgent in sex education and in the sex and reproductive health rights space. And did you know there was a datability meter in the past year and a half? Let's dive right in.
- John:** Talking about things that make you uncomfortable and awkward is what we do. We break the ice so that you can freely talk about them. This is Not Your Usual Subjects Podcast with your host Kwem.
- Kwem:** This is going to be a yummy episode. We are going to be talking and hearing about sexual pleasure. So talking about this always makes me giggly because pleasure and all its narratives feels so good. I've been reading pleasure activism, the politics of feeling good, written and gathered by Adrienne Maree Brown, whose work I deeply honor and make reference to. So I'll share with you an excerpt from the book of one of the different ways that Adrienne defines pleasure. That, "Pleasure includes work and life, and are at play in the realms of satisfaction, joy and erotic aliveness that brings social and political change." And that's exactly what we will be doing in this episode. And speaking of erotic aliveness, this episode is dedicated to all of us. May we find ways of continuing to welcome pleasure in our lives, the kind that feels like warm butter melting on your skin.
- Kwem:** So delighted to have you join us today, Jess. Let's perhaps start with the grounding of [inaudible 00:02:45]. In this moment. Why is pleasure necessary? Why is it relevant? And what has it meant for you?
- Jess:** Hi and thank you very much for having me first of all. And that's such an interesting question to start with because I think pleasure can often be something that we overlook or ignore or don't really recognize, but I think it's extremely necessary for our everyday lives, how we find pleasure and happiness and joy in what we do in our daily activities, in our jobs, in our education, but with speed of life, I guess, sometimes it can just get a bit caught up and forgotten about. And I think that's especially what happens with sexual pleasure, and the pleasure that can come from sex and intimacy and relationships and it's not really something that's spoken about a lot but I think it's something that's very important and something that should be spoken about more and it's very necessary.
- Kwem:** I love that, that pleasure brings us back to the moment that we're in, as mindfulness, as a reminder to just be and enjoy. So what has it meant for you during this time of the pandemic?
- Jess:** I think that's also a really good question because during the peak of the pandemic, I guess, everything was quite dark and gloomy and pleasure wasn't something that was at the forefront of everyone's mind, and we all had our chance to seek out sexual pleasure and partners and relationships reduced, and there was all this horrible stuff going on that I think it became really important to kind of look inside and kind of seek out pleasure because it was something that was hard to find, we were locked in our houses, so finding pleasure in the little things was important for me in the self care, in the going for a nice walk, in the chatting to friends, doing the little things that we could do to find pleasure in a time where it was, I guess, very hard to do so and very isolating.



- Kwem: So you've offered us and shared with us where you're situated with regards to pleasure. Would you share with us a little about you, where you're situated on the globe and what you've been spending or are spending your life doing and loving?
- Jess: Yeah, of course. My name is Jess, I from Scotland, from a town called Perth, and I studied in Glasgow a big city which more people have probably heard of. And I'm currently in Bath studying a Master's in International Development, Social Justice, and Sustainability. And I started that in September, and I finished this month which is exciting. And as part of that Master's course, I got the chance to do a placement and the organization I did my placement with was an organization called The Pleasure Project. And as you can guess, they're very focused on pleasure and eroticizing safer sex and making sure that pleasure is incorporated into approaches to sexual health education and in sexual health programs.
- Jess: And I finished that placement last month and I've recently been employed with the organization as their media and communications officer. So I'm in the start of that as a proper job and I'm absolutely loving it. I think the work that they do is amazing. The unique perspectives that they bring to conversations around sexual health, which are often scary and very medical and scientific. And to be honest, quite boring and unengaging. They bring this fun, creative pleasure focused perspective to that then they make it engaging and they make it fun. So I'm just loving it.
- Kwem: Yeah. First of all, congratulations the completion of your Master's, we celebrate you. So before we dive deep into our conversation today, which I'm very excited to be having, let's talk about the clitoris as it came up in our conversation when we recently spoke. So we know that it is an essential part of the reproductive system in women, and maybe to expand that definition, people with vaginas. If you did not know, now you do. And yet, there has been an erasure about it in sex ed literatures. At least I know when I was in school, I really did not come across clitoris or just even hearing the word clitoris in school. So I thought why not start off this conversation with cliteracy. So remind us Jess, why is cliteracy important? And as you do that, let's talk about the clitoris and the orgasm gap because this is a gendered issue and so I'm curious to hear what your personal reflection is on this.
- Jess: What an amazing place to start. I'm so happy to resign the conversation here. I am the same as you. I don't remember being taught about the clitoris in my sex education in school. I think if I had been told about it and had been a focus of a lesson I would have remembered because it's an amazing thing, it's sole function is pleasure. It should be something that should be celebrated and shouted from the rooftops and, as you said, it's just completely erased and ignored. And actually just before I decided to apply for my placement with The Pleasure Project, I was reading an article in The Guardian and it was about the lack of research into the female anatomy in comparison to research into the male anatomy, the penis, in scientific and medical studies. And I was reading this article and I was like, "This is crazy, that this is a thing and that the clitoris and the vulva and the vagina aren't as studied."
- Jess: And then a fact that jumped out to me was, I think the first mention of the clitoris or anatem, sorry my word, study wasn't published until 1998. That's the year that I was born, and that just shocked me, I think that they've only properly known about the clitoris as long as I've been alive. And I think it was 2003 or around then that they realized through an MRI that the clitoris had over 8000 nerve endings, that's also so recent, and it's too recent for it to be okay that they just found out about that then. So that's actually why I applied for my placement at The Pleasure Project, because then I came across The Pleasure Project job advertisement, and I was like, "I need to work for this organization that's just trying to change this and change the way that sex is spoken about including this erasure of the clitoris in literature."
- Kwem: I love it. Let's continue doing and running the cliteracy campaign and I'm glad that you're getting to do it here today. Interestingly, I was 27 years old when I first saw the picture of clitoris in its glory and fullness, so I saw it on the Instagram Stories of when Kaz, Karen Lucas, who is a Kenyan, 2021 TED Fellow and

he's also a certified sex educator who creates sex positive spaces and content. And Kaz has a podcast, by the way, called The Spread, You can find them on Instagram at thespreadpod.

**Kwem:** So they posted a poll on Instagram that had a photo of the clitoris and they asked folks what they thought it was, and I honestly just thought it was a new, beautiful sex toy in the market. So I don't know how old anyone who's listening to us today was when they saw the clitoris but please, get on your Google, Google Photo of clitoris and, yeah, join on this campaign, let's have a little more cliteracy and knowledge around the cliteracy in our lives. So now that we've started with wonderful grounding on what that is, I'm going to ask Jess, now that we are still in an ongoing pandemic, the COVID-19 pandemic, what would you say has been the impact of the pandemic in the ways in which you've been able to access pleasure? What have been your reflections and how has it also shifted the way in which you've pursued pleasure?

**Jess:** So I think, obviously, every country was different, but in the UK, we had a government mandated lockdown, which meant that you had to stay inside and you couldn't see anyone apart from your household. And I have a boyfriend, who was also living in Glasgow, I think he was a 20 minute walk from my flat and it was so weird to have my sex life curtailed by the government. And I've had lots of conversations about friends with this and just how when you really think about it, it was just very strange to be told that, no, I couldn't go and have sex and my boyfriend and my friends couldn't go out and make connections and meet people and have sex with people and we were just told no. And that was just, I think reflecting on that, it's just strange to think that that happened. It's not something that I've had the privilege of not having to experience before, which I think is important to also know.

**Jess:** But, yeah, being told no and moving on from that, and I was living with my friends and then moved back in with my parents, and that was over the December lockdown that we had, which I think was about lockdown two or three, and I had to ask my parents permission if I could go and see my boyfriend when it was allowed to go and see him and spend time with him but also yes have sex with him. And that was so weird because it was their house so had asked if it was okay under their rules like if I could go and see someone because obviously seeing people was a risk.

**Jess:** Yeah, so I think that was one of the main ways that my relationship with sex and pleasure changed over the COVID-19 pandemic, it was something had to be navigated and it was a law that you couldn't have it, because I wasn't living with someone that I was in a relationship with or having sex with.

**Jess:** And another major way it changed is just before we went into lockdown, I was out with some friends and we were talking about COVID and how there was the potential that there was going to be this lockdown. And I was like, we were all laughing, well not laughing but making jokes about how we wouldn't be having sex and how it just be masturbation for the two weeks that we thought the locked would be, so I bought my first my vibrator. And thank God I did, because as I said, I wasn't seeing my boyfriend so I was very much alone. And yeah, so buying a vibrator, that was definitely a journey for me. And I think because of this lack of talking about pleasure when I was younger and self pleasure, I just never had a vibrator, I never thought by myself one. By the time I may have done so, I don't know, I was in a relationship and I just didn't think about it. And then locked on came and I was like, "Okay, this is a big step." And so yeah, it's definitely changed my relationship with self pleasure and thus, my relationship with myself a little bit.

**Kwem:** I very much resonate with that, Jess, because it's also during the pandemic that I've also explored some self pleasure pursuits. So I recently discovered, which I'm calling the best discovery of COVID-19, as it relates to my pleasure, is I explored a little bit of audio erotica. And just the exploration of using auditory senses to access porn was such a wonderful entryway to solve pleasure, I might add,

so I definitely resonate with that in terms of the ways in which we were all able to navigate and find ways of loving ourselves and being ourselves, pleasurably, sexually. Yeah.

Kwem: So let's talk about the policies that were put in place. I know you've already touched on that and you've already mentioned how it affected you. I wonder, and you also brought up the conversation around your friends, is there anything else that you saw folks experiencing during that time, or rather during this time, because we're still going through it so are there any other impacts that you've seen? And this also relates to the work that you're doing at The Pleasure Project. Yeah, what's what's been coming up?

Jess: Well, I think what you said there does sound like an amazing discovery. And I actually remember reading something about audible porn on social media during the pandemic and that just made me think of a general reflection over the lockdown. I think people began to speak more about sex and pleasure a little bit weirdly because it was something that in the media, we've been told that you can have sex and Nicola Sturgeon, the Scottish First Minister, was actually explicitly having to say that you can't have sex with your partner, casual partners. Okay, now people can't go out and they can't stay at someone else's houses so casual sex is allowed, which I think is just crazy because we do live in a society where sex isn't spoken about, especially not in mainstream media really that much or in the government.

Jess: So I enjoyed that and I think, yeah, people began to speak about sex and pleasure a lot more, which I think a general reflection. within my friends, so my flatmate, one of my close friends, she has been speaking to some... She made a connection with someone on Snapchat and I think they spoke for about a year and a half without meeting, which I think is also quite weird if you think about it, because normally making connections people on social media, so she had the issue made connection with this guy, it was a friend and they spoke for about a year but they'd never met up until about a year later, which I think is also quite a unique impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Jess: And through working with the pleasure project, as I was saying just before, a lot of work has gone into how to have a sexy self isolation. So they did a lot of work on how to have a self care night to yourself, put on some nice music, masturbate, and they were promoting the benefits of masturbation, especially in a very stressful, dark time like a pandemic, it relieves stress, releases endorphins, makes you feel good, it's just good for your overall health. So that's been a conversation that they've been really trying to promote.

Jess: And another one in line with is also safe porn and accessing your porn in an ethical way because obviously being locked inside and isolating, people are accessing their porn, their sexual excitement and their pleasure from porn sites. So they did a lot of work into making sure that advising, how to guides and how to make, excuse me, how to access your porn in an ethical way and have fun online but also have fun online to be safe. So, I think it has just pushed conversations into this new area where they may have been going anywhere but the COVID-19 pandemic definitely pushed this idea of online sex and people in and governments having to talk about it more, and people having to navigate new relationships where they weren't necessarily able to meet in person.

Kwem: Thanks so much, Jess. I think that what you share in terms of how sexual pleasure is actually a necessary part of our aliveness, our feeling mentally well of releasing stress, and I'm sure that you'll also share with us how folks can also access some of this tips of accessing pleasure in a safe and ethical way. So, would you also, because you've already told us about The Pleasure Project, so would you tell us how the pleasure best approach that The Pleasure Project is using as a comprehensive sexual health and reproductive right approach. So would you talk a little bit more about that, because I know you do incredible work around



how you approach sexual health and reproductive rights through a pleasure-based approach, which is something we don't often see out there so, yeah, please tell us about that.

Jess: The general idea of it is just sex positivity and being more positive within whatever sexual health work and organization or program or sex education, so whatever the aims are, because a lot of the time, we focus in sexual health programs, there's a focus on the negatives and what to say no to and how to prevent disease and how to prevent sexual violence. And they're all very important factors, but The Pleasure Project is saying that this needs to be done with the recognition of the positives that can come from sex and the joy and the desire and intimacy and the pleasurable experiences that can also happen when sex is safe but sex is also good. So it's about incorporating pleasure and sex positivity, I think is the main thing.

Jess: So The Pleasure Project is an advocacy organization so they're really aimed to push this pleasure based approach and advocate for pleasure in a variety of settings and kind of open people's eyes to I think that's the best way that I can relate to it because I hadn't really thought about this perspective before when I joined the organization. But when someone says to you, "Most people have sex for pleasure. They enjoy intimacy and pleasure that that's why a lot of people have sex." But when you think about sex education, you always think about the negatives. So why would they not incorporate the positives and make it relatable and engaging to try and foster those better results in reducing STIs or reducing sexual violence? Because when you incorporate pleasure, it's more engaging, it's more relatable and people engage with it and can get better results. So yeah, what I found with my work with them, as a media communications officer, it's all about kind of getting that message out there as best you can, be opening people's eyes to it and going to conferences and saying, "We understand what you're trying to do, but have you thought about it from this perspective?" And sort of build up what we've been calling a pleasure wave, because it is building this pleasure wave, but we want to build it even more and get people to ride the pleasure wave with us.

Kwem: Pleasure wave, I like that. As you were speaking, I was just thinking about, even when we started this conversation, and I mentioned the reproductive health or rather the reproductive system, and I'm just thinking that perhaps we have a need to expand that such that it's not just a reproductive system, it's also a pleasurable part of our bodies and maybe we need to even add that in our language. And I also just went back down memory lane and I was thinking how in school, in primary school here in Kenya, I do remember us watching videos, being shown videos, gory images of STIs and all of this sexual transmitted diseases and like we're saying, information is important, but definitely adding a narrative around the fact that we have sex to have pleasure, to enjoy it, I think that is very important.

Kwem: And the pleasure-based approach that you speak of, I think what it means for me as I'm thinking about it is that I get to acknowledge my own desires and work through the shame that might have come from all of this narratives, all of this teachings and guidance, which "that I have gotten as with regards to protecting myself", and all of that but here is a new narrative, a new pleasure wave, telling me that pleasure pursuits are mine to explore and that's such a wonderful message. And speaking of the messages and I wonder, Jess, what would be the pleasure gospel that you leave us with so that we get to push on this pleasure with further.

Jess: I think the pleasure gospel is the tagline of the pleasure project, which is making safe sex sexy because erotica is very safe, and sex education is really sexy. It's about bringing the two together. And as you were saying, changing the narrative. And I think just another [inaudible 00:24:55] advice I'd like to bring up just before we close, is that the pleasure project have actually just launched seven aspirational pleasure principles within this pleasure wave that are an easy how to guide in how to support you as in yourself and within your organization or your work within sexual health or SRHR of how to be sex positive and include sexual pleasure and come at it from this new stance that makes it fun and exciting and it isn't shameful



and it's not scary, something that people want to engage in rather than as you were saying like, carried away in shame because all they've been told is sex is dangerous and sex is bad. We want to make safe sex sexy, so you can have safe and good sex.

- Kwem: Thank you, Jess, very clear gospel that you're leaving us with. So please share with us where we can find the work of The Pleasure Project? Where can we find you on the social? How can we contribute?
- Jess: So you can find the information about the pleasure principles on our blog and more information about us and publications that The Pleasure Project have done on our web page, which is just [www.thepleasureproject](http://www.thepleasureproject). And then our social, so our Instagram handle is @the\_pleasureproj, and our Twitter is @thepleasureproj. They're our main ones and we also have a LinkedIn account just under The Pleasure Project, and a Facebook page that's the same. And we have a lot of exciting stuff coming up, as I was saying this pleasure wave is building, we've just launched the seven principles which I really hope people listening go and have a look at, and just to really have an inner reflection and get involved in these thought provoking conversations about how can you make your work more pleasurable, because pleasure is one of the most important things in life, finding joy and pleasure, especially within your sex life.
- Jess: One blog post that I would maybe love to direct people to that I was very proud of writing is called, Why Pleasure Should Be Part Of The Solution To Sexual Violence? And it can be found on our blog under that title. And writing that was a really big turning point within my, I guess, pleasure self discovery because I was so angry after the murder of Sarah Everard, which sparked anger across the UK and I think that's spread out across the globe because she was killed in a senseless act and violence against women and it's a big issue in the world. So I got on my laptop and started typing and I just really got stuck into The Pleasure Project work and read all these amazing articles about how if you come at a consent based learning from a pleasure focused direction, it gets better results and it reduces violence and empowers women and empowers consent based sexual relationships and relationships in general. So that was a very important piece to me personally and if people wanted to read it, I'd be absolutely honored, but I do think it's an important topic of conversation to be had.
- Kwem: (singing)
- Kwem: During her childhood in Chile. Valentina, Vale for short, loved listening to the song you're hearing. This song by a queer Chilean is about her lesbian lover. But Valentina did not know this back in the day. What she also didn't know then was that she was also going to experience her own love story. A pandemic love story at that.
- Valentina: So when the pandemic started in March 2020, I found myself in the moment of life where things were changing a lot for me. I had just broken up with my ex. And before that, when I was dating her, we had just like started being non-monogamous so I have also very recently discovered dating apps and casual sex and one night stands and just dating in general. And that was really enjoying that, I was really, yeah, going through many changes. But then, boom, the world closed all of a sudden, and also my friends left the city because they live in other European cities but I am from Chile so I couldn't really go home, so I just stayed here and I was all alone for a few weeks, which was really hard, I guess.
- Valentina: And obviously just seeing through the online world what was going on everywhere else, especially in Chile, especially back home, you didn't really wanted to go out and date people for at least at the beginning. Because at some point, I got bored and I downloaded Tinder again and I was just seeing what was out there, right? And then I started chatting with someone and I really liked her. So we decided to meet and this was already like April or May but still I felt incredibly guilty and incredibly, I





don't know, not so sure if I should be meeting people just for a date while, I don't know, my family we're in lockdown and all that.

Valentina: So, for example, my sister, she's dating her boyfriend and they basically did long distance even though they lived almost in the same city, because of lockdown, they just couldn't see each other for a month and they have been dating for like three years or something so I just felt it was a bit weird to be seeing people, to have that pretty much I guess. So I kept it a secret at first, so we met with this girl and there was a lot of chemistry, it was really, really nice at the beginning. You know how the stereotypes on lesbian relationships, everything happening super things pretty fast and yeah, you're basically move in with each other well, it was a little bit later on. It might be just our apocalyptic sense, feeling that the world is ending and you might as well just go all the way for the person.

Valentina: And I remembered, I never lied to my mom but this time I use really did not want to tell her that we have met on Tinder because there's a pandemic. So I told her that some friend had introduced us. So it was quite some time after we started dating that I told her, because I just wanted to be sure. And then, well, didn't last for long, we were together like five, six months. And after that, I just kept using other dating apps and I also noticed how they changed a lot. Dating apps, you can say other stuff about yourself. For example, I remember Tinder had a special feature of Tinder Passport that during the pandemic, you can just be anywhere in the world because at the end of the day, we're all doing long distance kind of, which I found it was very strange, why would like to swipe with people that leave like thousands of kilometers away. But I guess for some people, it was interesting. I definitely use it to go to Chile like see if I will run into someone that I knew in the streets but no, it didn't happen. It was just funny.

Valentina: And also, there's other app, Hinge, where you could say your vaccination status. So you can be not vaccinated yet, or partially vaccinated, or fully vaccinated, and it's so weird how that can make you be more or less dateable if you have a vaccine or not. I even remember at some point because I got COVID in September at some point I got it and got sick. And then afterwards, when I was out of quarantine, obviously, I would write my Tinder bio something like, "I'm already immuned to the virus, just so you know." I felt like super immune and I thought it was like a funny thing to say or even make some people feel safer about meeting with me because I mean I just recovered from the virus, I wouldn't be catch it again. But that's so weird. That made me more dateable I guess.

Valentina: And I guess that also relates to pleasure. So, yeah, I mean this is that sexual pleasure episode, and for me, sexual pleasure has always been a very central part of my life. I feel very motivated by it and, I don't know, it's like this force that is important so my decisions and with the things I do and my happiness as well. And I think it's good to say it like that and not feel shame about it, and sexual pleasure is an important part of my life for sure and has been for many years. And I guess I access the sexual pleasures through dating apps and non-monogamy and yeah, I guess the lifestyle I have, going on dates and all that. And I feel like sexual pleasure is more accessible than maybe once before through dating apps because you can just meet up with... You suddenly have access to all these people, all this pool of people. And even though dating apps can be very shitty sometimes, many times, can just give you the illusion that there are a lot of people out there and make you a bit shallow maybe through that, it also just allows us to meet more people, and especially for queer people like me, it's not so easy to just randomly meet someone at a bar. It doesn't happen.

Valentina: And there's something about dating during a pandemic that also shifted the ways we go on dates. So obviously, you couldn't go to the movies or you couldn't go to a restaurant or you couldn't go to an event. So it was really boring because all you could do was go for a walk in a park or meet a house or I don't know, yeah, bring some beers and drink them in a bench, sitting on the bench. Although for queer people, it's not rare that our dates are like that because it's not always safe to do the

kind of dates that's straight people do, like two gay men going to a restaurant or two queer women or a trans person going out to a bar is not always safe unless you go to a gay bar or something like that which are not on every place in the world, obviously. So it's very common with queer people that you just have to meet in a house that you can't be out in the public. So maybe the pandemic for us did not change that very much because the public space wasn't accessible to us before either. And I think that's something interesting to think about.

Valentina: And I would also like to talk a bit in about like, be more about something I being part of, which is a research on sexual fantasies, because that also got me thinking a lot on being a bit more open on sexual pleasure in general. So there's this research project called Yes, Please! that is taking place here in the Netherlands, and it's a big project that is conducted interviews to people about what they fantasize about, what turns turns them on the most and things like that. Yeah, and there are a lot of different fantasies, but at the end of the day, they just form these big categories of fantasies, so you have people are fantasize with power, control during sex, or with non-monogamy or with adventure and new things or with romance and passion or threesomes and orgies, all these kind of things.

Valentina: And that's when I helped with conducting interviews and I was also interviewed by a friend about my own sexual fantasies. And something I noticed through this is that we all fantasize about quite similar things, even though it's obviously not always the same, but the fact that you can create these categories really tell you that, I guess, sexual pleasure in general or the things that turns us on are very collective or community based or social. And that's something important to share as well because through this project I will tell friends about it and then that would end up on us discussing our fantasies and being like, "Oh my God, that also does something for me as well, or yeah, I also fantasize about that." And I guess also just the whole spending more time with ourselves, giving ourselves some time to discover these aspects of us breaks a few of the taboos, not only with sexual pleasure, but also with gender identity maybe.

Valentina: I could see how many people in my circles like queer friends, explore a lot with their gender presentation during the pandemic because you had a chance to be by yourself, not be super in the public, and explore. I mean I did it myself by I got a big haircut, I have really, really short hair at some point and it was very freeing to be able to do that without having to go to uni every day and have people suddenly... It gives you a bit of anxiety if you get a very radical haircut and then you have to go to school the next day and everyone will be making comments about it. So I think it has allowed me to transition that better and try different haircuts, do whatever I wanted without having a lot of people commenting on it. So I don't know those are a few things that I feel about my own experience with dating during the pandemic and sexual pleasure. And I really hope that it will be something that is talked more about, especially for young people.

Valentina: And because when it comes to sex and when it comes to sex education and all this stuff, it's always about the bad aspects of sex. So when you get taught about sex in school, if you get taught, because in Chile sex education is barely, barely exists. They only tell you like, don't do it, and if you do it, you're going to get pregnant or you're going to get HIV or you're going get gonorrhoea or whatever. So then when I was when I was a girl and I didn't know about it. And I just heard like, "Oh yeah, sex just leads to pregnancy or leads to diseases." I was just, "Okay, why do people have sex then, I don't understand." And then no one talks to you about the good aspects of sex that the pleasure behind that. Yeah, that you can have fun while doing it and you can talk about it and the more you talk about it, especially with your partners, the better it gets. So yeah, that's my story.

Kwem: It is important that we amplify the narratives of a people, a community that has been upholding pleasure as necessary. So, let's visit Rwanda and look at the ancient, old practice called Kinyaza





- Speaker 5: According to Rwandan legend, Kunyaza originated with an ancient queen who summoned one of her male guards to make love to her whilst her husband was away on a military expedition. The guard was petrified and trembled with fear. He held his manhood as he approached her and began to shake uncontrollably as his penis repeatedly struck her clitoris, which caused intense pleasure, resulting in a huge gush of water. The water was so copious that it formed one of the great lakes of East Africa. When the king returned, the queen asked her husband to perform the striking motion on her clitoris. The clit-striking motion became known as the Kunyaza technique. Now, while the legend talks of a cisgender man, this is a practice that can be practiced beyond the confines of gender and identity. This ancient old practice continues to be practiced today in Uganda. Kenya, it now you could try too
- Kwem: Thank you for joining us today, Eno. So, would you please tell us about yourself.
- Eno: Okay. My name is Enoabasi Nta, fondly called Eno by almost everyone who meets me because they sometimes have difficulties pronouncing the full thing. I'm an 24 years old and me sexual reproductive health educator, a public health nutritionist, and recently a tech sister that is based in Lagos, Nigeria.
- Kwem: All right, would you share with us what your sex education like was in school? I mean now that your sexual health and reproductive educator, looking back, what was sex ed like and what are some of the real opportunities you see in terms of making that better? What needs to change?
- Eno: I would say sex education in Nigeria was almost non-existent for me for my journey because right from primary into secondary school, sex ed wasn't something that was included in our curriculum. The closest as we got to sex ed was in biology class and all the thoughts in biology was the basics about the reproductive system. And even that, at that they never really went all the way in, just give us surface, this is what this part is and this is what is useful, full stop. And joining into university, it became harder because I had a lot of questions and I wanted answers to those questions like, "Why is my body changing this way? Why am I beginning to feel this way? Why all these things happened to me or my friends?" And each time I would ask questions, I would be looked as, "Why am I asking this sort of question for a child who is supposed to not be interested in things like this?"
- Eno: In university, most of the information we got because by then we had put sex ed as one of our classes, the only message I remember being preached was abstinence and that was passed along with subtle but not so subtle messages regarding our religion and our culture, because Nigeria is a very cultural and religious country. So as opposed to actually giving us real information, they ended up sharing pictures of what their reproductive organs look like when they're inflicted with sexually transmitted diseases and telling us that, "Oh trust me, you really do not want to catch this and the only way to avoid having it is to avoid sex as a whole. The only way you can avoid having this, if you want to have sex, is for you to get married. So outside of marriage, you should not be thinking about sex or what it is because it shouldn't be any concern to you. I believe there is a real opportunity here because there is a huge gap in the knowledge about sex and sexual education and about reproduction as a general topic. And it is a lot of work, yes, but if somebody or a few people decide to take it on and keep pushing the agenda and keep on sharing all the information they have access, I believe a lot of things will change in this country.
- Kwem: I totally hear you on that. I mean, it is somewhat the same experience that I had in my sex education of images that were inflicted with STIs as a way of educating us on sex and it's repercussions and constantly leaving out pleasure as one of the major reasons, if not a main reason, that we have sex. So, absolutely yes. So as we move forward, I'd love to hear what are the pleasure narratives that you feel strongly should be embodied?



- Eno: So in general, pleasure narratives are not spoken about normally, they're not spoken about enough. And the only times pleasure is ever mentioned or suggested is when it is talking about males pleasure and brought in from the angle of how to pleasure your husband, how to keep your husband in the marriage and how to ensure that your husband is fully satisfied and pleased with what he puts in the bedroom. So I would say the pleasure narrative I want to see and hear more of is pleasure for women. And not only pleasure for women, but advocating for self pleasure and for women to take charge of their pleasure and not feel shame for asking to receive pleasure for when they eventually share their bodies or share their space and say, "Okay, I am willing to do this thing with you, but I also want to enjoy it and not feel like it is a mechanical process.
- Eno: Because most of the times, it is always pleasure for the man, and pleasure for the man comes in, in the confines of marriage. Outside of that, it is not ever spoken about. And if you talk about, what about me, why not me, they tend to look at you and then treats you like a sex worker. And in my country, sex work is nothing that you should be proud of or should be able to say that you partake in outside of your room when no other testing is. And they have shown time and time again, how terribly they treat sex workers or anyone who is perceived to be one, so much so that even if the person decided to go for assistance or go for help to either the police or healthcare workers, they will be turned away because it said, "You're the one who decided to go into that line of work, so you should be ready for all the actions and the repercussions that come with doing this. So definitely, pleasure for women and self-pleasure.
- Kwem: Thanks Eno, you've really brought a very important piece there about sex work and sex workers. And sex work is work and that is on that and that is very clear for us and in line with our feminist identity here at Not Your Usual Subjects Podcast and I really also love what you said in terms of women being able to take up space and take up responsibility and own their bodies when it comes to pleasure and self pleasure and all different aspects of sexual pleasure for them. Within your work, and you also talk about bodies, please tell us a little bit more about that line of work.
- Eno: Outside of promoting sexual health and female pleasure, bodies, I would say is one of my next favorite things to talk about, because anyone who meets me, the very first thing that always stands out to them is, I do not exactly look how I sound. So when they hear my voice or communicate with me and see my photos, they believe I am smaller than what I currently am. And so when they eventually do meet me it's always, "Oh, I never realized that you were this tall, or you were this big, or you were fat." And I'm like, "Okay, I don't see how that changes who I am or anything?"
- Eno: Nigeria is a country that has mixed emotions. So we have a number of geopolitical zones. Where I come from, is the South South. And in the South South, women with bigger bodies who are on the thicker side, plus sized women are more celebrated because they look at it like the bigger you are, that means the more of a homemaker you would be, the more effective you have been taking care of children, being a source of pleasure for your husband. You will also be a visual of social political class because it means your husband is doing well, he's taking care of you. But when you now move towards the north, and towards the west, women who are smaller are more appreciated. And I've had to live in the West for quite a while, I was sent to secondary school there, and teenagers can be very brutal.
- Eno: So I have been almost constantly bullied right from when I was 14 up until now, because I still live in the West because of work. And people constantly making derogatory comments around my body. And then, you have one set of people say, "Oh you're fat, you should hide, you should not put your body on display. You should only wear black, you should be fully covered. You should not show any form of skin, you should be ashamed that you are in a body like this." And then you have people on the other side who are saying, "Okay, I like your body, but I really don't want to be seen in public with you so can we hang out in secret when the lights are not so bright where people won't notice us." So sharing bodies and talking about bodies



and saying, bodies should be allowed to just be. If a body needs to be changed, it should be the personal choice of the person in the body.

Eno: And it was also hard because here I was plus sized and in the health sector. And I remember the times I would need to go in for one checkup or the other and many times the doctor would not even bother looking at my medical history or my records would instantly make suggestions that, "Okay, if you lost like say five kg, maybe it would be better for you." And I'll be looking like, "I came in for an ear infection, but apparently my body is the problem so I really don't understand why and how that should be an issue." So it's more or less like a personal advocacy and also advocating so that if there is anyone else who [inaudible 00:57:31] the same things, they understand that their bodies are just their bodies, they shouldn't put too much pressure or too much importance as to what their bodies are. Yes, take care of yourself. Yes, be kind to yourself. But there is so much more to life than being fixated on the size of your stomach or the size of your thighs.

Kwem: I couldn't have said it any better. Bodies are bodies and the work that you do when it comes to that I think that it is very important and necessary because our bodies are the spaces in which we access pleasure, and therefore, it is important and necessary that we love our bodies and we take ourselves on that journey of loving our bodies and learning to shun out the noise of folks who shame us in the streets, in the hospitals. Yeah so thank you for sharing that. During this pandemic period, I wonder what are some of the questions and concerns that you have been getting on Instagram, Telegram, the different channels that you have folks connecting with you? What has been coming up in terms of questions around pleasure? Concerns around pleasure?

Eno: So the major questions I've been getting around pleasure or concerns about pleasure since pandemic hit are one, asking about how to they will start the journey, how do they bring pleasure to themselves, because for a lot of people, this is something that they have never had to do, never navigated something that is always spoken about in hushed tones and then there's a lot of shame around it and it's something that just shouldn't be spoken about, more or less to a stranger who you do not know, someone off of the internet. So a lot of people wonder, "Okay, so I know I have these organs, I know I have these body parts, what exactly do I do with them? How do I utilize this to ensure that they're receiving pleasure?" A lot of questions around, "Okay, so now you have to explain what pleasure is and how I can get pleasure, what can I use to get pleasure? So we are talking about sex toys, we are talking about things to incorporate into the bedroom with your partner if you're safe and feel comfortable with that.

Eno: And when you're talking about sex toys, they're also talking about which sex toys are the best? How do you know which sex toys are going to be harmful in the long run, which are made of good materials that are safe to use that will not cause any issues for me? And in that area, quite a number of sex toy sellers started popping up because now even though people have a lot of free time to themselves, and a lot of private time, and are looking to fill in the blank spaces because once upon a time, you would have to be out of your home at 7:00 AM and you probably wouldn't be getting back until 7:00 PM. And between unwinding and getting settle in for the night, you really don't have any time or enough time to sit down and just do your thing, listen to your body, [inaudible 01:00:53], know how it feels and discover what it is that you like.

Eno: So those are some of the questions. Another, I'm aware because of the use of sex toys so people were beginning to experience like yeast infections, UTIs, now I the uncovered the different parts where we have to start talking about hygiene. How do you wash your sex toys? Do you wash your vulvas? What are the things you do when you practice self hygiene? And then we also started looking at contraception because a lot of you who are also trying to avoid pregnancies, especially those who had partners who were living in the same house with them, which means almost constant access and having to respond to the demands of their



partners, and trying to find what facilities actually offer proper sexual health care that would give you the care that you needed without trying to what I say, "Shame you into submission or make you feel like you were doing something wrong because you decided to take charge of sexual health."

Eno: And because of the questions and all the comments, especially when I would get private messages from people who would feel too ashamed to engage with work in public. I started two telegram groups, I also joined the WhatsApp group where it is mostly Muslim women who ask questions and talk about something that otherwise they will not be able to have access to and also creating a space where women are comfortable to share their escapades, their experiences and ask the very uncomfortable, embarrassing questions knowing fully well that they will always receive an answer and they would always have other people there who would hold their hands and guide them and share their own experiences to help them make better choices.

Kwem: On the point that you're sharing about SRH services, sexual and reproductive health, access to services and providers in that regard, could you share with us a little bit more about that? What does that look like, especially now with all of the things that you've mentioned have been coming up as a result of women and in general, people taking up their pleasure, what is the landscape like for SRH services and providers? And what should change?

Eno: So I have noticed that, in general, SRH providers and care is very limited. They are grossly understaffed, underfunded, and not exactly regarded as a necessary branch of care when it comes to the health sector, so it's like, why would you expunge on something as trivial as this when they can be putting all those funds into oncology, into pediatrics and the likes. And by rights, every federal and every state hospital should have an SRH clinic and a well-equipped SRH clinic. But most times you walk into the hospital and you asked, "Okay, so this is what I want to get done" And the only services they would offer is HIV screening and to check if you're pregnant or not. And if you are pregnant in any case, and do not want to be pregnant, abortions are illegal and punishable by jail time. So this is another area that says, "Okay, you want access to health care for this area, for them we really cannot give it to you we will not give it to you." And when you eventually find reproductive health clinic is mostly geared towards family planning, and it is broadly written family planning.

Eno: You walk in as a single female, and the question is asked, very first thing before your name, your age, are you married? The moment the answer is no, you can already feel the judgments being passed. They treat you differently, they would not exactly be as welcoming or as accommodating. If something is wrong, you would be treated like you are the one who decided to be fornicating so why are you now ashamed? Or when you would walk in and say, "I want to get tested for dash dash dash, I am sexually active and I am concerned that my partner might not be faithful," is just like, don't even bother.

Eno: Some hospitals actually do offer full sexual reproductive health care, but most of them are private and private hospitals are known for being super expensive. So you then question, "Why is this not accessible to the general public?" A few sexual and reproductive health clinics, there is one major brand that does that in Nigeria, and almost every other day somebody is trying to get the place shut down, they are trying to find a way to get the Ministry of Health to shut down the facility, because they are the only ones who accept, from the moment the woman decides to take charge of her life, from the age of 16, 15, we are here to give her help, and we do not need to get parental consent. We need young girls to take charge and decide whether or not they want to have children early or even have children at all.

Eno: And to that effect, we will be providing them with a number of free services like every now then, they do promotions as long as you come in from Plek city that's end of September, up until the 20th of September, you will get all your tests done free of charge. Any women who wants to get the implants who



want to get more feminine contraception methods done, please feel free to come in, we are going to get that done for you. And it is such a big hassle because you find them having to hide their services or having to do things under lock and key, but they are still trying in this very unfriendly/hostile claims to provide the service that is very necessary.

Eno: Over the next, let's see, let me be realistic, next decade, by the time people my age are beginning to take on more political positions, and hope to see a change in that regard where sex is no longer something that is tied to somebody's worth and virtue and actually identified as, "Okay, this is something that happens everyday, almost everybody is going to participate, so we need to put it in the healthcare projects, we need to appropriate funds, we need to ensure that there are doctors, they are nurses, lab technicians, it needs to be able to stand and function well to serve the people in the country."

Kwem: Thank you so much for those reflection Eno. Definitely, sexual and reproductive health is more than HIV testing, should be more than HIV testing, more than family planning for married women. We needed to be taken beyond those premises and we need them to be accessible to all, without having to break the bank. And that's why we are saying sexual and reproductive health rights, they are rights that we demand and ask for. And on the topic that you brought up about abortion, I'm so glad that we will also in a future episode be discussing about self managed abortions and we will be sharing different stories and reflections on what that is. So we hope that you stay tuned for that.

Kwem: And I would also like to affirm your work, of having spaces where women in their diversity can share their sexcapades. This is a very deliberatory practice, it offers a space for women and gender diverse folk that gives them an opportunity and a safe space to be free and to be joyful and to share their pleasure with others. And I love that, that is what we want in the present and in the future, that is a feminist reality, and a feminist future. Eno, before I let you go, please share with us a sexual pleasure nugget, a personal favorite perhaps that you'd like to leave us with.

Eno: Okay. So I will definitely say and share that sexual pleasure is not a myth, it is very real, and you cannot wait and depend on other people to find what is your pleasure points, and your pleasure is just on the other side of personal exploration.

Kwem: There you have it folks. I hope this conversation has awakened your pleasure senses, politics and goals like they have mine. Thank you so much for being with us today Eno, and thank you for your work.

Kwem: The support of Not Your Usual Subjects Podcast comes from staff and volunteer at Stories to Action, who are conjuring alongside young people, situated across borders all around the world. Together, we envision a world where every young person's voice is heard on their sexual health and reproductive rights, even in times of public health emergencies like COVID-19. We would like to honor, thank, and acknowledge all our contributors and guests for sharing their stories to action. Share Net International & Netherlands, who is so deeply grateful for funding and resourcing this podcast, reminds us of the role that philanthropy in working with youth in the diversity should and can play in raising collective consciousness.

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