

What's Wrong With You?

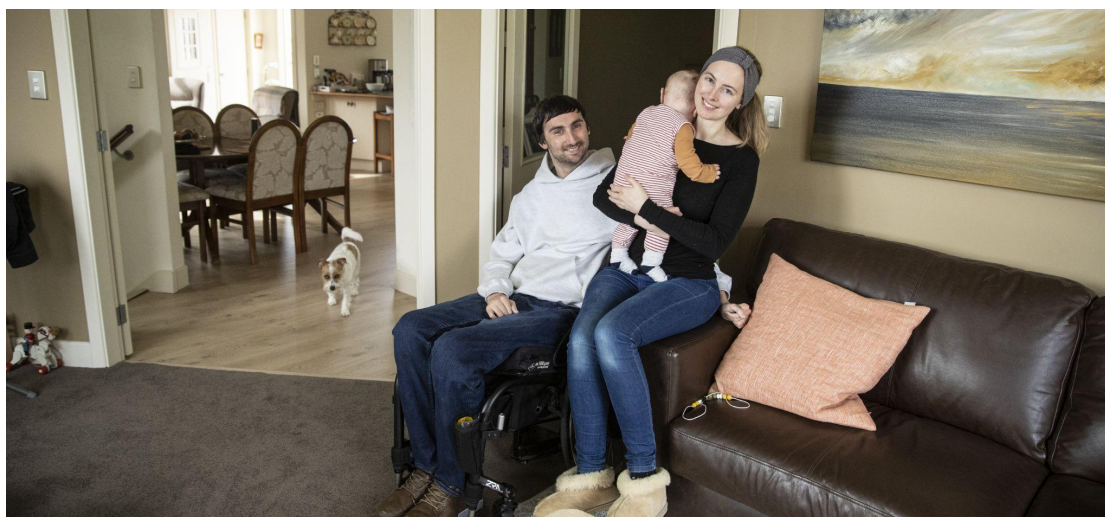
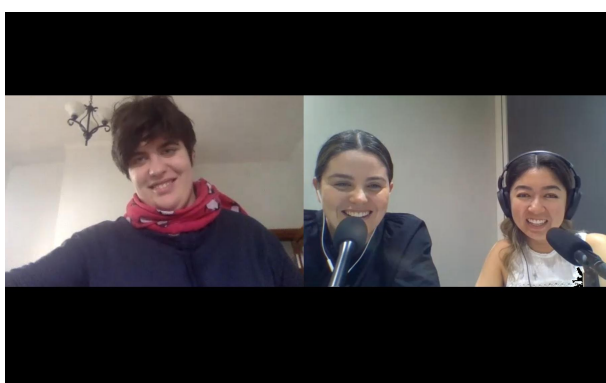
A podcast about disability and navigating a world that's not designed for you

Episode title: Why are you so obsessed with my sex life?: Disability and dating

Episode synopsis: Sex, dating and relationships are already complicated, but even more so in a world that judges disabled people so harshly. Olivia, Becs and guests discuss whether or not to include your wheelchair in Tinder photos, and guest Tim Young shares what to do when your catheter bag fills up on a first date.

Episode guests: Loren Savage, Timothy Young and Henrietta Bollinger

Photos: Olivia, Becs, Loren, Tim and Etta



Olivia = Olivia's narrated voice over

Becs = Becs' narrated voice over

Olivia/Becs/guest = interview in studio

Episode begins

Opening sting: Stuff podcasts

Olivia Shivas: Just a heads up this episode has a little bit of swearing in it.

Olivia: This episode of What's Wrong With You? is sponsored by EveryHuman - an online platform selling life-changing adaptive clothing, footwear and lifestyle products. It's the home of the ultimate shopping experience for people with disabilities. Shop the range at EveryHuman.com.au

Olivia: Hey Becs - how long would you say we've been friends?

Becs: Ah, I dunno? 9 years? 10? It must have been aah... early 2012?

Olivia: Early 2012?

[Cute music starts]

Olivia: It was February 27th 2012 actually, at 10.30am, outside the Town Hall – so that's exactly 9 years and ninety one days, 14 hours and aaaaah, 16 seconds, actually, 18 seconds now ... 20 seconds...

Becs: That's pretty precise Olivia!

Olivia: Well that day was really unforgettable for me. Meeting you was a big deal!

Becs: True ... it was for me too.

Olivia: I've always thought of it like a scene from a romcom - you know – how they always have that “meet-cute” scene where the future couple bump into each other, even though ours is just a friendship meet-cute. Like in a [Notting Hill bookstore](#)

Film audio grab: Can I help you? No thanks, I'll look around

Olivia: ... or in a New York City department store buying [black cashmere gloves](#) ...

Film audio: No you take it

Becs: ... or on a [doomed ocean liner](#). That's my favourite I think.

Film audio: Stay back, don't come any closer... Gimme your hand, I'll pull you back closer...

Olivia: Yeah. Exactly. And I don't know if they're going to make a movie about us or anything because our friendship is not technically a romance - and you're actually getting married to someone else soon - but I do like telling people about our meet-cute.

Olivia: So it was orientation day at university. There were heaps of first-year students in the city. I saw one other wheelchair-user in the crowd, and that happened to be you, Becs! I didn't know anyone else, so I just wheeled on over and said hi.

Becs: I'm so glad you did!

[Cute music ends]

[Theme music begins: Feel good catchy funk pop song]

Olivia: I'm Olivia Shivas

Becs: And I'm Rebecca Dubber

Olivia: And you're listening to What's Wrong With You?, Stuff's podcast about disability. We both use wheelchairs and live in a world that's not designed for disabled people.

Becs: We're covering faith, what it's like travelling in a wheelchair, parenting a child with a disability ...

Olivia: And we also try to answer some of the big mysteries facing people living with disabilities, such as: “Why are random shop assistants so damn interested in whether our ovaries work or not?”

Olivia: This episode, though, we're focussing on relationships. And not just the one between Becs and me.

Beccs: We're talking about all that awkward stuff – like dating, and sex, and whether or not to include your wheelchair in Tinder photos.

[Theme music ends: Feel good catchy funk pop song]

Olivia: First up we have Loren Savage. She lives in Wellington with her husband Mark, and they have a cat called Minnie. Our conversation started with a quick linguistics lesson ...

Loren: For me, the correct term is that I'm a little person or I have achondroplasia dwarfism. If I'm with my little people, or my LP friends, we have a pretty free and frank with each other about what we can and can't do and will turn into a comical experience for us. If it's a random person in the street then there is quite a few lines that are quite easy to cross. And I guess the first one is using what we refer to as the M word, which is the midget word. And for me personally, actually, I probably wouldn't even use that jokingly with my friends because it has so many negative connotations and we're trying so hard to stop people using it because they don't know, they haven't had an education.

Olivia: So, Loren, when did you realise that you had a disability?

Loren: I don't know actually. Well and truly, like I always knew. I think my mum and my dad were just it was part of life is that I was, so my family's all average height and including my older sister and it was just always a part of my life. Like I was always involved with the Little People New Zealand organisation. My first conference was when I was one so I don't really remember it. I don't remember it at all actually [laughter]. It's just been a huge part of me growing up.

Olivia: And growing up. What was your exposure to dating or seeing disabled people in relationships and things like that?

Loren: When I started to be interested in, like, guys having crushes or that sort of stuff, that was kind of a weird thing because there was no no kind of role models around me, you know, and there was no also for men. There was no one out there normalising it for them. So average-height men and there was no one kind of saying, actually, it's OK, it's going to be fine. It's not different. It's you know, you may have these extra struggles from society's perspective, but so there was no guys around me that were thinking that way. It was kind of always like either I was friend zoned or it was like, no, I wouldn't do that straight out no, that kind of thing. And when I started dating Mark, who's my now husband, it was definitely a kind of a learning experience for both of us because he had never dated a little person. And so my husband's average height, above average, he's quite tall, quite convenient. But, you know, so so it was a learning experience for both of us, which is quite neat, I think. And I think we both realised that it was a learning experience for both of us. So we were kind of helping each other, because he was no one else really there to guide us or to say that it's okay or to be like you are going to be dealing with X, Y and Z comments or these people's attitudes, or it's actually the looks more than the comments, you know, the patronising looks. Of how amazing he is, that sort of stuff which is uncomfortable for him. Like, he doesn't want people being like, oh, you're so amazing because you're-

Olivia: Congratulations!

Loren: Congratulations, you're dating a disabled person. You're doing a really good service, you know, like, um, I mean, good on him for dating me [laughter]

Olivia: But it's not because of your short stature

Loren: No, not at all. So, yeah, it was definitely a learning experience for both of us. When guys would express some sort of interest in me, whether it be, you know, like in a bar or like straight away, it's like the thought of like they just interested in me because it's a novelty. Like it's they've never been with a little person, you know, like that, or they've never talked to another little person or they're just trying to suss you out more because you're a little person, not because you've got the same interests and you've been watching the same sports game.

Olivia: Yeah, let's talk a bit about where that kind of novelty factor comes from when it comes to disability.

Becs: I definitely think there are people out there that have have feti- fetish- fetishised-

Loren: Have fetishes [laughter]

Becs: -for woman with disabilities, whether that's a little person, someone who uses a wheelchair. And it was quite prevalent with an amputee communities and with the rise of social media, there's a lot of accounts out there that quite like predatory. And in my time, like my Instagram, Facebook DMs have been filled with rather inappropriate comments and questions and marriage proposals. I think I around the time that I went to the London Paralympics, I had like a public figure page to post all my results from swimming and keep everyone updated. And the London Paralympics was huge. So I gained like 20,000 likes to that page over the two weeks of the games. And with that, 20,000 likes came, you know, a whole lot of very inappropriate comments and just requests and things all really relating to the fact that there was some lonely men out there looking for, you know, someone who they felt was beneath them. And I ended up having to delete that page because I couldn't keep up. And I just felt increasingly anxious and disgusted and just very unsafe, because the type of man I think or a person that comes into, you know, your DMs or sends you those types of messages, they don't react very nicely when you say no. And I think that that kind of gave me a lot of hesitancy around dating as well, because I had always felt that, you know, I would be lucky if I got a boyfriend or if I found someone that I-

Loren: He would be lucky. First of all, that's horrible that you had that experience and I can imagine how uncomfortable that would have been. I've like the odd one every now and then, but not to that level and not when, I mean they have no idea who I am so I just block them. I think men with a disability aren't taught about healthy relationships. And because they are almost in a similar way to us, kind of have that pressure on just to settle. And, you know, if you find someone good on you because it's good if they are willing to wake up and look at that, you know, or deal with it, the extra support needs or whatever it is that you need.

Olivia: And I think that whole perception of dating a person with a disability and that kind of gross side to it is definitely challenging as a young woman, because if someone so happens to be interested in you or starts talking to you on Instagram or on a dating app, it was always in the back of my mind. Are they interested in me or are they interested in my disability? And that is just so hard because then you invest, you know, you do invest a bit of time into that and emotional energy and you can't figure that out straight away.

Loren: And that's impacting on who you are around them, because you're like, I might want to guard this part of my life because I don't get to see that. Actually, today I am, you know, like I'm really struggling being a disabled woman in today's society, you know, today because I dealt with this, this and this. But then you're like, oh, I don't want to tell them that because they think, yeah, you know, will that kind of feed their interest and me being disabled or will they be like, well, that's a bit too much. Yeah, I wasn't prepared to deal with that or whatever.

Olivia: Yeah. I mean, I went on a first date once and we'd been chatting on a dating app for a little bit and then but one of the first questions he asked me was, why are you in a

wheelchair? And I was like, oh great. I wasted all this time. I mean, it should have been a red flag because he did ask me out on a date to the Coffee Club [laughter]

Loren: But then in saying that, what if he hadn't of mentioned it, what would you have done? Would have been totally OK? To what point do you feel like when is the right time?

Olivia: That is true.

Loren: Or they're not mentioning it, I don't see your disability and you're like, clearly I'm disabled, it's that balancing line.

Olivia: Yeah. Yeah. Well, I think the fact that it was like the first question he asked.

Loren: Yeah maybe the first question is a bit much.

Olivia: But then I'd been on other dates, where it didn't really come up. But we so I happened to be talking about something else that I talked about access and he was like oh yeah true, I never thought about it before or you know maybe had come up later on and being like also, you know, what's the name of your condition or how does it affect your life? Like it seems to me it's more about the interest in me, not just thought, oh like why can't you walk?

Becs: I think one of the most valuable pieces of advice I ever got given when it came to dating was when people show you or tell you who they are, believe them. I think that that really helped me get through some tricky situations where, you know, I might have been talking to someone on a dating app and I was really starting to like them. But then they would make, you know, a comment that raised a bit of a red flag. Of course, I made mistakes where I kept going and ended up really hurt and upset and betrayed. But then, you know, you learn from those experiences and, you know, for next time that that red flag comes up OK, yeah, I'm walking away now-

Olivia and Becs: Rolling away! Haha jinx! [laughter]

[Soft guitar music starts]

Becs: I met my fiancée on a dating app, so we started dating, having no prior experience or friendship to go off. But disability never really came up in our conversations either. And it was almost like a hard one for me to grapple with initially because I was waiting for it to come up, like I was waiting for there to be a, you know, why are you disabled or what does this mean for our future or, you know, can we have kids?

Olivia: Do you think you will have that conversation one day?

Becs: Well, I kind of-

Loren: After he listens to this podcast [laughter]

Becs: I mean, I kind of just think that from everything that we've been through, because we've been together for almost five years. And I think that through everything we've been together, through the hospital appointments. I mean, he was there when I had my last elbow surgery, which, you know, for the recovery period, you know, he was having to help me shower and do everything for me.

Olivia: When you got your arm surgery, Mitch had to help you, but it's kind of the only time he's really had to help you have a shower, for example. And I think there's also this assumption out there that if you are married or dating or in a relationship with someone with a disability, you are going to also be in that carer role. And for some relationships, that does work, but it's not always like that. That's not always the situation. Everyone goes through challenges where, you know, someone needs more support in a certain season of their life and then the other person needs more support or extra care. We all go through health challenges and ups and down, whether you have a disability or not.

Loren: Yeah, as you said, each couple has different times where they are relying on each other for different things, whether it be emotionally or physically or financially or whatever it is. And I think it but sometimes it does look that way, that it is going to be an extra burden on the people. And I think it's because media promotes that message. I'm not I'm not saying that we shouldn't highlight the fact that disabled people do need more support in different circumstances. But I think that's not the only message. And it's up to some people who who that person is to do their support. Like you felt comfortable with your fiancée doing that whereas other people might not. And that's totally fine if you want to get a support worker. Yeah, yeah. They should be able to get a support worker to do that. Or if they don't want that, like for me personally, I turn to Mark to do that. I feel more comfortable because he's seen me naked anyway. So one less person seeing me naked is always a good sign. [laughter] But it should be up to those people them to make that decision or not society's kind of pressure or assumptions.

Olivia: How did you learn to trust Mark that he was dating you for the right reasons?

Loren: I think time was it, I think time was a big thing. But it was like this real roller coaster. And to be in a more intimate relationship that, yeah, it was a journey. It was I don't know if there was one pinpoint, but as I said, is nothing on what he did. I think it was just really on my own insecurities, which was quite interesting because I didn't realise how insecure I was about myself until I started dating someone. And I was always like, yeah, I'm proud of being a little person. I'm a proud feminist. And then I just remember that kind of a few months into it, actually Loren you are quite insecure about yourself, you know, and because my identity was changing, I was not, you know, part of my identity was that I was Mark's girlfriend, not a key part but it was a bit of a, you know, a bit of a change and all that. And yeah, I didn't realise how like how much I cared about how I looked or what I did or, or- yeah, it weighed on me quite a lot. And it was quite interesting for me to learn that stuff about myself.

[soft piano music begins]

Loren: I definitely think that investing in our young people, disabled or not, is so key, so that, you know, the next generation of young women and young men with disabilities can go out and start chatting to someone at the youth group, at pub, at a park, at a sports game and be like, I'm confident that everyone's OK with disability. So actually they're interested in talking to me because I'm supporting the same team as them or I've got the same faith as them or whatever it is. I think it's just so important that we invest in our next generation for their sake.

[Soft guitar music starts]

Olivia: When you go on a date, your focus should be on asking the hard questions: Do they like pineapple on pizza? Which way do they hang the toilet paper? Are they a cat person or a dog person? And what happens next, if their answer is different to yours? Your focus shouldn't be on the struggle you'll have later on trying to get your shirt off. Adaptive online platform, EveryHuman, has accessibility-focused lifestyle products and clothing styles for all occasions, so your next date can be a breeze. EveryHuman is making sure you feel cute for that upcoming coffee date, or perhaps you'd feel more comfortable in something a bit more cozy, like track pants, for a movie night on the couch. EveryHuman's range of accessible lifestyle products, footwear, tees, tops, and shirts, are all designed with disabled people and their success in mind, taking away any of those extra worries you might have - and helping you be your most confident. With EveryHuman, whether it be in the lifestyle, clothing or

footwear department, you'll make a great first impression, so you can focus on what matters the most - like getting your shirt off easily. Oh - and making sure there's chemistry.

[Soft guitar music starts]

Olivia: Our next guest is Timothy Young. He's an entrepreneur, a husband and a new dad to 5-month-old Jasper. He's a C5 tetraplegic after breaking his neck while snowboarding in Canada 12 years ago. He lost the use of 84 per cent of his body, but can still feel from around the chest up. Tim now lives in Hamilton so we gave him a call. The thing about Tim, is that because he'd gone through his teenage years without a disability, he was able to do a bit of compare-and-contrast: dating as a non-disabled person and dating as a wheelchair-user.

Tim: So I had my accident when I was just before my 21st birthday. So I had all my teenage years and my university years able bodied. I had a few girlfriends that, um, and when I was a teenager and, um, uh, a few casual partners during university. I had as much trouble as the next guy, but um. Yeah. Not nothing like now, since my accident.

Olivia: What were your first thoughts when it came to like dating and relationships after you had your accident?

Tim: When I was in the spinal unit at the start, I thought a lot about sex and how I'd actually be able to perform it and what I would feel like. And, um, obviously there was actually quite a lot of grieving involved, but not being able to feel any more. I'm not have that same sexual experience but you kind of do figure out ways around it. And it's not the same but it can be better in a lot of ways, because you really are focusing on the emotional side of things and it's less shallow. And it's good to have had that hope that that still can be very enjoyable. But it is something to really acknowledge that it's quite a hard thing, especially as a teenage boy, well I was 20. But, yeah, it was quite a big part of your life. And, um, and whether you like it or not as a male that age, it completely dominates your thinking for a good decade or something. So yeah, it is quite a big part. Yeah, I thought about it pretty early on. I was pretty worried about it quite a bit, how, you know, how to start a family. And my mum was more all worried about me having a family, bit embarrassing thing like. So do I need to freeze sperm? Like, I need to get on this early. But they kept saying, oh, no, it's fine. You know, you can go even if you can't get sperm from ejaculate later, then you could go on like a procedure on the testes to grab some out and she was like double checking. And she got about four different opinions. Are you sure you aren't going to screw up? You know, it was pretty funny and stuff, but normal mum being a normal mum. We went through the IVF route and because I am lucky enough to be a ACC client, they paid for that. Uh. So we lined that up for a couple of years, then my wife and. Yeah, all the time fell in place and everything went according to plan, and we were lucky enough to for the embryo to fertilise on our first attempt. So that was really good.

Becs: So earlier you talked about how when you first had your accident and you were kind of getting back out there, how it was really different when you are not disabled. Tell us how you met your wife.

Tim: Yeah, so I did a bit of the Tinder game just because I mean, it's always a numbers game anyway, right? And more so when you're in a chair, you might be like one in five or 10 girls would have been interested before. And it was more like one in 30 or 50. And so Tinder was good, cause you can swipe lots of people and did a bit of dating so I got a bit of confidence from that. And then I was lucky enough to meet my wife in person at our educational psychology class, which was ideal. It's nice to meet someone in person, but

online dating did give me more confidence to get out there and just go for it. There was a date before I met Erica, and half halfway through my catheter bag filled up. And I needed to ask my date to help empty my catheter bag which wasn't ideal, but she was very sweet about it and helped me out. But otherwise I would have peed myself. Actually, Erica had to empty my bag, my wife emptied my bag on my on our second date. And she was totally fine with it wasn't awkward and, you know, she gave me a kiss afterwards. I was like, this is great. And it was pretty obvious that she was, she could well be the one. Yeah, not reason alone, but of all the other reasons and that's just a good litmus test I guess.

Olivia: Yeah. I mean, as tough as dating can be when you are disabled, in a way it is kind of like a good filter, hopefully for the kind of the better quality people out there.

Tim: Exactly.

Becs: Do you have any dating advice for other disabled people who might be keen to kind of get out there and find someone?

Tim: The two most important things I found was just being really being a positive person that's really helpful, like that's easier said than done for a lot of people in tough circumstances. But, um, and don't just put on a fake face, but that doesn't that doesn't help as well. But if you can kind of I think what really happens if you're confident in yourself and you, um, you know, I focus on all the good things that you've got going for you and try and work on the things that, you know, there might be negative then, um, just get to a point where you're comfortable with yourself and then you're going to be just more positive about the whole experience and more approachable and you're more likely to not take things so seriously. And I think people really pick up on that and then they feel more comfortable because that's one of the things around disability is it's just kind of new. And people don't know, you know, they might feel uncomfortable just because it's new and it's different. Not necessarily because they don't like it. And I think I think all that really helps and just actually actively try. And, you know, it's scary putting yourself out there and you're setting yourself up for rejection, which takes a bit of thick skin but just actively trying, going on the the dating websites. And don't be afraid if there's a cute person at the behind the coffee bar. Just just ask them out and like, you know, get more confident for the next time, even if you get rejected, you have to get used to being rejected and you brush it off faster. Yeah, just try.

Olivia: Your mum, is she stoked that she has a grandchild now, is Jasper the first one or?

Tim: Mum is so stoked she has a grandchild and it is the first one. She's very, very, very excited. She's already looking forward to the next one, just trying to get, trying to get our heads around this one at this stage.

Olivia: Next up is Henrietta Bollinger; she's a writer and disability advocate who works in the queer community. Etta and I actually go way back to our intermediate school days. She now lives in Wellington, so we video called her from our office in Auckland and started off with our favourite uncomfortable question...

Olivia: And our podcast title is What's Wrong With You?

Etta: Oh, so many things. I was thinking about how when that question gets asked to you, like in public or by particularly by strangers, it's happened so many times and every single time, I'm still just always, like, shocked, like really? You felt like that was an acceptable question. I kind of am keeping a rule for myself at the moment that I, I explain myself to kids and I don't explain myself to adults because I feel like kids, number one, it comes from a different place for them, it's just really genuine curiosity. But also you make an investment, kids will just take at face value what, they believe, they'll believe what you tell them about

yourself. And if you have a conversation with kids, then you kind of make an investment so that in 20 years they're not going to ask of you as an adult.

Olivia: So for you, what was your exposure to disability in dating growing up?

Etta: I remember when I would talk to like adults like my family and stuff about it, they would say stuff like, you know, you'll meet someone and they'll look past your disability. And that was a good thing to say at the time. But I've kind of come around to be like, I don't want people to look past it. I want people to look at it and be like, this is still what I want, because then they're completely on board with every part of you. And you're not feeling like disability is something that somebody else is going to have to kind of deal with. I've got my own emotions about it and I don't want to have to carry their emotions about it.

Olivia: I love that story you tell, Becs, where you and Mitch were on the third or fourth date, that staircase situation.

Becs: Yeah. I guess to add some context to the story Etta, I had probably been using apps like Tinder and Bumble for four years, like consistently before I met my now fiancée. Lots of bad experiences, lots of frogs, before I met my prince.

[Quirky drum music begins]

Becs: We were on our yeah, it was like our fourth or fifth date. And we'd gone downtown and we parked in the downtown car park. And we got out of the building and there was no ramp to the street level. It was just like a massive staircase of stairs down to the main road. And it was like 7pm on a Saturday. So we couldn't get back into the building **[music fades]** And we're freaking out. And because it's like the fourth or fifth day, I'm not going to ask this guy to carry me down the stairs. And there was a lot of them. So it was a dangerous task. So he offered to go and find help and to like find a way back into the building and to come and get me so we could find another way down to the street level. So he went away and I was kind of just waiting there and, you know, ten minutes had gone past and I was like, oh, surely he'll be back soon. Then 15 minutes had passed. And I was like, oh, like, surely soon. And then I was getting closer to have like half an hour. And I was like, OK, is this guy coming back? Like, have I just been left at the top of these stairs? Has he realised that dating a girl in a wheelchair is too hard and he's just like, gapped it? And I was like, OK, I'm going to need to call my dad and be like, right, you need to come and rescue me, I'm at the top of the stairs, my date stitched me, like, help. And sure enough, within, like a few minutes. And I was about to pick up the phone and I saw him appear through the building with a security guard. And he had just been running around that whole time, one, trying to get back into the building and then, two, trying to find someone that could come and open the door to let me back in. But it wasn't until maybe last year that I realised I hadn't told him how I felt during kind of that time. And he was actually quite offended when I told him that that's how I felt, he was actually quite offended, he was like you wouldn't, you didn't think I'd actually do that to you did I? And I'm like, well, obviously now now that, you know, we're engaged, we're getting married. Like, I know, you know, you're you're my life partner. I know you wouldn't do that. But at the time, it was all of those negative experiences that I had had before, all of those conversations with where my disability had been an issue or it had been a topic of conversation and had been a really big factor for people that I was I was like f..k, this is it. Someone's realized it's too hard and they've just left me here.

Olivia: In your own experience Etta, I guess can you talk a little about, like, the intersectionality, you know, of dating when you have a disability and also being queer?

Etta: Yeah, it was I mean, it was a funny one because it was a bit like, oh, s..t, here's another minority that I'm part of, but it does kind of let you off the hook a bit in terms of queer people are already kind of thinking outside what normal is. It lets me off the hook in terms of my body and in terms of how I want to explore my sexuality, because, yeah, people are already kind of have a bit of imagination about what expectations are and what what relationships look like and what sex is and what intimacy is like. I think that accessibility to, like, queer spaces and places that you might meet, people would spend time with queer people is like still a problem. I think in terms of dating, I would much rather kind of meet people face to face and things like that. I'd much rather be off apps, but I'm on them partly because, um, physical access to like bars and, um, spaces where I might meet people is such a gamble, you know?

Olivia: So tell us a bit of I mean, we've shared some dating app stories. Um, what's your experience been like with with dating like on an app? Do you, I mean, the question I often get is, do you share your photos of yourself in a wheelchair or how do you disclose it and that type of thing?

Etta: I have photos on there of me and all my kind of like disability slogan T-shirts and like, you know-

Olivia: Really in your face.

Etta: Yeah, I have a T-shirt, that my flat mate gave me that just says 'disabled and queer'. So, like, you know, states everything. And I also have T-shirts that say 'your unsolicited advice will not cure my disability'.

Olivia: That's great.

Etta: I've got a picture of me with that and I also but yeah, my profile at the moment kind of does say I'm here just, I'm here distracting myself from writing, and please don't like please don't ask what's wrong you, I get bad enough from random strangers on the street. I don't that's not what I come to apps to be asked and then you know if you're really stuck for an opener, here's a picture of my cat. And I have had quite a few people be like, oh, your cat's cute. So he's doing you know, he's doing a good job as a wing man.

Olivia: Do you have any memorable dates that you wanted to talk about, whether they're good or bad?

Etta: I think it was a date recently that I went on and I'd sort of I sort of said to myself, OK, don't go on to your kind of disability rights soapbox or like, you know, save it. Just slow down.

Olivia: Save it for like the fifth date or like? What do you mean save it?

Etta: Yeah. And then she kind of goes, oh, that just sounds pretty ableist doesn't it? And I was like, OK, good this is going to be like this is going to be good. [laughter] And on that date ended with, we went home and. I just want I want to get I wanted to get back and see what would happen, and, um, she, uh, she didn't have money on her Snapper and she said, oh, I won't be able to bus. And I said, oh, don't worry, like just come with me and now they'll like, let you know, it'll be fine and then they'll just wave you, just wave you on. And she goes, Why? Because they think you're my, they think I'm your support worker? I was like, just lead into it, just just go to, roll with the ableism. Make some more assumptions about how helpless I am now. And so, yeah, that was cute.

Olivia: We get such intrusive questions even outside of dating. Right? Like I mean, I've had like a random stranger come up to me like a public bathroom, ask me if I can have sex.

Etta: I always wanted to brave enough to be like, why, are you propositioning me?

Becs: Well, that's a good comeback.

Etta: I haven't been brave enough to do that.

Olivia: Etta, I'd be interested to know a bit about some of the research you've done around like sex education and disability. I mean, we were in sex ed class together and there was no mention of disability at high school.

Etta: Yeah, and that's kind of why I ended up, why I ended up doing that research is that a friend who was working in public health. And I started talking about this thing kind of. Yeah, being a teenager and not hearing discussion of disability at all in sex ed. And I really just wanted to know because we went to a school that was kind of so openly affirming of queer people and we went to a school that, you know, was quite inclusive, but it didn't get mentioned. And as kind of difficult as it was to hear that disabled people are so kind of poorly served by our sex ed curriculum, it was affirming in a way to hear that it hadn't just been, you know, me feeling those absences. And the real question was like, you know, how does that sort of shape your sense of self like later on in life? And yeah, and people really feeling like still carrying those questions into like early adulthood, like is this for me, am I going to be part of my life? How much do we talk about disability with our partners and, well, you know, down to things like like sort of how do you deal with muscle tension and sex or how do you deal with, like positioning or being comfortable or like pain or these kind of things that we contend with in our lives, or like medication or whatever, you know, all these things that we live in our bodies anyway and how those impact our sexuality. But the cool thing about, like, sexual expression to me for disabled people is that it's like an opportunity to experience your body differently. I think that's the powerful thing about it for anyone, but for people who's who the the kind of conversations around what it is to be disabled is, there's so much negative discourse there and negative thinking that, um, for me, um, yes, sexual expression is really exciting in that way, gives, creates a space for, um yeah for people to experience their bodies as good things and powerful things. We'd like to be desired and have desires and also just like on a really basic level, that touch is really important is really important and and touch that isn't functional, you know, like touch that's not about support or you know, it's not about sort of like basic needs, showering and dressing and those kind of things that it's about yeah, that it is connected to pleasure and desire and all those things.

[Theme music begins: Feel good catchy funk pop song]

Olivia: And that's it for this episode of What's Wrong With You?

Beccs: To watch a behind the scenes video on how we made this podcast, or if you want to listen to our other episodes, head to stuff.co.nz/whatswrongwithyou

Olivia: Coming up in the next episode ...

Rhiannon: Well, the Bible says that God heals stuff and so I'm like, why can't he regrow limbs? If he wants to do it with me, then have at it, I'll take it.

Latifa: This guy came in and was like can I pray for you? And I said yes, and then he was like, OK, and he's like let's go around the corner to this like alley, and I was like-

Beccs: Oh no, no, no, no.

Latifa: You can pray for me in your own time, I'm not coming with you down some alley please.

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[Theme music ends: Feel good catchy funk pop song]

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