

Disability, Disclosure, and Communication Documentary Transcript

Em (They/She) 0:00

First thing I would disclose is my sexuality because I-I've been out for a long time. So it's not something I'm you usually kind of worried about. Those conversations will come at like, I guess, times where it just makes sense? Where like, okay, an issue with a disability or like with my autism will arise. I'm having uh, on the brink of having a shutdown or a meltdown and I'm like, "Hey, by the way, I'm autistic."

Sonny (They/Them) 0:27

I mean, like when you're reading a dating app, and you're like, okay, like, what do I put in my bio? Like, do I just list my many identities like... [Laughing] am I just disclosing this information to new random people? But like... there's information like I'm very comfortable with people knowing publicly, um and there's information that like, I do want to gauge whether this is a safe person to share information with.

Tia (She/Her) 0:51

What I've learned to do over time, is that whenever I kind of am meeting a new person, I'm like, if I'm, if I expect that I'm going to be like, in that person's contact for any sort of prolonged period of time, I usually just say, like, hey, like, when I like when I can, hey, by the way, some days, I can't do this, or like, or just like, really generally, like, oh, like, like, I can't do that I have an injury, like, and I might either say I have an injury or I'm disabled, depending on who the person is.

Sonny (They/Them) 1:24

I've found with people who have similar challenges, there's a lot more like, just being there. Like just understanding that, being in that moment, listening to you... like, maybe you can make a suggestion or two, but it's difficult when you're in a situation with someone who's used to being able to solve these kinds of problems... um, and these are things that like, obviously, if it's something that I struggle with, I'm very intimately aware of, and conscious of all the things that I should be doing to fix it.

Tia (She/Her) 2:02

People tend to respond to injury, a lot better than disability because I think there's a temporality aspect to it, that injury is temporary, disability is permanent. Injury, you can say, "Oh, I hope you get better soon," disability, you can't always say that, especially like for people who have terminal illnesses, like some of my friends do, or who are chronically in pain, it's not going to get better.

Em (They/She) 2:24

The best way to kind of react to disclosure, if you're somebody, like any type of disclosure, like sexuality, gender, disability would be to obviously be accepting and especially if you're talking to

somebody who is autistic, it's like, again, saying it verbally rather than just giving nonverbal cues.

Tia (She/Her) 2:46

Like when we say disclosure, it often sounds like oh, it's like a one and done kind of thing. But like, it's so... like people I don't know, if people forget, or they just don't listen the first time, or like, what it is, or if it's just that like they don't believe me, because I look so able bodied and sometimes, I'm like, pain free on some days, which is like, really awesome. That's like only happened in the last like, year.

Sonny (They/Them) 3:07

For me disclosure in like, a, telling someone I have a disability or telling someone I'm non binary, um, is very comfortable... um, because I like I can rehearse that in my head, I can, you know, like, I-I have, you know, if they say something mean, I can just leave like, it works out well that way. I think the disclosure part that's difficult for me is like letting someone into what the day to day lived experience of that is, for me.

Tia (She/Her) 3:36

What I have found is that I find that more intimidating to disclose to someone who I'm like, romantically interested in than someone who's just like, platonic friendship.

Sonny (They/Them) 3:44

Having someone be in those vulnerable moments with you, is like the kind of disclosure I find difficult because that's, that's disclosure that is not that I'm not in total control of. I've just had a lot of people be surprised when I talk about autism. Because in a so- first date, dynamic, I am masking and I know that social scripts and I'm I get along really well with people. So I don't fit into the like stereotype of the socially awkward, young boy idea.

Em (They/She) 4:20

I-I can actually do the very typical, like stereotypical version of flirting that you see in movies and stuff if I try to mask... like if I mask, but you can tell it's an act. And you can tell I'm like pretending. And I have very specific, like social scripts that I can say... but they don't mean anything to me and they're just repeats and once I run out of them, like that's it, it's gone.

Sonny (They/Them) 4:43

In dating experiences or like dating situations that I'm experienced in. I have social scripts that are very comfortable and I feel good at them. But then it becomes very scary when you go into a situation you're not used to... um, so like you know the first time meeting your partner's parents or like the first time your friends become friends with your partner or your partner's friends. And having these new social dynamics and scripts that I-I'm not used to can be very difficult to navigate. And it doesn't mean that I like don't want to do them or that uh, they're bad or that my, like the- the anxieties I have about it, are any indication that this is a thing I shouldn't be doing. It's just anxieties about new and unknown things.

Tia (She/Her) 5:24

So usually if I'm going on a date with someone, I've met them in person before or like I've met them in some sort of social situation before. And so, chances are, like, I've like, before the date came up, I've mentioned it to them as someone who's like, in my periphery or something, right? Like I've mentioned, the injury, you know? But then so then when it comes to the dating context, I had to say, so like, remember, I talked about injury, it's actually like a chronic, like pain that I deal with, you know? And sometimes I have to get into like, the details of what that actually means for like, how I experience like how I like you know, how I experience the world and life and stuff.

Em (They/She) 6:04

If you are yourself that really allows the autistic person to be themselves as well, which is so much more easier, especially for a long term relationship, because there's no way somebody could be masking for such a long time. A lot of the relationships that have going better, like in the recent years is because I've gotten to know myself and I've gotten better at putting boundaries in place.

Tia (She/Her) 6:26

It's like, I think it's challenging for people to understand that it's an ongoing thing. But not only is it ongoing but it's also changeable.

Sonny (They/Them) 6:35

Having conversations around disability, kind of forces you to be able to have that level of communication, as well as like, reflect on those things for yourself, and reflect on how those things are navigated in your relationship beyond just disability. So, if I'm talking about like, I need to know how to communicate what I need to you, when I'm in a state where my emotional regulation is really bad... that's really important to know if you're someone with a disability, um but it's also really important to know in a relationship in general, because you need to be able to communicate to your partner when communicating is hard.

Em (They/She) 7:11

Often what I struggle with the most, and what I've noticed I struggle with the most in relationship is nonverbal cues. If I don't really get them, or I really struggle to get them. So, if something is said, like, okay, this is what's happening... it's so much easier to for me to know what to expect.

Tia (She/Her) 7:31

I use body language so much like I... like and facial expressions, and maybe more than I should perhaps like, and I like, but I'm usually pretty good at like reading other people's body language and expressions, and um... so I rely on that a lot. And that maybe comes from martial arts, like being very aware of my body and like also disability and pain, being very aware of my body and being aware of other people's bodies and how they react. I would run into

Em (They/She) 7:59

I would run into the issue of they would try to like, kiss me or hold my hand. And I would be like, I just wouldn't want to have that interaction, like I would just be disgusted by it um... and I never really understood why until I got my diagnosis, because that helped me understand that it was actually me being overstimulated by them wanting to constantly hold hands.

Sonny (They/Them) 8:20

I think there's also like an interesting discussion around like, what happens when my needs don't align with my partner's needs or their capacity to provide something and navigating like, okay, so how do we navigate a situation where we are, we're both facing challenges or our you know, particular needs in that situation are not aligning. Um, and that can be really challenging, um... for a relationship, uh it can be challenging emotionally, but it also like, kind of forces you to address like, how you navigate when things are not good.

When I have dated other people with disabilities or um, neurodivergent, um, ADHD or autism, there's a lot more of like a willingness and, a like, independently taking initiative to address and think about and challenge like societal norms or like socially constructed ideas. And that's something that's like, important to me... I mean, even just with like my gender, um and so that's something that I've noticed like because you've been forced to question the way that the world is set up, um, I think that there's a tendency to be more primed for those discussions in other wider arenas.