

Sex Critical | Very Loose Women Ep. #155

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Katherine & Emma interview Tasha and Kirsty, creators of Fucked Zine: On Being Sexually Dysfunctional in sex-positive Queer Scenes.

Intro: The programme which follows is brought to you by RESONANCE 104.4 FM. You're listening to very Loose Women.

Emma: So today we're joined by Kirsty and Tasha, who write a zine called *Fucked* zine and also they put on some workshops called *Can't Fuck*, *Won't Fuck*, which is where Lilly And I first made contact and met them, and were reinvested in what they were doing, so we brought them on to talk about a bit about those two projects. Hi, guys.

Lilly: Thanks for coming on.

Emma: Yeah. Thanks a lot for joining us. Maybe let's start off by talking about the zine a little bit and how it started.

Tasha: So the zine is called *Fucked: on being sexually dysfunctional in sex-positive queer scenes* and it's a zine that we put out, I think in March this year and we've been writing it for a couple of months before that. And it's us too and another two people were involved in doing the writing and it basically came out of a lot of conversations that we were having together as a group.

Just things that we felt no one was really talking about. So we're, you know, we're in London. I don't know whether we're like, part of a scene, but, you know, we know a bunch of other queers and stuff. So we're like friends with those people. And it just seemed like a lot of the things that we ended up writing, it was really hard to say them, like, even to each other. When we first started talking and we were like oh I'm not like the only person who feels like this. It was really amazing to have those conversations. And then we're like, well, if there's four of us having these conversations, maybe there's some other people who feel similarly. But when we first put the zine out, we thought like maybe some of our friends would buy it. And that was it. But I think we've sold, like, hundreds and hundreds. Of copies now all over the world.

Emma: What kind of issues was it that you were trying to address that you thought you couldn't? You hadn't talked about before? You couldn't talk about before.

Kirsty: Well, for me, earlier this year I started having psychosexual therapy and that was. Something that I didn't feel awkward about. I felt really pleased that I was doing it, but it felt weird to be. Going through that and also being part of a sex-positive feminist scene and hanging around in sort of queer places or queer parties where a lot of the attention is focused on hooking up with other people and and feeling a bit excluded from that or feeling like I'm weird or that everyone else. Is completely normal about sex and having loads of sex. And I'm. Mm-hmm. Just the odd one.

Tasha: But, actually pretty much everyone's a bit weird about sex, yeah.

Emma: Yeah, I think so.

Lilly: So for people who are listening and maybe aren't involved in these types of communities and maybe you could explain a little bit about kind of what sort of groups and what type of people maybe identify as queer and what being kind of sex-positive means in that landscape?

Tasha: Well, I think it's not specifically related to being queer. I think sex positivity was something that I came through to feminism. And you know, obviously, feminism and sex-positivity has, like, come a great way, you know, with like, emphasis and, like, people finding their own desires and being able to. I know you guys did a talk about masturbation and things like that. So there's like been loads and loads of progress within feminism. But I think what we found was missing is that. You know it's great to say like ohh sex is really fun and it's good for you. And if you have lots of sex, you're not like a slut or anything like that. But then on the flip side, it's like, well, I agree with that. But also I'm not having hardly any sex. And now I feel a bit weird and like, a prude or like excluded from spaces or from people who give the impression that, like, they're totally cool and sorted about sex.

Kirsty: And also I think a lot of sex-positive culture or literature always emphasises the fact that once you start doing consent right and once you start doing non-monogamy or polyamory right, you're gonna have all that great sex that you've always wanted to have and not everyone who wants to do

non-monogamy or who thinks that consent culture is really important actually wants to have loads of sex or the end goal shouldn't necessarily be having loads of great sex, unless you want it to be.

Lilly: So, when you actually started the zine, did you have a really clear idea about what you wanted to kind of write about? How did that actually evolve?

Tasha: I don't think we really had any idea what what we wanted to write about. I mean, for me, I don't know. I've like, kept a diary for like, 10 years. So a lot of the things I ended up writing were maybe just like based on diary entries and thoughts I'd been having. I also did sex therapy as well in like 2011. So it's using some of those ideas. And then just like, I don't know. Just experiences that I had, like within my friendship group or like within the scene.

Emma: I think just it's really interesting to me that you've both talked about having sex therapy or psychosexual therapy. Because I guess it's something that I didn't really know existed or was out there and it was a kind of a resource that could, geez, like how did you kind of hear about it or how did you come across and realize that was something that might be? Useful for you? Or maybe it wasn't useful for you.

Tasha: I think we've had different experiences. I found it personally quite useful and I know Kirsty, you didn't really. I guess for me, I feel like a lot of the reasons why I went to sex therapy was I had previously been in abusive relationship and at the time this was like 7 years ago or something. I didn't. I didn't even really think of it as abusive. I just thought that it was like normal as I guess a lot of. People do and I think that was a real failure of like. Sex education at school and things like that that I didn't realise that the situation I was in was actually really horrible and really bad for me and. My mental health. And then I guess like through feminism and stuff, I kind of. I like got the words to talk about what had actually happened and how it wasn't OK and it wasn't consensual and things like that. And and then I kind of like made a link with that and my mental health and and kind of being able to like self diagnose. And then I thought, well, maybe I'll go to therapy and see if that will work for me and it was OK, it was quite useful, but I know that wasn't except your experience scarcity.

Kirsty: So, I've always had a lot of anxiety about sex and have done since I started having sex, which was 10 years ago and I'm not sure when I became aware of psychosexual therapy as a thing, but. I guess about a couple of years ago I found out that the place where I go for my sexual health checks and where my gynecologist is, they also have a psychosexual clinic there and I managed to get a referral from the doctor I was seeing. And the therapy that I had was mindfulness CBT. So it was meant to be a combination of cognitive behavioral therapy and mindful meditation. And I really didn't like it at all. And I'd put a lot of. Pressure on myself because. It's something that I've been thinking about for a really long time and I thought now that I'm doing it, I'm actually gonna fix myself, and then I'm gonna be normal and have all the normal sex and be like. Everyone else. And I just put so much pressure on myself for it to, like, be a success which wasn't even the point of the therapy, because it's not goal oriented. It's about, I guess, about exploring. How you feel in those anxiety inducing situations? For me, it just didn't help at all. It made me more anxious and at the same time we were starting to write the zine and I was thinking more about one of the things I wanted to write about in the scene. And I did write about in the zine was. What if I'm not broken? And what if therapy won't fix me? And what if actually I don't really want to have sex, or I only want to have sex sometimes? And what would it mean to to say that? And what would that mean for my identity? And what would that mean? Like as a queer person? And that's I think, something that's come up quite a lot in our workshops as well.

Lilly: It's quite interesting hearing you both talk about this idea of, you know, having loads of normal sex and great sex and having loads of it. And it feels like often when we've done shows about ***** and orgasms. We've also brought up the fact that it seems like to be kind of sexually normal. You're having sex all the time and you're always loving it. And it's very particular type of sex. Where did that idea come from to you? Did you first become? Aware of what it was to be sexually normal and functional.

Tasha: I think I felt like a pressure to be sexual from a really, really young age. I remember like starting middle school at the age of nine and at that time suddenly it was like, OK, well now you have

to have a boyfriend cause like everyone has a boyfriend. And I feel like that was the beginning of then what was just like increasing, increasing amounts of pressure. And I don't know. I think I think being at school is like incredibly difficult and there is like a lot of pressure on the one hand, you can't have sex because if you do, you are a slut and. Uh. Yeah. I don't know. It was. It was really difficult, I think growing up at school, I found it very hard. And then I guess, maybe naively, I thought that like when I came out as queer and started hanging out with other queer people, that maybe that wouldn't be the case. But it often, to me, feels like a lot of queer culture is centered around hooking. Up and I really understand where that comes from when we live in a really homophobic society and like having those spaces where you are free to hook up with other queers, that is amazing and obviously really liberatory for a lot of people, but it still made me feel quite excluded.

Kirsty: I think that the idea I have of normal sex and this sex-positive. You know, everyone's getting laid all the time. It's it's kind of a straw man. And I know that the problem isn't so much that like there are loads of people having loads of sex, it's that the space isn't being made to talk about sexual dysfunction or asexuality or. Other you know being a survivor and other issues that people have with sex and that is the problem rather than the fact that I'm excluded from all the cool quiz getting laid because I don't really think that that's what's going on.

Emma: I also think when I kind of a kind of much lower level issue like the kind of sex banter that happens. A lot like I was talking to a friend recently and saying I've just started dating this. Ryan, you know, like within about one minute, she said to me. Oh, have you done it yet? Like kind of jokingly, but also like, and then she it was accompanied by, you know, hand action. But like maybe yeah, it was kind of a joke, but it did kind of make me feel like, oh, I need to answer this question and like, if I say like, actually, no, I've been a bit. I'm not sure about it like it. It was a bit embarrassing almost, cause you know so obvious that we would have had sex already that you know, like of course I'd answer that way. But I mean, obviously that's quite a low level thing, but to have that kind of ingrained banterous aspect also. Is a bit. I don't know anything sometimes.

Lilly: I feel like the way that I feel about sex and in terms of my sexuality, but also just how much of it I want and how it makes me feel about myself, actually is changing quite a lot as I kind of move into different stages of my life and of different pressures. And, you know, even friendship groups or a whole host of factors. When did you first, and maybe how did you first kind of start really thinking about your relationship with your sexuality? And I know that you mentioned about finding kind of feminist texts. When did that actually happen? Was there a particular kind of moment where you read? And seeing where that that makes sense to me.

Tasha: God, that's a big question, I guess. I don't know. My. Yeah, I first got interested in feminism when I was doing my undergrad degree. That was probably in, like, 2000 and eight, 2009. I don't know. I feel like that was a really that period of my life. Suddenly, like, lots of things changed for me and I feel like like pre feminism, Tasha is a really different person to post feminism, Tasha, but I guess I don't know. It's been like a, like, constant process with me. And I even think about how I was feeling like two or three years ago and I just feel like how I feel and like my desires have like, changed so much. And there's just like, there's not, like, a really linear narrative of, like, how I feel about, like, sexuality and stuff. It's really confusing all the time.

Kirsty: I think finding sort of second wave sex-negative texts was really important for me and I have to, as a disclosure say I'm anti-censorship, and I don't like the way that some of this discourse sort of tells heterosexual women they have a false consciousness, and that all the sex that they're having with men is damaging, and I obviously don't agree with that. But it was really exciting to find a sort of counter-rhetoric that was able to be critical about sex or negative about sex. And I really enjoyed it and I enjoyed how angry it was. And I think now we're trying to navigate between the kind of sex negativity that we're talking about or thinking about and this more sort of like second wave sex-negative feminism that we don't agree with a lot of.

Tasha: Yeah, it's it's really hard, I don't want us to be like, yeah, we're rad fems because we're definitely not. But yeah, there's definitely some something to be said for that kind of analysis of sex

under patriarchy and how it's just really difficult and fraught. And I don't, I don't think there's like any right answers.

Lilly: You know, associated with popularity like you were talking about earlier, you know, you've gotta have a boyfriend and you've gotta do this. And there's these milestones. But then when you're older, maybe there's more of a minefield about you get asked out on a date by somebody you don't know. And they spend loads of money and you automatically put on the back foot. And people might say things like. Ohh, he was, you know, say shivers. And he paid for everything. And now I feel like I have to see him again. And this this kind of. You know, discourse still links into very old fashioned ideas, and that's something that I've certainly struggled with I.

Emma: Think I think there's an issue which with like kind of feeding, there's a bit of a contract like an unsaid contract like Oh well, we've done this and now we've gotta do this or like, oh, we've done it once. So like the next time we see it server, we have to do it again because like that's now our relationship. That's what we've entered into. I think that's a. Real big problem.

Lilly: Mm-hmm. So when you kind of first started putting together disease, what kind of response did you have?

Tasha: So the zine was originally it was just done by the four of us who were already friends and we didn't think about asking other people to get involved. But then when we put it out and we have had like such an amazing response and we've done the workshops, which I guess we'll come to in a minute, we're we're working on a second issue of the zine at the moment and we are asking. For people to contribute, because just from the sheer volume of people we've had at the workshops, it does seem that a lot of people have things to say.

Kirsty: And also we within a couple of months of the zine coming out, we were being contacted by people like feminists all over the world being told that they were selling the zine at the like, you know, Clear Book fair or anarchist book Fair, Copenhagen, Sweden, all cities all over the UK, people who want us to. Come and talk about it. Or just to say that they've never read anything. And that's spoken about those issues before and how appreciative they are, which is amazing.

Lilly: Which obviously goes to show that you were completely right about there being a lack of space for people to talk about this. To get such a an overwhelming.

Emma: Response. Yeah, I was saying that Lily and I went to see, can't ****, won't ****. Like the workshop you were putting on. And maybe can you tell us about how those started? The kind of responses you've had.

Kirsty: One of our friends who is involved in the house. Brag squats, which is well, it's been a squatting project for a couple of years now. For queer people specifically, and this summer they were squatting in Brixton for over gay pride to host alternative pride events, and we one of our friends. Asked us if we would do a talk based on the scene. Because they wanted something slightly different to the kind of standard consent workshops that go on that often have a really sex-positive focus. So we agreed to do that and we would sort of deciding what we would do if more than 15 people came because we might not be able to facilitate it properly. And there was at least 50. People, though not 60, and it was astounding and everyone was so respectful to each other. Everyone gave each other space. No one said anything problematic. And afterwards, everyone was just coming up to us and saying how great it was and we felt really validated because we thought maybe everyone's just going to think we're we're weirdos.

Emma: Yeah, people like, what's your problem? That's fine. Can you explain a little bit about how it works and what you know what kind of themes or what is it you're addressing and?

Tasha: So I guess it's actually less of a workshop and more of a discussion. I mean, I don't feel that we personally have any like expertise on like feeling weird about sex, so.

Kirsty: I'm really good at it.

Tasha: We are. Yeah. We just wanted as many people as possible to participate. So it's so yeah, it's it's a discussion really. And actually, what's been interesting about doing it in different places in the country is that different themes seem to come up in different places. I guess that's reflective of different

scenes and and different things that people want to talk about. But yeah, we. I don't know. Every time we always run out of time. It's like always like 2 or 2 1/2 hours and then we just have to stop because everyone's exhausted. But you know, it's great. We talked about everything from asexuality and aromanticism, things like consent and communication, past abuse and trauma, and then sex therapy and things like that. Polyamory and non monogamy seems to be quite popular. I don't know what else.

Kirsty: We've talked about the role that alcohol plays in feminist or queer spaces, and how the absence of alcohol can really change the dynamic. And we've talked about disability and sex, so one person at the AFM conference was talking a lot about autism or the type of medication that you're on and how that can affect your engagement with sex. One of the really interesting things someone asked was they didn't have anxiety about sex, but what? What could people do? Who have who, if they have partners, who who do have that anxiety, and that was really productive cause a lot of the time our workshops are really depressing and yeah.

Tasha: Makes a lot of heavy stuff, yeah.

Kirsty: We feel really. So that was good.

Tasha: I I guess we've also we try and for the last section of the workshop is to try and have maybe some more constructive ideas of of yeah, either how you can support your partner or just each other within the scene and maybe some more practical things to do because I think it is really cathartic to talk about, you know, some of those quite negative feelings, but. You know, obviously we also want to be able to try and create a better situation for everyone.

Emma: And why do you think I mean, cause I was kind of astounded at that straight off, you know, you kind of did a bit of an intro and then it just everyone went for it and just, you know, really, really personal stuff. Why do you think people feel like so comfortable sharing? I don't know. I certainly didn't feel that confident when we did the first workshop. I don't know whether it's just the fact that, like, it's such a novelty.

Tasha: To have a space to talk about those things like there's there's nowhere else that you can talk about that at the moment or so. It seems. Anyway and yeah, to have so many people like waiting to talk is is really great.

Kirsty: But yeah, it's really scary. I don't know. And I guess at a firm we talked a lot about asexuality and I think there are a few people there who it's not a distressing issue. It's not a traumatic issue. That's just how they identify. And they were really happy to give some information about that because we were using a lot of terms that people hadn't heard of before to do with asexuality. So I think that helps.

Emma: I think as well, I guess the minute one person says something really personal really gets the ball rolling and was like, oh, it's 3/4. I can say whatever I want, but also I guess when you're with complete strangers, it's kind of like, well, there's no repercussions. You know, I can just say whatever because no one I know.

Lilly: Mm-hmm. And I think you're coming at it from a very personal point of view and sharing your stories rather than saying, you know, I'm the academic journalistic expert on this. And this is my view and everything I do is Co opting other people into my view. You're not, you know, you're going and and encouraging people to feel safe sharing their own. By using yours as a kind of vehicle to encourage the. So I imagine that that kind of makes people feel like right from the beginning. They're in a place that's OK for them to be as honest as possible. You mentioned a few of the topics that kind of come up and and how there are differences when you do different workshops in different areas. But are there kind of particular specific issues that come up?

Tasha: Again and again. So definitely, asexuality is 1. I think also polyamory and non monogamy that seems to come up with all of.

Kirsty: The ones we've done, I think because I've been going to like the a firm, was the day after the anarchist Book Fair, which I've been going to for quite a few years, and there's usually a discussion on sex or sexuality. It's usually about polyamory, and it's usually about how great polyamory is. How? Awfully oppressed, monogamous people are, and we're also.

Tasha: So radical because we've all got so many partners with that kind of rhetoric.

Kirsty: Yeah. And I I think that people need a space to explore the difficulties in being non monogamous. And one issue that comes up quite a lot is. Having multiple partners and not wanting the same relationship with all of them, and how do you? How do you tell one person you're saying that you wanna have sex with them when you don't, and then another that you don't and that I think that is issues come up quite a lot. I I think it's like what you were saying earlier about obligation and things like that and and working through within yourself.

Tasha: I I certainly often feel like a lot of obligation to have sex with people, and that seems to be a thing that's come up in terms of like, how can we combat that? But it it seems to be really, really ingrained.

Kirsty: And another thing that's come up as well is. When it's been because we always frame it as a queer discussion, even though it's not, even though other people can come as well and and one thing that's come up is that when you're a queer person in a homophobic society, you're constantly having to defend your identity and your sexual practices. And sometimes you end up doing it to the point that you deny that there's any. Problems within your communities or within your relationships because you're constantly on the defensive. And so I think having. Yeah, having that space to be able to talk about these those issues without facing criticism from people going, yeah, that's because you're queer or that's cause you're ***** or whatever.

Emma: Yeah, what I felt was it was really helpful like that. You're facing that for everyone. Like for some people as well kind of hearing it a label or a name for something that they've been experiencing and realizing, oh, other people have that. To like feel that as well. And that's that's kind of really useful. Do you? Think it's helpful for you? Yeah, definitely.

Tasha: I think after. After the first one that we did at the House of Brag, I was so nervous beforehand, and I think as Kirsty mentioned, we were like ohh God, what if everyone just thinks we're like making up and it's not really a problem. But after that first session, like it is incredibly validating to be like, oh, I'm not the only.

Kirsty: One who's really weird and now we have a handy little booklet to give every anyone that we're dating, just like by.

Emma: The way read this that we take our radio show. We're like, oh, you should listen to this episode about this before we. Yeah, before we.

Tasha: Just the scene.

Emma: Heartbreak. Yeah.

Tasha: I I think that is that is true though because I did date someone earlier this year and they had already read the zine and I just felt like so much relief. I was like ohh God, I don't have to like, explain everything, it was really.

Lilly: It you mentioned about how towards the end of the sessions, you really want to kind of focus on finding ways and strategies for partners and people to be supportive and work around some of these issues. What kind of ideas have you and people taking part hard?

Kirsty: We haven't got that far. People mainly. Want to talk about how sad they are? Yeah, we had some good suggestions for people who are having sex or want to have sex, which is systems of consent that don't necessarily rely. On the idea of enthusiastic consent, which suggests that like you love sex and you wanna talk about sex and you're gonna talk about your body parts. And that's not gonna be traumatic for you. Whereas some people might find doing good consent really difficult and really triggering, but actually really important. So we've talked a lot about how the slogan consent is sexy. Can actually be really problematic because consent is just mandatory and it might not be sexy, but you have to do it anyway, so people suggested like numbered or coloured systems so. Yellow means I want to do this thing. Red means I don't want to do that thing or or a numbering system which I don't like because it's got. More of a hierarchy.

Tasha: Like but I get. I guess it can be useful for some people if you just if you very clearly know what you want. But like talking about it. But you can just be like #3 tonight. Would be.

Kirsty: It's a please.

Tasha: Go for it. I think we've also, I don't know, it's difficult. So we talked about, you know, trying to create other spaces for quiz that are not centered around hooking up. And obviously you're quite limited by that, particularly in London where like everywhere is very expensive to like higher spaces and things like that. So I guess that's like an on. Doing discussion of how we would.

Kirsty: Do that trying not to do banter, because even even though, like I know, Tasha and I both sometimes feel excluded if everyone's talking about sex and we don't necessarily feel like we have something to contribute or we don't want to talk about it. So we've been trying to do less sex banter because even I'll do. Sex banter that excludes me, so I think it's just.

Lilly: This is.

Tasha: I guess just like like what? Yeah.

Emma: Excluding yourself. OK.

Tasha: I think like what you're saying, Emma, like, not just like, if someone's, like, gone on a date with someone. Just like, assuming that they're gonna have sex or whatever and kind of like questioning that within yourself and then maybe. Not focusing on that as a as a topic of discussion with people constantly, it's really.

Emma: Great that you're kind of doing these things and kind of like queer spaces. How do you think there's a way that we can kind of make things like this so these?

Kirsty: Kind of discussions and these kind of stuff more inclusive. We've been really encouraging people to go away and have these conversations in their friendship groups or their communities or wherever they hang out. Because yeah, it's obviously not just an issue that affects queer people, and it's definitely an issue that's. And to and, you know, affect women and basically anybody. So we we do want people to have those.

Tasha: Conversations. Yeah, we have really been emphasising that like it's, you know, we're not experts. It is for people to take away and have those conversations within their friendship groups. And I think even though the zine is written by queer people, like a lot of our experiences. For me anyway, was when I was ideating as like a straight woman and having a lot of sex with men. So I I don't think it's like necessarily a really yeah clear distinction.

Kirsty: I think one of the reasons we focus on the queer scene is partly because we're part of it, but also because we expect it to have a better standard because it's engaged with feminist politics or. It's got a good consent culture or it's meant to, so kind of expect that standard to exist.

Tasha: But, but I think the problems that we're talking about are pretty universal. Really. Hmm.

Lilly: I wonder if you could maybe tell us a bit about what you've got coming up next. So anyone who is listening and it's like yes, really want to get involved. And how can they do that and keep up?

Tasha: To date with you. So we are taking submissions for our second scene, which is gonna be called too far, too furious. If you want to submit something of that, you can e-mail us at sexcritical@gmail.com. Really, really emphasise if people wanna write something that would be really, really great because we wanna hear from as many people as possible with with different experiences from ours as well. So. And we also have a Tumblr which is *****.***. and that keeps up to date with events and stuff. We're hoping to go and do a tour in Manchester in the New Year. Yeah, that's what.

Kirsty: We've got planned and if people want to invite us to. To do facilitate other discussions that.

Lilly: Great. Brilliant. Yeah, I was. I was thinking about how a lot of what we've really talked about links back to our first experiences of sex people talking about it and how, you know, sex education at school. We talked about this a lot on the show, just isn't really fit for purpose and and a lot of these ideas.

Emma: I think should roll out into schools really ideal, but.

Lilly: Looking at texts and experiencing kind of different points of. View talking about different different types of sexuality. It's really basic at school and so much of this would be so helpful to kids. So I completely agree with you on that front because it's just coming up all the time. People we spoke to.

Tasha: Yeah, we we have talked about that. I think at the Brighton one we were talking a lot about consent and especially with children and how often children aren't treated in very consensually way, not to do with sex, but just in any way, you know, you just assume that kids will want to be hugged or tickled or whatever and how it starts really basically at such a young age that people don't. Give consent to what's happening to their. These. So yeah, I think we need to do really early interventions.

Emma: I guess it's probably a good.

Lilly: Point to stop. Thank you so much for.

Emma: Coming on, thanks for coming on.

Lilly: For full versions of our shows, check out [very loose women.wordpress.com](http://veryloosewomen.wordpress.com).

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