

LAURA FLANDERS & FRIENDS

FULL, UNEDITED CONVERSATION — “LOVE IN A F*CKED-UP WORLD”: DEAN SPADE’S SELF-HELP BOOK FOR MOVEMENTS

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NARRATOR: While our weekly shows are edited to time for broadcast on public TV and community radio, we offer to our supporting members and podcast subscribers the full, uncut conversation. The following is from our episode featuring Dean Spade, lifelong activist and author of the recently published book, “Love in a F*cked-Up World: How to Build Relationships, Hook Up, and Raise Hell, Together”. These audio exclusives are made possible thanks to our member supporters.

LAURA FLANDERS: Life is not about to get easier in the years to come. The crises we're facing are real. Climate, healthcare, human rights, work, we are looking at challenges on every front. "And the reality is," writes our guest today, "We're going to need each other more than ever." That means that we had better get our interpersonal house in order. And to that end, lifelong activist [Dean Spade](#) has written "Love in a F*cked Up World: How to Build Relationships, Hook Up, and Raise Hell Together." It's just out from [Algonquin Press](#). Dean Spade is a lawyer, educator, and author of "Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis" and "Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, And the Limits of the Law." And he's the director of "Pinkwashing Exposed: Seattle Fights Back!" And in 2002, he founded the [Sylvia Rivera Law Project](#) in New York City, a law collective that provides free legal services to trans and gender non-conforming people who are low income and, or people of color. "The famous feminist slogan, 'The personal is political' is correct," writes Spade. "It matters what happens in our intimate lives. It matters for us and for the people and causes we care about." What's love got to do with it? A lot. Dean Spade, welcome back to "Laura Flanders & Friends." I'm so glad to be talking with you again. It's been a while.

DEAN SPADE: Me too. It's wild to me that it was 10 years ago that we last had an interview.

LAURA FLANDERS: Well, I'm glad we're catching up. And I have to say, it did occur to me, what is a nice, radical, trans lawyer doing writing a self help book? Why?

DEAN SPADE: Yeah. Well, you know, over all these years, I have continued to be part of the struggles that I've always been part of, you know, abolition, queer and trans liberation, work around poverty and immigration and war. And in all those struggles, another part of the work that I've always been doing, different from the stuff we talked about last time, has been just, like, you

know, supporting each other to be keep groups together, to figure out how to keep collaborations going, to deal with the conflict that never really comes up when you do work together that you care about. And so I've kind of had this other track of work. I've been writing this book for about 10 years actually, and, work also on myself to figure out how to show up in groups and in relationships related to organizing with, you know, without playing out the toxic stuff that we all inherit from our society and from our own experiences of difficulty and trauma in our lives. So this book is really about that. It's about what I really see as one of the worst vulnerabilities of our movements. It's how we treat each other. Can we stick together enough to get things done, to take big risks together, to do difficult things? Sometimes with people we don't know well or don't have a lot in common with. And for me, it's a pretty big fault line, and I've seen a lot of groups and collaborations and projects that we really needed fall apart over the relational piece. So to me, it's kind of a natural extension of my other work. You know? My work is a lot about how does social change happen? How do we actually do it?

LAURA FLANDERS: And there's a lot of bumps in the road.

DEAN SPADE: Absolutely.

LAURA FLANDERS: I mean, they say, you know, when the times get tough, the tough get going, but it's not, doesn't necessarily make us better, more easy to get along with people. Is it a coincidence that this book emerged in a way, at least sequentially, out of your mutual aid work? Because mutual aid efforts really brought a lot of people together in difficult circumstances during the COVID epidemic in a sense. And I could imagine a lot of those tensions would come up.

DEAN SPADE: Yeah. I mean, mutual aid, I believe, is a vital and central part of our movement. It's the part where we really take care of each other because the systems that we live under are, you know, harming us and certainly not giving the essential care we need. And for most people in our movement, it's the entry point into movements. It's like, I needed something and these people were giving it out after I was denied it at school or by the government or whatever. It's really vital, and people do mutually work primarily in unpaid groups, like just doing community work that needs doing. So if we can't get along there, we leave. You know, you're not being paid. Right? And so I've seen that definitely since 2020, but even before in all my years in movements, the thing that often is the biggest trouble is the relational piece. And some people even leave our movements because they have negative experiences of conflict in groups that are never resolved. And I think it's just kind of this you know, you mentioned at the opening that personal is political. Sometimes relational work is considered like women's work or it's not important. All that matters is how many banner drops did we do or how many meals did we get out. There's a kind of external focus that I think is actually kind of capitalist and sexist often. And so it's really a feminist move to talk about, like, what's going on here in our group that can actually make us

be able to keep doing this work and stay in the fight? So, yes, this I think it is a natural extension of my work in, you know, in all my writing, actually.

LAURA FLANDERS: How would you describe the fight that you feel is ahead of you and the people that you work with right now?

DEAN SPADE: Well, you know, to be honest, obviously, conditions are already really dire in terms of the ecological crisis. The, you know, the storms and fires and floods are not gonna stop. They're not gonna stop coming. They're gonna continue coming in faster, and we've seen how little support people get in the face of that. And we're already living with a, you know, giant criminal punishment system that harms our communities, a horrible border enforcement system, you know, US imperialism all over the world and supporting genocide in Palestine and, you know, so many other, awful, militarized fronts around the world. So all of that's been going on. And now we're getting the second Trump administration, which is far more geared up even than it was last time. And we're in worse conditions than we were last time he came into office. Right? Like, rents are higher, more people are unhoused, Like, more people are in crisis. Many people have long COVID. I mean, there's so many pieces to the puzzle. Right? And so it's a rough fight. Like, more people are about to lose their health care because, you know, on on many fronts, both specific health care that's under attack, like reproductive and trans health care, but also the possibility of the loss of the, of, you know, sort of any kind of affordable, health care for lower income people. There's gonna be a tax on all of the kinds of social programs we rely on. There's greater political repression already underway under the Biden administration, ramping up under the Trump administration. I mean, I think it's just we're gonna, like, have an a need to be with each other and have each other's backs more than ever and not get lost in fights that tear us apart and and make us fail to show the solidarity that is, you know, like, just so vital right now. It's a, this is a very difficult horizon that we are looking at, and, really, we're all we have. Like, there's not no one's coming to save us. There's nothing coming from on top. If anyone had that fantasy, it's definitely not happening. So it really turns us towards, like, faith in each other, faith in each other's goodness, faith in the idea of collaboration, shrugging off ideas that people are naturally greedy or selfish and moving towards, like, what happens in crisis? How can we actually come together and back each other up and show our best selves and and be willing to be humble and look at some of, you know, the ways we may have internalized toxic stuff from the culture that impacts the organizing.

LAURA FLANDERS: You write in the book that before we can even start grappling with what's within, we have to have the courage to face what we are up against. And the list that you just gave is exactly the kind of list that has driven a lot of people to say, "I am going on some kind of vacation," or "I am at least gonna absent myself for a while because I can't handle how much we're up against." So how do you advise people take in the reality of what we're facing in maybe bite-sized chunks?

DEAN SPADE: I think part of why it's so hard to take it in is that most of us are taking in all the bad news by ourselves through a screen. That's not actually the way humans were evolved to take in bad news. I think we're the first set of people on earth who've primarily taken in bad news alone. Usually someone would've come and told you or you'd already be in a group. So I think one of the best things we can do to support our own wellbeing through the overwhelm is be with others. Like joining any kind of project in our communities, a creative project, a mutual aid project, something that connects us to others to digest what's happening and feel like we're part of anything that is pushing back and supporting care is good. Not just for the world and the people who may get support through your project, but for you. It's the way to make friends who care about what you care about. It's the way to break isolation. It's the way to not feel that you have to numb out to survive, which is a very reasonable response to this cultural moment. And there's a lot of really great entertainment technology and really high quality cannabis products and such things that people could use to numb up. But, actually, that doesn't get you what you need, which is, like, we all need people to visit us in the hospital when we're sick. We need people to have our backs in our communities. And so finding those real connections is, I think, people may feel avoidant of it, like it's overwhelming to imagine joining others, but, actually, it's also deeply soothing and nurturing to have others with us when we are scared.

LAURA FLANDERS: We've been producing a weekly television show for the last year, and that has been great. And I'll also say that the monthly potlucks I initiated at the beginning of 2024 have been a lifesaver for me. So that's for what it's worth. As to this question of your approach versus others, even in discussing the collectivity of our progress or our condition, you're distinguishing yourself from a lot of kinds of self help groups. How else would you say you're different and your book is different from all the many self help offerings that are out there?

DEAN SPADE: Yeah. I think that a lot of the self help field that it, the the typical self help genre is very focused on the individual. It doesn't contextualize the kinds of suffering that everyone's going through in a broader, like, feminist analysis, anti capitalist analysis, anti racist analysis. Like, if we understand that our individual suffering is a bunch of bigger scripts that we didn't actually write, and that those feelings and strong states aren't necessarily us, they may actually be, like, stuff that's implanted. It can be a little bit freeing. The other thing is I really hope people read the book and realize that this, like, the conflict they're in isn't unique. This is common across our movements. It can be a little relieving to the judgment of others or judgment of oneself to be like, oh, I'm in a pattern. The pattern is cultural. There are ways to be gentle and caring and notice it. And I think that there's a lot of liberation, even that critical inch of distance you get when you see, oh, I'm having a strong feeling right now, and it's part of a pattern that's cultural. It's not all me. And so I don't have to be like, oh, Laura's bad or Dean's bad. If we're having that conflict, I could be like, oh, we're in that pattern. Can we find any room, any choice? Very different from, I think, the self help genre is often both, like, make yourself better. There's

kind of some pressure on you, and also, like, be better in 30 days. And that kind of, like, you know, there's nothing gentle there. There's nothing acknowledging how complex it is to wade through the feelings that come from living in a very disordered society and very painful ways. And so I'm hoping that the political context helps people feel, you know, very much in the way that feminism often has offered, a sense of collectivity and resistance in dealing with the interpersonal realm, which, of course, the rest of life is only made of a bunch of relationships. Our movements are just made of a bunch of relationships. There isn't something beyond the interpersonal realm or that doesn't include it in some way. Like, how, whether and how we can show up to our movements depends on how we're doing and what's happening relationally.

LAURA FLANDERS: I really appreciate some of the very practical tools in the book, and one of them that lingers with me is the “what else is true” tool. Can you talk about that?

DEAN SPADE: I'm so glad to hear you say that. Yeah. One thing I've noticed a lot is that whenever we're having a very strong feeling, like, "I'm so angry at the people in this group I'm in," or "I'm so mad at a person I'm in a dating relationship with," or whatever the case may be, "I'm so jealous," the world kind of narrows. It's like all I see is how angry I am at Laura and I'm up at night thinking about it, and I kind of lose track of the broader context. The tool is designed to help you think through. "I'm so mad at Laura about our disagreement in the group. What else is true? What else is true about Laura?" "Oh, I remember Laura cares a lot about migrant justice like I do. I remember, oh, actually Laura's caring for someone ill right now. Oh, I may not exactly know why Laura said that, or what she was thinking, because I haven't asked," you know, you're just kind of giving ourselves some context around the way that a conflict or a disappointment can give you tunnel vision. So yeah, that tool I have found incredibly useful. A lot of things in the book are about supporting a friend. So not just for ourselves, but you know, we're supporting people who are in conflict and crisis. What are the ways to help a friend whose world has narrowed down to, you know, they're on a war path against somebody else in our group that's going to destroy our group, or they are very vengeful towards their ex lover in a way that's actually dysregulating our community. How can I support my friend to see some more context and feel that they are supported and cared for? And remember that that person is actually a whole person, not just the thing they did that they didn't like. The tool is really about that.

LAURA FLANDERS: How do you recognize conflicts that are worth engaging in, if you know what I mean? I remember Sarah Schulman wrote a book about "[Conflict is Not Abuse](#)," which looked into this in some of the same ways that you are, years ago, and tried to make the point that some conflict we really do need to have.

DEAN SPADE: It's actually really useful that I give you feedback about what we disagree on, or that I think we should take a different political position, all of that. Being more able to have conflict requires realizing that conflict is normal, instead of thinking that if there's any conflict

between us, one of us should leave the group, or somebody's gotta be bad or wrong. We live in a society centered around imprisonment, right? We're the most imprisoning society in the history of the world. We think conflict means someone has to go and we really are afraid it's going to be us. So we're afraid to give feedback, we're defensive when we receive feedback. I think one of the questions though that I would ask, I think sometimes what's happening in organizing is that people are feeling, you know, feelings that come from other parts of their lives, from historical experiences in their families, or at school, or in organizing or cultural stories about who's valuable, not valuable. So I've got those feelings going, and I tell you it's a political difference. How can I know when I'm having strong feelings so that I can be a little more careful about whether I'm going after you in the meeting about something, but really it's because I felt left out when you all went and had drinks and I wasn't invited. Or when you, you know, are now dating my ex or whatever, how can I have a little bit of emotional awareness that'll let me not act out certain emotional things as if they are political things.

LAURA FLANDERS: Can you elaborate on the point that you just made about there's a relationship between our kind of carceral approaches to things, and our relationship to dealing with conflict? Because that's fascinating.

DEAN SPADE: Yeah, I would say that one of the most common patterns I see in groups and in relationships of all kinds is people just don't give each other feedback. I don't tell you that I'm frustrated about you not doing the dishes for two months and then I blow up and say you have to move out, or-

LAURA FLANDERS: You mean just leaving them to pile up doesn't send the message?

DEAN SPADE: It doesn't. Right? All of the things that we do involve being so afraid to give each other feedback that by the time we give it, it's a very elaborate, I've created an elaborate story. Maybe I've told all of our friends how bad you are. You never do your tasks in the activist group. Whatever it is. Right? Like, we're so afraid of even the smallest giving and receiving of feedback. And if you give me feedback, I'm like, it wasn't me. I didn't do it. I didn't mean it. You know? I go into defensiveness instead of being open to hearing about it, and that's because we have this good guys, bad guys framing from a carceral society that's in every form of media, including for children. Right? That's very binary. And so I'm so afraid of being a bad guy. And this includes, like, if you were to tell me that something I've done is racist or ableist. People are so afraid of those words, and, of course, we're all doing racist and ableist and sexist things all the time, that we can't take in or, or give small amounts of feedback because it feels so high stakes. And most of us are only getting feedback in hierarchical environments, like in the family or at jobs or at school, where it is very high stakes. We haven't had, like, peer feedback. You know? That's work. And if we have, some of us have had it in friendships. I think that's the place to kind of model, that many of us may have had somewhat less hierarchical relationships. So, you know,

it's really harming our ability to just, like, work through stuff. And, also, like, we wanna give feedback all along the way, so it's not a big surprise when we disagree at the big decision making meeting or, you know, later in the relationship and kind of lose everything. So learning, testing the water, skilling up with small amounts of feedback, giving and receiving, and knowing that, I think in a lot of organizing groups I work with, we do trainings on giving small amounts of feedback so people can, like, work the muscle and and know that the group values giving and receiving feedback and acknowledge that it's hard and most of us have never tried. And so that the group becomes a healing space. People learn a skill set we're not supposed to have in a carceral society that we really need.

LAURA FLANDERS: Now the idea behind all this work, it to take us back to where you began, Dean, is not so that we can sit in our groups and have beautifully, you know, engaged and calm meetings, but so that we can actually get stuff done and get changes made that we need to be making in this time. We started with risks. Well, we started with a big list of what we're facing, and you build to the point that we need to be in better shape so that we can take risks. And I guess my question to you then is what risks would you be seeing us take right now, if we were skilled up in all the ways you described?

DEAN SPADE: People are going to need to break a lot of rules and laws to survive this period, already we do. We're going to need to hide people from the police and from immigration enforcement. We are going to need to disrupt the ecocidal industries and war industries that are destroying the planet and killing people. We're going to need to get each other medicines and procedures that have become illegal under this new administration. I mean, people already do a lot of this, but we're about to need so much more of it because there's going to be more political oppression, more criminalization of basic survival for people in our communities. We're going to need to defend each other from eviction. We're going to need to stand up to cops and stop them from sweeping areas where unhoused people are. I mean all of this stuff, we have to turn up a lot to survive and it requires trusting others and learning how to be trustworthy, which I don't think we necessarily have in place right now. One thing I've been thinking about a lot is that we need to do more underground work. Right now we're oriented towards being seen doing good and posting on social media and a lot of it is about people's brands. We're going to need to do secret, useful, law-breaking and rule-breaking work to survive. And so these are different emotional skills to want to do work without getting public credit. Even that is a distinction from what the social media companies have trained us for.

LAURA FLANDERS: Now, far be it for me, here on public television, to be advocating that people do any of the kind of law breaking you've just described. But I hear you, and I hear from activists that we talk to on this program about the urgency of this moment. And we have, as journalists, also become very careful about what strategies and tactics do we actually ask people to talk about in public. So there is that question of how do we share information in the climate

that you're describing? Are there examples? I think of the early part of the Trump administration, the first few days after the Muslim ban came down, and about how people on their own initiative went to airports across this country to welcome in people who were arriving in a country with reason to be very scared. That's one form of resistance and action that stands out very clearly in my memory from the last Trump term. Are there other stories that you tell, that you cling to, that you see as models, or give you hope?

DEAN SPADE: Absolutely. One of the stories that moves me so much I learned from a wonderful book by Vicki Osterweil, called "[In Defense of Looting](#)." She talks about how in the 1930s there were these eviction defenses where people would just walk through the streets and gather people, and they'd go to where someone was being evicted in New York City and stop the eviction because they just had so many people. And they defended tens of thousands of people from eviction, 1/3 of evictions in New York City in the early '30s, during a period of extreme economic crisis. Right now we don't have that level of people power and that's the level we need because nothing else is going to work. The courts don't work. There's no legislation against evictions, right? The levels of crisis that require, you're describing like airport shutdowns, like the kinds of work that can only be done with a lot of people putting themselves on the line together. It's also much safer to take those risks when there's tons of you than when there's just a small group. So we need a lot of people to get really brave. That's not everybody's first step in their organizing career. Many people start out being like, "I'm going to make food for folks," "I'm going to do childcare." All of that is vital and essential. But ideally, a lot of people become brave enough and driven enough towards justice to take big risks together. And, also, a lot of the work needs to be underground. We need nurses and teachers and others who are about to be asked to administer unfair and dangerous policies to be willing to, you know, work in cahoots underground and take risks and get people care they're not supposed to give them, like, that kind of you know, or not do what they're supposed to do at school that's harmful to kids. Like, all of that kind of secret, careful work together is also something that requires trust and bravery. And, yeah, it's time for all of that.

NARRATOR: Hi, lovely listeners. Laura Flanders & Friends is, as we say, the place where the people who say it can't be done take a back seat to the people who are doing it. Our guests are doing it. Now we just want to thank you, our member supporters, for doing your part. All of you who have yet to become members, please do it. Join our community today by making a one-time donation or make it monthly at lauraflanders.org/donate. Thank you. And a reminder to hit that subscribe button wherever you get your podcasts, and thank you. Now back to our full, uncut conversation.

LAURA FLANDERS: How do you deal with the grief that comes? Or maybe it's just the question of timelines. Our culture leads us to be in you know, to be constantly expecting instant gratification. And therefore, sometimes when our protest efforts don't pay off, we feel like we

failed and we might as well give up. I look at the year plus of people protesting the genocidal assault on Palestinian life and culture that followed and preceded, but followed the Hamas attacks on October 7th last year. And I think of the feeling of failure that so many people have expressed. How do we sit with that? How do we process that? Having been unable with all of these efforts and all of this risk taking to stop a genocide that we're funding.

DEAN SPADE: Yeah. I mean, one thing I think that's happening is that there is so much to grieve in our culture generally. I don't think we properly grieved COVID deaths. We have, and there's all the police violence in people's lives. Like, everyone's affected by so much and then also witnessing so much. And if we can't grieve, we get kinda numbed out, and it becomes harder to really act together. It could be, it's harder to be trusting of others. It becomes harder to feel your full emotional range. If you shut down that part, a lot of people lose joy. There's a lot of depression and kind of numbness happening in our society, and that can lead to a lot of avoidance. I don't wanna do anything. Everything sounds bad. I think that's a, like, lack of grieving. So figuring out how to grieve together, I really think, like, gathering together to do any kind of grieving ritual is so useful or make space in our friendships and in our groups to grieve is vital. And I think the truth about it is, like, we have to get comfortable with uncertainty. I think liberalism wants us to believe that if you just make enough noise, your government will listen to you. That's never been true in the United States. This is an imperial project that has got, you know, ecocidal and genocidal, you know, drives from day one. So letting go, grieving even the fantasy that we can be heard that way and that, like, elites will save us, and instead shifting our faith and hope into each other who we've been told not to trust. That's very healing and also very empowering. Oh my god. It actually is just up to us to figure out how to resist and to have solidarity, people resisting all over the world and how to do things in our immediate local communities and collaborate across space, and we don't actually know what's gonna happen. None of us actually knows exactly how to resolve issues that are, like, so overwhelming, and that's not a reason not to act. It's a reason to study political action that others are doing and have done and to try stuff with other people you know. Like, that's the way to live. Like, if we have these short lives and we don't know what's gonna happen, let's fight. Let's care for each other our entire lives. Let's feel the gratification of that. It's not the gratification of a pat answer or a certainty about outcomes. I don't think anyone who's promising that I wouldn't trust because, yeah, we don't know what stops that genocide. We don't know what stops this ecocide. We have to keep working together and fighting and caring, and it's appropriate to be scared and to be grieving. That is the right thing to do. That actually enables us to come together and act. I would add that it is a place of connection even for people that have very contrasting political opinions. And I'm thinking particular of people who invested all their hopes and dreams in the Democrats in this last campaign and who felt so profoundly depressed that the country had taken a different route is a way to connect with people who never had time for Democrats and who were engaged in the frontline fights against genocide. But around that question of grief and disappointment, perhaps, there's a place of connection.

LAURA FLANDERS: Do you have a favorite story, Dean, about this stuff working perhaps in your own life?

DEAN SPADE: Yeah. I mean, I you know, I've spent all these years, you know, 20, 25 years or whatever it is in the movement, having to do this kind of intimate work with myself around emotional awareness, around figuring out how my own trauma stuff and internalized cultural messages were showing up in my activism, in my friendships, in my love relationships. And the result of doing that work is that I actually just have a lot of very close trusting friendships where we get, meaningfully give and receive feedback, you know, including with former lovers. I I talk in the book about how I think people act their worst in our love relationships because of the romance myth, because it's an area people get very heightened feelings. So to me, it's a huge accomplishment for us to be able to maintain kindness with people when we've had a hard time and had conflict and had breakups. And so, you know, at this point in my life, the people who care for me when I'm having a really hard time and who I care for are people who I've actually learned how to give and receive meaningful feedback with, and let them change me, and let me change them. I think in some ways, that's, you know, that's what I want for people instead of what a lot of people have is a lot of isolation, maybe perfectionism towards themselves or others or towards groups they're in, and feelings of, like, judgment. And, you know, that all the research shows that most people in the United States are isolated. More people live alone. More people don't have a single confidant when they have good news or bad. Don't have someone to care for them when they're sick even though we're living through a really intense pandemic. You know? And what I really want is for everyone to have, like, what I call in the book a promiscuous and robust support system. And the way to get that is through being in our movements and really being caring and not treating our movement work like a job where we just burn people out and where we, you know, have to get this done even if it means everyone's body is, you know, and psyche is being destroyed and the relationships destroyed. You know? And there's no one task we're gonna do together that's gonna solve all the problems. So everything we do together should be strengthening our relationships to continue because we have to continue on a possibly lifelong, probably lifelong journey.

LAURA FLANDERS: As I listen to you, I think back over the 10 years since your book "Normal Life" came out and we last spoke, and I think how much I've learned about trans liberation and trans life. And before we close, I want to make sure that we address that population of trans and queer people who right now are feeling that they're under attack perhaps in a way that is distinct. Not to say they're the only people, but we don't wanna share differences that everybody is under the same level of attack. So do you have a message or thoughts specifically for our trans brothers and sisters?

DEAN SPADE: Yeah. I mean, Laura, I reviewed our prior interview, before coming on today, and it was so interesting to think about how 10 years ago, where the trans struggle was in terms of, you know, there's so much more visibility of trans issues, including this outrageous intense, very scary backlash against trans people. I think a lot of the fundamental conditions for trans people didn't really change with the mainstreaming, which is often the case. Most people were still experiencing poverty and a lot of criminalization and immigration enforcement and all of that, even though there were more trans people on TV. But one thing that did happen was a lot more people have come out as trans and non binary, which is so wonderful. Right? The possibility of these kinds of identities and experiences is more in the air, and so many young people are letting themselves have more liberation around gender and also facing really scary consequences that are worsening as we enter the second Trump administration. So I think the message for us is, like, we've always been here. We need each other. Don't be alone in it. Find other people who care about you. Don't be alone. And, you know, we have to be scrappy. We have to figure out how to get ourselves what is gonna be taken away from us. We have to remember that we know who we are. It doesn't matter what the government says we are. It doesn't matter what someone's parents say they are. It doesn't matter what people, at work or school. We have to find a way to affirm one another, and that's how trans people and queer people have always had to survive. And it is really scary, and the kind of peace around community empowerment and having each other's backs in the face of this onslaught, it's we're all we have, and we're what we need. Right? And so I think that's, that's the moment we're in. How can we all build more projects to help each other, to find strangers in our community who don't know anyone right now or yet? Like, how do we build that really, really solid support system for one another in impossible times where we've become this, you know, political football. It's so unfair, and it's so dangerous, and it's and it's materially really taking and going to take trans lives. And how do we grieve that together and try to hold each other, keep each other alive as long as we can? For allies, I would say that what I've learned is you don't have to be perfect and that you can learn. And you can ask questions and you can get feedback and you can apologize and you can do better next time. I think we are all figuring out how to be a bit more honest about our capacities and a bit more honest perhaps about what we're up against.

LAURA FLANDERS: I can't let you go without just mentioning all the material in your book that has to do with love and sex and romance and that romance myth that you just referred to. We're about to, heading into February, be buried in an avalanche of commerce around romance. What do we take? What do we leave? And how do we survive the rest?

DEAN SPADE: I mean, in my opinion, sex and romance, you know, a beautiful part of our lives that can be highly creative, can really generate aliveness, and also, you know, one of the most dangerous areas of our society. Right? You're most likely to be killed by somebody that you are romantically connected to. That is real. And so we have to figure out —

LAURA FLANDERS: They don't mention that in the Valentine's Day promotion.

DEAN SPADE: They don't. Why is this area of life so toxified? And what does it look like? What have I imbibed from the society that justifies jealousy, or justifies stalking people, or justifies trying to control others, or makes me think I should let others control me in ways that undermine my connection to friends and to my political beliefs? You know, we've all just got a lot of baggage here. There's a lot of bad information out there. And so what does it mean in our communities to take up, like, we're gonna collectively do something different and help support each other to not act out that worst stuff in our romantic relationships that often, I mean, can we think about how many groups have been destroyed by unethical behavior in that realm? Right? So that's that's really the urgency behind this book for me, and get to the part where it's really delicious and juicy and fun and, and enlivening. Right? And I think, you know, queer and feminist traditions have a lot to offer us about how sex can be a sight of liberation and also what it takes to move away from the deeply not liberated inheritance we have in that area.

LAURA FLANDERS: Do you have to be an activist to enjoy this book? Who's your desired audience?

DEAN SPADE: I think this book is full of very practical tools for anyone who wants to clean up the relational areas of their life and support friends who are trying to do so. And I hope that it helps people bridge into movement work. And for people who are already in movement work, I hope it's like a sigh of relief. Like, "Oh yeah, that is happening in all the groups I've ever been in. What a relief to have an account of that and some practical tools for addressing it."

LAURA FLANDERS: Alright, Dean. Thank you so much. I do have one last closing question, but I do want to point out to our audience that the book isn't actually called, "Love In An Effed Up World." It's just that the word on the front of the book is not one that I can say. So, bravo for you, Dean, to breaking rules right then, right there. What do you think is the story the future will tell of this moment?

DEAN SPADE: You know, I've heard a lot of people talk about this time as an unraveling. And I think that it's useful to ask ourselves, what's it like to live during the unraveling, to live during a time when a lot of systems we've relied on have been eroding in lots of ways where we know that the systems we rely on are bad for the planet and bad for us, where, there's a lot of chaotic, action happening in the weather and politically and everywhere. And to ask ourselves, like, who do I wanna be in that? Who will I wish I had been, having been someone alive during such a profound unraveling, really unlike anything else in the history of humanity? And just to just to think about orienting ourselves towards values of resistance and care and love even though it's really scary because there's no getting away from it. It's everywhere. There's no

geographical solution. There's no, it's on, and it asks a lot of us, and I think we get to choose to meet that.

LAURA FLANDERS: Such valuable work, Dean, for as long as I've known you. And, again, this book, really valuable. Thank you so much for everything you're doing for all of us, and I look forward to speaking to you again at some point. Keep it up.

DEAN SPADE: Yeah. Thank you for doing this beautiful show. It's such a great service to our communities to have this kind of information.

NARRATOR: Thanks for taking the time to listen to the full conversation from our episode featuring Dean Spade, lifelong activist and author of the recently published book, “Love in a F*cked-Up World: How to Build Relationships, Hook Up, and Raise Hell, Together”. These audio exclusives are made possible thanks to our member supporters. Please join our members now by making a one-time donation or make it monthly. All the details are at lauraflanders.org, and thanks again to all our member supporters.