

**Audio Title: James Rose**  
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## Transcript

**Rebekah Borucki:** Hello, friend! I heard you were looking for our spot. I got you.

So, you're going to go past the corner bodega and down the block from the fresh cuts barbershop, and there you'll find a brick row house at the intersection of Literature Place and Social Justice Blvd. That's the stoop.

Amanda, Amanda Lytle, she will be there to welcome you to the conversation. The Book Stoop, that's the name of the spot. We got the hottest takes on book culture, nerd culture, current events, with best-selling authors, change-makers, and risk-takers, the best kinds of folks.

Oh, me? I'm Rebekah Borucki, President of Row House Publishing, and this is our podcast. I am so glad you're here.

Now, I'm going to let you get to Amanda.

**Amanda Lytle:** Thanks Bex. Hey friend. Let me be the second to welcome you to our spot, *The Book Stoop*. I feel incredibly honored to be the host of this podcast and I'm so grateful that you're here.

Today on *The Book Stoop*, I'm speaking with James Rose. James is a non-binary, gender-fluid actor, Health at Every Size Personal Trainer, a trauma-informed yoga teacher and DEI consultant in New York City Lenapehoking.

They write about gender, eating disorder recovery, sex, feelings, and their exes on Instagram where they hope to leave the internet a little bit better than they found it.

In this dynamic conversation today, James shares their excitement about the future of theater and witnessing different experiences through performances on stage and what and where their inspiration comes from.

James talks about the power of individual change as well as how they show up in their social media corner of the internet. Social media has become a space to share, heal, connect, and be held accountable for going to therapy.

You will also hear about the healing powers of alone time and learning to enjoy the company of oneself. We start our chats on *The Book Stoop* with a rather fitting question. So what are you reading these days?

**James Rose:** Oh my god. I'm reading scripts. I'm reading so many scripts right now. I am on – I can't say the names. Not that I'm under an NDA but I'm on the Artistic Advisory Committee for the Cardinal Stage Theater which is where I did *Newsies*. Probably my favorite show that I've ever done and the director of the company, her name is Kate Galvin and she's wonderful. In an effort to continue diversifying the theater that she runs, she has hired a whole bunch of us that have identities that have been historically excluded from theater.

So we've taken about 60 titles and we've split it up amongst all of us that like we recommended, and we brought to the table of like here's a musical and a play and a new work and a children's show and all these things.

So we are reading all of them by January. So then we're going to come back and discuss what do we think is going to be the most enriching for this theater, knowing that it's in the middle of Bloomington, Indiana, knowing what the creative limitations are, knowing what the spaces are because everybody who is – actually that's not true. Not everybody who's on the committee has worked there but everyone is familiar enough with the space, but not everyone actually lives in the community like myself. So I'm reading a bunch of really exciting new work plays right now. The future of theater is so fucking cool.

**Amanda Lytle:** Yes!

**James Rose:** Like yeah. So I'm reading that and then like in my backpack, I'm rereading *We Do This 'Til We Free Us* by Mariame Kaba. It's kind of my like yearly return to that text, which to me has kind of been a compass and a lot of like what has – ironically like what has radicalized me. You know, like [0:03:48] [Indiscernible] leftists. You know, don't let this discourage you. Let this radicalize you. So I've been revisiting that. But yeah, a lot of scripts.

**Amanda Lytle:** And what inspires you the most in that space? What inspires you to – you know, what do you want to see I guess on stage or in that creative process the most?

**James Rose:** I want to see things that I have. Well, I guess what inspires me about that kind of art specifically is like I want to see something that I would have no other way of understanding that culture. I would have no way of having that experience unless I saw it on stage.

You know, there are – I mean how many zillions of people do we have in the world that have their own individual experiences and like our American theater bubble really doesn't encompass the breadth of humanity, the breadth of culture. So the opportunity to see something that like I might never get to see but done through a medium that is specifically designed to translate difficult emotional experiences, that lights me up. I think that's so cool, and I love that space in particular because everybody that I met that was working there was dedicated to that kind of work before it became trendy and popular.

You know, we've seen really quite the rise of like diversity, equity and inclusion committees over the past year, which I think has been directly tied to like the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement and while I think that's wonderful, I also am taking note of like what are the

spaces I'm being invited into because you're trying to do the right thing and whose values align with mine before it was "trendy" to do so because like capitalism has corrupted everything that's good.

**Amanda Lytle:** Yeah.

**James Rose:** So yeah, I think as an example, like I am a non-binary actor, right? So when I was being hired to play a man on stage, before I even got the role, Kate who is directing that particular show and also there just the director of the theater had a Zoom meeting with me. I was *[0:05:38] [Indiscernible]* actually to show that I'm wearing the sweatshirt where I was *[Indiscernible]* for Young Frankenstein and I couldn't leave because I was the damn captain.

So I was in charge of preserving all the choreography and she was like "I wanted to have a meeting with you because if you get offered this role, I want you to know we will be bringing you to Indiana and even though Indiana is a pretty conservative state, in our specific space, we are dedicated to honoring your identity and not as an afterthought. It's something that we want to center here, and you would not be the only non-binary or gender non-conforming person working on this project."

She was like, "I just wanted you to know that. I only saw your pronouns in your email signature. So I didn't want to assume anything about your identity. But I wanted you to know that that is something we specifically value in you as an artist. So if you were to get this role, I would never want the reservation about your taking this contract to be that you felt like your identity might not be represented."

She was like, you know, "I can't understand your experience. But as a woman, I know that's something I have often thought of. So like as another non-man, you may have similar reservations," and I got off the phone and I like cried. I was saying that is actually what this process is supposed to be, and I was like thank you so much. That actually makes me feel so safe.

**Amanda Lytle:** Yes.

**James Rose:** And then we hung up and she sent me the contract. So ...

**Amanda Lytle:** That is so beautiful! I just wrote down the word "seen", and I circled it. Like to be fully seen as you are and feel safe.

**James Rose:** Totally, totally, totally. And it was cool because I was not the only non-binary person. There are many spaces I walk into these days where I am and I think that's part of the like walking the line of I'm a very palatable non-binary person because like I am tall, I am white, I'm thin, I'm not disabled. Like there are so many things about me that fit in with the "societal ideal" that of course I don't subscribe to that being the ideal but recognize its privileges, right?

So especially because like given how I choose to present, I can pass kind of in either direction what I'm learning recently, and I've noticed that I will get invited into spaces that I will see my other friends that have identities that stack in a way that is less palatable to society are not invited into and I find that interesting. Usually if I find it interesting, I mean I say something about it and then [0:07:53] *[Inaudible]*.

**Amanda Lytle:** Yeah. Yeah, I was just going to ask too. You know, how is that received or how has it been in your experience when you do speak up or there are people that are like "Oh shit, I had no idea," or are they super resistant to it?

**James Rose:** I'm actually doing a lot of work to make sure I don't do the speaking up as of late because I am almost always without fail in a space where there are cis people that know my identity walking in and even if it's the first time we've ever met. Like if we're all in a space together and I've introduced myself and I'm like, "Hi. I'm James. My pronouns are they, them," you know, whatever comes after that.

Everybody knows what my pronouns are. So that's really all you need in order to respect me in that space and so then my expectation is that the other people who also have their pronouns in their bios understand that it's their responsibility as cis people to make sure that I am taken care of and that if I'm misgendered, it's on them to correct the person who misgenders me. It's not on me to speak up.

I also find it much easier to speak up for other people than for myself. I think that's a pretty universal experience, especially because I was trained in a society that was like don't rock the boat. You know, like be accommodating, which is a very feminine experience I found. You know, like the whole make sure that you're always doing right by everyone and never a bother and – oh god, how much of that am I trying to unlearn? All of it.

So I have set that expectation with like the cis people in my life that are close to me in the same way that I would go to that for anybody else for their identities as well. You know, if someone says something anti-Semitic, I'm going to speak up on that because that is with the education I've received from in particular Jewish educators. Like that's something that I'm learning about how to speak up for in the same way that I would speak up for my friends of color if they've set that as like an expectation for our relationship.

Some people like to fight their own battles and it really depends on the identity. Like gender is such a personal and public experience at the same time because it's so personal that like nobody can quite understand your gender because it's yours. Nobody has your set of like experiences that inform the way you see yourself and so that's very personal, right? But it's such a public experience because we refer to people through gender terms constantly. We have an entire part of speech for it. That's why pronouns exist is for many people to represent their gender or at the very least respectfully refer to them in that space.

So it just really depends that for me I am trying to speak up about it less over email. Are you kidding me? I will eviscerate you and I will CC your boss. I'm so fucking done with it. I've had

enough – like I can't. There is no reason. If it is in my email signature, there is never going to be an excuse. You had to write that out.

Like I understand that some people have auditory processing disorders and literally trip up on the words. I have grace for that, and I understand that people have dyslexia and I understand that people have difficulty typing things out.

I do not have – I have such limited grace for being misgendered over email these days by people I work for. I just left a job because they misgendered me. I was like I'm done. I can't do this anymore. I spoke up in front of like the whole group of executives and I was like, "I am disrespected here every day and I hate it and here's why." I say I left. They fired me but I'm – the narrative in my head is that I left and ...

**Amanda Lytle:** Yeah, absolutely stick to it. It wasn't a good fit.

**James Rose:** No, it was a bad fit and I was so mad too because it was like some technicality that they tried to find and I was like "This is because I spoke up, isn't it? It is because I spoke up and I told you all that you are loosely committed to this work in a shallow way that you can slap a diversity, equity and inclusion statement on your website, and you are actually not invested in this work because I am consistently misgendered here and none of you met me under any identity but the one I currently hold."

**Amanda Lytle:** Yeah. But now, OK, so it's a big deal to step away from a space regardless of – you know, I think it's more just tied to an income too, right? A job. But was there such a sense of relief in just the actual finalization of that?

**James Rose:** No, there was not.

**Amanda Lytle:** Oh, OK.

**James Rose:** I will be honest, no.

**Amanda Lytle:** Yeah.

**James Rose:** Because I wasn't expecting it because it happened like a month later.

**Amanda Lytle:** OK.

**James Rose:** I actually found out that I had been terminated when I came back in town after an acting gig, and I was expecting to go back to work, and I didn't have the job anymore and they never told me.

So I know. Yeah. So I mean I've gone through. I'm still going through a whole like HR thing with them because I'm like I was never notified of this, and they were like we did notify you and I was like you sent it to the wrong email. That email is no longer active. That doesn't work.

They're like, no, we sent it out. It's legit. Like it's not. You got a bounce back error. Like there's no way.

So there actually isn't much of a sense of relief. It's actually quite discouraging, and I think that's the honest truth of it is like people who hold identities that are historically excluded and now like with this – I will go back to the idea of it being trendy to be inclusive all of a sudden. People don't know what work that takes. People literally think it's just saying, "Oh, I accept you for who you are."

But the acceptance of who someone is is very different than treating them equitably in a space, right? Like I can accept. Here's something that I've learned from like antiracism educators. Like Rachel Cargle and Layla Saad, right? They talk about – I'm paraphrasing but this is the general – the gist of it is you can accept my blackness for instance, you can accept my womanhood, but the actual need is for me to be paid more than white people are in this space for my education, say for example, and people aren't willing to do that work. They're just like, "Oh, wait, why do I have to do that? I have to compensate you for existing? What?"

Yes, absolutely. That is so required, and I don't think that people recognize how inviting any sort of DEI work into like your space means that you have to do things that will be probably not what the company wants you to do and it's why like DEI work is essentially like bullshit, I think, and I do it.

Like I'm saying this as somebody who literally pays their bills sometimes with DEI work but like when we're doing any diversity, equity, inclusion, like committees, it is to serve the white supremacist structure that the company exists under, right?

We know there's no ethical conception under capitalism. But we also know that there are ways to manage it a little bit more. So that makes it slightly more livable for those that are currently maligned and oppressed, right? But when we're doing DEI work and it's just like it is essentially a cosmetic fix for a systemic issue, I happen to think that we do need a little bit of both. I think that it is – as much as I want to abolish all the systems that aren't working right now, I understand that sometimes we have to concede a little bit to function and I'm not going to blame anybody for getting their paycheck doing DEI work and capitalizing on their identity if that's what they choose to do.

You know, I think that that's – if that's the decision that you need to make for your safety and survival, go for it and at the same time, we can recognize the incredible limitations of this work. Like in my experience, the most impactful moments of this work are not when the system changes in a company.

Like when does that happen? I've seen it happen once and it was tiny. Like I got to be on a team of people that redid a policy for harassment and misconduct issues, and we were able to make like an entire anonymous recording for them and hire an outside person. Like I mean ultimately you don't want a whole bunch of people involved in something like that, but we were able to

decentralize the power enough to where I was like this is a baby step. But the issues were still there. The people in power that were abusive were still there.

Like we didn't tackle it from a let's reckon with what you're doing and why issue. That's what I always brought to the table, and it was like, ah, you're being negative, and I was like, "Yeah, uh-huh. Yeah." I am – I – no, I was not being negative. I'm just being realistic.

It was like yeah, negative. I want abusers not to have power. If that's negative, damn am I negative.

**Amanda Lytle:** Well, you've got me curious about the rewarding side of it though too because you were saying like a lot of it is not. So what parts are?

**James Rose:** Individual change. I have watched people through like year, year and a half long processes absolutely flip around and that's rewarding and also I've gone through that personally. Like if you met me 10 years ago, you would be like, "What were these opinions you hold? You know, like what are these beliefs? Where did you learn this?" and those were then the questions I started asking my own self as I started to like take the mental nutcracker to my brain and start to learn about more than just my own bubble, right?

So I do have I guess a fair amount of empathy for people who do hold some harmful beliefs because I once used to be one of those. I used to be the most transphobic person. Can you imagine? I was out there gaslighting people for their identities. I was out there being like I will not put my pronouns on a name tag. I was in meetings where I held power being like we will not cater to this. Can you believe? I caused a lot of harm. Like I could give you the people that like out of respect for them, I have not reached out to to atone because they don't need to hear from me again.

Like I did harm by gaslighting them about their identities and I did harm by being transphobic. Ironically it was an internalized transphobia. But that's just the avenue in which it presents. That doesn't absolve me of any of the harm, right? So I guess I have a fair amount of empathy and maybe that's – I don't think it comes from a place of guilt. I think it comes from a place of like I get it. You don't understand this thing. It costs you nothing to respect it and I was in the camp of people that was like, "Well, if I don't understand it, then I can't respect it," which is a very white supremacist way of thinking, right?

So in the unlearning of that, I have learned I guess a little bit of grace for those who still hold those. So watching people transform their opinions and their ideologies and start out similar to where I started where they held harmful beliefs and they held power in a way where they could enact them. You know, my power was very limited as a college student. But nonetheless, power is power, and trauma is trauma. You know, like it doesn't really matter the scale or severity. It matters what your personal meter for that scale and severity were.

So it is super rewarding and I think an honor to witness people's transformation. And I have been lucky enough I think to see that a couple of times and selfishly, maybe even not selfishly, but just an important note to reflect on how I change and transform through those as well.

I find new boundaries. I found new spaces for grace and for acceptance. I find walls I come up against. I am not great at coming up against a wall and being told no and I've had to learn how to like get told no more, which has been an interesting lesson in maturity that I was not interested in learning. But I had to. I mean my goodness. We don't get everything we want, do we? So that's the long of it.

**Amanda Lytle:** No, I love it. Thank you so much for opening up about that.

**James Rose:** Yeah.

**Amanda Lytle:** You've said the word "radical" and "radicalize" a couple of times and I've also heard you say "empathy" especially for empathy of self and even with a conversation that I had with Rebekah this morning, #MightyRebekah, so cool, we were talking about radical empathy and in this case even speaking with you, it's like radical empathy, radical compassion, radical acceptance. But also turning it back inwards and recognizing your own journey and having empathy for even who you were. Like you said, 10 years ago because you were showing up with what you had, what you knew, right?

**James Rose:** Yeah, exactly.

**Amanda Lytle:** Yeah. So what does radical empathy mean to you in this space? Because then I'm kind of trying to weave this over into your corner of the internet, which I can't wait to talk about.

**James Rose:** Yeah. That's interesting. I don't know if empathy is always radical by nature. I think that empathy is for the majority of people kind of an intrinsic thing. To me for something to be radical, it has to really go against the grain of what society considers to be normal and acceptable and I don't know. I'm running up against a block around radical empathy.

Maybe the act of being empathetic to other people is in and of itself a rejection of the society that we have kind of formed because we are taught to be very self-centered, and we are taught not really to love our neighbors. As much as that gets thrown around, I really don't think that we understand what that requires and the way that we have to show up for people is usually much more intense than perhaps we think.

It's not I made you some cookies for the holidays. It's can I support you through this difficult time. Would you like me to make an appointment for you? I can pick up groceries for you. Do you need me to spot you for this bill? Do you need me to take out your dog? Do you want me to go shopping for you?



You know, all of the things I've labeled can be forms of mutual aid, right? So I guess the empathy isn't actually radical so much as the actions we take from what we learned by the empathy. That's my gut instinct because like empathy is just the process of like putting yourself in somebody else's shoes and imagining their experiences that you can't have for yourself.

Well, that's great but that's not an action. That does not change systems. That does not change ourselves until we act upon it. So I think to me it has to come with an action. That's I guess what makes it radical is then like what we do with that information because like I could put myself in your shoes and like think, "Oh, wow, you know, XYZ." But then if I don't do anything with that information, then what was the point of that? But if I go, "Oh wow, XYZ. Maybe I should blink." Then I think we get somewhere.

**Amanda Lytle:** Yeah, I love that perspective. It's amazing.

**James Rose:** I imagine that there are so many other people who have completely different equally valid respectable opinions on that, that I can learn from. Yeah.

**Amanda Lytle:** But I think that that's what's so cool about it is that there are so many – and especially what you show up with experience-wise is going to shift your opinion.

**James Rose:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. I guess maybe though if – just to kind of take this down as like a parallel rabbit hole is having empathy for your inner child and taking action to heal that. I think that is in and of itself radical because we are not taught to do that.

**Amanda Lytle:** That is so true.

**James Rose:** I think that is a statement we learn. So I suppose the act of going back and having any sort of grace for myself, which does not absolve me of accountability, right? But like it does, I don't know, undercut it a little bit.

Maybe not undercut. I think it actually adds more. I think it adds something else to be reckoned with on the perspective I can have for like my younger self and for other people that hold harmful beliefs. I suppose the radical part that comes out of that is the way in which I work on my healing from that.

**Rebekah Borucki:** Hey friend. We are coming straight back to *The Book Stoop* after a quick break.

**Amanda Lytle:** Oh, I have so many more questions now.

**James Rose:** Go for it. I have so many more questions too. Great news listeners. If you came to this podcast for answers, you will find none but I have a lot of questions.

**Amanda Lytle:** Me too! OK, this is awesome. I kind of want to come back though to your corner of the internet because now, having a bit of a backstory about where James was even 10

years ago and, you know, even when you said that you were super transphobic, I'm like, "Wait, wait. You were? I don't understand," and especially when you start to look at how you show up on social media and the love that you speak to and speak from. Like you are so heart-forward but you're also so real and you show up and you talk about some of the real shit you've been through.

Yeah, tell me about the creation or the back story to where you're at with your "corner of the internet"?

**James Rose:** My corner of the internet, yeah. Oh, the big secret is I don't know what the hell I'm doing. I know – I think about it now as a combination of the values I set out for how I wanted to engage with the internet and I was also – oh, this is another good one. I was super anti-internet for a long time. I have only ever had an Instagram. Now I have a TikTok as well. I have never had a Facebook. I've never had Myspace. I skipped out on all of that. I don't get the like jokes about Myspace and like Facebook and stuff.

So like there's a section of like meme culture that really just I don't get. It was – I mean that came out at a time when I was in middle school, right? So I was primetime for bullying and like why would I want to subject myself to the internet. There was a Facebook group for me that my friends started in middle school, and it was called the "I love James Rose Group". I did like that. I thought that was good.

**Amanda Lytle:** That is nice.

**James Rose:** So occasionally people would post nice things about me. I was in show choir. We were tightknit. No shocking turn of events that I was in show choir. That was like my artistic bedrock essentially. It started everything for me, show choir.

But then out of that I got an Instagram and because it was my only social media, everybody followed me on there. So like out of my friend group, I was the one with like the followers because I didn't have any Facebook friends. The only way to engage with me on the internet was through my Instagram where it would be like a picture of me at a state thespian competition, you know.

So then as I started to – we're going to notice a pattern here I did a lot of things around and I started – I went through my – what I call the "instagay phase" which was like a peak eating disorder when I was like, "Yeah, look at how I look," like an Abercrombie model and like would do photoshoots and post pictures like that. It's sickening, disgusting. I did it.

I was so there. I was like I want to be objectified for being a hot, white man. Oh, god. Oh my god. So I went through that phase. And you know how fulfilling that was? I will tell you, not at all. Simply not in the least fulfilling. I had some great hookups that came out from it, I will be honest. There were some people that would like slide right into the DMs and then I got a boyfriend out of it who's still my friend.

I mean he is a great person. He didn't just follow me because I posted like thirst traps. He's wonderful but nonetheless and the Gilmore Girls of my life, he's Dean everyone. We will not be talking about my Jess on this podcast. We probably will but nonetheless I never dated a Logan. I would never stoop so low. Logan was not right for Rory everyone. This is not the point. So ...

**Amanda Lytle:** Oh, I love it.

**James Rose:** This is for the editor. Edit nothing. So like I said, I did a lot of things wrong and then I started – I really think that my sexual assault was kind of the turning point. I had been writing a lot. I have been assaulted multiple times. I really don't know many survivors that haven't been, but the most traumatic one for me was being raped and before that I had talked about various incidents that had occurred of this very strange gay culture that is sometimes excellent at consent and other times horrible at it.

I started writing more about that and I started putting my stories into words because for me writing has always been a point of clarity. Maggie Nelson who's my favorite author said that once. So I was like, "Why do I spend so much time like futzing with words and like trying to string them together in a way that organically aligns with how I experienced it emotionally?" Maybe not even chronologically but emotionally. That to me is an exciting process. Like really get into the weeds there.

And to me that is a healing process because when I spill it out onto paper, then I can see it and then it's real and then it doesn't have to exist in my chest anymore and it doesn't have to take up space in my brain. It can be its own entity and then the benefit is that it's like a nice piece of art that I've created, right?

Like I love to write. I am not prolific. I have to be hit by like the inspiration in a very pretentious artist way. If inspiration doesn't strike me, I can't just write you a piece. It has to be something that I am gnawing at, and I started writing about my relationship to gay culture, to sexual assault. Then therefore my relationship to gender, eating disorder recovery and through the various pockets of the internet that started to pick up on that. People started to follow me. I am still kind of in awe of how it has happened.

I mean I started the pandemic with like 5000 followers. And I have what? Like 30 something thousand today. That's so many people and my goodness, I wish we could all like sit in a room together and I could just give everyone a hug one by one because what I learned was when I posted about my rape, I had maybe a couple of thousand people that were following me, majority of people I knew and then like the instagays that were still following me from the thirst trap phase, and I posted it.

I was like this thing happened to me and I have to be open about it because the rest of my next couple of weeks looks like hell and I can't move, and I can't work, and I can't – I was so physically and emotionally damaged from that experience and the only way that I knew how to heal was to put it out there. So I only have to talk about it once.

Then all of a sudden, I started – I woke up to maybe 50 messages the next morning from men who said they had experienced the same thing and that was horrifying and also community building.

So I started to realize how important it was to talk about survivorship and so I have kind of chronicled over the past few years. Like my survivorship of that. My recovery from my eating disorder which led me to the gender discovery of I'm gender-fluid. I was never the gender I was assigned at birth and that informed a lot of my eating disorder. I truly feel this is what I've been writing about recently. It has taken me months. I can't quite get the words out but they're going to come eventually.

I feel like I recovered from my sexual assault more as a woman than I did before and I'm really trying to figure out where that came from and how sometimes it's like a very simple solution of the narrative of survivorship is female-centered and how the narrative of survivorship means to expand beyond that and is my womanhood tied to that because that's the only community I could really, really find that had been through it publicly that was willing to engage and discourse about it because all the gay men that I knew did not feel ready to talk about it.

It's so taboo and so there were so many reckonings there and I just put it out there and I decided that if I was going to engage with the internet, I wanted people to walk away from my corner either learning something, loving themselves a little bit more than they did when they got there or just feeling better than they did when they got there.

Those are kind of the values I guess that I built it on. Not really intentionally. It was just the pattern that I noticed because I thought about, you know, what is the – what's the voice that I am missing? Kendramorous talks about this on Instagram. So follow Kendra if you don't already but she talks about I am becoming the woman of my own dreams. I feel like I am doing a similar version of that in my own way, and I remember when I worked with her on something and she said that and I was like, "Oh god, I felt like my Jenga blocks just aligned." Like ...

**Amanda Lytle:** Yeah.

**James Rose:** So that's how the internet came about. I really – like I said, I don't know what I'm doing. Half the time it's like 3:00 in the morning and I'm like, "Let me tell you all about this chaotic hookup story I thought of. You know, let me answer these questions. Let's talk about gender. Let's talk about sexuality. Let's bring in some expert on something else to do a takeover here because they've got knowledge I can't. Let me share this writing with you that feels close to my heart."

I do my therapy accountability because I didn't want to go to therapy for anything because I was perfect and had no flaws and everything was fine. LOL. And so then I was like I started posting the process because I found that if I felt accountable to a group of thousands of people, that I would do it. But if I just kept it to myself, I wouldn't do it, you know.

**Amanda Lytle:** And did it work? So they were kind of like – you were – because I guess at that point, they’re asking questions. Like how was it? What did you talk about? That kind of thing?

**James Rose:** Sort of. It was actually just the act of posting it to be like I emailed another slew of them with my insurance company and then I was like I found one. I like her. I’ve been with her for almost a year now and like every week I will be like, “Here’s what I learned. Here’s what we’re working on,” especially I mean it has been a big year. I learned I had ADHD. I learned I had PTSD. My being able to be like the neurotypical friend has been shattered. So ...

**Amanda Lytle:** The ADHD thing I’m with you.

**James Rose:** Oh, yeah.

**Amanda Lytle:** Oh, yeah.

**James Rose:** Have you heard this conversation?

**Amanda Lytle:** I – no, I don’t – but I mean – that’s the whole thing too is like you have these strategies and especially even as a woman. It’s like for me, I – growing up in this space and as a young girl, it was like, you know, stop talking, do this, be quiet. Like it was the chatty – it was just more ...

**James Rose:** Yes.

**Amanda Lytle:** Yeah. I don’t even know. It was just not seen, not “diagnosed”. It wasn’t flagged. Our behaviors were just different. We were just chatty.

**James Rose:** Yes.

**Amanda Lytle:** Yeah. It was so different. So to have developed – or I guess that’s all I knew for so long. So now to understand the strategies that can help keep me focused, that can help keep me organized and listening and all of these things. Wow, it has been a game changer.

**James Rose:** Absolutely. And even to build upon that because like the hyperactivity in non-men is definitely seen as like a social difference. Like what is that? But it still goes underdiagnosed. But the one that goes really underdiagnosed for specifically women, but I would probably argue like all non-men and any feminine people is the inattentive one because like – and which is my subtype. Like I have like the inattentive one which means that like I will zone out in the middle of a conversation, like 10 seconds into it.

I won’t mean to. It’s just like what my brain does and because like women are trained to be obedient and sit there and listen and smile. It’s like we’re all zoned the fuck out over here. I have no idea what you said. Like you know what I mean?

**Amanda Lytle:** Yeah.

**James Rose:** Like in this metaphorical conversation. Like they – and so I find that fascinating because like kind of different to your experience but also a parallel one is like how underdiagnosed it goes but ...

**Amanda Lytle:** Oh, yeah.

**James Rose:** ... how [0:34:40] [Indiscernible] it is.

**Amanda Lytle:** So common.

**James Rose:** So common.

**Amanda Lytle:** Oh, OK. I want to come back to the inspiration thing because when you were talking about writing obviously from a space of pain because the writing was becoming healing and then also starting those conversations and starting to normalize the conversations.

**James Rose:** Yeah.

**Amanda Lytle:** When do you, as a creative and especially creating content online, when do you feel most inspired?

**James Rose:** Whenever I've had an experience that I can't put into words. If it feels so big that it doesn't fit in my chest, that's when I get inspired. That happens often. For all the astrologers out there, I'm a Leo sun, a Leo rising in a Pisces moon, which is the absolute best combination. But it means I cry at everything and the emotional toll that like existing in the world takes on me is like it's such a pendulum and then you're adding ADHD on top of that and it's like there's just – everything that I experienced is the biggest thing I have ever experienced, which is also true. It's my truth, you know.

**Amanda Lytle:** That's right.

**James Rose:** So it's like if something brings me joy, that was the best moment of my day, you know. Somebody stopped me on the street today and was like, "I follow you on Instagram. Oh my god. I can't believe I'm meeting you," and I was like, "I can't believe I'm meeting you. This is so cool." They were like, "You made me feel comfortable to walk into a dance class," and I was like, "No way! No way!"

I was like that is – that makes me so excited and that's like – that was the biggest thing for me because I was like I feel terrified to walk into dance class. That's why I do it and that's why I post about how it terrifies me to walk in a dance class and like I'm so glad that like any part of my story could inform you and give you strength in your day-to-day life. Like that's so cool to me.

So that made me inspired. I haven't done anything without inspiration. I just let it like nestle into like the corners of my heart and I sit there because when I need it, it will come back. That or music usually really gets me.

I did have to take a day off when Taylor Swift released the Red rerecords. I have been anticipating that for months. It was everything I ever wanted. I literally did a TikTok last night for two hours and I was like I will be covering every song. Buckle in and I sat there with my piano, and we did every song. I did the regular all too well. I did the 10-minute all too well. I did all the rest of them. I started making mashups of them. I love doing that. But that is kind of –

**Amanda Lytle:** So fun.

**James Rose:** Yes, that's a creativity that like I do not need inspiration for. I can sit down at the piano anytime and start playing and singing and I am the happiest. But in terms of writing, it has got to be something so big, it doesn't fit in my chest, which is usually a new discovery or an experience that has triggered me or something that I – something that's unsettled.

I kind of think about it as like there are all these hanging light fixtures in my brain, and I have the cords and I know that they all do connect. But it's the act of like untangling them and then plugging it back in and like I am constantly creating a mental chandelier when I'm writing. I love this metaphor.

**Amanda Lytle:** That was really good.

**James Rose:** That was so good. But that's really what it feels like is like as soon as I get it, it's like "zzz". Now we have a room that we can like light up, right? And I think also – since we're talking about the creative process, I will just keep going because I think from a writing the book standpoint, this is kind of interesting. I write a lot about like the men that I have loved or have loved me, and I write a lot about my rapist. I write about my experience with gender. I don't write about things that are currently happening to me. I write in my notes app because my thumbs can move almost as fast as my brain and I ...

**Amanda Lytle:** That's pretty quick.

**James Rose:** Yeah, exactly and I will brain dump something and I will get a – I will get a solid first draft in. Not to say that I am Taylor Swift which is not the person that I actually want. But I remember she was like I can write a song in 20 minutes. It just pours out of me and that does connect with me. When I feel inspired, when it feels too big to fit in my chest, I can brain dump it and I'm like this is good. Then I tuck it away for like three to six months and I go back, and I will revisit and be like, "I think I started writing that piece about my ex," or whatever.

I think I started writing about that guy that left me for whatever. Let me get a look at that again and thinking about him and about that. Then I will start to edit it with the process of like having some perspective on it because usually what I'm going through, this one I will write But that is not the time to post something. That's not the time to release something into the world because it

is beautifully unbaked. And how many raw eggs do you want to eat in a day. You know what I mean? I would argue none.

So I'm like let me put this in the oven and make a nice souffle for us. I don't know why I picked that as my metaphor.

**Amanda Lytle:** I love your metaphors.

**James Rose:** Before going with it. I will – I don't know how to take this any further, but you see my point. So that way kind of as a personal mental health practice. That way I can edit stuff when it's a little bit more removed from me.

Even for stuff on anniversaries, I have been writing that for the full year. You know, like it will – and I was just going to come back to it every now and then especially around like trauma-anniversaries. I just kind of clock. Like when do I have a moment that has been big enough to where I want to write about it? And I will just tuck that in the app and then I will start writing about it a little bit more. I go down the thread that seems like it has got the longest ball of yarn and I can knit the best scarf. That one was just for jokes. But it's true and I think that we look at *[0:40:02]* *[Indiscernible]* books so much in writing in general so much faster than they are written.

**Amanda Lytle:** Oh, yeah.

**James Rose:** Like I'm joking that I'm writing an autobiography. I say I'm joking about it. I fully have a document.

**Amanda Lytle:** Good. I hope so.

**James Rose:** Yeah. I started writing like a series of epithets that are like kind of sad about the parallels of being broken up with and living with my grandfather with Alzheimer's and really it started as like kind of an allegory between like sex parties and Alzheimer's and how it's similar they both are, which is fucked up and that's why I was like I have to write this.

So then I was like I just wanted to massage out some of the like kinks in – “kinks” is a funny word I've used there. I wanted to massage out some of the – just I don't know, the things that I was stuck on. So now I have a 20-page document that is an absolute feast that says to why you should never write an autobiography in your 20s. But like later, one day I'm going to want that.

**Amanda Lytle:** Yeah. Oh, the going back is sometimes so fun. It can be really moving. It can be really confronting but overall like the takeaways and the lessons and the experiences are so beautiful. It's where – I guess even the ugly ones are – they have put you where you're at.

**James Rose:** Yeah. I love the word “confronting” because absolutely writing feels like a confrontation to me and I love a confrontation not because I want to be belligerent but because I love the idea that we can go off against something and we can work through it and work with it and not how to be your enemy anymore.



**Amanda Lytle:** OK. I had written down the word “terrified” when you were talking about dance, especially because something that we had spoken about prerecording was how difficult it is for some people to be alone and how even you and I both are so comfortable with silence that for other people can be really challenging. But you grew to love the silence and I want you to share the alone time story of 100 happy days.

**James Rose:** Oh my god, yeah. So I went through – this was sometime around like post-rape, post-breakups. I realized that like out of the past three years I had been in relationships for like 90 percent of those three years. I had very little space in between each one. I hadn’t really – I had thought that I had healed but, you know, the healing is not an arrival point. It is not a destination. It is the never-ending road, right?

So I realized that it was actually really difficult to be in my own company and just the idea of dating sounded horrific to me, and I didn’t want to be in a relationship. I mean I did, but I also knew that wasn’t the right thing and I wanted to get to know myself better. I wanted to know what it was like to date me before I started dating other people again. I just felt like there was a gap.

So I started taking myself to solo dates. It started with like really small things like going to Krispy Kreme by myself and like sitting at the table and eating my doughnuts. You know, like and just learning how to do that and then it became I’m going to take myself to Broadway shows by myself.

Then it became I’m going to go to dinner by myself and then it became I’m going to go to dinner at the place I used to go with my ex by myself and the only rules I made were that I couldn’t bring my phone. So I couldn’t like just sit somewhere and be distracted, you know. I had to put my phone away. I could journal. I could bring my writing with me, and I can work through what I was feeling. You know, the early entries are like “Why am I fucking doing this? Oh my god. Like everyone is looking at me.”

**Amanda Lytle:** Yeah.

**James Rose:** And by the end though, it was like I feel so excited to have this day with myself today because I have been thinking about this. You know, like – and like oh, I came back to my favorite place, whatever the deal was. I started to remark all these places around New York that were – at one point held difficult sentimental value and I rewrote every single one of them with a date, sometimes multiple.

A hundred dates is a lot of dates and I actually don’t know if I finished the project. I don’t remember getting to a hundred because then I did meet somebody, and I felt like – I think it was in like the ‘80s or something like that and I remember thinking to myself what you feel is a gift here. Like feeling this for him is not something to shy away from.

It doesn't mean that it's going to work, and it doesn't mean that it's going to be a perfect relationship. But if your gut says give this a shot, give this a shot and if you hold so stringently to this project you put on yourself, then you actually haven't figured out what the project is for. The project was just learning how to be alone.

So then I got to a place where I was like I love being with myself. I would be OK adding somebody in to like keep me company sometimes. That relationship didn't work out. That's fine.

But the ability to be with myself has only gotten stronger and that has never gone away and so learning how to literally date myself. I mean I would literally buy myself flowers and bring them to my own date with me, which sounds so sad. Until you dress up and do it for yourself enough to where you're like – first off, you raise your standards for how you want to be treated.

Also I was building the way in which I would want to love somebody else. I was doing all the things for me that I wanted to be able to do for someone else. But like I wasn't in a place to. The men I had tried to clearly were not the right ones or they weren't able to accept that kind of love or offer it back.

So I started practicing giving myself what I wish I could give to other people and what I wish I was receiving from them. It is not the same. It's not fulfilling in the same way. You know, being loved by somebody else I think is much – it's just much different than taking care of yourself. But for me it became less about maintenance and more about giving myself time to have an enriching, emotional experience to sit in the silence and to learn what it was like to be in my own brain. I learned I was pretty cool and through that, I mean that was also part of my gender journey. All of this was around the same time. So ...

**Amanda Lytle:** I find that so empowering and so inspirational to think about finding comfort with yourself because it can be such a challenge for so many people. We even talked prerecording about something as simple as having the TV on in the background all the time and how simply turning the TV off is an invitation to just be like, "OK, brain. Where are you at?"

**James Rose:** Yeah, yeah. And now that has become my norm. Like we were talking prerecording about the video that I put us through with me, with the donuts sitting in the table alone and that was because now it's a regular thing for me to be like I'm going to take myself to dinner. I'm going to cook for myself. I'm going to get dressed up and go see a show by myself. Like whatever the deal is. Obviously that's much harder in a pandemic time. I had to get much more creative about my self-dates but – because it's not a practice that I stopped. It just became a regular habit.

**Amanda Lytle:** It's beautiful and I hope that that never stops. I'm sure at this point it will only get better.

**James Rose:** I think it will only get better. I do also want to add the caveat that this was not like I have to learn to love myself before I can love anybody else. I hate that saying. I don't hate that

saying. I think that saying is extremely misguided because it's not true. We never get to an arrival point where we fully love ourselves.

So therefore by that definition, then we would never be able to be in a happy relationship. When the truth is like in all my relationships, I was working on myself. I felt like I fell out of touch with myself when I was in them. That was the difference and so I wanted to reconnect to that. It wasn't that I didn't love myself. It was that I was like trying to figure out the ways in which I could reconnect with loving myself and then building on that.

But I do think it's important to note that it's like that's not a precursor to figuring out how to be in a relationship.

**Amanda Lytle:** I could honestly talk to you for days about that stuff. Being mindful of your time, I do have one last question and that has to do with a shoutout for an account, a person, an organization, a disruptor, an activist, or a change agent that you would like to point us in the direction of.

**James Rose:** Oh, what a great question. I am learning a lot from Wagatwe right now. She is an anti-rape activist on Instagram and TikTok and I think anybody who's invested in the work of survivorship could learn from Wagatwe for sure. There are like 27 other names that came to my mind. I am constantly putting people on my Instagram to say follow this person. I learned from them.

I keep it pretty slim in terms of like how many people that I allow myself to follow that I don't know just because that's how I need to take care of my own brain. So like the people that do occupy that space, I have a lot of respect for those educators, and I really like them. So yeah, I would say look into Wagatwe's work. I think she's amazing.

**Amanda Lytle:** OK. I will put that in the show notes.

**James Rose:** Yeah.

**Amanda Lytle:** James, this has been such a treat. Thank you for your time. Thank you for being a guest on *The Book Stoop* and sharing everything that you have. You will definitely be back.

**James Rose:** Oh my gosh. You're so welcome. Thank you for having me and letting me speak extemporaneously on all of this stuff.

**Amanda Lytle:** So here for that. Thank you so much for being with us. We hope you loved the conversation, and we will be back again soon. Please be sure to follow us on your podcast app and leave a rating where you're able to do so. Writing a written review helps reach more listeners too. Check out all of the show notes for the links and share *The Book Stoop* with your friends. Talk soon.

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