

Phallology with Dr. Emily Willingham

Ologies Podcast

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Oh, hey. It's the bouncer who pretends to check your ID, but... who are we kidding? Alie Ward, I'm her. This is *Ologies*. You're here. Unless you are my parents, in which case, please leave. Okay. Buh-bye now. Okay? All right, they're gone? Cool.

So let's get into dicks with an ologist who wrote the actual book on them. She has a PhD in Biological Sciences from the University of Texas at Austin and authored the book *Phallacy: Life Lessons from the Animal Penis*. And you have read her words, perhaps enjoyed her wry candor in *Scientific American*, *American Scientist*, *Forbes*, *Slate*, and more. She's taught biology and genetics. I became aware of her book and I begged her to talk boners with me. And then life got busy and she gently *popped up* in my inbox, and what followed was a business email that included the word 'dong' several times in all caps, and here we are.

Before we get to the *nuts* and bolts of inflatable crotches, let us say a quick thanks to patrons who make the show doable. It costs \$1 a month to join that club and submit questions. Also, thanks to everyone who's rated and hit subscribe on this podcast. That matters so much. And the reviews! Oh, the reviews! They keep *Ologies*, right now, the #2 science show on Apple, and I read them all. And this week, let's read aloud MarmarTheCandyBar, who called *Ologies*: Science, comedy, life hacks, therapy all in one. So get ready for all of that and more, including, if you stick around, some sex tips this week, sourced from ologites anonymously. Also, NormSaxy, I'm sorry about your pops, and as your weird internet dad, I send hugs.

Okay, let's get into it. Phallology. It's a word. It is derived from the Proto-Indo-European root 'to swell', which is swell indeed. So buckle up. Get ready to hear about pronged dongs, myths about toxic masculinity, why an erectile might dysfunct, and what to do if size really matters and to whom, turtle romance, sea slug sparring, the biggest *members* of the animal kingdom, life beyond a binary, the giftshop that keeps on giving, and reasons you might affix a metal dick to your baby.

Now, as deep as we went, this whole episode could have just been miles long, and we touched on as many penis questions as possible. And even as I record this, more info is just gushing in. I'll be adding it to the very, very end, so stay tuned for trivia, tricks, and of course *just the tips*, with scientist, author, and Phallologist, Dr. Emily Willingham.

Emily Willingham: First name is Emily. Last name is Willingham, unless you're British, in which case, apparently, it's "Willingm." And my pronouns are she/her.

Alie Ward: [laughs] Um, wow. Phallology. Did you know it existed? I'm sure you did.

Dr. W: Did I personally know it existed? [laughs] I did, yeah. I did. At some point in my life, I did learn of its existence.

Alie: Do you call yourself a phallologist?

Dr. W: No, I don't. [laughs]

Alie: Can you start? Because it's great.

Dr. W: Can you imagine that? People would be like, "What? What do you mean by that?"

Alie: [laughs] Oh my gosh. Tell me a little bit about how long your life has involved... the dick.

Dr. W: Let's see... There's so many ways to answer that question. I mean... you know. Sex life, or like research life? Or...? Let's say the research life because I don't want to get too private for people who aren't here to consent to that.

Alie: [laughs]

Dr. W: I would say... You know, I actually started out with gonads because I feel like you need to start at the beginning of any story. So, I did... my PhD was a focus on gonads, but when I did my post-doc, what we focused on was penises. ["*But of course!*"] So, it was like 2002 when I started getting into that.

Alie: Can you tell me about why your research *pointed* in that direction? What was it about gonads and dongs?

Dr. W: You know what? I don't know. It's so weird, but I was just really into reproductive biology. I don't know why. I have an English degree, and when I went into biological sciences, I remember looking through this, like, pamphlet or something from the school I attended – it was University of Texas at Austin – and looking through, like, what the researchers did, like what they focus on, and actually drew little hearts [laughs] – I was way too old to be doing this – next to these two labs, the pictures of the PIs and two labs that did this kind of work. And I mean, it's just what I wanted to do. I can't explain it. I'm sorry.

Aside: She just loved it. A lightbulb went off. A fire ignited in her soul. And Dr. Willingham was like, "Gonads have my whole heart."

Alie: Is the work... Is it very [shyly] hands-on? Or is it a lot of lab work? How does that work?

Dr. W: [laughs] It is hands-on. And actually what that means, and a more serious note, is that a lot of times it's hands-on, you know, with animals, and they don't survive the hands-on-ness. So, there's not a lot of salaciousness to it, but it is basic research so you do, kind of, learn about what makes these things tick.

Alie: Did you find that, because of what you were studying, you got a lot of questions from people in your social circles? I mean, did you find yourself being introduced at dinner parties as, like, "This is Emily. She studies dicks."?

Dr. W: Well you know, no. But I used to write about what I did and say... If I started to talk about it at parties people sort of back away slowly. Like, "What do you do?" "Well, I study gonads," and they're just like, "Okay..." So I decided maybe that's not a party word; like you shouldn't say 'gonads' at a party, maybe. But yeah, now I do actually get a ton of questions from people about penises all the time.

Alie: Was it just easier to write a book?

Dr. W: It's funny. It was not easy to write a book, but it was incredibly fun to write a book. This stuff is interesting. You can't get away from how interesting it is.

Alie: Oh, for sure. And I'm sure if people do start asking you questions you can just say, "Please, buy my book."

Dr. W: "Here's a book. I wrote a book. Can you buy the book I wrote?" [laughs]

Alie: So let's, I guess, start at the base, if we shall. And can you explain, what is a penis or a phallus in anatomical terms?

Dr. W: Holy cow. That's a big question because, I mean, across the animal kingdom, what they're made out of varies enormously. And if you're in the world of penis research or the genitalia

researchers of the world, you discover that they actually also like to argue a lot about what actually makes a penis. At least some of them do. Maybe we're just bored. I don't know.

So, not everything is a penis that we call a penis, depending on whom you talk to. So, if you take a human or a mammalian version of this... Humans don't have a bone but a lot of mammals do. So there's a bone in the bone. That's called the 'os penis', actually. And there's smooth muscle which we can't contract voluntarily, so our bodies have to do that for us. And they have blood vessels, and they have spongy tissue that gets filled with blood, as we all might know, ["*Oh, I know.*"] might be familiar with that.

And of course, there's skin, and running through... [*laughs*] It has skin on it, which is good. [*laughs*] And then running down the center of it is a urethra, and most commonly that exits at the tip of it. And the tip of it, you know, has a little helmet on it. There's a foreskin; that's the glans. And then the longer part of it is called the shaft.

Aside: So there you have it. Like a realtor giving you a tour of a quaint, homey schlong. So that's form. Let's talk function and then we'll talk fun.

Alie: And does something have to be a sperm delivery device to be considered a penis?

Dr. W: Not really, because... No. There are things that deliver sperm that are not penises, and it gets very complex. I used to describe penises as sperm delivery systems. That was back when I was young, beautiful, innocent, and didn't know what I was talking about, somehow still teaching biology to freshmen in the universities.

But the reality is that lots of different things are used to transmit sperm. Sometimes feet, if you're a millipede, for example. And sometimes the penis doesn't really do that at all. You just sort of load up the penis, you transfer its contents to some other body part, and then you insert the sperm. So, there are lots of ways to get that into a partner without using a penis.

Aside: So, sometimes the penis is just the caulking gun.

Alie: Let's talk about some quick flimflam. I think, obviously, culturally, there's a big binary in terms of, like, "You have a penis; you are a man. It transmits sperm. You do not have a penis; you are a woman." But obviously, in your studies, there's a lot of gray areas, right?

Dr. W: Yeah. You know, our problem as a species is we really like to categorize things and we don't like a lot of categories. We're just not fans of it, so we like to make two, and we like to just squeeze everything we can into those two categories. Nature has other ideas.

The subtitle of my book is *Life Lessons from the Animal Penis*, and one of the lessons is that, you know, penises don't make an animal male and not all male animals have them. And in some cases, animals that make eggs actually have the structure that transmits sperm to a partner; inserts into and transmits sperm into a partner. And I think we know from being human beings that a penis doesn't make a man and a man doesn't always have a penis. So, it's way more complicated than the two buckets we like so much.

Aside: Hold up. Let's back up here. Who does what with a what?

Alie: What kind of animals were you just talking about who have eggs and... What types of animals do that?

Dr. W: There are a couple. One is pretty well known, which is the seahorse, and what they use isn't really technically a penis. I made a term in the book because, across different groups of species, people have so many different names for these organs. They call them so many

different things. So, I just needed one term that captured it, so I decided on intromittum because intromission is inserting an organ into something and transmitting gametes.

Aside: Once again, that was an intromittum organ.

Dr. W: And so, the seahorse doesn't really have this, technically. What the seahorse does is that the female, the one that makes the eggs, takes those eggs, and puts them into the male pouch, and then the male broods them. And when that happens, there's this tiny little moment where some sperm comes out of a little pore in the male, and fuses with the eggs, and the male broods them.

Aside: So, the lady seahorse uses an ovipositor to jizz eggs into the boy seahorse, and he is like, "Doinks" with a little bit of sperm, such as a Salt Bae might just gently sprinkle. And then he incubates them. And some cave insects, Emily told me, have an ovipositor that goes into a boy cave insect and sucks up sperm. And that clutch info was published in a 2014 study titled "Female penis, male vagina, and their correlated evolution in a cave insect," which just introduced me to a new ology: Cave Ecology! It's dark, and damp, and musty, and mystery. Let's do it!

But back to seahorses.

Alie: You know, I heard from some listeners a few years ago that trans men who carry babies are known as seahorses, colloquially. Were you aware of that?

Dr. W: You know, actually that does ring a bell. That's pretty cool.

Alie: I had no idea. Can we talk a little bit about, in humans, where does a clitoris and where does a penis come from in development? Because I feel like I've seen drawings where they kind of start in the same structural way and they divide, or sometimes with intersex humans, divisions will be less binary. Can you talk about the bulb of it all?

Dr. W: Sure. I'm actually a developmental biologist, so this is right in my so-called sweet spot, something I'm really into talking about.

The early structure is called a genital tubercle. And it's just a little nub that develops, and then what happens next really depends on what hormones are available, kind of regardless of which animal with a backbone you are. You start out with this little genital tubercle nub, and in us, if there's a hormone – these are steroid hormones – called dihydrotestosterone, which is a version of testosterone, then the urethra and that genital tubercle will start to elongate and you get what we call a penis. If there's a different kind of hormone present and dihydrotestosterone isn't present, then that elongation doesn't occur and the urethra stays short.

I used to tell my sons when they asked me why some people have penises and some people don't, I would just say, "Some people just have a shorter urethra," because we don't want them to get all caught up in some of the other binary stuff.

Alie: Yeah. So how come even an enlarged clitoris, we don't pee out of it?

Dr. W: In the case of development and without the dihydrotestosterone present, the urethra goes in one direction and that is just underneath where the clitoris is.

Alie: Did you find, especially in writing this book, when you were deep in the creation process of it, did you just see dicks everywhere you went?

Dr. W: Absolutely. Outside the window where I sit in my house, where I work, there's a hillside, and it has this bare area [laughs] and I swear to God, I've been looking at it now for the

longest time, and it just looks like a penis and testes out there. It just does. I look at it every day. So yes, that's exactly what I'm doing.

Alie: *[laughs]* Thoughts on Darth Vader?

Dr. W: You know, it's funny you mention that, because I was watching that the other day, as one does, and I was looking at him, and I... You know, there was that part of it and it really does look like that. But also, it's oddly just the head. *[laughs]* It's really large for the rest of him, and I don't really know why they did that.

Aside: Why does Darth look dickish? I had to know. So I sniffed down a few happy trails, one of which asserted that they were a nod to Nazi helmets. Ew. But then a few other sources said that George Lucas wanted to, kind of, tip his hat toward samurai culture, so designers based it on a helmet of a 16th-century Japanese warrior, Date Masamune. And if you google it, you're like, "Oh yeah. Darth Vader is just Date Masamune cosplay." So now we know why he is shaped like one of those, but on the flip side:

Alie: And when it comes to the head of the penis, can you explain, why *does* it look like a Darth Vader helmet?

Dr. W: You know, we can only infer, but there are lots of people... not lots, but some people have tried to explain it as, "Oh..." *[laughs]* My favorite thing is, "It's a plunger," or something. Like it plunges semen out of the partner's vagina because you're trying to get rid of that... because you're the next guy in line. And I'm just thinking, you know, I know people are really various in how they do things, but most people don't just have... lie around in the bed and have partners lined up out the door so they can come in one after other and just plunge the vagina and get their semen in line. So, that's kind of a funny way to look at it. And I mean, people have hypothesized all kinds of reasons but nobody has a direct explanation for that.

Alie: Mm-hmm. But is that sort of the leading hypothesis for now?

Dr. W: No, because I think that the people who are proposing that were leading with something else when they decided that or proposed it. I don't buy it.

Alie: I had heard that it was to clean things out, and I just accepted, like, "Okay, that must be what it's for," but it's interesting that it might... maybe could've served aerodynamic purposes as well, perhaps?

Dr. W: So, I would say "clean things out..." I mean, I understand why that seems plausible. I think a lot of people have found that plausible. But there's... not in the way that humans mate and the mate structure that we have. It doesn't make a ton of sense that there would be a need to clean things out. And also, just the way sperm travels so quickly and how all of that works, that wouldn't work anyway. It'd be a little too late for that to really have an effect.

And it's not really that impressive... One of the things that I wrote about in the book is that our penis is not particularly impressive. It doesn't have a lot of adornments. It doesn't suggest that there's a lot of competition with the males having sex with the females or something like that, which you see in a lot of other species. Because when that happens, those penises have all kinds of things on them, like spikes, and hooks, and you know, really fancy looking. And ours isn't like that at all.

Alie: *[laughs]*

Dr. W: They're very fancy. Fancy phalli.

Alie: *Accoutrement.*

Dr. W: *Accoutrement, yes.*

Aside: I'm so sorry, humans with penises. Not a lot of bells and whistles. But there are a lot of balls and whiskers. Anyway, Dr. Willingham says that our partner structure is pretty chill compared to some other organisms.

Alie: I did want to ask about that. If you could walk us through, maybe, a gallery of highlights of some donges in the animal kingdoms. What are some notable ones?

Dr. W: The most notable donges in the animal kingdom. Well, I mentioned the millipedes because they just kill me. They have this pair of legs that they use, and there's another pair that serves up the semen, but before they do that, they first test the partner with, like, an uncharged pair of legs, like, "Poke." And if it seems like it works okay... Which, I mean, one possible explanation for that is they're just like, "Is this the right species? Is this a millipede?" You know, you gotta make sure. But then they get their legs, and they draw up the semen from another pair of legs, and then use them for real. [*laughs*] It just, kind of... I don't know. It just amazes me.

Another one that amazes me are these swallowtail butterflies. From what I understand, other butterfly species may have this as well, but they have light receptors on their genitalia.

Alie: Fancy!

Dr. W: Which means they can detect light with their genitalia.

Alie: Oh my god.

Dr. W: Imagine if you could detect light with your genitalia.

Alie: Oh my gosh. Absolutely changes the rave scene completely.

Dr. W: Changes a lot. Like, what would you do? So, that one is also... I really enjoy that. People talk about duck penises all the time because they're corkscrew-shaped, and I'm honestly kind of over them. [*laughs*] I'm like, "Okay, fine. Whatever."

Aside: And if you're not yet over that fact, great news. I have more dick duck gossip. So, most birds do not have willies. 97% of them, happily dickless. They just perform a little 'cloacal kiss' is what it's called. They gingerly smash buttocks, and boom, you've got baby birds. But ducks not only have wangs, they have ones that can be longer than their entire bodies and are spiraled like a tightly wound curly fry.

And likewise, duck vaginas are just a spiral staircase of resistance, replete with hidden pockets and dead ends. And according to Dr. Patricia Brennan, a scientist who researches duck dicks, this likely evolved to thwart male ducks' forced copulation, as Dr. Brennan explored in a paper titled "Explosive eversion and functional morphology of the duck penis supports sexual conflict in waterfowl genitalia."

Also, my good buddy Dr. Jason Coleman reported via *Nat Geo* a few years ago that apparently a duck penis will shrink during the off-season and then get big and weird again during a breeding frenzy. But if you're not the dominant male in your duck posse? Your dingle-dangle may just stay modest. But on the topic of small but mighty:

Dr. W: The flea is a bit daunting. It has a penis that is, sort of... It's weird how many people have written poetically about fleas. John Donne and that kind of thing. But it has a penis that,

like, curls up inside of its body and basically takes up the whole rear half of it and is a couple times the length of the animal. And even when it's inserted into a partner, there's still a whole bunch of it still inside the animal.

Alie: Why?!?!

Dr. W: I know! Fleas are just whacky.

Aside: John Donne Who? He is a dead English poet and a cleric who secretly married a lady and had 12 kids with her, and also wrote some sad, emo sonnets, and some erotic ditties about bugs, such as "The Flea," which includes the lines: It sucked me first, and now sucks thee, and in this flea our two bloods mingled be.

So, this was straight-up horny shit in the 15th century, and people were hot and sweaty under their woolen vestments about it.

Dr. W: And there's one in the book... One of my favorite pictures in the book is of this penis of a fairly common snail in Australia. It's called the *Phallomedusa solida*, and it's kind of... It's like if a mop were put on top of Medusa's head, and then she kind of wrapped a fancy late 18th-century cravat around her neck. That's what this thing would look like. It's really quite striking.

Alie: Is it true that barnacles have the biggest body-to-member ratio?

Dr. W: Yeah, so I have this whole chapter on, you know, who's the big winner when it comes to the biggest penis. And so, I don't know how much you know about Charles Darwin's other interests besides the natural selection situation, but he wrote this, like, four-part, gigantic set of monographs on barnacles, to the point that he actually got kind of sick of them. He actually just got to the point where he hated them, which is understandable.

But there was this one teeny, teeny, little barnacle he found that at first they thought was, like, a parasite or something. It turned out to be the male version on the female, which is not uncommon. There are, you know, quite a few species where the male is teeny weeny. Then when you got a close enough look at this thing, its penis is, like, many times the size of its body. So it really does have the largest penis-to-body proportion of any animal.

And if you wanted to go just, like, "What is just actually the biggest penis on Earth?" You know, guess what that is.

Alie: Oh gosh. A whale?

Dr. W: Yeah, the blue whale takes it.

Alie: How big?

Dr. W: Oh... Eight feet.

Alie: Eight feet?!

Dr. W: Yeah.

Alie: Eight... feet.

Dr. W: So if you know somebody who's, like, six feet tall, add two feet to that, and that's an average blue whale penis.

I went to the Icelandic Phallogical Museum because, you know, if you're writing a book about penises you kind of almost have to do that. And there are... It's Iceland, so there are a ton of whale penises in that museum.

Alie: I can't even imagine the gift shop.

Dr. W: Oh, the gift shop was hilarious. Actually, the museum itself was a little sad to me because it was a bunch of penises, you know, disembodied from the animals, which... I don't know. It was not uplifting to me. But the gift shop was hysterical. [*laughs*] Really enjoyed the gift shop.

Alie: Not *uplifting*. Oh my god.

Dr. W: Oh no. There it is again!

Aside: If you just added the Phallogical Museum to your travel bucket list, prepare for a whole gallery full of glass columns stuffed with wangs of all shapes and sizes, floating in sepia-toned liquids. Just stroll through the gift shop and browse an array of designer condoms, creatively handled mugs, some penis pasta. They've got ice cube trays, lots of plush toys. They have human-sized willy warmers, and more, including, of course, some carved wooden bottle openers that just straight-up look like a severed pecker. Who's thirsty? Not me.

Alie: That brings me to... In terms of disembodied penises, what animals in the natural world do have a gift shop structure where the dong is broken off in a, kind of, courtship offering? I understand that seminal plugs and dicks just break off in animals. Octopuses will just break off a sperm paddle. Who's just, like, "I'm good. Take it."?

Dr. W: You know, this is an interesting question because there are two, kind of, different things driving the loss of the penis here. In one case, there might be a sperm plug or a penis left behind. Some people hypothesize that that's basically, like, you've just blocked the door to the tomb there; nobody else can get in. And so, it keeps other suitors from showing up and doing anything.

On the flip side of that, for example, there is an octopus that is called the paper nautilus, and it is neither paper nor a nautilus. I don't know why we name things like we do, but we do. It's an argonaut octopus. And the male is teeny weeny compared to the female. And they're octopi so they're not above just, sort of, eating each other when they get the chance to. She would make a snack out of him, maybe, if she got the opportunity.

And one of those is a hectocotylus, which takes little sperm packets and deposits them into the female. And this little guy, he's like, "You can just keep this thing because I need to get out of here." He just, kind of, sneaks up, and pokes it in there, and swims away as fast as he can before the much larger female decides he also is lunch. And people used to find these females and find all these little squirmy tentacle things inside of them and thought they might be parasites or something that had gotten in there.

Aside: Literally just a bag of dicks. You're a bag of dicks. So perhaps it's not so much a ritual courtship gift as it's more akin to just tossing it all on red and then getting the hell out of dodge.

Alie: It's really much more about preservation than it is about generosity, though, right?

Dr. W: In that case, it is. But speaking of courtship gifts, there are species... One of the most famous ones is the bush-cricket – just do with that what you will – which is known for the size of its nuptial gifts, which is semen. Like, a gallon of semen, if the crickets were our size. It's just an enormous amount of semen. But the thing is that semen has a crapton of nutrition in it because, you know, it's supporting the cells in there and all that. So, the going idea about that is it can support the female and the great deal of work that goes on with the

development of new little members of the species. So, that's a nuptial gift. There's a scale of those. It could be, "Here's a gigantic bolus of semen," all the way to, "Here's my entire body. Enjoy."

Alie: You know, this makes me wonder, in terms of the way that a sperm organ, or just in general, genitalia, are used, is there any evidence that there's a ton of nerve endings for all animals and that is incentive to mate? Or is it just maybe humans or mammals that have a lot of nerves in the area?

Dr. W: It's an interesting question that I do not know the answer to. I don't know if they've looked at... I haven't seen anything that's comparative of, like, "The nerves here, the nerves there." I will say that, for example, some animals mate out of these, like, plates on their thorax. Some insects do that, so I don't know how much nerve endings, physiologically, would have anything to do with that part of... These are the animals that go and, kind of, stab their intromittum into the partner, leave some semen, and run away.

Alie: Penis fencing. How often does it happen?

Dr. W: *[laughs]* I don't know. A lot. Right? They do it. Some of these invertebrates do it, the slugs, but I've never actually asked them. I don't know how often they do it.

Aside: Any sea slugs listening to this? Because I just wanted to congratulate you for the enviable biology of having two differing sets of gennies, although, yes, my condolences that you have to use them as weaponry.

So, they fight until one gets stabbed with a dick, inseminates the other, and is like, "Boo-yah. I'm out. Have fun raising my babies. I'll see you in hell, brother. Well, I guess now, wife." So, if you and your human Hinge date didn't have chemistry, but you didn't stand around nude trying to impale each other with your crotch and then one of you fled without child support, I guess you're doing okay. I don't know.

Alie: When it comes to mammals, let's get into the Bone Zone. Baculum. Bacula? Baculi? So many mammals have bones in their boners??

Dr. W: Yeah. How about that? What do you think of that? And we don't, and nobody... *[laughs]* Nobody's quite clear about why, and nobody is even quite clear about why other species that have bones have them. But can I tell you the acronym for the taxa that do have them? Primates; like chimps and that kind of stuff, except us. We do not. Rodentia; mice, rats, that kind of stuff. Insectivora; which are those little furry things who eat bugs. Carnivora; bears, dogs, and so on. Chiroptera; bats.

So you have Primate, Rodentia, Insectivora, Carnivora, and Chiroptera. What does that spell?

Alie: PRICC!

Dr. W: It spells PRICC. And then, if you add in... They've found now, belatedly, this tiny... Do you know what a pika is?

Alie: Yes!

Dr. W: I love pikas so much. They're at high altitudes. They're so cute. And if you get near them they throw their little hands up and go "Eek!" But they have these teeny, teeny, little penis bones that were discovered. And they're the lagomorphs. So if you add an 'L' you have PRICCL. So... *[laughs]*

Alie: Oh my god. Too adorable! Why do you think humans evolved not to have a penis bone? And what does a penis bone do for animals that have them?

Dr. W: That's the thing, is that nobody's quite sure what they're doing. They have all of these hypotheses about, you know, what does the penis bone do? Does it keep things in place long enough for the copulation to complete? But nobody quite knows exactly why. It is the boniest mystery around. It's such a mysterious thing. And nobody is quite sure why we lost ours. Evidently, we didn't need it, because otherwise there would've been selection for it because God knows there's enough selection right there, where the genitalia rubber hits the road, as it were. And it's gone, so... you know.

Alie: Well, speaking of 'god knows', any history to substantiate that the "rib" that is given to Eve of Adam's is actually a baculum?

Dr. W: You know, I had a little bit about that in the book and I had to take it out because I was running out of word space. But yeah, it's nonsense. Apparently, the Hebrew word really does mean 'rib' and it was never anything about, "So he took away Adam's bone from his rib except it was the rib way down there by his testes somehow," and somebody got confused, you know? No.

Alie: Ribbed for her pleasure, I suppose.

Dr. W: I suppose.

Alie: And what about culturally? What part of the US are you from?

Dr. W: I was born in Waco, Texas, actually.

Alie: I thought I detected a twang!

Dr. W: Yes, people mention it on occasion, Alie.

Aside: I love accents. I'm not sorry. I would like to do a Dialectology one day, please. Regional idiosyncrasies are just very fascinating.

Alie: Do you find, in writing this book, that you came across a lot of different cultural relationships with the phallus, domestically? I mean, obviously yes globally, but how do people think differently of dongs depending on where you're raised?

Dr. W: That's a good question. I'm not an anthropologist, so I can't speak to that with a bunch of expertise, but I did write a little bit about it in the last chapter. It varies so much across cultures and time. You've probably read... They wrote some stories about this, even some recent ones, that the Greeks apparently thought it was just, kind of, gauche to have a giant penis and that it was much more desirable to have one that was kind of small and pencil-ish. And then if you ask people with vaginas who have sex with people with penises, you find out that the size thing is just, kind of like, [*sarcastic*] whoop-de-do. Not the top consideration at all.

Aside: Listen. Was there a 2013 study called, "Penis size interacts with body shape and height to influence male attractiveness"? Based on photos, did they find that 105 female-identifying people chose penises that were in the 98th percentile for size? Sure. But also, are we usually picking partners when we have only looked at pictures and they are nude? Back when clothes were hair, maybe. But now, usually no. Some studies have found that only 20% of bevagina'd people can achieve orgasm through penetration alone. 80% can't. So the clit, kids, is lit.

Also, the vagine is a mere four to six inches long. So if you're out there and you have dongxiety, maybe you just really need a deep, deep breath. Maybe look into some positions, like from behind, which are more physiologically advantageous. And some sources say, you may just be a makeover away from some confidence. Yep, you've just got to trim up down there. Even experts agree. Don't hide your lightsaber under a bush wall. Cut bangs. Trim pubes. You have so much dick under that muff. Metaphorically *and* technically speaking. So let that be a lesson to all of us.

Also, I really hope that you are not listening to this at work or driving carpool. But you know what? Maybe I hope you are.

Alie: Do you think that it's gotten more conservative and it's gotten more taboo to discuss penises openly?

Dr. W: That is an interesting question. I think that people talk about them a lot more openly now than they did when I was young. I feel like... But again, I'm from Waco. Now I'm not there anymore, so maybe that's partly why that is. I don't know. It seems like there's a lot more...

You know what? I kind of can almost trace this back to... Let's see. When Viagra became a thing, I remember... You're way too young. Probably not even alive when this happened. But I remember when Bob Dole was a senator from Kansas, and erstwhile presidential candidate, and started taking it. And they actually asked him about it, and Liddy Dole, his wife. And she's like, "Thumbs up. The stuff works great." *[laughs]*

[clip of Bob Dole from commercial, "The point I want to make is that there are many treatments available for ED. So my advice is, get a medical checkup. It's the best way to get educated about ED and what can be done to treat it. It may take a little courage, but I've always found that everything worthwhile does."]

It was kind of a strange turning point, I feel like, culturally, that that was being openly discussed like that on the GOP side of the aisle, actually.

Alie: Viagra, that was an incidental finding, from what I understand, right?

Dr. W: Yeah, they were looking... Because what it does is relaxes the blood vessels, right? And the reason the penis can get engorged is they relax and fill with blood. Well, they were trying out this drug, I think, to see if it would relax blood vessels to reduce blood pressure, like as an anti-hypertensive. But the men who were taking it were like, "I'm kind of getting this erection and it's lasting kind of a long time. Pretty cool." And you know, dollar signs. Ch-ching!

If you hear the commercials, they're like, "We can cure 99% of erectile dysfunction." What they really mean is that it doesn't have a physiological basis. Physiological in the sense that there's something wrong in that area, or something related to that area. And so, what it kind of comes down to is, you know, you and your brain are not connecting anymore about, like, working towards a mutual purpose here. And so, there is... Which is why Viagra works, because it just is like, "Screw you, brain. I'm just going to cut straight to the blood vessels here and fill this sucker up." So that's what it does.

Aside: One 2019 survey said that, globally, up to 76% of folks who have erections have had erectile dysfunction. So, it happens a little bit more as you scoot past 50, but if you have ever had an uncooperative peen, fret not. You're totally normal. According to the Mayo Clinic, some causes of it though could be anger, because it messes with blood flow and sends more blood to the surface of the skin. Stress can also mess with you down there.

Being above a medically healthy weight can lower your testosterone and mess up your blood flow. Smoking and just straight-up low self-image can contribute to floppy dong. Medications can also interfere, and if so, totally talk to your doctor about it. They are literally paid to help; they have maybe had the same problem with themselves or a loved one.

And if you're like, "I have the depress but I don't want to take the medicines for it because of wang issues," I read a study on *Harvard Health*, they published an article noting that about 35-50% of people with untreated major depression experience some type of sexual dysfunction prior to treatment. So maybe don't blame the player, the antidepressants, blame the game, the clinical depress.

Also, I've mentioned it before on this podcast, they're not sponsors of the show, but there is a test called GeneSight that shows promise in terms of pairing you to an antidepressant that might work better for you. And I used it after trying three different antidepressants and I landed on one that works much better for me, based on those results. Your mileage may vary, but that was called GeneSight. Ward to the wise.

Alie: Do you find that in any of your research, that there was a myth about prolonged sex and what was desired from partners? Or is there, like, a correlation between pleasure and "the longer you go, the better"?

Dr. W: There's a related myth. I didn't examine that myth exactly, but what I did examine was this emphasis that people seem to place on the size of a penis, and that being really crucial, and super important, and also being able to last a really long time, which I think is, kind of... reaches into what... (haha, reaches in) gets to what you're asking.

And what I found is that what people who are having sex with people who have penises want is – and these surveys, the people are identifying as women – a partner who knows what they're doing. *[laughs]* Not a partner with a giant dong. Not a partner who can go forever. But a partner who knows what they're doing and also knows that the penis is not the only instrument of sexual pleasure available on the human body and knows how to use all the other ones as well.

Aside: Suggestion: Get yourself a book about it. Watch some educational materials that perhaps were not filmed in a Van Nuys motel.

Now, culturally, we all have a lot to learn about the clitori. And if vagine-gasms are just too much to expect from a weenis. A lot of terms in this episode. I'm sorry.

Dr. W: It's not super common, and I think, at least from the studies I saw and the results of those studies, it's also not something that people give that much of a rip about. I think it's part of impossible masculinity, that somewhere along the line, people with penises learned that "Oh, you've got to make this happen with this thrusting, massive organ. And if you don't, you're a failure." And that's just not, evidently, what a lot of people who are having sex really want.

Alie: Why have we tied a dick around our own brains? What's going on?

Dr. W: *[laughs]* You know, it's interesting. I trace a little bit of that in the last chapter of the book because there were, it looks like at least, in a lot of cultures, an association... When we started settling down and trying to grow stuff in one place, this connection between the penis, and especially an erect one, and obviously the fluid that comes out of it, I think we probably made the connection that that's associated with reproduction. Even an early-

Egyptian god called Min is depicted as holding a flail in one hand, which is a harvesting instrument, and he also has an instrument that is parallel to the ground, an erect penis that sits parallel to the ground. So, that's just a clear association between those two things. [*clip from Wayne's World: "Schwing!!"*]

The god Priapus, who's known today for association with priapism –which is an endless erection, which is not comfortable, by the way; it's not something that's enjoyable – first started out as a scarecrow. And so, those associations, I think, were made in a lot of cultures. And because of also the greater relative muscle mass and physical strength that people whose gonads make testosterone, testosterone confers on them, then you've got, "Well, this is fertility. It's protection. It's strength. And it's associated with this organ."

Even the Romans had little amulets that the children would wear that were a phallus with wings. It's called a fascinum, which is where we get 'fascinating' from, because it was supposed to distract the evil eye to the amulet and "fascinate" them away from the children.

Aside: Of course I looked this up! And yeah, it looks like a mythological griffin, but if God ran out of lion and eagle parts and had to use leftover dicks instead. And one photo I looked at for a little too long, appears to be made of bronze. I think it was dug up at Pompeii, but this winged-wang amulet could fit right in right now. I'm just saying, it never goes out of style. I could see it hanging off the rear-view mirror of a car belonging to a shift manager at the Tallahassee Hooters. Maybe someone who had a Red Bull toast at his wedding. Just ready to get loose and party. Let's do it.

Alie: I mean, on the topic of an homage, why do we love to draw dicks on everything? [*laughs*]

Dr. W: Oh god, it's so funny because I was just... I was staying somewhere to finish my next book, which is about the brain, and every day I was walking out to this platform on a lake, and it was really beautiful. And one day there were a bunch of teenagers there having a great time... I love teenagers, by the way. So it's like, "Yay. Teenagers."

And the next day I went out there, and there was a dick that they had drawn on, [*laughs*] I think, with Wite-Out, you know? It's ejaculating... It was tiny, but it was there. And then the next day, a goose had shat on it, and I was just like, "Okay, World. This is great." [*laughs*]

And then, one of my sons came home yesterday with his yearbook, and of course a couple of his friends, inevitably, somebody's drawn a penis in the yearbook. It's like, "This is for life. Enjoy." And in some cultures, it's way more obvious than just teenagers doodling something on a... There are parts of the world where they're on houses, you know, and they're considered protective and just the same associations with physical strength and protection.

Aside: I was going to put an aside here, listing some examples, but they are too numerous. From Japanese shrines to Mongolian monasteries, even the Empire State Building. A lot of boners on buildings. Luckily for all of us, though, there is a Wikipedia page just titled "Phallic Architecture." It's waiting for you.

Dr. W: So, in our culture, I mean Western culture and US culture, we hide them away and we act like it's salacious, and "Oh my gosh..." and the word 'penis' is scary to say, and you get in trouble, and things like that. So it gives it this aura of something kind of secret and funny that you can do that the adults can't see you being up to at the time. [*"Penis." "Penis." "Penis." "There's kids around." "There's no kids around." "Penis!"*]

So, I think it's maybe not super helpful to, kind of, shroud it in that air that this is something not to talk about, or consider, or to take seriously except as to, kind of – excuse me – *put on a pedestal*, [laughs] and set up as kind of a replacement representation for you, a young man in our culture.

Alie: You mentioned shrouded dick, and I'm wondering, how did you even approach the culture and the history behind circumcision? And when did we start to do that? And are there any medical benefits?

Dr. W: I did not discuss circumcision in the book, although I did talk about it... my co-author and I wrote about it a little bit in a parenting book that we wrote a few years ago. And you know, it's present in a couple of very globally distributed religious practices, and that started thousands of years ago in one of them.

And as far as benefit goes, if you look at the urological literature, it comes down to almost happenstance benefit, in a way, because for example, children who have infantile-onset urinary tract infections, right? Which means they've got something going on in their urinary system where they're probably having urine back up into their kidneys. But what they find is that if the children are circumcised, they don't tend to have repeat urinary tract infections as much and the outcomes tend to be better.

And there's some research pointing to, in adult men who undergo circumcision, there's a reduced transmission to sex partners of certain viruses that are transmitted through them having sex with people. But again, it almost comes across as, like, serendipitous benefit after the fact. It's not something you can just look at somebody at birth and go, "Well, this will protect them from this." It's just reduced risk for some of these outcomes in those cases.

Aside: And, Dr. Willingham notes, that while some sexually transmitted viruses could possibly be curbed by vaccines, like for HPV, HIV vaccines have proven much trickier. And hopefully, one day, humans will conquer that challenge.

But on the topic of non-humans, there's plenty still to boggle the brain.

Alie: Yeah, including, like, four-headed, pronged dicks...

Dr. W: Echidna. That's the echidna. [laughs]

Alie: Turtle dicks. What's even happening there?

Dr. W: Well, there's sort of a subset of penises that, you know, instead of waiting for the blood flow... They're not going to have to have Viagra, let's put it that way, because they're just going to fold it up at the ready. And when the time comes, the muscle just goes, "pa-plunk" and plops it out like an airbag. Turtles, alligators. Crocodilians have that going on. And turtles are... [laughs] In the book, I wrote about a turtle video that was really something to behold.

This poor turtle is extremely aroused, and it has this little ball that has paw prints on it, like dog paw prints. It's very pissed off or very aroused by this ball. And it's trying to, I guess, mount the ball, but its penis is flipped out. And also, the end of a turtle penis is like a cup, sort of. It opens and closes like a flower. So, this angry, angry little animal with its little flower-opening-and-closing penis, just attacking this little ball.

[clip from video: dog squeaky toy quietly squeaking, person giggling quietly]

It's quite a video. Humans are so weird.

Alie: What an O-face they have too. Like, the last thing...

Dr. W: *[laughs]* They never change their expression. *[laughs]* Just a turtle.

Alie: So uncomfortable! *[laughs]* Can I ask you some lightning round questions from listeners?

Dr. W: Sure. Let's give it a shot.

Alie: I mean, wow. The speed with which these questions came in. Wow. Just... very fast. Comin' in hawt, let's just say. I'm just going to run through as many as we can. Is that cool?

Dr. W: Okay, sure.

Aside: Absolutely bananas that we took so long to get to Patreon questions. Which you can submit for future episodes. Just a buck a month to join.

But before we ask them, we take the chance to donate to a cause, and this week, Emily chose Doctors Without Borders, which is a nongovernmental organization that provides assistance to populations in distress. They are global first responders to emergencies and epidemics. They do amazing work. That hot cash injection was made possible by sponsors of the show who you're going to hear about now.

[Ad Break]

Okay. Let's get back to your *hardball* questions.

Alie: Hollis wants to know: As a penis-haver, why is morning wood a thing, and is this happening with all penis-havers, human and otherwise?

Dr. W: *[laughs]* Don't know about other animals. Morning wood is a thing because it has to do with hormonal changes while you're asleep. I don't know about other animals. Like, I'm pretty sure bedbugs don't wake up that way. *[laughs]*

Alie: Ari B, first-time question-asker, wants to know: Is there any scientific research around BDE, Big Dick Energy? I feel like your book deals with this a lot.

Dr. W: This question I like, because I think we shouldn't use that phrase. I think that people who consider themselves progressives will say, for example, "small dick energy" or "big dick energy" when a person is acting a certain way. I think that's kind of part of the problem with how we talk about penises and what we make people with them think how they need to be. I think it reduces them to this body part when, you know, actually, our most important body part is our brain. And the manifestations of that are so variegated, and interesting, and not reducible to just this one phrase that way.

So, most men, I think, tend to think that... They under or overestimate what average is and how they relate to that, and they're often wrong about it. So that's a whole side problem. But you know, the idea that this person has this giant truck because their penis is teeny... and I kind of think that's not the way to talk about it or approach it. The same thing if a guy's in a Starbucks with an AR-15 and people are like, "Small dick energy, this guy."

There are so many complicated social messages that go into shaping somebody who does something ridiculous like that. The size of the penis has got to be way, way down on that list in terms of what's driving performative behaviors that they think are masculine but that are actually desperate in that way.

Aside: Do you love how compassionate she is? I love how compassionate she is. Raising people who are comfortable with their masculine traits does not start out with shame, is

what I'm getting. And it's good that she's getting that message out into the open, like a ball sack.

And on that note, first-time question-asker Devan Lawrence wrote in: As a cis female, external genitalia seems like such a hassle. The amount of times men sit on themselves is crazy. And Jordan Engelke asked: Why do some creatures have their junk on the inside like birds and some creatures keep their junk on the outside like humans? Rachel had the same question.

Out with it, Emily.

Alie: We had some questions about internal and external gonads, essentially. Is there anything about having external gonads that influences feelings of insecurity or feelings of protection, in terms of, maybe, like, compensatory aggression?

Dr. W: Hm. I would just, at its face, say no because testosterone itself is associated with aggression. So if the gonads are external, they are very likely testes, which means they're making testosterone, so there's a confounding thing there. Because the actual hormones those external gonads are producing is a hormone that's very, very well-known to drive aggression.

Alie: That makes sense. Celia Bell and Madelaine both asked questions... I hadn't heard of this. First-time question-asker Madelaine said: I've recently heard that data's starting to come out about covid patients who have a penis experiencing erectile dysfunction significantly more. Celia Bell said: What's the deal with covid dick? Have you heard anything about this?

Dr. W: Yeah, I actually tweeted about this the other day. This is really... It's not surprising. One of the things that this virus does is that it has an effect on what's called the endothelium, which is the lining of the blood vessels. And we've already talked about the role of blood vessels and how they need to relax for a penis to become erect, right? So, if you have a virus that's, like, messing with those and making them dysfunctional, well, that dysfunction's going to be body-wide. It's not just going to be one part of the body. There are a couple of reports about having had covid and then experiencing erectile dysfunction. There's another study, a couple of men who'd had covid, the virus was still persisting in their penis tissue a few months later.

Alie: [*gasp!*]

Dr. W: Yeah. And then there was another study that suggested that the penises were a little bit smaller. Which, I mean thinking, "What mechanism underlies that?" And it could relate, again, to having the blood vessels being contracted. It's like that *Seinfeld* episode where, you know, you get in the water and everything shrinks up. [*laughs*] And you know, George Costanza wants to hide his genitalia or something because it's cold.

[*clip from Seinfeld. Female, "I'm really sorry." Audience laughter. George Costanza, "I was in the pool! I was in the pool!!"*]

Everything just kind of goes "vwwhoop!" You're cold, and so your body... If I understand this correctly, because this is not my side of physiology. But if I understand this correctly, your body shunts to the core because you're cold. And you need to keep your core warm, so it's like, "You don't need blood here right now," so it sends it away because you're cold. You're not going to be having sex right now. You're too cold.

Alie: You're just like, "Teeth chatter! Let's get this body temperature up! Put your dick away!"

Dr. W: "Get this man a heating pad!"

Alie: Logan Laveau had a great question. Wants to know: What do they put in those bizarre Tiger Love-type enhancement powders you can get at gas stations? And is there anything remotely legit about them?

How do you feel about Yohimbe, and Horny Goat Weed, and all of that?

Dr. W: Oh my god. So, first of all, don't buy that stuff. Who knows what's in it? Supplements, in this country, are completely unregulated. And their contents can be not at all what it says on there. It can be too much of what it says on there, and a lot of other things. So, just don't buy stuff like that. The other problem is that a lot of things in the aphrodisiac market are acquired by abuse and torture of animals, and nobody needs to be doing that.

Aside: So yes, as a species, let's leave the rhinos alone. Let the tigers keep their dicks.

Alie: Donald Hayward wants to know: What's the hand-foot-size-to-penis fallacy? What's with that? Where did this idea start? Alexa and Donny want to know.

Dr. W: That's a... I looked at that, and apparently, for reasons that are unclear to me, the UK National Health Service also looked at this. I don't know why. And there's not an association. It probably got started because it would be a very easy shorthand, or short-footed, way to tell what somebody's size is since we're all wearing pants in this culture. But yeah, there's not an association.

Alie: Ah! Jess Swann and Andrea Levinson want to know: I've heard you can sprain a penis like you would an ankle or a muscle. True? If so, how?

Dr. W: *[laughs]* You can. I mean, yeah. Anything that has muscle or... this is smooth muscle, but anything that has a connective tissue component and stuff like that, you can overstretch it, or overdo it, and experience very uncomfortable outcomes from that.

Alie: Rachel Moore wants to know: Is the average size listed on Google actually the average? They feel like nearly every person they've been with has a larger than average penis, if it is. What is the average?

Dr. W: Well, what is the average size listed on Google, is that I would like to know first.

Alie: This is a good question. Let me see. Average... I mean, I always feel like it's 5.5. And also, there's a length and a girth difference, I'm sure. *[reading]* Six inches... in fact, the average is much smaller... I think they say 5.1 to 5.5.

Dr. W: Yeah, it's around 5.5" in our measurements, somewhere around there. And I think that a lot of people think that the average is bigger than that, but it's not. And then the girth thing is another thing entirely.

Alie: Have there been any studies on folks valuing girth over length?

Dr. W: Mm-hmm. So, first of all, neither is necessarily that important compared to some other factors that are valued, but girth is at least in a tie with length for, sort of, importance.

Alie: Is there a medical term for a chode?

Dr. W: *[laughs]* I don't know.

Alie: I don't know either. You've got to make...

Dr. W: I spent two years working with urologists, and I honestly don't think anybody ever, like, mentioned that before.

Alie: There are different-sized receptacles for penises, just as there are different-sized penises, right?

Dr. W: Sure. I hate to say this, but... I don't really hate to say it. Maybe I both hate and love to say it. When I see, like, a certain somebody's penis being made fun of because of its shape, publicly or whatever, I think, you know, we're doing this kind of as a target, what we perceive as some kind of sensitivity in the masculinity we demand from people with penises, and it makes me feel bad.

Alie: I think that's a really great point. And I also think it's really interesting how we would never make fun of, or deride, vulvas the way that we say that dicks are ugly or balls are disgusting, you know?

Dr. W: Right. I think that's true. Although I remember, there was one of those women who was a Hollywood Madam or something, and one of the people who worked for her was described repeatedly in news stories as having a beautiful vagina, and I think what they meant was vulva.

Aside: Vulva: The outside business. Vagina: The tunnel. So, a beautiful vagina is really quite an exploratory observation, so they probably meant vulva, just for the record.

Dr. W: And I remember thinking, "I wonder what makes one beautiful." So, you know... You're right. We don't have a cultural construct for, "What's the perfect iteration of the vulva," you know?

Alie: Yeah. Interesting. I think all dicks, beautiful dicks. All vulvas, beautiful vulvas. You got 'em, love 'em.

Dr. W: Yep.

Alie: Nikki DeMarco had a question on that note. She said: The language around penis health versus women's health is very different. For example, erectile dysfunction versus ovarian supply being exhausted or failure to produce hormones, no one would say ED is "penis failure." So, is there an expectation of masculinity or toxic masculinity that we're just not understanding that's looking at those things differently?

Dr. W: I think that the expectation is that anything that's associated with the masculine as the norm and that anything that deviates from that is abnormal. And it starts from the position of being 'less than' and then anything else that doesn't even meet that threshold of less than is a failure. So, that's why all these things associated with the health of people with ovaries and vaginas are characterized that way.

I saw that in the literature about genitalia as well, anything that's associated with vaginas, and with women, and things like that, the language around it is so very, very different. It's passive, or calling it a receptacle for things, and the physiology and the reality both belie that.

Alie: Elizabeth Rich had a question: Use it or lose it. Is that fact or flimflam? Does lack of use cause penile atrophy?

Dr. W: Not to my knowledge.

Aside: So if you've got to keep your peen under a white sheet like furniture in an abandoned mansion, it's cool. Just like a chaise lounge, it'll be just fine to sit on later.

Alie: Baer Hodge and Alicen Meysing both had questions about penile surgery, phalloplasty, and are transplants a viable option? And is phalloplasty... why is that hard to get right?

Dr. W: I'm not a urological surgeon so I can't answer the latter part of that. I would hope the clinicians who are with patients who are asking for these things really dig into what underlies it and that there's a physical indication for it.

This is so terrible, Alie. If you go to message boards – which I did because I was going to write about it and I just didn't have space – and look at what people with penises are doing to try to make them bigger, longer, last longer, and all these other things, we have a lot of work to do to (excuse me, but) pull out away from this kind of... this feeling of urgency they have that this thing just has to be so huge. Because the data show that the people they're presumably interested in having sex with just are not... That's not what they put at the top of the list.

Alie: Yeah. Any advice for penis-havers on how to have a better relationship with theirs?

Dr. W: I could have this conversation about any body part, just about, which we're not happy with, right? It's that you have it, and it's there, and it's doing what it can for you and you're doing what you can with it, and that's the most either one of you can ask from each other, right? And understand that you have a lot of other body parts that contribute as well as the penis does to having a great time with one or more other people.

Alie: That's a great way to look at it too. Jackie Fleming, first-time question-asker, wants to know if you have a funny dong joke.

Dr. W: My book is full of dong jokes. There's so many, and they just *come* to you, as it were. And it's *hard* to just pick one.

Aside: You've got to *hand* it to her, so many dick puns, it's *nuts*.

Now also, a few folks had a question. My dear friend Greg Walloch, whoms I love, and first-time question-asker and dong owner Kevin Glover inquired as to the rumor that they have heard gay-identifying men have larger penises on average. Is this true? If so, why? And Greg notes, based on some of *his own research*, it seems like this might be true.

Alie: A few people have said that they've heard that gay-identifying men have statistically bigger penises than straight-identifying men. Is that flimflam?

Dr. W: I sort of poked around looking at that, and not in any kind of significant way that I could find. It's a complicated question, and I know why people are asking it, but no, not on average that I could find. And I did look.

Alie: What about the *hardest* part about your job?

Dr. W: [*laughs*] The book-writing job?

Alie: Just in general, and as someone who looks at reproductive biology, or evolutionary biology, or an author, or a communicator.

Dr. W: I would say that I think the most difficult thing is, kind of, the pain and the empathy I feel for people who are struggling with these issues that society imposes on them. There's just no reason for society to do that. That's actually really difficult for me.

Alie: Yeah. That's so empathetic, especially since your book does deal with a lot of what we might consider notions of toxic masculinity or toxic expectations, that you have delved so deep into that and you've come out with such empathy, and understanding, and compassion.

Dr. W: I feel really strongly. I love men and boys. I feel really strongly that we could be doing better by them, and if that happens, then in general they can be doing better by everybody as well.

Alie: Is there something about your work that's changed the way that you're raising your sons?

Dr. W: No, because when I started this particular work they were already, kind of, raised. They were adolescents. One of them is 20. But it certainly informs some of my conversations with them, and I think I'm being even more careful than before with language that I use around them about men, and boys, and expectations, and that kind of thing.

Alie: Any advice for parents or partners?

Dr. W: I think the most important thing we can do is to take care with our language and our assumptions. I know that when I see people speak to teenagers today, they'll often make an assumption that the teenager is a cis heterosexual person, and they'll say, "Do you have a girlfriend? Do you have a boyfriend?" That kind of thing. I think that we need to be careful about what we gender, and what we don't, and what we show as kind of a default expectation, and examine that a little more closely, and try to be a little more neutral in opening statements to people and that kind of thing.

Alie: That's really great advice. That's awesome. What about something that you really cherish about your work? What do you love the most?

Dr. W: My favorite thing about what I get to do for a living is the research, the discovery, the going down rabbit holes, the finding new things about different people, different kinds of cultures, back and forth in history. I just love all of that so much.

Alie: Any advice for anyone who loves researching, and rabbit holes, and maybe wants to write a book about this stuff?

Dr. W: *[laughs]* Oh boy. I would say, you have to figure out when you need to stop digging at some point, and I don't have good advice about that. It just... You've got to find a way to stop yourself from digging at some point.

Alie: As someone who researches this podcast every week, it can... It's like expanding foam. Like, the work will take as much time as I give it.

Dr. W: Exactly. Right? It's almost kind of addictive, and you're like, "Okay, I just spent 50 hours chasing down this one lizard in the literature."

Alie: Someone's gotta do it. And what a joy, though. Oh my gosh.

Dr. W: It is.

So ask smart people to explain the long and the short of it, because we're just a bag of gametes. We're on this rock for the ride before we die. So, follow Emily. There are links in the show notes. She's on Twitter [@EJWillingham](#). Her website is [EmilyWillinghamPhD.com](#). She is the author of *Phallacy: Life Lessons from the Animal Penis* and the upcoming book *The Tailored Brain*. All of that will be listed in the show notes and there are links up at [AlieWard.com/Ologies/Phallology](#).

We are @Ologies on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#). I'm [@AlieWard](#) on [both](#). Come be friends. [Patreon.com/Ologies](#) is where you can join to submit questions. Erin Talbert admins the *Ologies* Podcast [Facebook group](#). Great group of people. Shannon Feltus and Boni Dutch manage [merch](#) and host the comedy podcast *You Are That*. Emily White of The Wordary makes our transcripts. Caleb

Patton bleeps them, and those are both up and free at the link in the show notes. Kelly Dwyer makes the website and is available for website design. Her link is at the bottom of my AlieWard.com website. Noel Dilworth handles the booking of guests and is amazing. Susan Hale has been making you quizzes on Instagram. Happy birthday to her.

Jarrett Sleeper edited this week, and thankfully, our romantic relationship does not count as harassment most of the time. And of course, thanks to Steven Ray Morris who was on standby this week and is chief sweetie-petey. Nick Thorburn wrote the theme music, and he is in a band called Islands.

And if you stick around until the end of the episode I tell you a secret. As promised, I'm going to give you blowjob tips. I sourced these from penis-havers from ologites anonymously. Here they are. Free of charge. Are you ready? Okay, here we go.

I'm going to list off the advice. Number one: Please, no teeth. Also, don't forget the berries. Grab the sack with a spare hand where they connect to the peen. Gently roll them. Only do it if you want to and enjoy it. Make an "OK" sign with your fingers, gently grasp under the head, fingers go down loose but up tight. (Good to know.) Stick your tongue out on the way down, wiggle it, good suction on the way up. Practice controlling your gag reflex. Focus on breath and rhythm. Don't focus too much on the head. It gets numb. (Good to know.) Don't neglect the bwalls. And enjoy it.

Mostly it sounds like you should just enjoy it.

The other bonus secret is: I'm very good at drawing dicks. All over stuff, all the time. I've drawn so many dicks on so many things. Right, Jarrett?

Jarrett: It's definitely very true. I have this beautiful thing right here. You should put this online.

Alie: I drew a picture of a dick for Jarrett years ago and it's the only thing that he has on his wall behind his desk. It says, "Good Morning, Jarr," in jizz. Okay, bye.

Berbye.

Transcribed by Emily White at TheWordary.com

More links you may enjoy:

A donation was made to DoctorsWithoutBorders.org

Purchase her book [*Phallacy: Life Lessons from the Animal Penis*](#)

[Dr. Willingham's website](#)

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