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[00:00:00] **Ronni:** Welcome to. This is probably a really weird question. The podcast for a medical doctor

[00:00:16] **Rebecca:** and a doctor of history talk about sex history. And the not at all weird questions we hear from patients, students, and colleagues about our bodies and our sexualities. I'm Dr. Ronnie Haye. And I'm Professor Rebecca Davis.

[00:00:32] **Ronni:** And today's question is,

[00:00:35] **Rebecca:** is it okay that I haven't shaved. So Ronnie, I have an exciting announcement. Ooh, bring it. We are launching a fundraising drive for, this is probably a really weird question.

[00:00:49] Mm-hmm.

[00:00:50] **Rebecca:** And we continue to have the. Unparalleled, absolutely amazing support of the Phils Wickler Charitable and Memorial Trust.

[00:00:57] And we love, I'm so grateful. Let's just say again, how much
[00:01:00] we love everyone there. And we have expenses that go beyond that contribution. And so what we're going to do is. I don't know if you know this, Ronnie, but you and I are each going to make a donation of what? No, I'm kidding. Of 50. And this combined \$300 will be our matching donation for listener donations.

[00:01:23] So listeners for every. \$5 you can spare that you donate through our website, through the foundation for Delaware County is a tax deductible donation. And Ronnie and I together will match every single donation that you bring. So our goal is to raise \$600 by June. And again, I mean, and honestly, really, truly.

[00:01:44] \$5, \$7, \$10, that would be amazing. Mm-hmm. If you are in a position to donate more, of course we will. Gladly, warmly, graciously. Mm-hmm. Yeah. Appreciate that. Um, but every tiny bit can really help. I know that [00:02:00] there are a lot of demands on everybody's. Right now. So we just are hoping to be able to continue to do this work and are calling on all of you for a little bit of help this spring to get that done.

[00:02:11] **Ronni:** And although this feels very much like an NPR pledge drive, I promise we're not going to continuously interrupt what you're listening to, to ask you to make a donation. We also, uh, are not giving away free tote bags, but no, we have excellent merch. I do should you, should you want to buy a really weird.

[00:02:28] Question tote bag.

[00:02:29] **Rebecca:** Yes.

[00:02:33] It's become the joke in the family that we have our cat and we have mommy. And both have

[00:02:38] delightful whiskers.

[00:02:46] **Rebecca:** Oh, hey Rebecca. Hey Ronnie.

[00:02:48] **Ronni:** Do I sound any different to you today?

[00:02:51] **Rebecca:** You sound like a podcaster with a professional microphone. Audio

[00:02:57] **Ronni:** setup. Mm-hmm. You know why that is? Why? [00:03:00] Because I got some new podcasting gear and our woohoo amazing sound person, Mick, uh, very kindly walked me through getting it all set up.

[00:03:10] Yeah. I feel very fancy. Thanks Mick. And I love that like in the end, the thing that really, uh. Brought it all together is turning it off and turning it back on, which is just so classic. I love it. Yep. Yep. Um, you've been busy, you've been traveling.

[00:03:29] **Rebecca:** I've been traveling a lot, giving a lot of book talks and doing signings and events, which is so much fun.

[00:03:35] And just as a hey to everybody, uh, if you're teaching a class and you assign a chapter of my book or you're teaching a class on writing and your students have questions about. I would be glad to zoom with anyone's class any day of the week. I love it and I'm glad to do it. Sort of community organization stuff, you know, just gimme a shout.

[00:03:55] I, I love that kind of thing. But I am looking at [00:04:00] mid-June, late June is the period at which I will cease my regular travels for a, a good span of time and I'm already. Kind. I have that penciled in on the calendar.

[00:04:09] **Ronni:** That's so amazing. Yeah, we just got back from Ireland. Oh, did you? Oh, yes. Uh, and it was delightful.

[00:04:16] Let me tell you, highly recommend if you've never been. The people are so lovely and so welcoming, and boy, it's a different world over there. You know, one of my favorite things that happened is one night we were staying in this really small town, six.

[00:04:36] I oftentimes am seized by like intense awkwardness and I really wanted to go out and hear some traditional music in one of the pubs. But you know, I was the only one who would go because it was late and somebody had to stay with our kid. So I had to like work myself up and I went to this pub and I was like.

[00:04:55] Crawling out of my skin feeling so awkward. 'cause I was there by myself with [00:05:00] like nothing to do until the music started. And thank God this lovely, like 70 something year old lady, Francis, uh, came and introduced herself. Shout out Francis.

[00:05:10] **Rebecca:** Mm-hmm. Shout

[00:05:11] **Ronni:** out to Francis and was very kind and we chit chatted a lot and she introduced me to everybody that was coming in because of course she knows everybody this.

[00:05:21] And she introduced me to the local undertaker. Who

[00:05:26] **Rebecca:** then bought my beer. Oh, I was gonna say, let's hope you had no need for anything to do with him during your visit, but it sounds like he was very helpful.

[00:05:34] **Ronni:** He was very kind. He bought my beer. He didn't even like slip me his card with it, you know, like in case you drink one or many of these.

[00:05:41] Um, but no, it was. Lovely. It's so green and there's so many, so many little lambs because it's, they're all being born right now and they're all like gambling around the, the fields. It's just, it was gorgeous.

[00:05:54] **Rebecca:** Gambling is one of the best and most underused of the verbs. Hard agree. [00:06:00] Yeah. Yeah. You know, listener, what might surprise you is that Ronnie and I had conversations like this when we were 16 years old at summer camp.

[00:06:10] We've been talking about our verb. For a very

[00:06:14] **Ronni:** long time. We might even have talked about our favorite jarons. Oh dear. We love a good verb functioning as a noun. Anyway, you know, actually I think it's very apropos that I'm mentioning sheep because sheep often are shorn. Oh my god.

[00:06:36] I didn't even plan that. Oh my God. I know we need to like, I think Mick could probably add that.

[00:06:49] Yeah. So the question of the day, is it okay that I haven't shaved, uh, most of the time I don't actually get this as a question. I get it as. [00:07:00] Shot across the bow, almost like usually when I'm about to do some sort of sensitive exam, like a pelvic exam, someone will say, oh my God, I'm so sorry I haven't shaved.

[00:07:08] It's like a mess down there. Oh yeah. And you know, as somebody who has not like looked at a razor in a really long time, like I just don't care. But people really care a lot. People have a lot of strong feelings about body hair and specifically about pubic hair, but about body hair of all kinds.

[00:07:29] **Rebecca:** Well, you know, there might just be historical reasons for that.

[00:07:35] Why might that be Dr.

[00:07:37] **Ronni:** Davis?

[00:07:37] **Rebecca:** So it's actually, this was one of the funnier things. Sometimes the things that I research for this show are kind of downers, right? Yeah. Like it's, you know, sad things that happened. But the, the history of like ideas around body hair were quite entertaining. For example, I enjoyed learning about.

[00:07:57] This ancient Greek story [00:08:00] attributed to Hippocrates. Oh, about fusA of Abrah, the wife of HIAs. So her husband goes away and doesn't

come back, and while he's away, she stops menstruating, grows a beard, oh, and also grows excess body hair. Her voice gets deeper, and then she dies. But,

[00:08:24] but this made sense to the ancient Greeks because Aristotle's, we talked about this like much earlier episodes, but Aristotle's theories like that there are humors in the body that need to be balanced out, and that's why women menstruate and that women are cooler and men are hotter. That's why men's genitals are outside their bodies and women have to keep theirs inside.

[00:08:41] So like they figured this out as like, well. You know, normally when a woman's body gets too hot, you know, she would menstruate. But if menstruation stops, then it's just gonna spring out of her chin is like hair. So yeah, her, her menstrual blood had turned to hair is the theory. [00:09:00] Indeed. It's so funny because this is like, I mean it's obviously, it's like a woman going through menopause.

[00:09:05] And, you know, maybe having higher testosterone levels relative to, you know, other hormone levels. And it's very common. It's extremely common. Sure. For women as they approach menopause to grow thicker facial hair, like we already have some facial hair, everyone has Yes. Facial hair. We're mammals. Yes. But it just gets thicker and it can be a little more whiskers like.

[00:09:25] Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

[00:09:26] **Rebecca:** And also our voices get deeper as we age, and that's just universally true. Yep. Oh, and with her husbands. Intercourse, not invigorating her body system to like move the around. Yeah. In his absence, she. Oh God.

[00:09:43] **Ronni:** Yeah. It's amazing.

[00:09:45] **Rebecca:** Isn't that great?

[00:09:46] **Ronni:** I love that this, that you finished the story with And she died.

[00:09:49] And she

[00:09:49] **Rebecca:** died. Right. It's like she, these things happen. Nobody can understand why and then she just dies. Yeah. And like that's kind of the end of the story.

[00:09:57] **Ronni:** She turned into a grotesque [00:10:00] man creature. Yes. And then her life was over.

[00:10:02] **Rebecca:** Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I don't even know what to say about that, but yeah. So like if we look fast forward, I don't know, a few thousand years in the 17 hundreds to 18 hundreds, and even the early 19 hundreds people in Northern Europe and in the early America, and then the new United States relied often on this one book that was called Aristotle's Masterpiece to get their information about sexual anatomy and conception and things like that.

[00:10:27] It's as one historian says, neither by Aristotle nor a masterpiece, it's like a cobbled together multi-author. Popular health guide. Oh. With lots of myth baked in. And some, some of them even have like poems and riddles and other, you know, funny illustrations and so on. Written when again, it sort of, its first emerges in the mid 16 hundreds.

[00:10:50] Okay.

[00:10:51] **Rebecca:** And there are no copyright laws, so to speak. So people like do new imprints of it and it, you know, circulates really widely. And then people vary it, you know, depending [00:11:00] upon what messages they. Some of the earlier versions have this very dramatic woodcut called, it's the old fashioned word for this is frontispiece.

[00:11:11] It's back before we had book jackets. So you'd have the plain leather cover or cloth cover of a book, and when you opened it up, that's where you would see a picture. Um, with the title of the book. Now we do that more like on the cover, but it used to be inside the book and that's the front is piece. And so the front is piece of some of the older editions of Aristotle's masterpiece have this two figures.

[00:11:33] One is this incredibly hairy woman and one is this very small black child, and both are speaking to this idea that a child. Resembles what is imprinted on the mind of the mother at the moment of intercourse. And I just wanna like say right up front, this makes a hot load of no sense at all. Like each one of these theories works for like 30 seconds until you find a reason why it [00:12:00] doesn't.

[00:12:01] But these were popular for a very long time so that the maternal imagination is one historian describes it would have this profound effect on the visual appearance of the baby. So for the hairy woman that her mother while pregnant had looked at a picture, a drawing of St. John the Baptist in the desert, dressed in animal skins.

[00:12:22] What? And that image in her mind of St. John the Baptist, wrapped in animal skins caused her child, her female child, to be born, covered in fur basically. Then the black baby being the result of two white people who had a drawing of a black person in their room. The woman looks at the drawing and has a black baby.

[00:12:47] I'm, so, it was also then purported that a woman who was having, uh, extramarital affair. As long as she like concentrated really hard on what her husband looked like.

[00:12:58] **Ronni:** Oh my

[00:12:58] **Rebecca:** goodness. Um, the baby would [00:13:00] still be born looking like her husband and not like sure the man she was having an affair with. Sure. None of this, like, there are so many holes in this theory.

[00:13:08] It is ridiculous. But this was a thing. So what does that mean though? Like this image of all the things that Aristotle's Masterpiece talks about, and it talks about many, many things. Why is the hairy woman and the black child beside her so prominent for like a. And part of it is in some additions, they're juxtaposed to this man of science sitting at a desk with like a skeleton and a globe and a book in front of him.

[00:13:34] So it's like the man of science and the woman of nature. And of course it's a racialized image too, because the child is black. So this, this tension between, you know, our people, our humans, totally distinct. As mammals, as sort of creatures on the earth with this knowledge and this stability that supersedes anything else present in the animal domain, or [00:14:00] is there part of humanity, women who are in fact much closer to the beasts and so hairiness?

[00:14:07] Then what's not only associated with like animals? But with women's sexual lusts. So you know that it's, it's not erotic as like being an attractive image of this woman, but it is supposed to show excess. If we think back to the real Aristotle, this idea that the extra heat would come out of someone's body in the form of hair uhhuh.

[00:14:29] So this woman whose body is covered in hair. This is a premenopausal woman, so she's got all of this heat, you know, and it's gotta come out somehow. And it's sort of, the association is like, she's too much, right? Right. There's all this excess and that makes her body hairy again. This is all so funny. And the images change by the 18 hundreds.

[00:14:50] White people in the United States are really worried about thinking about women as being super sexual. They start to wanna. Portray the ideal woman as not terribly [00:15:00] sexual at all. Uhhuh. And interestingly, right around this time, the front is piece in Aristotle's masterpiece shows just a plainly nude woman without any hair to speak of except on her head.

[00:15:10] Yeah. And a much more sort of demure, not excessive, um, woman. So it's very racialized. The last thing I know from this is that, speaking of sort of the pubic hair issue. It is understood that many, I don't know how many, but many indigenous North American nations had a practice of plucking pubic hair. The women did.

[00:15:33] Huh? And usually, uh, indigenous women might have their chests uncovered, but would usually have their groin area covered. But when they were visual, when they were viewed, the Europeans were noticing that there was no pubic air. So great. Uh, uh, statesman is Thomas Jefferson commented that when, you know, fur traders, uh, T-R-A-D-E-R, not traitors as we might be [00:16:00] thinking about.

[00:16:00] Got it, got it. Our politics. But traders Uhhuh, so traders who were in the sort of interior parts of North America, you know, hunting animals and dealing in the fur trade, were often very isolated from other European descended people and we're far more likely to move indigenous community.

[00:16:17] **Ronni:** Yeah.

[00:16:19] **Rebecca:** According to Thomas Jefferson, a lot of these men were like, Hey, hun, please stop plucking like that.

[00:16:25] This was, this was a practice that was not at all. I, I kind of imagine Jefferson got drunk one night with like one guy he knew who did this, who told him this, and then he just sort of assumed, yes, all of these men dislike that the women do this, huh? Because meanwhile, the man is usually living in her village.

[00:16:42] So his job is to assimilate and to learn her communities. Practices.

[00:16:49] **Ronni:** So you're talking about like a white person coming into an indigenous village, potentially like consensually or not consensually. Starting a relationship with somebody there [00:17:00] and then asking that she change her own practices, her own cultural practices.

[00:17:05] Okay.

[00:17:05] **Rebecca:** And I find that hard to believe many of these relationships and that occurred like with individual traders, like up and down the Mississippi River. We generally think that these were with the full consent and participation of the indigenous woman and her family because they would've had so much more power over this one lone guy, right?

[00:17:24] Like he's not in a position to force his way into a community once there are like English forts in Detroit. You know, once you have that situation, then there is an active trade in indigenous people, both among different indigenous nations and then among those nations. So like indigenous nations, fight with each other, take captives, and then trade them to white people in places like Detroit.

[00:17:48] So there is Nonconsensual stuff that happens for sure. But what I think Jefferson's talking about is these. They would say like in, in the ways of the country that these men uhhuh start to behave in the ways of the country. They go, [00:18:00] they start to dress the way that native people do. They learn the native languages.

[00:18:03] They start eating native traditional foods and so on. So where Jefferson gets this like, can you believe what they do? We make our women stop doing that, I think says a lot more about Thomas Jefferson's sense of the power that white men have over darker skinned women. Yeah. Than it does as a social historical anecdote.

[00:18:21] It doesn't. That that would've really worked. Yeah. But at any rate, you do see this like intense male gaze on women's pubes and on like, does this make her like acceptable or not to be somebody's wife? We have this historical association of women's hairy bodies as like excessive and animal-like and disordered somehow.

[00:18:46] That's a lot. To deal with. That's a lot to contend. Sure. With, um, the last tidbit I learned, which is just totally random,

[00:18:54] I love it, is

[00:18:54] **Rebecca:** so all those like, uh, gosh, I can't think of what they're called, but the, the sort of chemicals that people [00:19:00] put on their legs mm-hmm. To like strip the hair off.

[00:19:02] **Ronni:** Debil depilatory greens.

[00:19:04] Yeah.

[00:19:04] **Rebecca:** Thank you. Thank you. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Technology for that originated with the meat packing industry. Oh God. Because they had to find which chemical compounds would strip the hair off of. Hides, oh God. In order to be processed in, in sort of to like do factory process. And when you move from having the traders out, you know, in the wilderness processing the hides or the indigenous women really processing the hides, that was a big part of the indigenous economy by the 17, 18 hundreds.

[00:19:33] Anyway, when you wanna industrialize it, you look for chemical factory solutions and that. Then of course some poor women like put these solutions on their bodies and had terrible. Results. But then you know, companies realize, oh, there's a market here. Women want something to put on their bodies to take their hair off and start.

[00:19:58] Then researching and [00:20:00] developing these different products that we have now. But the original, oh my god. Yeah, it was from the meat packing. Interesting. Oh, it gives me like the hot you, you know, I.

[00:20:16] To this issue, I do not exist above this cultural pressure.

[00:20:21] Mm-hmm. I

[00:20:21] **Rebecca:** do still have a razor in my shower. I, you know, get the closeup mirror to see if, if I need to pluck any of my whiskers, you know, because. I'm not ready to get one of those devices that they now sell these little shavers for women for their faces to like take off all our peach fuzz.

[00:20:38] Personally, that's not the direction I'm headed, but I do try to make sure I don't have like full on cat. Like it's become the joke in the family that we have our cat and we have mommy and both have

[00:20:50] whiskers.

[00:20:53] **Rebecca:** You know, and I try to get rid of mine. We let the cat keep hers and I try to take that off. Yes.

[00:20:57] So like, I don't want it just feel like I'm [00:21:00] judging people who practice any of these things. I'm really sympathetic to it. I think we live

with so many negative messages Sure. About women's facial hair, about pubic hair, and you know, it's absolutely, it's very hard to exist Separate from that cultural. You know, air that we're breathing.

[00:21:22] **Ronni:** Absolutely. I feel exactly the same way. I feel like people are allowed to modify their bodies or, you know, do things to their bodies to help themselves feel good and right. Like that's my whole job is like helping people feel embodied and feel happy and healthy in their bodies. And also I think a lot of the messaging and the ideas that we have about body hair clearly come from a.

[00:21:49] Misogyny and also like the hairless female body is kind of like. Infantilized female body, right? Like we don't really get a ton [00:22:00] of hair on our bodies until we are in puberty. And before we, uh, I don't know if we had like turned on the mics yet or not, but I was remembering that I was like maybe in my.

[00:22:10] Early teens, like probably, probably in junior high school. I remember my mom telling me that I shouldn't start shaving my legs. 'cause once I started I could never stop. I mean, at the time I was like, yes, absolutely. I can never ever stop once I start. Now looking back on that, I don't even know what that means.

[00:22:29] Yeah, just that maybe the, I think the prevailing idea was that if you started shaving, then your hair would always come back.

[00:22:37] **Rebecca:** Yeah,

[00:22:37] **Ronni:** but that's definitely not the case. There's just, yeah, there's a lot going on with body hair and one of our, uh, former residents who I think is now out practicing in California, had this really lovely way of talking to people about it.

[00:22:51] Like people oftentimes feel, you know, like embarrassed or ashamed of like whatever. [00:23:00] How much hair they have or if they have a bunch of like acne or if they are worried that they're stinky, you know, she would always tell people like, I am here to receive bodies in whatever way. They come to me and it's just such lovely way.

[00:23:15] Isn't that nice? It's just like you have nothing to prove at the doctor's office. Right? I can totally appreciate that. People have all sorts of feelings

about it, but I think it's probably similar when people like. Go to get massages. Right? Like people just have a lot of fear of judgment if they have body hair.

[00:23:33] Yeah.

[00:23:34] **Ronni:** Not only do people. Sometimes feel embarrassed about being judged about how much hair they have. I think it's definitely also a marker of, what is the word I wanna use? I think sometimes people feel like it is a marker of class in the sense of who gets to be taken seriously by their healthcare team and who is kind of brushed [00:24:00] off as somebody who is not.

[00:24:03] Either telling the truth or a reliable narrator, for example. So I have a, I have a patient who had somewhat urgent neurosurgery this weekend, and I was talking to their partner about how it took so long for them to be taken seriously because they are somebody who is living in a fat body and they also have a lot of body hair.

[00:24:26] And so. Before an appointment where they were trying to get care for this person. They spent a lot of time like trimming their beard and making sure their hair was kind of like cut and styled and combed appropriately, and making sure that you know, they had bathed and that their clothes were. Air quotes appropriate because they were really concerned a appropriately that if they came to a healthcare provider looking air quotes disheveled that they wouldn't be taking seriously.

[00:24:57] And disheveled is a really interesting word that I [00:25:00] think is coded in the healthcare world, where if you see the word disheveled, I think it, it communicates a lot more than just kind of. It's kind of a mess, kind of a hot mess. It's like somebody who is disheveled is also maybe not terribly reliable.

[00:25:17] Maybe somebody who is not being honest about what's going on. And so a really coded word. And so this person's partner was really aware of that and trying as hard as they could to do everything that they could to make sure that they got good care. Like what a tremendous amount of energy. Spent that they didn't have.

[00:25:40] Right. They were dealing with this really scary medical issue and they were spending all of this time trying to make themselves look acceptable so that they could get the care that they need. It's just exhausting. Yeah. Well, I have to say I, I have learned so much today. I kind of very selfishly, I love these episodes [00:26:00] where it's a little bit history heavy.

[00:26:01] 'cause I always learn so much from you.

[00:26:04] **Rebecca:** Uh, well back at you. And I love this way of thinking about accepting bodies, however they come to you. And just as a general philosophy of life, that's just a really beautiful place to start. So thanks Ron. Thank

[00:26:20] **Ronni:** you.

[00:26:21] **Rebecca:** And, uh, listeners, just again, if you have a few bucks to spare, you can head over to our website, find the link to support us and make a donation of any size.

[00:26:29] It's welcome. And Ronnie and I are gonna match donations up to \$300. And,

[00:26:34] **Ronni:** I mean, where else are you gonna get to hear about people? Talk about the oak cask of the Nads. I mean, I think that's worth five bucks now.

[00:26:44] Bye Ronnie. Bye bye. You've been listening to. This is probably a really weird question, which is created, hosted, and produced by Rebecca Davis and Ronnie Hays.

[00:26:57] **Rebecca:** You can learn more about us. Read our show [00:27:00] notes and find links to resources on our website, [www really weird question.com](http://www.reallyweirdquestion.com). Follow us on Instagram at really weird question Pod send us your really weird, not really questions by emailing us at [really weird question@gmail.com](mailto:reallyweirdquestion@gmail.com).

[00:27:19] **Ronni:** Nora Carlson is our website Guru and social manager. Mick Finnegan is our sound engineer. Mark Wurzelbacher composed and recorded our incredible theme music.

[00:27:30] **Rebecca:** We are grateful for the financial support of the Phils Wickler Charitable and Memorial Foundation Trust. We additionally thank the foundation for Delaware County.

[00:27:39] Please rate us and review us on Apple Podcasts to help other people find us in their feed. Our website is also where you can find links to our fabulous merch, which helps support the show. Thank you for listening and keep on asking those questions.