

TDS AJA BARBER

[00:00:00] **Samantha Baines:** Hello. I am currently sitting with a very needy puppy, my puppy custard, on my lap because she won't leave me alone long enough to record any intros. But I'd love to tell you about meeting Aja Barber. I followed her on Instagram for so long. She's brilliant. She talks about sustainable fashion. We discuss that a little bit as well. As leaving a long-term relationship and what to do, kind of coming out of that, and recovery and moving to a different country and finding love again. Yay! I do Fan girl a little bit, so I'm sorry about that. But definitely check out Aja on Instagram, if you like this chat, because she shares so many important messages on that and I'm so excited that I got to talk to her on the pod.[00:01:00]

[00:01:00] So I am joined by Aja Baba writer and author of Consumed. Welcome to The Divorce Social!

[00:01:07] **Aja Barber:** Thank you for having me!

[00:01:08] **Samantha Baines:** . You're so welcome. How does it feel when I say welcome to The Divorce Social? Because you're not divorced.

[00:01:14] **Aja Barber:** Well, no, I'm not. And I'm like, 'If anyone's listening to this, no, no, Steve's still in the picture, don't worry!'

[00:01:21] But the premise was interesting. Cause I think we've all gone through like breakups are ending of relationships. And so I think anyone can really speak to that. Not everyone can speak to divorce, but relationships ending. We can all speak to that.

[00:01:35] **Samantha Baines:** Yeah, definitely. You just didn't also have to fill out paperwork to do with it, or maybe you did!

[00:01:39] I don't know, we'll delve .But how long ago was this particularly memorable breakup that you'd like to talk about?

[00:01:46] **Aja Barber:** So, I've always categorized 2013 as the worst year of my adult life. It was just a miserable year. So 2013.

[00:01:55] **Samantha Baines:** Why was it so miserable? Was it this breakup or was that like [00:02:00] a whole list?

[00:02:00] **Aja Barber:** It was everything, you know, when your life just sort of falls like magnificently apart.

[00:02:07] I don't want to give the breakup too much credit, but like, it was also a catalyst for me to really start talking openly about race and all the things that I talk about on my platform, because I hadn't been doing that. I hadn't been talking honestly about it, especially not on the internet. And I would argue after 2013, I just stopped giving a fuck.

[00:02:30] And in some ways it was freeing. And I would argue that that pivotal year. Made me the person that I am today for sure. But it was horrible through the midst of it. So I had been dating someone and one of the things I'll say about the DC area is that, I felt like when I lived in the DC area, my standards were unbelievably low and I would get excited about like anything, like just like, 'Oh my God!' Do you know what I mean? And part of that is because [00:03:00] the ratio of men to women in DC is extremely off balance. Or at least it was for a long amount of time. So like, it's not uncommon, to see a man who is a total troll with a really hot woman in DC. Like it just, it's a very DC thing. And also DC is very political, high power, that sort of thing. It's sort of, I think people have referred to DC as like nerd prom, because it is very nerdy. Like there are people that are powerful, but in LA it isn't bright and shiny lights and super like, you know, attractive people, but there's a lot of power going on. And so it's just not uncommon to see women in the DC area where I'm from dating completely beneath themselves.

[00:03:46] And I was that person, and I would get excited about anything that was like slightly mediocre. And so, I've been dating this person. I was really excited like, 'Oh, wow. This is the first time that I'm feeling [00:04:00] really good about something!' And this person just yanked a rug beneath me. I think everybody has had that before, where you think that it's fine. And then it turns out that the person just unceremoniously, like dumps you out of the blue and you're just like, 'What? I did not see that coming!' But also I just feel so fucking silly for getting excited. My pride was so hurt because I really didn't see it coming, that it made me really depressed and sad. And so for like two weeks, I just was really sad and cried a lot and just stuck to myself and my grandmother was living with me and my parents at the time I had to move back in with my parents. It was, it was horrible. And I didn't talk to anyone. And then my grandmother had a stroke and she didn't recover. So

[00:04:51] **Samantha Baines:** I'm so sorry.

[00:04:53] **Aja Barber:** That was really, really hard because, sorry, I'm trying not to cry. I [00:05:00] wasted the last two weeks being upset about something

that was completely out of my control. And then I lost someone. Who was so dear to me. And you can't get that back. You can't, you can't bring it back. I remember she was in the hospital for weeks and then she went and tossed this care. I was just crying at her bed and she woke up for just a really short, brief time period. And she reached over and struck my head and said, it's okay. Grammy knows that you were hurting. Sorry. I'm like, this is supposed to be happy and I'm like, remembering this and there's still so much trauma around that.

[00:05:41] **Samantha Baines:** No, Not at all

[00:05:43] **Aja Barber:** Even at her last moment, there, she is trying to comfort me for like, you know, feeling embarrassed and silly about something that didn't work out.

[00:05:50] And like, I could have spent so much time just laughing with her and instead I just was miserable. So, that was a pivotal [00:06:00] life changing moment with me where I was just like, 'Never again will I ever let anyone make me feel this way.' Because when that happens, you lose things. You can't get back. You can't get back that time that was spent like moping. You can't get back those precious moments with family. And you never know when you might run out of time, you know? So, that was a really, really, really intense experience. And the rest of the year, I was just in this weird place. I lost all the work I had. I moved back into my parents' basement. I have been dumped, I had lost my grandmother. And you know how people say, like when you start from the bottom, there's only one way to go, which is up. That was it. It was my rock bottom. Which is silly because in retrospect, the relationship didn't matter that much, but all of the chain events of like spending that time moping and being really sad because I didn't understand why I got the rug pulled [00:07:00] out beneath me and then losing my grandmother and then just being so like depressed. I mean, I went on antidepressants and they were great. I'm not currently on them for a lot of different reasons, but like, let me tell you, yummy antidepressants

[00:07:16] **Samantha Baines:** I'm on anti-anxiety medication and it's the dream!

[00:07:19] **Aja Barber:** I love you. Samantha. And I had to say, like, I think perhaps at different time periods of my life, it would have served me to have been medicated. Like I think high school would have been a lot easier, but that was the moment where my family was like, 'You need to get on something, you need need to, like we're going to help you because girl, like you need to get up off the floor'. So I went on antidepressants. They were amazing. And what it gave me was this complete Joie de vivre where I just didn't give a fuck. You

know? It was like, 'You're already on the floor. So like, why not say the [00:08:00] thing about race? Why not date the person you wouldn't normally date? It's just for fun. It's not going to end in marriage. We're going to have a lot of fun together. Let's just do that. So let's talk about race and piss people off.

[00:08:12] Let's actually go back to writing about fashion, even though you got so discouraged earlier'. And I would argue that that pivotal moment really helped me to become the person I am today, but I had to really pick myself up off the floor from zero. Like I talk a lot about how, when I met Steve, I was living in my parents' basement. But I also really didn't give a shit whether or not he judged me for it or not. And luckily he didn't, he was like, 'I've got a full-time job at this prestigious paper. Can I leave it and come live in your parents' basement with you?' He was like, 'Is there room for two? Can we get in a tent though?' Like, and that really warmed my heart because a lot of the people I was dating were really judgmental [00:09:00] about me living at home, which is so like shitty. So it was surprisingly refreshing that this guy in London who had his own flat was like, 'No good for you. You figured it out!'

[00:09:14] **Samantha Baines:** It's so true though. Cause like I've been guilty of it, you know, when you're on dating apps. So you're finding people and you're like, 'Oh, they live at home, What?' But actually I think after my divorce, I realised everyone has that period where you go and stay with your parents. And normally it's the kind of recovery time.

[00:09:33] **Aja Barber:** It's the recovery time. That moment where I really had to pick myself up from like the darkest place I've been in, I think was pivotal to me. Like now I look back upon it and I almost feel like I had to go through that to be where I am today. But gosh, darn it, it was horrible.

[00:09:55] **Samantha Baines:** Yeah. I mean, it's so interesting. Because I'm doing some work at the moment with a [00:10:00] coach. I had a counselor originally just straight after my breakup and I'm working with a coach and the coach said to me that me and my ex were meant to be together. Because it's got me to where I was now, you know, we were meant to eat together and then we were meant to break up and this idea of like, accepting that, that wasn't a mistake, but actually, you know, and hearing your story that is actually turned into an amazing thing and made you who you are in a, in a really kind of strong, positive way, I think is really nice to hear because when you're in there, you're like, how can this ever be a good thing?

[00:10:38] **Aja Barber:** It's hell, you're just like, 'Wow. I am so depressed. I can't eat and I have no job and I live in my parent's basement and we're, you know, I'm writing a eulogy for my grandmother, like Jesus Christ, you know?'

[00:10:52] **Samantha Baines:** Yeah. That's a lot. So I just wanted to go back to. What happened in the breakup in those two weeks, [00:11:00] when you were crying just before your gran got ill, it sounded when you were explaining about it, that you have a bit of guilt still around that. Is that something that you've worked on letting go or?

[00:11:14] **Aja Barber:** Now, this is getting into a therapy session. I think I do need to work on letting that go, but yeah, no, I do feel guilty that I was such a wet blanket in her last two weeks on earth. Like yeah, that I feel very guilty about that,

[00:11:30] **Samantha Baines:** But I think guilt is such a relatable thing into doing with breakup and how you deal with it. And I know I have tons of guilt by all sorts of things, but do you think crying over a loss relationship is being a wet blanket as you called yourself?

[00:11:47] **Aja Barber:** In retrospect. Absolutely.

[00:11:51] **Samantha Baines:** I thought you were going to be like, 'No, it's understandable.'

[00:11:55] **Aja Barber:** At the time I was. And, and, you know, [00:12:00] I don't think I was even crying over the relationship.

[00:12:04] I was crying because I felt silly. It was my ego that made me feel bad. It was just like this thing that I had gotten excited about, did it work out, but I also didn't see it coming because this person was not very forthcoming. There's nothing worse than like meeting someone's family and being paraded around like a prize pony, you know? And then it's like, 'By the way , no!'

[00:12:30] **Samantha Baines:** That rejection is hard. And when you were telling the story, it reminded me of times when I've gone out with someone. And I thought, you know, especially when I was younger and I was like, 'I'm way too good for this person. Like, lucky them to be going out with me'. And then they've broken up with me and I've been like, 'The audacity!' 'Did they break up with me?'

[00:12:53] But like being genuinely like upset and like angry about it. I feel like we've all been there of [00:13:00] like

[00:13:00] **Aja Barber:** Relatable.

[00:13:01] **Samantha Baines:** I didn't even really think that it was going to be a thing, but then I was just getting excited about it. Like, you know, like, why did you end it?

[00:13:08] **Aja Barber:** But you know, where that comes from though. And I think particularly with women, often we lower our expectations in order to be okay with relationships. That's where I think that comes from. I think women are so used to sort of having to lower the expectations of what we want, that we do get excited about things that might not be like awesome. And that's a societal thing to deal with, but then at the same time, Single much of my twenties. And if I had a dollar for every time, someone told me that I was too picky, or you just want everyone to be a prince, but that's not the reality.

[00:13:46] Or, you know, just telling me that my standards were essentially too high. That's where that comes from.

[00:13:51] **Samantha Baines:** I felt like a lot of people would still give that as like advice to someone who's still single. It's like 'Your standards are too high. You've got to give [00:14:00] people a chance.'

[00:14:00] **Aja Barber:** What I tell people is it's a numbers game. Like I tell people don't get too emotionally invested, which was how I carried on. You know, after that, I was like, don't get too emotionally invested, but instead try and have fun and look at it as a numbers game. Don't look at it as like, 'Oh my God, am I going to marry this person?' And I really did have fun after that. I started dating people that I really didn't really see it being like long-term, but then at the same time, On the other hand, you have people telling women, 'Tik tok better, hurry up! You know what I mean? So it's like, you can't even really enjoy just having fun because the world tells you that you're not supposed to do that. Especially if you're like unmarried and over the age of 30,

[00:14:47] **Samantha Baines:** 'I'm worried about you. Cause you're being a bit wild'

[00:14:50] **Aja Barber:** Yeah

[00:14:51] **Samantha Baines:** Because you're like, you know, going for it. And, and obviously your friends are going to worry. And as long as you're being safe. But actually, it's really nice to have [00:15:00] fun.

[00:15:00] **Aja Barber:** I had a frenemy who used to like slug off every person I dated. And I was just like, you know what? You've got to go because your

relationship is nowhere near perfect. By the way, this frenemy is now divorced. And apparently her divorce was quite nasty.

[00:15:15] **Samantha Baines:** I should get her on the pod

[00:15:20] **Aja Barber:** At the time. You know, they were in this relationship that was really fast moving, but definitely had gigantic red flags, but she was a frenemy because she was constantly putting down the people that I was dating and just having fun with it, like, I met this man in Italy who's lovely. And he would call me constantly just to like chat and he just always professed his love for me. That was exactly what I needed. Something that was low stakes, where I felt fond over. And she'd be like, 'He just sounds like a player.' And I'm like, 'Fuck you, this is what I want right now.' You know? And if someone [00:16:00] can't see that you're having fun for the first time and really enjoying what you're enjoying, then maybe it's them that needs to go. Cause I wouldn't take back that time period between meeting Steven and a really bad breakup for anything. It was great.

[00:16:16] **Samantha Baines:** And how long was that time period? How long were you having fun for?

[00:16:19] **Aja Barber:** Uh, probably about three years maybe. I dated a few people during that time period. And I would say the people from that time period are the ones that I would still like chat with today. Like I don't really make it a habit to like talk to exes and a lot of stuff in my twenties went so bad and sour tortilla that I don't wish to have like any contact with those people. But the people during that time period, I am still Facebook friends with

[00:16:48] **Samantha Baines:** That's good. You're obviously a nice person. I went a bit wild in a fun way, but I don't talk to a lot of the people I went wild, fun with. [00:17:00] Um, in fact, not sure I could remember all of their names. If I'm being honest, I knew that name at the time and that's what matters.

[00:17:12] So I just want to want to take you back to, you know, you said you hit rock bottom, you were in your parents' basement, you know, your grand had just passed. You had this breakup. What did you do? Or what did the people around you do to help you out of that place?

[00:17:33] **Aja Barber:** Ooh, that's a tough one because I come from a long line of people who don't get the help that they need. And a lot of that has to do with systemic issues surrounding help mental health help for black people. You know, so I would say everyone just sort of freaked out and was full of loathing

for the fact that they couldn't help me. You know, there are a lot of tough love [00:18:00] lectures happening not to trigger anyone, so trigger warning, but I stopped eating during that time period. I could not eat and it was depression. It was spending a lot of time in the hospital. I find hospitals very hard to eat in. Just all the different smells, but also the anxiety of what is happening. You know, seeing people lose people. My grandmother was in intensive care. And the person next door to her didn't make it.

[00:18:29] And they gathered the family and having to listen to that was gut wrenching. And like when I am in those sorts of scenarios, appetite gone for months. So I always share pictures of that time period, but I remind people. Don't compliment people on weight loss because you never know what they're going through and that time period, I was the smallest I've ever been in my adult life. And arguably the most miserable I've ever been

[00:18:58] **Samantha Baines:** It's a really good [00:19:00] reminder. Actually, I still remember a time quite a few years ago now when I complimented someone on their weight loss. And then they told me that actually they'd been going through a really hard time and it was all because of that and they didn't mean to lose the weight. And that, that was a real turning point for me of, oh, why am I commenting on people's weight as a way to

[00:19:21] **Aja Barber:** Compliment? Yeah. People, people kept telling me, I looked amazing during that time period. I was like, 'I'm miserable thank you!'

[00:19:30] **Samantha Baines:** I feel horrific.

[00:19:32] **Aja Barber:** I haven't eaten in months.

[00:19:35] **Samantha Baines:** Oh my gosh. And because you said. You know, there, uh, lots of issues and stigma around mental health, especially if you're black and getting the help. Yes. What would you say to anyone listening? Who's feeling that at the moment. But they want help. How can they go about it?

[00:19:56] **Aja Barber:** Only, you know what you need, and you have to block out the [00:20:00] stigma and the judgment in order to get help. And if you can't find what you need with the people that surround you seek outside sources. Look online that, you know, deep down in your heart of hearts, what you need most and belief that believe that and stick to it. And there's no shame and medication, if anything, it's brilliant.

[00:20:26] **Samantha Baines:** I agree from the anxiety medication side of things. Other than kind of trying to deal with your mental health and getting medication. Was there anything you did at that time that you found useful for kind of that recovery or getting to a better place? Like, you know, some people talk about exercise. I don't, I just eat lovely food and that helps me, um, or like hanging out with friends or even I painted my kitchen pink and that really just really helped me. Don't know why

[00:20:56] **Aja Barber:** I would argue that some of the habits I was engaging in where [00:21:00] super unhealthy. Like I was exercising to the extreme, I mean, like I was taking things that were normally healthy and being like, 'How can I make this actually, probably something I shouldn't do'. Um, I lost all this weight, so I went and bought a bunch of clothing. Don't do that. If you lose weight, ask your friends, if you can like borrow things or whatever. But like, you're never, you're not going to stay that size. So like I thought all this clothing ended up like having to like sell it all like two years later. Cause it didn't fit anymore. I managed to turn even the healthiest habits into like super unhealthy things during that time period

[00:21:41] **Samantha Baines:** Yeah. But that's interesting too, isn't it? Cause people say, 'You know, oh, you should exercise or you should do these things. You know, maybe give yourself a make-over.' But actually you can go to the extreme with those things and they become unhealthy. So when did you realize you were exercising too much?

[00:21:59] **Aja Barber:** I [00:22:00] think, you know, you try on a pair of trousers that you still like fit you fine, and they're like slipping and you're just like, 'Hm.' But everyone's telling you, you look fine. You look great. And you're like, 'But is that true? Because I am dying on the inside.' I don't think that's true. I think I'm being lied to, for me. My dad was like, you need to go and talk to someone and he was really, really stirred about it. I think the only way my parents know how to like respond to things that are so hard is to be angry about it. It's just their response. It was like, 'You're going to a doctor!' And I would say, 'No I'm not!' And he was like, 'Yes you are!'

[00:22:40] **Samantha Baines:** Nice of a family member to step in though, I guess.

[00:22:43] **Aja Barber:** Yeah. But he was like really angry about it. I just think we don't know how to process our feelings surrounding these things. And so my dad's response is anger.

[00:22:52] Like, 'Arrgh!'

[00:22:55] **Add:** It's the ad break. So it's a perfect time to [00:23:00] remind you to hit subscribe, to be notified about more episodes. You can also leave us a lovely review because honestly it makes a difference to the chart positions and one time I was in the charts next to Michelle Obama and I was really thrilled about it. So it'd be nice to do that again.

[00:23:17] Uh, you could also join in the conversation on social media. We're on Twitter and Instagram at divorce pod. We have a website, the divorce, social.com. And you can also join us for our like 90 style divorced chat room experience over on Patrimon. So just go to patrimon.com forward slash some month of Baines, B a I N E S. And it starts at two pounds a month and we all have lovely and awful and amazing chats. See you there.

[00:23:49] **Samantha Baines:** You mentioned, you went shopping and bought all these clothes and then you had to sell them again. And obviously now you talk a lot about sustainable fashion and your book. Was that something that like [00:24:00] ideas that started coming during that time to you?

[00:24:02] **Aja Barber:** Definitely like, what am I doing? I am so unhappy. And I'm like, 'Let's spend money I don't have, because I'm unemployed, Woo!' I began to realize that the ways in which I was shopping were not healthy at all. And I had always sort of had an unhealthy attitude towards like consumption and spending, but that also got amped up during that time period. It was like all of my unhealthy habits, just really, I just took it to an 11 during that time period. And so it got me thinking about all of these things and yes, I would argue that it was definitely a catalyst towards like what I talk about today. It was a pivotal moment

[00:24:46] **Samantha Baines:** Because I was really interested to talk to you about this. Cause I am a shopper. Like I have always shopped too much. I think it started when I was younger, my mum would let me have mental [00:25:00] health days off school. So if I felt awful, you know, she'd let me have the day off, which in some ways was great. But then to cheer me up, she'd take me shopping. So then it became this like special and we wouldn't buy loads, but it became this like special thing of like, I love shopping and it's said, And shopping, cheers me up. And I feel like I've kept, not to blame my mum, I mean, bless her, she's like, 'Oh no, I've ever I've done is wrong!'

[00:25:28] **Aja Barber:** my mother, does your mom say to you, 'I guess I was just the worst mother in the world'?

[00:25:32] **Samantha Baines:** Yeah, she just worries about everything.

[00:25:34] **Aja Barber:** Yeah. 'I'm just the worst mother in the world'. And sometimes I'm like, 'Maybe?'

[00:25:41] **Samantha Baines:** Yeah. I mean, I don't know if it was that or, but basically I have always shopped to cheer myself up. Do you have any advice for me? What have you learned during your sustainable fashion journey?

[00:25:54] **Aja Barber:** You know, the thing I tell people is monitor those feelings. When you go [00:26:00] shopping, monitor what's behind that and try and address the feeling rather than taking part in the action. I always tell people not to go shopping when you're sad. You know what I mean? Because I used to do that. I know that, pay attention to the feelings behind what compels you to shop and try and get to the root of that, instead of tackling it with shopping. Now I view shopping as something that I do, but I do it with such enjoyment and I have a method to like what it is that I buy.

[00:26:33] And I'm not the type of person anymore where I go into a store and I'm just eager to spend money. I'm spending money because this is something that I have thought about for a long time and something that I would like to purchase something that has a purpose in my house. And some of that also, you know, my journey with all of this has definitely come from like a place of one, like moving [00:27:00] overseas, moving here to be with Steven I had to get rid of 50 to 75% of my possessions. And that really gets you thinking about your stuff. Let me tell you, moving overseas is like God's punishment from materialism. I knew all the things that I talk about, I was starting to get an idea for the fact that like these global economies that we're participating in are actually polluting the planet and causing strife for people in the global south. So like, I kind of knew that even before I was really, you know, on the speed. And that meant that when I moved to for here, I couldn't just pack up my stuff and just donated to a charity. I couldn't do that because I knew that there was something going on there where a lot of the stuff that I donated was not going to get used at all or resold. It was probably going to get dumped on someone or put in a landfill. [00:28:00] So when I was going through my stuff, I had to thoughtfully think about everything. So it was putting up, you know, albums on Facebook from my Facebook friends and being like, you know, 'I will sell you everything \$5, you know, you pay the shipping.' That sort of thing, reselling online and doing all of that when you have to like, get rid of, you know, hundreds of items, it really makes you think when you're in the stores.

[00:28:29] **Samantha Baines:** Yeah. That's so true because I think so often it's like, 'Oh I'll have a clear out and I'll, you know, get a bin liner together and then

I'll just put it in the charity clothes drop.' And if you imagine that each one of those pieces, isn't going to someone else's going to be sitting in a

[00:28:47] **Aja Barber:** Landfill or dumped in Ghana. You know? So when you actually, take the time to thoughtfully decrease your items. So right now, if I were to go through my [00:29:00] wardrobe and, and find a lot of items that I can't use anymore, I would probably hold a sale online. And then sometimes I will like donate the proceeds of that to a charity, but that takes work or I would you know, resell on Vestier Collective that also takes work. All of these things, they take work, but it makes you think before you go on a shopping spree, like, 'Okay, but what's going to happen to this stuff once the dopamine runs out?'

[00:29:26] **Samantha Baines:** Yeah. It's so true because, and I think a lot of people be able to relate to this as like coping mechanisms after you have a breakup. And I spoke to Julie Da Silva , on the podcast. And she was saying that she used to go on these huge shopping sprees and also she used to buy really expensive holidays as like a way to cope. It's interesting, because at the moment I'm selling things, um, on a secondhand website.

[00:29:51] **Aja Barber:** Yeah. And it's work

[00:29:52] **Samantha Baines:** Yeah the amount that goes into selling, like one dress is like, hours!

[00:29:59] **Aja Barber:** It's [00:30:00] Work! So I will resell my clothing. Either, I'm lucky cause I've got a big Instagram readership, so that's an easy way to do it. Or I'll use Vestier Collective, you know, or any of the other resell sites I've used all of them, to be honest, it's all work. And then that really makes you think. And if I have anything left over, that I've tried every other way of getting grown to fit. I will give it to charity, but order to donate it to charity, it has to be something that I would buy if I saw it on the racks. So that means no stains, no rips, no tears. All of its buttons, like new quality. And a label that people like I have these rules for myself, because I know that people are dumping things on charities and that's making the charity shopping experience, not that great for everyone.

[00:30:48] **Samantha Baines:** And so what would you do with it if it had rips and not all of its buttons?

[00:30:52] **Aja Barber:** Well, one of the things that I think we all need to do is we need to push for textile recycling to be made [00:31:00] abundant because currently only 1% of textiles actually get recycled. So there aren't that many

options, you can turn it into a rag, you can try and upcycle the garment in some ways there's a lot of projects online, but it's just like at the moment, a lot of textiles get landfilled because there's really not much, you know, there isn't much infrastructure for it. And that's, what's really sad because, one, like only 1% of textiles gets recycled, but like every minute a dump truck of textiles goes to a landfill. Here's what people don't understand. Textiles can be used for all sorts of things like insulating homes. So when I see insulate Britain doing their thing and people getting mad about them doing their thing, I just think that this is a legislative problem where we don't have legislators who are creative thinkers. Why don't we have systems in place for textile recycling to turn the textiles into insulation and that we can insulate people's homes

[00:31:58] **Samantha Baines:** I didn't even think of that [00:32:00] they can be used for insulation, which is like such a useful like everyone needs it. So

[00:32:05] **Aja Barber:** Yes, yes.

[00:32:06] **Samantha Baines:** Oh my God. I'm definitely going to think more next time I shop because I've been, I've been there and I don't know if anyone listening has been there to have like, 'Just want to buy something. What shall I buy?' Sort of scenario. And yeah, you get it home. And I've got some MNS sparkly boots upstairs that I bought, because I was like, just want to buy something and then not really my style. And I'm trying to sell them on eBay and it takes 4 million years.

[00:32:35] **Aja Barber:** One thing I think you can do, if you still feel that keep a wishlist of things that you want, you can do that on so many things like Pinterest or whatever things that like, you can actually use things that like, you know, that sort of thing. I always have a wishlist going, a things that I would buy, you know, if the time comes. But when I was really coming off the fast fashion train, when I felt that urge, and [00:33:00] I don't feel that urge so much anymore, I would turn to like beauty products because I had never really gotten into skincare. And I was like, 'I should probably start taking care of my skin'. And that was a nice way of being like, 'I really want to buy a treat, but I don't want to buy fast fashion. Let me go and dive through like the piles of like beauty at this discount store and see what's here and see if I can find a gem that I know that they sell on the shelves at Liberty'. And I did actually have, you know, I'm really good at like finding like expensive brands that like discount stores. And so that was one way that I sort of allowed myself, a bit of grace, but moved away from like consuming fashion. And then another thing I started to buy myself like nice socks. Like right now I've got so many socks from that time period because it's like, I don't want to buy fashion, but I'll buy myself a nice pair of socks instead

[00:33:58] **Samantha Baines:** I like that. [00:34:00] I've also started shopping second hand and especially on eBay because you have to bid for stuff. So it takes ages. That's good for me because then, you know, the dopamine of the first thing goes away. And also what I do is I go on websites and I shop and I put it in my basket and then I never check out the basket. So it's still like the feeling of buying it, but it never arrives

[00:34:25] **Aja Barber:** On eBay set a limit for yourself. Always be like, this is the most I'm going to pay for that. And don't go above it because there is a nature there to be like, 'I just want to win it! Wait, and I paid \$200 for this thing that I would never pay too much for?'

[00:34:40] **Samantha Baines:** Yeah. I do always say to my mum, 'I won this on eBay'. And she'd be like, 'You didn't win it. You bought it.' it's not a price. I'd be like, 'Oh yeah!', Um, I have to avoid I have to bid, like a day in advance, just my maximum and then avoid the last, because it's the [00:35:00] last minute when it's like four seconds to go, that makes me go crazy. And then I just put in like 200 pounds, I have to avoid it because it's too much for me. But so you talk about that, that sort of really difficult time after the breakup kind of being a pivotal point for you. And obviously we've talked about your kind of sustainable fashion, but you also said it was a pivotal time for you talking about all sorts of things. Cause you didn't give a fuck anymore, like race. So how did that kind of moment come of? 'I'm going to start talking about rice, somebody platforms.'

[00:35:33] **Aja Barber:** Well, with the person that I've been dating, I had kind of been like dipping my toe in the water and I was sort of met with like, 'Uhhmm'. You know what I mean? And it was a bit like that should have been a red flag, to be honest, the fact that I didn't feel like I could talk about these things with him. And then it was like, 'Well, you know, they're out of the picture. I'm miserable. Fuck it. Let's just say the thing, what, what, [00:36:00] I can't get any lower than here so if a bunch of people get mad at me because of like, hey everyone! I'm a black person that's never told you how I really feel.' Then that's fine let them get mad. And it was definitely the minute you start talking about race, especially if you're a black person who grew up in a predominantly white area it's it's like you have farted in the pool. It's it's a way of clearing out your friendship group. Like, because people will be like, 'Oh my goodness. Oh my goodness. Can't handle it. Gotta go!' So like, there was this mass sort of friend Exodus on my Facebook page because I was just like, 'Yeah. And I'm going to tell you how I feel about this. The reason why that all happened was because the minute Barack Obama became president. All the racism in America, which had been like simmering beneath the surface, came bubbling right up to the top. It was like racists of the world had carte [00:37:00] blanche to like, be like, 'Well, racism's over because we have a black president.

So let me just say this really racist thing.' I had never seen America like this before, and I should have known that it would happen and I think that in many ways I could see Donald Trump coming because of the ways in which people were reacting to this black person who had ascended to the highest seat in America, basically. And so I felt a need to start talking about race because white people were acting really whack. It was like, what? Like, I remember people started calling Facebook Racebook because it was just like, someone's relatives would be like, 'I'm not racist, but' Proceeded to say something incredibly racist. And you're like, yeah. So I would argue that it was also the time period that we were in as a society.

[00:37:59] **Samantha Baines:** What do you [00:38:00] think it is about speaking your mind that helped you through that time or did it help you?

[00:38:06] **Aja Barber:** It helped me clarify all of my messaging that I do today on Instagram. Like Facebook is a great, I mean, it's a hellscape, but it's a great test kitchen as well, you know? So like, it really helped me to get my messaging where it is today. And then also, sometimes it's just. Like when you're a marginalized person in your existing, in a world that is very white, there are things that you keep inside of you. And when you let it out, it's like, it's like unbuttoning your trousers after a really heavy meal, it feels great. You know, you're just like, 'Oh, thank God I finally told you how annoying it is when you say this thing'. Like, I grew up with people saying, 'I don't see color. What is that? What is that?' So you don't see color? What they're basically saying is your blackness is something I would like to not see [00:39:00] because it makes me uncomfortable. I love being black, being black is awesome! I want you to see that I am a black person because I think it's rad. Why are you having a problem with it? Talking to people about why phrases like that really suck. It did make people uncomfortable, but they need to hear it.

[00:39:17] **Samantha Baines:** I mean, it's not the same, but I have a hearing aid and sometimes I tell people and they say, oh, you'd never know as if I was trying to hide my, and I'm like, I'm not trying to hide it. Like, you're very welcomed to know. I love my hearing aid.

[00:39:32] **Aja Barber:** I'm going to need a hearing aid in the future. I have hearing loss in my left ear and I've had it since I was a child.

[00:39:38] **Samantha Baines:** Oh, do it! They're great. You can stream music and podcasts on your hearing aid now and answer the phone on it. It's great. I recommend them thoroughly. After going through that really difficult time and then sort of like, we talk a lot in the podcast about finding yourself again after a breakup. And it sounds that you did that in the kind of speaking out and letting

[00:40:00] your voice be heard. How do you approach issues in relationships now? Do you think you approached them differently to before you have that period of time?

[00:40:12] **Aja Barber:** It's tough because I feel like my partner and I are re-finding ourselves because nobody's signed up to spend a pandemic together. Like nobody who dated long distance for three years. First of all like you date long distance for like three years. And it's like, great. You're like, 'Oh my God, I love you so much, it's like, let's get married!' Let's take two adults who are well into their thirties and stuck in their ways. And then we're going to cram them together in a small London flat. And they've got their boundaries because they're older and a bit crutchy. And then one of them doesn't have a lot of stuff. One of them does have a lot of stuff. So let's have them fighting for space like rabbit raccoons. And then on top of that let's add a sprinkle of [00:41:00] pandemic

[00:41:01] **Samantha Baines:** What a recipe,

[00:41:04] **Aja Barber:** What a recipe. So I feel like we are refining ourselves as a couple and redefining because meeting and dating long distance and then moving in together is a challenge. It's a challenge when you come from two different cultures. It's a challenge when one person, when you're navigating an immigration system where the prime minister ex prime minister said, they want to make it hostile for people that want to immigrate. All of these things are challenges, which we have been navigating together. And we will constantly be navigating them because relationships are not easy. Despite what I thought before I was in a marriage.

[00:41:42] **Samantha Baines:** Well, if you ever get divorced, you know where I am.

[00:41:46] **Aja Barber:** Thank you.

[00:41:47] **Samantha Baines:** And him as well. If anyone that feels that they can really relate to your story, but they're finding themselves in that kind of dark time that, that rock bottom. Do you have any [00:42:00] words of wisdom or encouragement for them?

[00:42:03] **Aja Barber:** Yeah, it's true. What they say, what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. Like honestly, when I came back, I was back with a vengeance. I was back and I was not taking anyone's shit. And like, I definitely feel like, you know, as they say in Alice Through the Looking Glass, 'The only way out is through'. So, you have to go through it and you have to feel it. And it

sucks to feel all those things because it's painful. It's rough, but the finished product on the other side, the you that comes out the other side is going to be one of the better yous that you've experienced. And that's the thing it sucks but if you're going through it, keep going through it, because you will get out of that, that time period. You'll get out of it. Nothing lasts forever, but you do have to just go through it and you have to feel it.

[00:42:56] **Samantha Baines:** Yeah It's so true, go through the looking glass. It [00:43:00] is a bit of a looking glass situation. Isn't it? Recovering from a breakup?

[00:43:04] **Aja Barber:** Oh God. Recovering from breakup, loss, unemployment everything. But the funny thing was I truly stopped giving a fuck about what people thought of me that I was dating in this way. I was living for myself and myself only. I mean, not in a selfish way, but like I think I put way too much emphasis in the past on what that person thought of me. And when I met Steve, I was so brutally honest with him, which we still laugh about because I was like, 'Right, I live in my parents' basement and I'm mostly unemployed by the way, if we ever get together, I'm not cooking and cleaning. I hope that's okay with you'. And he was like, 'I'm in love!'

[00:43:51] **Samantha Baines:** I mean, he sounds like everyone's ideal.

[00:43:58] **Aja Barber:** We always joke that [00:44:00] like, you know, I've got two sisters and they have both definitely at the time period when Steve like met me, I was definitely the family loser and we always sort of joke that like Steve was like, I'll have that one in the basement.

[00:44:17] **Samantha Baines:** No way in the basement.

[00:44:19] **Aja Barber:** I always tell him, that like when he came, my family was going to hang up a banner that says, 'Please sir, take our shrew'.

[00:44:27] **Samantha Baines:** Wow. that sounds very happy. Like it worked

[00:44:34] **Aja Barber:** it does, it does. That's the funny thing. I talk about how much we've been through in a relationship. And we really, I tell him like when we're, when we're like not getting on and when we're trying to like parse through it, I'm like, 'Hold space for the fact that like, we have been through so much Steve!' Like seriously and like, When I arrived here, I was not quite [00:45:00] penniless, but close enough, couldn't work in this country. Didn't have working papers. Steve was the one with the job, you know, I had to

basically like stay home and try not to spend money until I got my, my, um, my, uh, until I got my papers to work here and my resident alien card. And, you know, it was fine. We were happy even though we've, we're on one salary and it's hard in a very expensive city and now our rules have completely, flip-flopped like, I am the breadwinner and you know, I'm happy to be there, but like, we've had just so much incredible change in such a short amount of time. And so I give us props because I don't know a lot of relationships that would survive everything that we've we've been through. And I know plenty of relationships that didn't survive the pandemic, and there's nothing wrong with that because no one actually signed up for this, you know, but when we aren't getting on or when things aren't going according to plan, [00:46:00] I always remind him exactly how far we've come. And like how against the odds were still hanging in there and that's pretty rad.

[00:46:07] **Samantha Baines:** Yeah. I love that. Also, it always gives me hope when I speak to someone and they're in a kind of happy relationship now, uh, after, you know, being through a really bad breakup. Because it's like, oh, maybe in the future I'll have that too.

[00:46:23] **Aja Barber:** Oh yeah, no, I think everybody is worthy of love. And no matter what age you are, no matter where you find it. You know, I ha I have faith in everyone I meet that love is coming for them.

[00:46:36] **Samantha Baines:** Oh. I feel like that's the perfect place to finish. Um, thank you so much. It's been a glorious to chat to you. Where can people find you online and remind us about your book

[00:46:47] **Aja Barber:** Yeah. So I am Aja Barber on Instagram. Currently, I am doing lots of fun reels of me getting dressed because I am a plus sized person who advocates for sustainability, [00:47:00] and I want you to get dressed and I want you to, really wear the things in your wardrobe, I'm not trying to sell you something every day, because Lord knows that's part of the problem, but I want you to enjoy getting dressed and wear are the things in your wardrobe and find ways to wear them differently. And then when you actually need something, if you can support a sustainable or ethical brand or buy it secondhand, I'm going to encourage you to do that too. So you can find me on Instagram at Aja Barber, I've written the book *Consume: the Need for Collective Change, Colonialism, Climate Change and Consumerism* that is available at all find booksellers. Please do not go to Amazon support your MD or Waterstones. And, uh, I support my work. My work is supported through Patron because when you are a person who like talks a lot of shit about the fashion industry, you can't then turn around and ask that same industry to pay you. So you enjoy my message

and you will like what I'm doing and what I'm saying, if you sign up through Patron, that would be cool as well. And that's me!

[00:47:58] **Samantha Baines:** Amazing. Thank you so [00:48:00] much.

[00:48:00] **Aja Barber:** Thank you for having me