

On Selfhood: Young Lesbians Within the Margins
Oral History Project

The Reminiscences of
Ash

2022

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Ash conducted by Olivia Newsome on December 14, 2022. This interview part of the On Selfhood: Young Lesbians Within the Margins oral history project.

Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The following transcript has been reviewed, edited, and approved by the narrator.

Olivia Newsome 00:00

Oh, okay.

Ash 00:02

Okay.

Olivia Newsome 00:06

Today is December 14, 2022. I'm Olivia Newsome interviewing Ash virtually over zoom. Do I have permission to record this interview?

Ash 00:17

Yes.

Olivia Newsome 00:19

Do you know you can stop this recording at any time?

Ash 00:23

Yes.

Olivia Newsome 00:24

Great. Can you state your name, age and pronouns?

Ash 00:30

My name is Ash. I'm 21 and my pronouns are he/the - my God and excuse me, he/they/she.

Olivia Newsome 00:35

Can you tell me where you're from, where you grew up and what your childhood was like?

Ash 00:35

I grew up in and am from Indianapolis, Indiana. I was an only child for nine years until I had my brother. So my childhood was mostly spent doing nerd shit. Honestly, um, playing with bugs, reading books, running around, and all that kind of stuff.

Olivia Newsome 01:07

Did you like attending middle and high school?

Ash 01:10

No, school was awful. For me, I actually ended up having to get an IEP, individual education plan, because I skipped so much and was so miserable all the time [chuckles uncomfortably] So I will say senior year of high school was a little bit better because you get a little bit more freedom.

Olivia Newsome 01:29

Could you talk a little bit more about why you hated Middle School, and maybe what led to the IEP?

Ash 01:38

I ended up having [zoom technology buzzing sounds], really, looking back now it was I think the age where a lot of mental illness and neurodivergent starts to like onset. If it was like I would get anxious and I would throw up and then I throw up so much, I would throw up blood, and so it was just a really hard time. And my body did not enjoy the school schedule. Lights were very bright, everything was very loud um, waking up and leaving at three or whatever was not really my jam. It was just really hard for me to get used to the school system with new um mental issues that I was experiencing.

Olivia Newsome 02:27

Thank you for telling me. How did gender norms affect you when you were growing up?

Ash 02:35

I think it's kind of funny. All the men in my family seemed to know from a very young age that I was very boyish, and they kind of raised me almost like a little boy. But the women in my family did not. They were very, very strict on me being very girly. I did martial arts growing up and there was a big reaction to that. So it was kind of funny, depending on which side of the family I was with, and what gender the people around me were, it was either strictly enforced gender norms, or like, 'Oh, you're basically a little boy. Here, let me show you how to use a slingshot kind of thing.'

Olivia Newsome 03:13

That's really interesting for you to talk about. Have your relationships with your family members been strained in any way?

Ash 03:26

Yeah, definitely. I think there was kind of the assumption that I would grow out of tomboyishness, which did not happen. So, it's kind of funny to pop up at family events and see people be like, 'Oh, you're still like that. Okay.'

Olivia Newsome 03:44

Okay. When did you first learn about queer identities in general? How did that happen? Maybe when you were younger?

Ash 03:53

Yeah, so I went to Catholic school until third grade. And I mean, for a Catholic school it was very diverse, but it was Catholic, so nothing about queer identity is any thing so I think actually the first time I ever heard the word gay was probably - [Zoom audio disconnects and reconnects in next paragraph]

Olivia Newsome 04:25

Hey, Ash, I can't hear you, can you say something again? [zoom technical issues buzzing]

Ash 04:52

Okay, so yeah, I don't think I heard the word gay until I switched to public school and even then, you know, it was like kids insulting each other. I didn't really understand what it meant, understand what it meant. But eventually I came to understand that like, you know, boys could be gay. And I think that was really my only understanding of any kind of queerness until probably, I saw it in pop culture. But for a long time, like, any idea of like, lesbianism or anything was completely off my radar, I have no idea.

Olivia Newsome 05:25

When, like, when did you think you saw it in pop culture? Like when and where? Like, what was it?

Ash 05:30

I think, honestly, I was thinking about it earlier because I was trying to pinpoint it, and I think it may have been, I think her name is Angela on Bones; a bisexual character that has an ex-girlfriend. Because I think I remember seeing an episode or something because my family would watch TV while we ate dinner. And just being kind of confused for a long time until it finally clicked like, 'oh, they mean girlfriend like, like a girlfriend, like an actual romantic partner.' Not like 'oh, that's her ex best friend.' But yeah, it was it was a very long time, I think. And very few and far between representation wise, but I also think I remember anytime queer female characters would come on screen. My mom would go 'BLEH' like an actual

Olivia Newsome 06:19

She would say it out loud!?!

Ash 06:21

Yes, she would. [Olivia giggles in the background]

Olivia Newsome 06:24

She would gag out loud?!?!

Ash 06:26

Yes, it was -

Olivia Newsome 06:27

Kind of iconic [Ash laughs]

Ash 06:27

Honestly! But no, thinking back, like every time I could think of it was because she did that. And it pointed it out to me. It was kinda -

Olivia Newsome 06:32

I mean, it was her fault at the end of the day!

Ash 06:40

Right? Like you queued it for me, mom, but again, [laughs] it's very funny looking back and she's, she's accepting now I guess. But it was very funny.

Olivia Newsome 06:50

That's so Wow. Mom's are so funny.

Ash 06:55

Yes!

Olivia Newsome 06:55

Shout out to moms! Okay, who are what influenced you the most growing up?

Ash 07:03

I was really, really close with my dad. And honestly, a lot of my role male relatives, my grandfather kind of stuff like that. I was in martial arts. So I loved like, Ronda Rousey. There was a I don't know if she actually became more popular outside of Indy, but there was a female wrestler named Cyborg. I loved any kind of I mean, Mulan, any kind of like, not like other girls, you know, type of female role model, but other than that. I read a lot of Nancy Drew [pauses] Trying to think

Olivia Newsome 07:50

Yeah, no, no pressure, I'm going to follow up on something. So the 'not like the other girls'. What a concept. Right? Would you be willing to talk more about the not like the other girls like movement? What is not like the other girls? And maybe can you talk a little bit about how it maybe influenced your queerness in some way?

Ash 08:14

Yeah, I think I'm right around when I was 12. I was like, heavy goth. Um, heavy emo very much into the like, you say like, what is not like other girls like very? I guess you would say like Bella Swan, or like, the kind of rejection of traditional femininity, but in a way that was more acceptable. Partially because it was super misogynistic. So it was acceptable there, like a patriarchy, I guess. But, um, I think I had so many feelings about other girls that I could not parse. Really. So the main way that I dealt with it was just kind of rejecting all of it. In the idea that I would even have friends that were girls was like, not okay, and things like that, just because I think girls made me feel weird and I was upset about it. And I did not deal with that in a very nice way.

Olivia Newsome 09:20

So Real, so real. I think, I think a lot of us had a very, very strong not like the other girls' space for various reasons. And until now, I never really thought about it in relation to queerness at all. And that makes a lot of sense. So you had mostly boy friends growing up. Boys space friends.

Ash 09:40

Yeah, I have one as one of my closest friends actually. We met when we were like 11. She's still my best friend but other than that, it was a lot of male friends and I think a lot of it was the not like other girls but a lot of it was also genuinely, I struggled to interact with other girls at that age because so much of girl called Sure, when you're that age is boys, and I could not figure it out. I would just genuinely like when any girl was like, Oh, who do you have a crush on, I would pick the friend of whoever I knew she had a crush on.

Because that's how it always was in movies, you know, like [Olivia laughs] the best friend's mother or the. So I was like, this works. He's a boy and he's in my orbit. So that makes sense. But I could not keep it up for very long, because they'd be like, Oh, what do you like about him? And it'd be like, like, I don't know, this is this is the script, you're not supposed to ask me this in the script.

Olivia Newsome 10:36

That makes a lot of sense. That makes a lot of sense. So, unfortunately, a little bit of a pivot. But how did class influence you growing up? We've talked a little bit about gender, and gender norms, and maybe your rejection of gender norms for a variety of reasons. Would you be willing to talk a little bit about class and what it was like growing up in Indianapolis?

Ash 10:59

Absolutely. Um, I think my class background is kind of strange, because basically, my grandma had my dad when she was 15, and immediately had to get to work because I mean, she has a newborn. She's 15, from a poor family, all that kind of stuff. But then my dad and his sister who she had later on, when she's a little bit older, have done very well for themselves. So I had a lot of privilege growing up, I never had to worry about where my next meal was coming from, I always had a roof over my head, all that kind of stuff. But with the 2008 recession, and also, you know, when you're older, and you get to know all the family secrets, there were a lot of reasons. But I was always under the impression that everything was going to fall out from under us at any given time. Because so many of my family members, you know, had been imprisoned or had been, you know, had drug problems or things like that. And then with the recession, you know, you saw a lot of people just losing everything. So, it's weird, because it's this mix of like, immense privilege. I mean, I never had to worry about anything. But also it came with this weird caveat of like I never understood how we afforded what we afforded, because there was like, financial machinations going on in the background that I was not aware of. So it was always kind of, okay, you know, I've never had to worry about these things.

But it was always on my mind that it was going to in the near future, everything was always just a little bit precarious. And then when I got into my teenage years and stuff, things actually became precarious for a bit. due to mental health reasons and stuff, I had to strike out on my own a little bit. So I was for a time eating only what I could keep in my car. So I lost like 30 pounds, I had a lot of food insecurity and stuff like that. Um, so and, you know, then going to college and my roommate, her parents were both doctors. And I remember she would talk about, like, you know, the city watch or whatever, that they had wherever she was from, and I was like, What do you mean, like, everyone I know is a felon, like, I don't understand. Um, so it was really put in perspective for me, because I had always, you know, my friends had always been poor growing up all that kind of stuff. I had always thought, you know, I was the most privileged it could possibly be I was, you know, but so coming into very stark contrast with the people I met in college, I was like, oh, okay, there are a lot more levels to this

Olivia Newsome 13:52

Would you be willing to go a little bit more into that period of like housing insecurity and food insecurity that you mentioned was brought on maybe by mental health or some issues with your family a little bit more?

Ash 14:10

Yeah, basically, my parents split up when I was I think nine or so, that's totally wrong. I'm sorry, like 14 and, you know, but get into different relationships and all that stuff. So at some point, my dad ended up cohabitating with a partner and she had dogs and at this point, I had pretty severe obsessive compulsive reactions to the dogs I would vomit I would like scrape on my skin off essentially I could not deal with the idea of the germs I had really really big contamination fears. So I could I mean I couldn't physically be in the house, there was food to be eaten. All these things provided for me all these things, but mentally I could not. The physical ramifications were too strong and especially after The history of like, vomiting, illness and stuff that I had, when I was younger, I was really, really afraid that I would get very sick again. So I kept like bags of tortilla chips in my car, I worked at a Japanese restaurant as a dishwasher at the time. I think it was my second job. So I would get perishables at the Dollar Tree, keep them in my car, even whenever I could stomach it. Take whatever free food I could get from school or from friends or whatever. I ate a lot of fast food if I could afford it. And then I would just try to stay out of the house as much as possible.

Olivia Newsome 15:43

And did that resolve when you went away to college? And you didn't have to be at home anymore?

Ash 15:50

Yeah, I think I'm very lucky to be able to access therapy. So that has helped a lot. And then also just being able to control my own environment, like the idea that I would have. I have a cat now, and that would have been completely incomprehensible like three years ago to me. But, you know, if I want to disinfect my counters four times, I can do that. That's fine. So having control over my environment has significantly helped that.

Olivia Newsome 16:22

Yeah. Can you talk a little bit about maybe growing up in a religious household? You mentioned going to Catholic school? Were you Catholic?

Ash 16:34

Yeah, um, my mom was Catholic. My dad was not. So he wanted to send me to public school. She wanted to send me to Catholic school she was. So I went to Catholic school for four years. So that was mass Friday, Last Wednesday, and then we would go to Mass on Sundays with my mom. Very long. Very, very strict, you know, sit, stand, kneel, and all the right times say all the right things, there's no wiggling around. There is no. So it was a very, I think Catholicism in general is just kind of a very rigid religion. That's probably not the experience for everyone. But it definitely was for me. Although, I mean, I will say the Catholic school I went to was primarily Latinx. And I think the benefit of Catholic school and of experiencing Catholicism with such like a diverse group of kids, was that I definitely saw the ways that different cultures like practice religion, and did not all have to be like my very Irish Catholic upbringing, where it was very, like, strict, you know, they had a lot of like, big fun events. And like, I remember for in May, we would plant marigolds, because there was a big festival for the Virgen de Guadalupe and stuff like that. So I didn't get to see the benefit of Catholicism, but it was not my own.

Olivia Newsome 18:04

Yeah, so can you? You grew up going to Catholic school. Catholicism was really rigid. did, when you were coming, into your queerness? Or maybe you had no clue but you knew that you maybe weren't like other people who you should have been around? Or should have been close to? Did growing up in an Irish Catholic setting and maybe in a religious background ever influence your lesbianism? Or your queerness, or your gender identity in any way?

Ash 18:41

Yeah, I think there were a lot of growing pains when I was first. Coming to terms with everything. Especially just because I think the idea of like, a woman is already so contested and kind of in our culture, but the idea of a Catholic woman is like, a whole different monster, essentially, like, you know, you have all these kids and you don't. Technically, I mean, when you're Catholic, you're not even supposed to use any kind of birth control after you're married. You're, it's very tied to your biology and kind of things like that. So the idea that not only would I be queer and kind of failed that way, but once I started, like encountering my trans identity and stuff like that, the idea that I would fail even on like a bodily level was very disconcerting and took me a very long time, I think, to kind of work around

Olivia Newsome 19:47

When you're talking about this sense of like, double failure, did you - was this mostly like internal pressures that you were dealing with? Like coming into your transness and

coming into your lesbianism, or was this pressure external, maybe from family members, maybe from friends or people close to you.

Ash 20:15

Um, I think a lot of it was internal. I was, I think one of the first people to come out in my like, age group. So it was kind of unfortunate to have to be the one to like, go against what everybody was expecting. But I don't know that I necessarily was like bullied for it or anything like that. But there definitely was a sense that it was not the norm and that by being against the norm, I had to announce it and then like, be one of the good ones in air quotes, you know. And then with family, my immediate family was honestly very supportive. A lot of my extended family. I think they know now, but I never formally came out to them because I knew it would be ill received and I never really saw the parade.

Olivia Newsome 21:19

That makes a lot of sense. Like being the first one to come out in some way, with your friends, or in your friend group. Can you talk a little bit about your earliest interactions with queer spaces? Or if you had queer lesbian friends growing up? How did y'all find each other? Maybe you didn't know you were all gay until later on.

Ash 21:49

Yeah, that's exactly what happened. I was I think in like seventh grade, I spent pretty much all my time at our local library because of who I was as a person. And eventually there just happened to be like seven or eight of us that would hang out there all the time. And then a year or two later, it started emerging that we were all created, and had somehow found each other in a little iron troop. So it's funny actually, a lot of the activities we did like we were all in FFA. So -

Olivia Newsome 22:24

What's FFA? For the recording?

Ash 22:27

Yeah, it used to stand for Future Farmers of America. Now. It's just the acronym, but it's like a little agricultural education thing, which it's so funny to me looking back on growing up in an urban setting, and then also all of us being queer. For some reason, it was truly like the strangest possible thing we could have picked for some reason. But we all did it. And I think the first actual queer space because it FFA became a queer space because

we kind of forced it to be but I think in high school, we had a gay straight alliance chapter that it was it was called people for acceptance because they didn't want to call it Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) for some reason. I don't know if that's outdated or what, but I think that was the first actually like meant for queer people queer space that I ever occupied.

Olivia Newsome 23:18

Can you talk? So lots of people have many different experiences about GSAs? My school personally, we weren't allowed to have a GSA because the board was like, That's too gay.

Ash 23:29

Oh, that's awful!

Olivia Newsome 23:30

Not great. [laughs] Um, But like, can you talk a little about, like your involvement in people for acceptance or what it was like being in an intentional queer space in high school? And what was it like being young and queer in this space? So many people have so many different experiences in middle and high school for acceptance for GSA groups?

Ash 24:00

Yeah, I honestly, I think of all the, like, groups and spaces that I occupied, it was probably in some ways, I would say, like the least accepting almost, um, not necessarily in an overt way, the teacher actually was a lesbian. And I love her very much. She was great. But just the I think because you're drawing queer people, from, you know, freshmen to seniors, and across all kinds of different backgrounds and stuff like that. It's in a lot of ways, that's great. But you're also putting, you know, baby gays with very experienced gays and stuff like that. So I think it was a little rough around the edges. And because it was explicitly queer in a way that a lot of the other spaces occupied by queer people that were not explicitly queer that I was in if that makes sense. There was very much like a sense that we should feel like a community even that made it kind of awkward when We didn't. Um, but I think it was a good experience because I did interact with a lot of people I don't think I would have otherwise.

Olivia Newsome 25:14

Can you talk a little bit about the other queer spaces that maybe weren't labeled queer, but you made them queer with your experience and your involvement other than FFA? Can you talk a little bit about what those spaces were? They don't have to be formalized. And can you talk about what it means to maybe make a space queer with your presence and stuff?

Ash 25:39

Yeah, um, so the little friend group that I occupied at the time, took over like the quiz bowl team, we were the quiz bowl team, that was all, it was only us. So that pretty quickly became very clear. We have t shirts, the it's funny, the teacher who did that group was a very dry humor type of older man, he had eight kids like very high. Just I don't really know what to call him, but like, you picture a white man with children and that's him, you know, but he was so sweet. So like, our quiz bowl T shirts have the B movie script on them, because that was big on Tumblr at the time. So we were, you know, oh, that kind of stuff. FFA was definitely a big queer space. I think because we were all nerds, a lot of us were very close with some of the teachers. So just like, any random teachers lunch period, wouldn't become a queer space, because we would all eventually accumulate there. And at some point, other people got the message and we would all just kind of descend.

Olivia Newsome 26:59

That makes a lot of sense. And you know, when you're thinking about what makes a queer space, especially when you're young, a lot of it can just be being queer. And being in a space and that can be enough.

Ash 27:11

Right? Especially I think, in Indiana because it's not. Um, you know, I think a lot about when you see like the accounts where it's like, oh, People of New York, and everybody's dressed so fashionably in so cool. And there's androgyny and there's all this that does not exist in Indiana. So pretty much any of us occupying any space, we were invisible, or even if we weren't necessarily like visible to the eye, we were known. So it kind of colored any space that we were in with, like this sense of like, oh, the gays are here.

Olivia Newsome 27:52

Can you talk about that? Visibility, you know, and y'all were in Indiana. And I completely understand what it's like I was I'm in Southern, Virginia. Every space me and my friends were in was a gay space. It was the art room. I didn't even take art, but I was always there. And I was always there. And they called us they thought we were all dykes and we weren't

but they called us all dykes and God, I really, really do understand about making a space gay. I was in Latin, the Latin teachers office, that's where we would all congregate. Yep. She made a fake club for us to eat lunch together in her office because I fucking hated eating lunch in the lunch room. It was beautiful.

Olivia Newsome 28:42

But I would love if you could talk a little bit about, you know, Tumblr, for a different thing. But then also what it's like to be a visibly you guys were visible no matter what, like there was no way you can negotiate or think about visibility when you're in Indiana, right? Anything you'd be doing would be considered gay would be made gay would be made Queer. How did that make other people, straight people feel? Was there this sense of like uncomfortability in any way so you can ignore the Tumblr thing so we can get back to that later?

Ash 29:21

Um, yeah, it was definitely there was a kind of tension I think all the time with like it's weird because I don't know if I think especially towards the end of high school, there is very much this push by the straight people that I knew to not only stopped being homophobic although I did appreciate that because you know, there were instances of homophobia and like, I remember there was like, when I first started high school, random guys would come up to me and like, propositioned me for oral sex and stuff. like that, like just because they knew I was gay. So it was like a joke, which, like, I know is awful. But honestly, it's kind of funny to me. But um, you know, there was a very big push, like homophobia is no longer in fashion, essentially. But then I feel like people kind of started adopting us as pets almost like, in a strange way where it was like, you know, I know gay best friend is like a long hallmark of like queer culture and all that kind of stuff.

Ash 30:25

But not even just like the gay men that I knew, like, even like people would be like, oh, you know, I think it's so cool. And you're so brave, that you're lesbian. I'm like, I have never spoken to you in my entire life. Like, this feels very unnatural to me. And it was always kind of hard for me to tell necessarily, for me if that was because of the neuro divergence, or the queerness, or what, but it was very much all wrapped up in this like, oh, like pity kind of reaction. So I think it did become sort of fashionable or trendy or whatever, towards the end of my high school experience. To kind of flip that tension almost in like, I think they thought it was a good way. But for me, it was like, definitively worse, I would much rather be able to tell if you're being rude to me.

Olivia Newsome 31:10

No, for sure. It's, can you spend a little bit of time like maybe thinking about or working through that tension? Of 'if it's because I'm gay? Or if it's because I'm neurodivergent? Or what's going on?' Like, are there any moments where you think that maybe you couldn't figure it out? Or you don't know which one is influencing which? Or maybe it's both or neither?

Ash 31:40

Yeah, I think definitely out of our little friend group, I was the unfriendly one, essentially, partially because I think I was the most masc of any of that little group. But I also just, I wasn't sociable, it wasn't really, I wouldn't say I was unfriendly. But, you know, if I don't know you, there's not really a reason for us to be speaking as far as I was concerned in school. So it was hard for me to tell sometimes, because I was the most visibly gay, other than probably some of the boys that I hung out with, but definitely, of the queer women that I hung around. I was the most visibly gay and so it was kind of like, you know, are you picking me because I'm the most air quotes like to you like, you get the most points for befriending me because I'm the most dykey or whatever? Or is it because it's harder in a way, like, if I'm speaking to you, you kind of win or whatever, like, there's a sort of overcoming because my barriers for injury are much higher than some of my other friends who are very much more willing to be personable, and, you know, make small talk and things like that, that I wasn't really able to navigate. But yeah, it was very difficult for me to tell when I mean, still is, when I'm being made fun of are when people are being genuine, or because there were definitely times when I made the wrong call on either side, and either ended up feeling very dumb or like, being unnecessarily kind of cold.

Olivia Newsome 33:22

That's a really, really good, interesting point. I think it's this tension of like social capita that young people were aware of, for various reasons. Maybe it's because of our involvement on the internet. But that sense of overcoming or I'm going to align myself with like, the most marginalized in whatever way person so that I can get some kind of clout, by association, some kind of pity clout, which I think is really gross, and it still happens. And it's awful. Yeah, being able to tell and you were very aware that it wasn't like you didn't know. Maybe you didn't have the words for it at the time, but you weren't aware of that. That tension? Yeah. You mentioned Tumblr once and so I'm obligated to ask what was your involvement with Tumblr? What did that mean to you as a space, especially as a queer person as a lesbian?

Ash 34:25

Oh, yeah. I mean, Tumblr was like, the heyday. I have downloaded it several times since and it's not the same as it was for me, probably just because I'm not 14 anymore. But, um, it was, I mean, to have a platform that is so I would almost say like queer as like a rule

was amazing. It was amazing. I don't even I didn't really generate content on there. You know, I didn't post or I would just reblog stuff or read things that other people wrote or you know, to I get like the news, essentially, but just being able to log into this little thing on my phone and be suddenly like, one of a million people who are probably way more like zany, and visibly queer, and, you know, all these things than me, it was very, very nice to have a place where it was just normal. And almost I mean, you know, you talked about social capital, like almost kind of cool. Like I felt almost, instead of being kind of tokenized it felt kind of like, I got to be the token myself, almost, you know, like, oh, here being queer is cool. And that is, you know, you saw lots of posts of like, especially I think straight women being like, Oh, I wish I you know, know that, then it was so kind of nice to be like, oh, here I am. I'm already here.

Olivia Newsome 35:49

Were you on any of the unfortunate sides of Tumblr? Maybe like the glorifying mental illness or like ED side of Tumblr or where you just don't like the fun. We're queer. We're doing weird shit. Small being Tumblr.

Ash 36:06

I think I did definitely interact with the darker side of Tumblr on occasion. I did have a history of self harm. So that was never great on Tumblr, there was always really big glorification of that really big. Lots of triggers, and all that kind of stuff on Tumblr, especially in art for some reason, which like looking back kind of is so wild to me that you just put that out there. But I also I really, I think one of the biggest things that I remember from Tumblr is the suicide of Leelah Alcorn. I mean, I was I had never interacted with any of her content. I don't think I even knew she was before the story broke. But seeing someone who was so close to my age, and so active on a platform that I loved and stuff like that have this sort of double life that they could not escape from almost. It really hit me hard. I think I was, I still think about it.

Olivia Newsome 37:12

And that's, that's one of the funny awful things about Tumblr is, it could be it could have been that one online space where you were like, You know what, there's a million other freak weirdos just like me. You know? And that was great to see. But then they would be like the ED Tumblr, glorifying self harm Tumblr, the like pale grunge, skinny, skinny, thinspo Tumblr. And how you could go from something so funny. And then you then you scroll, and you're like, oh, yikes.

Ash 37:57

Yeah

Olivia Newsome 37:58

I don't think Tumblr moderation was at a time. It was good enough.

Ash 38:04

No, definitely not.

Olivia Newsome 38:05

Being 14 on tumblr was a minefield, and you're warrior.

Ash 38:13

Yeah, we all survived.

Olivia Newsome 38:15

Can you just for point, you've talked about identifying as a lesbian in high school. What year did you identify as a lesbian? And how did you get to it?

Ash 38:28

Um, I think I knew I was queer probably think 12 or 13. It's actually me and another girl that I was friends with came out for each other, essentially. And we both came out as bisexual. And I think for me, I I don't know what she identifies as now but she I think she stuck with bisexual throughout high school. But for me, it was very much a like sort of fear that if I was a lesbian I think probably a very Catholic fear but also just a very general fear that if men could in no way be part of my life, like my romantic life and my sexual life and all that kind of stuff, that was more bad essentially, like I felt like I had to leave that door open. And I think it I continued identifying as bisexual for a year maybe just quietly on my own until I eventually realized like you have never been attracted to a man in your entire life. So might as well just full send it that and also, you know coming out for that relationship and going through that relationship really solidified like Nope, it's girls man like you're

Olivia Newsome 39:46

Can you clarify what you beat? So did you? Did you come out to date your friend?

Ash 39:53

Yeah, essentially, we both had had like we were in the same friend group and and had little crushes on each other or whatever, but I

Ash 39:59

Mmm hmm. Essentially came out and started dating at the same time.

Olivia Newsome 40:07

Okay. Okay, were you one of the only gay gay couples to be out in dating at school?

Ash 40:16

I think the time we were the only because I think we were in seventh grade. We were very, very young looking back. So yeah, I think we're the only and then I think on top of that being a sapphic relationship it was so strange because I think all of us had a conception again of gay male relationships, you know, like, there weren't any out gay men gay. I just tried to think of the gay word first African I can think of it but yeah, gay man relationships at our school, like, they weren't out. But we knew essentially, you know, in the way that kids air quotes know who the gay boys are and who they you know, Nirvana. So the idea of coming out and being the sapphic relationship publicly was very, like, scandalous in a kind of very funny way, especially I think, because all pretty much all of the adults in our lives immediately took it as a sexual thing, which was very weird when you're 12. But it lesbianism I think, in general, is so sexualized that it was kind of like, racy almost in a way that I didn't I was not prepared for at that age.

Olivia Newsome 41:26

You've kind of hinted on it a little bit, but you were 1213. Around there. Did you have an understanding of what it was like to be a first in something? Um, I think

Ash 41:44

I'm a very conflict averse person, which I'm working on. But I think that was the main concern for me in that. I didn't want to have to announce anything or make it a big deal. But I knew that I couldn't have it. Unless because we were the first I knew that there were

going to be questions, I knew that there was no one else really around to answer them. So I think I regretted it more than anything. And I kept wishing that someone else would do it before me but

Olivia Newsome 42:21

so we spent a lot of time talking about your childhood and growing up queer and identifying as a lesbian at like 14 around. So we're going to not move in. We're going to kind of go into your later, later teens. Is that the word? What's after adolescence?

Ash 42:47

Oh, man, I think I think later teens would have to be it was like What young adulthood? Oh, genius.

Olivia Newsome 42:53

Okay. Okay, we're gonna talk a little bit about your young adulthood, and then we're gonna go into you now. We're gonna, it's not even like flashing forward that much like, what four years but you're gonna go into like your young adulthood and then your current life. So Okay. Have clothing jewelry, like tattoos, piercings, makeup or any kind of body modifications helped you with affirming your transness or your lesbianism?

Ash 43:27

Absolutely, yeah. I got my first binder whenever COVID started and I like I had kind of been putting off because I was afraid that I would like it too much. And then I put it on and immediately like burst into tears. So it was like okay, well here we are. So that was very, very affirming. I think I have one tattoo and my low piercings and then one other ear piercing but being I was very very excited to turn 18 so that I can go do all those things on my own. And I think you know, it's queer but I think it's also just human you know, making your body a home for yourself kind of thing. Although I do like that the tattoos make me look a little bit scary so those have definitely been a big push Yeah, to not be afraid to modify myself to feel at home and all those kinds of things. And then with jewelry, I don't really wear jewelry. I know the lesbian thing now is to wear a bunch of rings but I can't because of work so Oh, twins.

Olivia Newsome 44:45

Yeah, I don't wear rings either. It's like I feel like sometimes I put myself in Little Finger sensory jails. Whenever I wear rings.

Ash 44:54

I feel that um,

Olivia Newsome 44:56

so you mentioned briefly what it was like to be uriens of putting on a binder for the first time. And not to put it's not putting you on the spot or anything. But I'm sure other people and other people in this for like in this project will talk about that form of gender euphoria when putting on a binder for the first time or any other gender affirming items or events that they've had. And I wanted to give you the space to talk more about that in that process. And also to put you in conversation with your other your other trans lesbian peers. So if you want to expand on that at all. Yeah, I

Ash 45:46

think one of the things that sucks about COVID I mean, other than COVID, and its existence, you know, you know what I mean? Um, but one of the most nice things about it is that I think it really gave a lot of people the space to explore themselves, and what gender is when no one else is looking and those kinds of things. So, part of the reason I bought the binder was because I was home and I had seen I hit spam online, and I had been kind of interacting with a lot more lesbians faces. And part of the reason that I was really afraid of adopting any kind of trans-masc identity was, you know, the lesbianism that I had seen and that I had previously participated in had always berry like femme with femme, like, there was not butchers. We're almost kind of treated like as a joke. And many of the like, you know, it's just not aesthetic, it's old school, it's heteronormative. It's all these things. So, once I started kind of trying to find more lesbian space for myself, and seeing which is really actually like, allotted and kind of like, appreciated and all these things, it was very enlightening, I think, because it always felt like this. The more masculine sides of myself partially were what made me identifiably gay to straight people, and therefore, like, we're kind of bad for that. But we're also kind of bad and that like, you know, like with certain strains of political lesbianism and stuff like that, were unfashionable. So get putting myself in more trans masc lesbian spaces, and just transforming across the board spaces really opened me up to like, look at all these people, they're having this gender euphoria, why can't you have a little bit of that? So yeah, it's it's very strange to not think about something for so long on purpose, and then have all the puzzle pieces kind of slot together when you're not expecting it.

Olivia Newsome 47:50

Good, thank you for thank you for telling me thank you for telling us the people who are going to listen to this. I know it's kind of like a meta moment. But I think that's what's cool about you and everyone else is that there's an awareness of the other people in this project that I think is really great. So you mentioned briefly binding online, maybe trans masc spaces, and I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about maybe, like, film, television, art, and then even like social media, helped you with your lesbianism or your gender identity in any ways. So maybe, where did you find those online trans masc spaces?

Ash 48:42

Yeah, um, I know, it's kind of almost outdated already, but I'm on Instagram, mostly just because that's where all my knitting pages are. But there's also I follow a lot of Butch boudoir there's Butch4Butch. There's a lot of artists and you know, obviously being Butch isn't explicitly trans masc or anything, but it kind of cultivates these spaces where masc of center is celebrated and is okay and is talked about and also a lot of theories I love. I think her name is pronounced Cosima be Concordia. She's a trans leather dyke who does like theory and stuff on Instagram, I love her posts. I think a lot of the time I ended up like, half disagreeing with some of them and then I come back later on and I'm like, You know what I've thought about it. So I think it's definitely helping me push and expand my worldview and all that kind of stuff. So yeah, it's a lot concentrated on Instagram, a little bit on Twitter. As far as art a lot of that is also the artist on Instagram I love very much they just got engaged to their partner, which is very exciting. And then trying to think film and TV I think film wise, there's really not a whole lot of masc representation. I think "The Taking of Deborah Logan" has the long haired book, which I love very much. I watched that movie so often just for her. I know it's a horror movie. So I should be probably watching, you know, the horror, but now it's really any horror, actually, I think, because I think there's so much queerness and horror, and then also just the female characters that you see in horror so often, either by situation or by nature, kind of queer in their appearance and perception and all that kind of stuff.

Olivia Newsome 50:49

You said so many wonderful things in that one section. So I'm gonna ask you a question. And I don't know if you know the answer to it or if it's a yes or no, and if it's a notes, okay, you mentioned like, I think a trans masc leather died that you follow. You mentioned the word leather Dyke. So, I have to ask you about are you involved in like, the leather dyke community in any way? Or like the BDSM, or kink community? And is that helped you like I know, a lot of leather dyke spaces, you can find the more people who wear a masc of center and trans mascs just like historically and also, now in general, and you mentioned it.

Ash 51:36

Yeah, the theorist that I mentioned is transfemme. But -

Olivia Newsome 51:40

Oh, sorry!

Ash 51:43

Um, but I'm not currently in those spaces, just because with COVID, and then like, I'm still overcoming a lot of social anxieties and stuff. But I really, really hope to because so many of the accounts and people and thinkers and you know, historically, I think there's just so much of our community contained in leather and kink and BDSM, and stuff like that. So I would love to be part of them in the future. I'm hoping that one day, we're not living in a pandemic, and I can branch out a little bit. But I think I do end up in those online spaces very much, which not even necessarily out of, I think a sexual interest, but so much is like the community is very. Yeah, they're just great people.

Olivia Newsome 52:33

Like certain especially like, I don't even think being in like a leather community is inherently sexual in any way. Like they have, like a very intentional, like political bent and community organizing bent. And especially like the masc of center. Mass people and leather spaces have a very specific, very strong identity that goes back many, many, many years.

Ash 52:57

Right? That's the thing I one of the things I love so much about it is being able to look and see the history like in what people are wearing and what we're doing. And what also I think, you know, like you said, because they have the very political bent, it's one of the few spaces where I feel like there's not a lot of, or at least I don't see as much of the like community policing kind of thing. There's very much like an acceptance of nuance that I think it's kind of hard to find in some queer spaces. And probably just community spaces in general, I don't think it's a queer specific issue. But a lot of the leather accounts or people or whatever that I follow are very, like, actually, let's have a dialogue about this. Because I don't think it's that simple. Like, there's this and this and this and this, you know, and I think that's very enriching both to the community and for me to see because I - it's good to see that everything's not you know, end all be all black and white thinking kind of thing.

Olivia Newsome 53:55

That's true. That's true. I know, that wasn't on our list, but

Ash 54:00

Oh, no, that's fine.

Olivia Newsome 54:01

And I was like, if we're gonna talk about leather we're going to talk about it. Don't let me forget to show you the leather stuff that we have at the archives. I can like, email you all the leather, the leather stuff that we have.

Ash 54:13

No, cool!

Olivia Newsome 54:13

don't let me forget. Okay, send me a text. So, you mentioned political lesbianism. So how would you define political lesbianism for yourself? Not a trick question. I'm not a cop. Anything. And then you mentioned how and maybe political lesbian spaces, like what's going out of style a little bit. Can you talk more about that? Or if you feel like there's like a disappearance of like Butch identity and like lesbians our age and stuff like that?

Ash 54:48

Yeah, I think um, like, for me personally political as big as I'm like, is sort of lesbianism or influences my politics because you know, like, I think it just kind of completely shifts your worldview there is no world for me in which anyone can be oppressed because I'll always be, you know, part of that for failing to like, fulfill all these societal gender culture sex norms, all this kind of stuff. So I think it inherently for me at least I know that's not true for everybody but um puts me in very leftist, I would say spaces. I honestly, I'm not that educated on like, socialist anarchist, all that kind of stuff, but they you know, all those kinds of spaces that are countercultural and very activist bent, I think. But I think for a lot of other lesbians and I would venture to say specifically other white lesbians. Um, there is this sort of politic, where it's like, lesbianism is very much like

Ash 56:05

I guess I would say like, liberal, more like, you know, men are achy and masced people are icky. And like, you know, antiracist is too strong of a word and like, we're crunchy, and we're kind of, you know, very conspicuously bougie and stuff like that. So I think whenever

I think of political lesbianism, like as a thing, it would probably be that like, as a class of people sort of thing. That's, I think, the way I most often see it being enacted as sort of like a very, it's also I think, a lot of the time very transphobic like, you know, like, Oh, no dick here. Da, da, da, da, then it's like, well, that's kind of gross. But

Olivia Newsome 57:01

Can you, you mentioned it earlier, and since we're talking about the mascs are icky. Men are icky, that kind of white lesbian or political, lesbian online spaces that you're in. Can you talk a little bit about where you're seeing these conversations and how they're manifesting or conversations about masc people or butchness or Butch femme relationships like reproducing like heteronormativity or like are inspired by heteropatriarchy since you mentioned this kind of stuff?

Ash 57:40

Yeah, I think I've definitely tried to weed out any of the accounts or things I follow that engage in that just because I very much disagree. And then also I think it's really harmful. But I think I see it most often in Like honestly, I think whenever I've followed like democratic political things, like for a while I was on like, the I think it's called like, act now. Democrat, Twitter or whatever. And there would be lots of people you know, like, kind of um, oh, like, kind of like Charlotte climber. I don't know if you're aware of her, but she's a trans woman on Twitter who like, I think is an Army veteran and things like that. So it's very much like a I feel like it's a very much sanitized, um take on our community.

Ash 58:43

And I think genuinely with a lot of it, there is this knowledge that masc spaces and butch spaces and like leather and kink and things like that are unpalatable to straight people. And there's this kind of like, I mean, like you said, You're not a cop, but I think a lot of people are inside cops. And they definitely want to present whatever they think is going to get us get them specifically the most, right. So it's very much like two long haired friends that are together and they're very much chaste. And they're very much not. I mean, like they're political in the sense that you know, they vote but not in, they're not engaging in community activism. They're not engaging in community spaces beyond like maybe your pride parade and stuff like that. So I think it was kind of strange because I followed a bunch of political things for my like, knowledge because I don't check the news anymore. I can't mentally do it. So that was how I was getting my news, but it was also bringing this influx of people where I was like, Oh, I thought we were cool, I thought we were cool, but we are not.

Olivia Newsome 1:00:02

Really, really, really good points I always am so curious about where people are hearing these conversations about butchness and mascness because I've seen that reflected in how people are identifying now. Do you identify as Butch?

Ash 1:00:21

Um, it's kind of confusing for me personally, I would categorize.

Olivia Newsome 1:00:25

You can talk through the confusion!

Ash 1:00:26

Yeah. So my partner's Butch identifies as gender fluid?

Olivia Newsome 1:00:31

Y'all are in a butch for butch relationship!

Ash 1:00:32

And I would definitely, yes, I definitely would categorize our relationship as butch for butch. But, but me personally, it's kind of strange, because I'm still navigating, like, like, we went to an event the other day they had for school, and I wore a dress in heels, because I think it's easiest for me, because when I'm going to a formal event, I'm already performing, right, like, I'm already I don't know, these people, I don't know what's going on. There's a lot happening, I have my like, full social masc on kind of thing. So I might as well wear clothing that I know looks good on my body from like, an objective standpoint. But I don't feel that I am feminine, any way, I just think I perform that way, sometimes. Kind of like the Jessica Rabbit, I'm just drawn this way. Like, that's just how my body is at this moment. Eventually, it won't be hopefully, if I can, you know, get on T (testosterone) and stuff like that. But I would say like, my insights are Butch. And one day, hopefully my outside will reflect that. And I know you don't have to, like look specifically a certain way to be Butch, but I'm always just a little bit reticent to completely claim that for myself, just because I don't want to like, I know that there are historical meanings there and stuff. And I don't want to dilute that or anything. I I don't know.

Ash 1:00:49

I get that. I mean, you seem to have a very substantial understanding of lesbian history. And, and this sincere, maybe fear about not wanting to, as you said, dilute it in any way, and I don't think that you can, or are in any way. So we've talked about being Butch for Butch maybe a little bit and what it's like being Butch for Butch in some political lesbian spaces that are femme for femme or maybe see Butch for butch as, too, not palatable enough to maybe straight people or to, to get them the rights they think that, they think that they need and deserve. Can you talk a little bit more about or maybe just talk in general about your first encounters with queer sex and lesbian sex? both directly and indirectly? And what thoughts you had about lesbian sex before? And then after?

Ash 1:03:20

Um, so I think my first like, I'm trying to think of like a pop culture.

Olivia Newsome 1:03:30

You can generalize.

Ash 1:03:32

Yeah, I think it was probably like just the concept of the Femme Fatale, almost, you know, there's the scene where, like, the, you know, the good girl is kind of upon by this, you know, like, dangerous, sexy woman or whatever. And again, my mom would always go, like, actually vocally. But I think even when I was younger, it was always there was always a sense to me that it was very much performance, like there was very much like, almost like porn, like they're, you know, they've got long nails, like really long nails and their hair is pushed out of the way so that you can see what's going on and that kind of stuff. So I don't think I really internalized like the idea that that could be something that I had or did or interacted with in any way. And then I think, kind of the benefit, I guess, of being a queer kid in Indiana, is that no one knows what's going on. So I think when I did first encounter lesbian sex directly, it was like, in a way, very wholesome, I think, because I had no idea and I don't think any of my partners had any idea. So you kind of have to start from the ground up and check in and work off of like, you know, does this do anything what it feels good for you? What are you wanting to get out of this experience? You know, like, I mean, obviously, consents, like a good thing in any respect, but I feel like there was very much a intentionality that you kind of had to have what you were working with? Absolutely no knowledge.

Olivia Newsome 1:05:10

So we've talked a lot about political lesbianism. Butch for Butch, trans-masc spaces, we talked about sex. And you talked about social media. We talked about leather, and life, and COVID. We've talked about so many things. And now we're going to talk about even more things. So, here, we're going to talk a little bit more about how you think about community, and how your lesbian is impacts how you form community and how you form lesbian community. So can you talk a little bit about being neurodivergent? And dealing with mental illness and how that informs your interactions with lesbian community?

Ash 1:06:04

Yeah, I think, um, in a way, queer community is so much more accepting of neurodivergent mental illness, certainly not across the board. But just all of the queer people that I've met, you kind of almost have an instant connection, just because you both can look at each other and like, know, like, okay, we're already part of the same group a little bit. But also, I think, the ways that lesbian, lesbian communities specifically breaks down a lot of, I think social barriers that I have. with other people, it's beneficial, like, my first day with my partner lasted like eight hours, you know, and kind of like the you howling and stuff like that. It's a joke. And obviously, it doesn't happen for everybody. But I do think that is a stereotype that kind of works well, for my specific neurodivergence. Because it's like, I don't have to pretend to understand things that I don't understand. I just get to be here and be me. And it will go on an eight hour date. Yeah, there's no I don't have to make awkward excuses after an hour, because that should be when the date ends, kind of. And then, you know, with lesbian friendships and stuff like that, I think there's, I think friendships is one of the areas where I struggle a lot, honestly, because the barriers and like the guidelines can be so fluid for different people, you know, some people kiss their friends, some people don't some people hang out for, you know, four days a week, or once every six months are things like that. But I think in lesbian community, and with lesbian friendships and stuff, there is very much a like, Come as you are sort of group chat mentality, you know, someone can be the friend that is always everywhere, at all times FaceTiming you randomly all that kind of things. But then there's also a better understanding of like, oh, you know, if this person doesn't respond to the text for a few days, that's fine. They'll get to it. Like, that's just how they are. I think as a community, I would like to say that we're I would like to think that we're slightly more accepting of the different needs that different people have and more accommodating.

Olivia Newsome 1:08:29

I think building off of that, the different needs that people have. Can you talk a little bit about because I think yes, there's definitely for sure, that moment of understanding where you'd have but I also think that it's really fun or important to think about how, where these understandings came to be and it isn't just like Leyton instant moments. Can you talk a little about maybe in your lesbian community moments where maybe you didn't anticipate someone else's needs? And what it was like negotiating that in the lesbian space? Or do you feel like you always have your needs met in lesbian -

Ash 1:09:19

No.

Olivia Newsome 1:09:20

Can you talk about that?

Ash 1:09:21

Yeah, yeah. Um, so I think definitely with I do think what lesbian spaces is one of the things that can be really nice that I kind of touched on with the other thing but can also be a little bit intimidating and sometimes unsafe is like the almost like taking for granted of intimacy. Like I have definitely been in spaces where people I think, I thought that we were a lot more intimate or close or connected than I thought we were and it's, you know, there's like boundaries around touching that I think are a little bit more relaxed and queer community lot of the time that can be very uncomfortable. If you're not prepared or comfortable with that, or you know, I don't even know if the term trauma dumping means anything anymore. But you know, there is definitely because especially when you're in queer people, I think, you know, we there's an understanding that you have some sort of adjacency to I guess, like coming out and just kind of having a hard time, in general, and I think it can, it has, I think I have historically, either over shared or drastically under shared or drastically over shared or on accident by like, not understanding the rules of the space I was in or the needs of the other people around me or things like that. And I've definitely had that happen to me too.

Ash 1:10:56

So I think that a lot of the issues that I've had and that I've caused to have been around misunderstandings of like, as a community we are. Or I guess, when you hold people in community, you are like, opening yourself up to a certain vulnerability and a certain intimacy. But everybody navigates that differently. I think, me as a person in the community in general, we all need to get better at kind of learning how to be more explicit about asking questions and checking things because I think situations where you take it for granted can definitely end up being like, awkward at best and harmful at worst. I think you're still muted.

Olivia Newsome 1:11:46

Think about when you're thinking about that concept of forced intimacy, or maybe some kind of understood intimacy that isn't present, because they assume that because y'all are both lesbians, that they completely understand all of your access needs, which can be awkward, and lead to a lot of misunderstandings.

Ash 1:12:06

Yeah, I think especially Oh, sorry. Yeah, no,

Olivia Newsome 1:12:09

no, no, no, please continue.

Ash 1:12:11

Oh, like, before, I was able to have a cat. But mentally, just like I, I know, it's like a joke. But you know, lesbians loving like animals and cats and dogs and stuff, it was always very awkward for me to have to navigate, like, Hey, I know that you have seven dogs, and that's great for you. But like I can't, you know, eat food that has been prepared at this event, because I know that you have seven dogs kind of thing. So yeah, I think definitely like the individual needs that kind of go against community needs are more difficult to navigate for sure. And I'm sure that looks like totally different for people of different personalities and all of that.

Olivia Newsome 1:12:50

Do you feel like maybe if you have if you're in lesbian spaces that are merged neurodiverse or disabled lesbian spaces that some of this might be mitigated, or is mitigated if you are in any of these, like neurodiverse lesbian spaces, or lesbian communities or neurodiverse lesbian friends?

Ash 1:13:15

Yeah, I think the neurodiverse queer friends that I do have, it's it's kind of running because I feel like every time we have a conversation, someone signs a contract, essentially, but because we all kind of over communicate to ensure each other's comfort and stuff like that, like, does it get annoying for other people probably. But it's really nice to be in a space where we all explicitly at all times have each other's backs are constantly like, you know, like, you don't have to triple check with me, but I appreciate that you did. And that's like, we're all going to hold that for each other. And that's really, really nice. Especially because a lot of the time, I think sometimes my friends will intense anticipate needs that I didn't even recognize that I had sometimes and there's I mean, sometimes it's kind of uncomfortable, because I'm like, Whoa, I didn't know we knew each other like that. But I think that also speaks to like how important it is to have community because you can't

recognize everything about yourself, yourself. You know, part of that is defined by the company you keep and the friends you have and the community you build and all that kind of stuff.

Olivia Newsome 1:14:27

Very, very true. And while we're talking about community, I think we can go back to talking a little bit about your gender identity and your transness and your interactions with lesbian community on that axis, and maybe about how some lesbian community neglects gender nonconforming lesbians in their spaces.

Ash 1:14:58

Yeah, for sure. I try not to be on Twitter. too much because it's bad for me. But there was a very big discourse not too long ago about like the existence of he/him lesbians and like, can that be a thing? And yeah. But I think it always makes me a little bit nervous to be in lesbian communities that I'm not that like, I haven't already navigated just because like, obviously, like, I understand that, like, every space should be accepting of a variety of identities and masc people and stuff like that. But also, I just don't want to make people uncomfortable. And I think that as lesbians, we already kind of navigate that like feeling of being predatory. But especially as a masc lesbian, I'm always so conscious of like, am I'm making people uncomfortable? Am I going to be like, a conflict in this space? Am I going to be, you know, which I mean, like, I'm 5'2. So luckily, for me, there's like a variety of things that make me not necessarily stick out, as, you know, air quotes, scary person, but it also, you know, um, I think a lot of lesbian spaces, like, I know, specifically, I follow a dance club thing in London, that's like a lesbian, but they say they're women only. And, you know, they have the little trans flag in their bio, and all that kind of stuff. But it always kind of gives me pause, because I'm like, Well, you know, do I count as a woman or, like, you know, if a tall trans femme comes in, is she going to be allowed in is, you know, like, and of course, like, that gets extra compounded when there's like, accessibility issues, or, like, you know, is, it's a whole thing like navigating passing is very, very concerning to me as an issue just because, like, it's so subjective, and people get so I mean, you know, we all hold gender or not all, but a lot of people hold gender very close to their hearts. So when you kind of transgress that, it can very much feel like an attack, even if it's not. So I feel like I'm always very kind. I think definitely my gender identity makes me nervous to be a new spaces.

Olivia Newsome 1:17:10

So you mentioned passing a little bit, and I didn't explicitly make this a question because it's not something that people want to talk about or that's relevant to every person. But since you mentioned it or fear passing, or can you talk a little bit about what passing means to you and how it relates to your, to your to being transmasculine or her relates to being a trans lesbian? And passing in lesbian spaces?

Ash 1:17:43

Yeah, I think like, my partner's very butch short hair, broad shoulder and all that kind of stuff. So they occasionally will pass as male. So like when we drive their family lives in another state. So when we go visit, I'm always constantly afraid of the bathroom situation at any gas station. We stopped that so I tried to go in with them because I look a little more like femme, I guess, like my hair's long so you know, stuff like that. And then in lesbian spaces, like there's always this weird tension I feel between like, I feel like I look like a lesbian visibly now that sides of my head are shaved, you know, I wear baggy masc-coded, I guess you would say like clothes, all that kind of stuff. Excuse me. But I feel like I'm always kind of toeing the line between like good lesbian and bad lesbian almost, you know, because like you said, you know, sort of the idea that butchness has fallen out of fashion or become kind of like not a good air quotes identity to have or things like that. I'm always worried that people will look at me and see kind of like a caricature. So yeah, I guess for me passing in the ideal sense. Like if everybody saw me, as I say, see me, you know, and just kind of be like, Oh, that's a human person like and not necessarily assign a gender to it or you know, sometimes have to be firm and sometimes have to be masc or whatever. But I think yeah, for me, personally, passing is very much probably more about like, do I look like I guess a good lesbian or a scary lesbian? Unfortunately

Olivia Newsome 1:19:39

There's been lots of issues in some lesbian spaces about policing, gender expression, and if they are visibly lesbian enough, or the way that they're presenting is to lesbian. It's right for you if that makes any sense, but it is The thing and it still happens in New York too. So you don't, it's not just like an Indiana thing.

Ash 1:20:09

Yeah. Yeah, that's unfortunate.

Olivia Newsome 1:20:11

Not to get into that. But it is an issue. It is an issue here as well. So the last thing for this section is we're going to talk a little bit about converting to Judaism. And what that process has been like and how it's influenced your lesbianism?

Ash 1:20:31

Yeah, so, um, I guess. I started converting, and I had been talking about it for I think, like a year or so. Just kind of like, Oh, what if I converted? Hahaha, but like, no, really, what if I did. And, you know, a lot of it came about partially because so many of like, the queer theorists and queer thinkers that I love and like, really gel with are Jewish, and it just kind of, I mean, there's not a huge Jewish population in Indiana, I have met one whole Jewish person before my conversion. So the idea that all of these thinkers that I really, really

loved and admired happen to be Jewish was really strange to me, I was like, why, you know, like, it just seems like such a small subset of the population should be making it such a disproportionate number of all these people that I admire. But I looked into it, and I think I don't know the I think this far my conversion, it seems that like, the Jewish way of looking at the world, and a Christian way of looking at the world, and unfortunately, in the US, if you're, even if you're atheist, which I previously was, like, I feel like you're very much shaped by Christianity still sort of like a secular Christianity, almost like, you know, you still probably celebrate Christmas, or you still probably, you know, unless you are another religion.

Ash 1:21:56

But I think one of the biggest things that attracted me to Judaism and that I think impacts my lesbianism is there's no idea of original sin. Like, Catholicism loves the concept of the original sin, you know, Adam and Eve doomed humanity forever, and we are all suffering all the time and paying every single like, possible that we could ever pay. And we're all indebted to be alive, and all that kind of stuff. And I think that was very painful for me when I came out, because there was the sense that like, my life is a gift from God. And even when I didn't believe in God, that was still the framework I was working with. You know, your life is a gift from God, and you're wasting it because you're not creating children, and you're not being a good wife, and a good Christian woman and a good, you know, mother and all this kind of stuff.

But Judaism doesn't have. And I mean, certainly they're like, you know, there is the idea of a Jewish woman or a Jewish mother or Jewish, you know, all those kinds of things. But because you're not, your entire identity does not have to be centered around guilt. And I think that really coincides with my lesbianism, because it's really helped me embrace this idea of like, I know that lesbianism is not a defect, but it has finally released me to be really celebratory. Because I think when you look at lesbianism as like, almost sort of like a deviance, even when you accept it, it's still kind of like, oh, no, it's just a part of me like, it's, it's fine. It's not bad. But this idea that like, I don't have to have that guilt, and I don't have to have, I don't have to be living in anyone else's image or anything like that. has really opened the door for me to be like, You know what, actually, lesbian is not a part of me. It is me and it's great. And I love it.

Olivia Newsome 1:23:58

That's so beautiful for you to talk about that process. I know converting it is very hard. And long.

Ash 1:24:04

Yeah, it's a lot of books. The books list was like 15 different things. I was like, Man, I'm in school.

Olivia Newsome 1:24:11

I wish you the best in that process.

Ash 1:24:13

Thank you.

Olivia Newsome 1:24:15

So what's it like making a meeting lesbians in Indiana?

Ash 1:24:18

Um, I think honestly, the biggest place I've ever met lesbians has been the farmer's market, which is kind of funny to me. Which it's weird because I think the place where I live now is the same place I grew up in it for a long time was a very low income area that has been gentrified. So I always have mixed feelings about going to the farmers market, because it's like hmm, I love fresh squash, but I also don't love that this, you know, is it's complicated, but um, yeah, there's always queer people walking around with their dogs, all that kind of stuff. There's lots of art events nearby now. So lots of queer people there. I think I've been to three or four pride parades now which we have a pride Shabbat, which I have never been to because I have not previously been Jewish but I'm so excited for next year, hopefully if COVID allows and then also just getting my art history degree art school is like one big lesbian flocking events. That's kind of nice. I will say in Indiana I think if you have to be a lesbian Indianapolis is probably where to go. Just because you know, any urban city is going to have a better density of queers, I guess.

Olivia Newsome 1:25:45

Um, so you're meeting lesbians at the farmers market? At art shows and galleries in the area, pride parades, and in Indianapolis and like a dense urban setting. And can you talk some about maybe any disconnection or isolation from the broader queer community as a lesbian that you may have? You may feel like a queer space that isn't lesbian, or a sis lesbian space and talk a little bit about what that disconnection and from community feels to you.

Ash 1:26:26

Yeah, for sure, um, I was really, really excited to go to college and get to, you know, meet more queer people and lesbians and that kind of stuff. And then COVID hit. And also, I didn't really anticipate that not everyone in college works. So I'm working a lot and a lot of people are not, so I can't go to events and stuff like that. Um, and that was really upsetting for me, honestly, because I had really psyched myself up to kind of put my best foot forward. And unfortunately, that has not since happened. And then I also think, in the same way that I think butchness is sort of unfashionable in the lesbian community. I think being a lesbian is sort of unfashionable. In the broader queer community, even just like, you know, there have been times when people have been like, Oh, are you like, queer? And I'm like, Yeah, I'm a lesbian. And they're like, oh, queer. And I'm like, I mean, yes. But like, I don't know if we're saying the same thing. So it's sometimes strange.

Ash 1:27:31

And then I also think a lot of queer spaces that are very dominated by sis gay men, I think have been, I won't say like, hostile to me, necessarily, but there is very much a culture that I do not feel like can be safely a part of, sort of. So like, you know, I've been to directions and I love directions, but like, if there's a 50-50 shot, if it's gonna feel sort of unsafe and weird for me, just existing as a lesbian and as a masc lesbian. And I think there is a similar kind of tokenism a lot of the time in gay male spaces where it's like lesbians are kind of like, almost like the ugly stepchild. In contrast to this very, you know, glamorous, like, fun, gay space.

Olivia Newsome 1:28:29

Sometimes when you're in those kinds of gay spaces, your presence feels like an anachronism.

Ash 1:28:34

Yes.

Olivia Newsome 1:28:35

Yeah. Like, especially in those queer spaces. They're like, Oh, you're a lesbian. So you're not queer. Like what do you mean by that?

Ash 1:28:47

Oh, it's so strange. Sometimes. I feel like a time traveler. I'm like, I don't think we're speaking the same language.

Olivia Newsome 1:28:55

Really strange vibe, really strange vibe. And I completely know what you mean. I can play No, to me. They're like, Are you sure? You're not? Like, you're not queer. Like I like it's like I do. It's like some people I like can't be queer, because I'm a lesbian. Right? And like queer is like a future identity that lesbians are not a part of.

Ash 1:29:18

Umm Hmm,

Olivia Newsome 1:29:18

If that makes sense.

Ash 1:29:20

No, it totally does. I feel like there's definitely this idea that like we've moved past lesbianism like we as a society have progressed past the need for lesbianism, which is really sad because I think like, especially with projects like this lesbianism is so expansive. And it's so diverse and so amazing. And the idea that it would ever go away really makes me sad. Because I think we're I mean, you know, like everybody in this project, we're all redefining it every day and I don't think we should abandon it for some kind of like, shiny new ill defined queerness necessarily, although you know, I wouldn't define myself as queer also, but not, I think in the way that people mean when they say

Olivia Newsome 1:30:09

That was really important to me when thinking about this project and thinking about the participants is that this was, this is an this is specifically a lesbian space for lesbians. And you can also be queer, you can be a, you can have, you can feel a connection to queerness. But I wanted to make sure that this was first and foremost, a lesbian space. And I wanted to give lesbians the space to talk about this, because I feel like a lot of times lesbians are not really allowed to talk about what it's like being a lesbian and queer space, when you go to a queer space, and you're the only lesbian.

Ash 1:30:43

Right.

Olivia Newsome 1:30:44

And what that feels like. Um, so can you talk a little bit about what your first visit or online lesbian space or event was like? So not like a queer event? But like a lesbian event? Or place? Can you talk about what it was? When it was? What it was like, what you expected it to be like, what actually happened?

Ash 1:31:15

Um, I think the first like, by lesbians for lesbians space I ever really occupied was probably, um, I think it's called lesbian_herstory. I can't think of what it's called now. It was an Instagram page. I think it was like lesbian_herstory or something. It wasn't the archives, and it wasn't affiliated with the archives, but it was similar.

Olivia Newsome 1:31:38

Yeah, I know. I know what account you're talking about lesbian -

Olivia Newsome 1:31:41

Oh, sweet.

Olivia Newsome 1:31:41

Underscore herstory.

Ash 1:31:43

Yeah, I think so. Um, and I followed it for a long time and really liked it. And then they started posting stories, you know, that were kind of like, I don't want to say TERFY (trans-exclusionary radical feminist like) because I feel like that's like an accusation to level sort of thing. But it was very I would say exclusionary, some much of the lesbian experience that I love. And I think it was again, kind of sorted down to this divide between lesbianism and queerness. Where, like you said, like, it's important to have lesbian spaces for lesbians. Absolutely. But I think they were sort of having a reaction against queerness, which, as a lesbian, who likes, does feel connected to queerness. It was kind

of strange. And I just increasingly kind of felt alienated from the account in this space. But also, like, so many of the lesbian accounts and people that I knew and followed, like, really loved the account. I was kind of, you know, put in this awkward position of like, well, am I just being weird? Like, am I the problem? Like, am I just making up a problem where there isn't one, but eventually I did disengage from that space, just because it didn't really feel like something that was truly lesbian to me anymore. I think so much of the lesbian experience is um you know, just looking at a huge range of lesbian as with all kinds of different experiences, and being like, yeah, you know, this is this is our community, and we're gonna make it work. And I don't feel like that was really served by me, continuing to engage in that space.

Olivia Newsome 1:33:30

That makes a lot of sense. There are some people who look at lesbian history or feel like the expansiveness that young lesbians like us. I'm not saying this is a real expansiveness or a reactionary response to the supposed expansiveness of lesbianism. you can't just use words. Or like the fact that lesbianism is disappearing, they end up overcorrecting.

Ash 1:34:06

Right.

Olivia Newsome 1:34:07

and get a little bit TERFY. I don't want to say TERFY because they're not rad femmes but just phobic in general, I feel like TERFY is like, too soft of a word. They're just being transphobic.

Ash 1:34:20

Right.

Olivia Newsome 1:34:20

Which is not great. And, and I think it really drives a lot of gender nonconforming and trans people away from identifying as a lesbian.

Ash 1:34:30

Yeah, for sure. That's, it's always kind of upsetting. Like to see that too, because like you said, it's so rooted in the history and that's what I loved about the account and what brought me to it and like why I love the archives in this project and this stuff so much is lesbian history is so beautiful. And so, you know, whether or not even you know, whether or not you're focusing on the expansiveness of it, like even the pictures of the old working class bars with the butches and femmes you know, like the moat is You know, it's great I'm so to kind of be so rigid about that I feel like not only erases a lot of our history, but kind of like whitewashes it in a way that makes people feel like, you know, like, there is no precedent for me, therefore I cannot exist, essentially. And yeah, like you said, it's just transphobic and it sucks.

Olivia Newsome 1:35:31

Can you talk a little bit about what identifying as a lesbian has meant to you and means to you?

Ash 1:35:41

Yeah, I think, um I don't know that I feel as connected to any identity that I have. As much as I feel connected to my lesbianism. I feel like it's very much something that was born in me, and then something that I see when I look at myself every day. And when I look at my community, and when I look at the life I've built, it's all intangibly lesbian, like for me to look at anything that I do, or anything that I have, or anything that's related to me that without looking at it, as a lesbian experience would be to fundamentally misunderstand it. Um, I think a lot of lesbianism is really looking at in a sense both a gender and sexuality that kind of reject your existence and being like, Nope, I like it here. This is me, this is what I'm doing, this is I'm gonna make something out of this.

Olivia Newsome 1:36:50

I think there's a real sense of creation, when you think about lesbianism? And I think maybe that's why lesbianism is so enmeshed in everything that you do. And I think that was a really beautiful thing to say that lesbianism is the identity that you see the most when you look at yourself in the new year. So can you talk a little bit about what lesbian community means to you? We've talked about all the different aspects of lesbian community that you're involved in, to talk about the importance of lesbian community to you, what that means to you and all that stuff?

Ash 1:37:27

Yeah, absolutely. I think. In a way, being a lesbian as somebody's heart is, so many hearts are so hard in so many spaces, you know, in cis-het spaces, you're already just kind of like a sore thumb. And yeah, it's rough. And then in a lot of queer spaces, it's still kind of not really understood or accepted or things like that. So I feel like being in lesbian community is very much being with people who see you and understand, like, quintessentially, like what you're trying to do kind of with all, with everything we've all been given. I think lesbian community is messy, and it's, you know, there's so much history, and it's so expansive to the point that it almost gets sort of turned in on itself and confusing. And I love that I think, you know, when you're dealing with people who come from such a wide variety of backgrounds, and identities and all this kind of thing, and they try to hold on to each other through all of it. I think that's great. And it really speaks to, again, kind of like that creation aspect of lesbianism and that I think there really is this drive. Like, I know, you said kind of meta earlier, but like this project, you know, we, we understand that we're here and that we've always been here and that we're going to continue to be here in a variety of different ways in the same ways. So just giving each other a space to kind of rest your head after all that I think.

Olivia Newsome 1:39:22

Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes to all of that. So you've touched upon this briefly multiple times in the interview. But if you could list some of the lesbian spaces or communities that you're involved in now, as like a fully formed, adult Ash is continuing to grow and evolve, obviously, but the lesbian spaces that you are in now it could just be like your friends or you and your partner and what it means to have that kind of lesbian space that y'all curated together and um that kind of thing.

Ash 1:40:04

Yeah, I think the space I occupy probably the most is just me and my partner. But it is very different in the past I have dated. I think everyone I dated at the time was identifying as bisexual and I love bisexual women, they're, you know, a backbone of community, they're great all that stuff no biphobic nonsense here. But I do think that being in a specifically lesbian relationship does kind of give a different vibe and it's I feel like we're both very much outsiders together, like it is very sort of a safe haven away from a lot of other things. Because, you know, neither of us could in any way ever be construed as straight or cists or any of those things. So it's a different sort of relationship in that I'm trying to find my words, I guess just. Both kind of having come to terms with the idea that you know, there's no universe in which this works out for a cishet gaze. Like there is no passing for me there is no ending up in a relationship with a man and having, you know, like that kind of life or anything like that there is no there's no future in which it's not lesbian, like the lesbian community in the lesbian experience and lesbian culture is so ingrained in this space that we are creating with each other that it couldn't be anything else.

Ash 1:42:17

And certainly, I mean, lesbian and bisexual relationships have their own culture that's beautiful and very interesting. But this is the first time I've experienced and explicitly dually lesbian one and it's a very, very different and interesting kind of understanding. I guess it feels very much like two Frankensteins finding each other almost. And then outside of my partnership, I guess. I am blessed to have queer friends. I love them. I don't know. Trying to think I don't think I actually have any friends right now that are identifying as lesbian, my social circle has significantly shrunk with COVID. But the lesbian friends I've have had in the past and the lesbian acquaintances I have it's it's really just funny because again, there's that culture that just kind of imbues itself in your relationship. And then a lot of the lesbian spaces they occupy are online. So I follow lots of again, leather dykes, lots of theorists, lots of lesbian thinkers, lots of butch for butch accounts and Butch boudoir and rent a bunch out in Portland, which is like my dream job. But yeah, I'm hoping to eventually whenever COVID gets out for more lesbian community in real life, like I know, I just saw there's a lesbian movie group in my area that I would love to get in on that sounds ideal. All that kind of stuff. I even just from online, the trajectory I've been seeing from the lesbian communities, I think, is a good one. I think we are getting more accepting. I think we are getting more expansive. I think we are getting more comfortable with holding nuanced and like different identities together. And that makes me excited to partake when I can.

Olivia Newsome 1:44:33

Oh, thank you so much. This is the end of your oral history.

Ash 1:44:42

Sweet!

Olivia Newsome 1:44:42

I'm going to stop recording. Is there anything you want to talk about before we end the recording?

Ash 1:44:49

Um -

Olivia Newsome 1:44:50

Do you feel when I mentioned something else? You don't have to?

Ash 1:44:55

I don't think so. I think that was all.

Olivia Newsome 1:44:57

Okay, well, I'm gonna stop the recording now.