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SPEAKERS

Olivia N

Olivia N 00:05

Good. I'll just feel like my friend still be with the dog

Olivia N 00:18

Today is January 29. Right? Yeah. 2023 I'm Olivia Newsom interviewing for bleah here in New York City in my apartment to ask permission to record this interview. Yes. Do you know you can stop recording at any time? Yes. Can you say your name, age and pronouns?

00:37

My name is Polina and bar I'm 23 years old. I used to they pronouns.

Olivia N 00:42

How would you describe yourself?

00:45

Well, that's a good question. I think I would describe myself as a organizer and a multi disciplinary artist and writer and Vanya, she lesbian, Muslim, Marxist, lesbian. All of these identities I hold really close to because I feel like for me myself, like being a Bangladeshi, Muslim, lesbian, all of those individual things are very loaded, and its own connotation and the way that I live, but and then individually, but they all coexist in a really intricate and beautiful way that I view as multifaceted. So yeah.

Olivia N 01:22

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

01:26

Yeah. So I'm from Brooklyn, New York City. I was born and raised here. And I've lived in this same neighborhood my entire life. Sorry, you what was other questions?

Olivia N 01:38

Um, just like where you're from where you grew up in kind of what your childhood

01:41

was like? Yeah. So I grew up in the sea. I was born raised, and I've lived in the same neighborhood my entire life. It's a Orthodox Jewish community. And yeah, it's just like, everything I've known is there. And my childhood was it was a bit interesting growing up, because so growing up I was born into I was born into a family, my parents, they're immigrants, and they're Muslim. And Mama, she and I grew up in poverty. You know, like my parents, they were undocumented for most of my life. And that definitely impacted our financial stability, especially because growing up, I didn't really see my dad much because he was always working like he would work these long night shifts, and I didn't know it'd be at school. And my mom, she was just like, always trying her best. And I remember one specific memory where it was my brother's birthday party, and I don't really remember when it was, maybe I was in first grade. Like, he, it was his birthday, and my mom didn't have money for soda. And we were like, the board that poor like, we just didn't have money for like one gallon of soda. So she went to like the corner store. It was like, hey, like to this like Uncle that we know that owns a convenience store. Like hey, like, is it okay, if we could just have one soda? It's my it's my son's birthday. And I'll pay you back tomorrow. I just don't have money. And he was like, No. Yeah. It was like, so like, I just remember that growing up and mom crying, like, like, she just wants to give her soda to her son's, you know, for her son's birthday. And I remember growing up like that, and it was like me, my, my brother and my mom, we would sleep in the same bed when me and my brother were really young, and my dad would sleep on the floor. And like, it sounds sad. But it was honestly really beautiful. Like, I remember like, my brother and I, they were just like, you know, have tickle fights or like growing up or like, you know, I mean, like, and obviously, being a mom and mom were like, Okay, go to sleep. Like my mom like making like little puppets out of like, extra fabric that she had. So even though it was hard, it was still really beautiful. Like make we made the most out of what we had. And I think that's also because like, I didn't know what was more, because everyone around me like all my friends at elementary school, they're also poor. So I thought this was all people have. No, like, I just didn't know. And then it wasn't until when I was I believe, maybe in fourth grade, when we moved into my mom's sister's household, and my mom's sister is mentally ill. So my mom became the caretaker of her and my like, aunts family is wealthy. So they had their own house. So you could see like, there was a drastic change from living in poverty to suddenly living in a duplex house with their own backyard, and a really established neighborhood. And things through definitely took a turn, like seeing a lot of manic episodes and things like that. And obviously like my mom, she was not well equipped, like she just wanted to be there for her sister. So it was a bit hectic. And I think that was when also during my formative years of being a teenager, when I started to kind of get hints of my lesbian identity and really push it down. And I think that's when I started to realize that it was bad quote unquote Old, because growing up, like, when I was like really young, my parents were not religious. But when we moved into my mom's sister's household, her husband, my uncle and my aunts and my cousins, they're all superduper religious. So suddenly, I was like, Mike, my parents, but in my nuclear family, there weren't, but they would have expectations for us, even though they were not my guardians. So I would be kind of confused, like confuzzled, like, between these two things. So So I was like, these new expectations, like, you know, and also this new awareness of what's bad and what's good. Like, for example, my mom should put mascara on me for fun. Like when I was 13. For the my cousin's will be like, your mom's the devil, why she like putting mascara on you? Or like, why she letting you talk to boys, you know? And that's when also when I

started to realize Yeah, like, like, certain things like, that wasn't caught on good or quote unquote, like, like, good, like being a Muslim girl and things like that.

Olivia N 05:58

So can you talk a little bit more about maybe what middle and high school were like, Yeah, you mentioned how you ended up moving in with your aunt, on your mom's side to take care of her in around fourth grade. And that is pre Middle School. So like, as you were living with your aunt, and your whole family was living with your on at the time? Yeah. Okay to take care. Okay. Yeah, this is still in Brooklyn. Yes. Okay. Can you talk about what middle school was like? Did you move like school districts?

06:42

Um, no. So I didn't move school districts. But I remember, middle school was pretty big for me, because, as I mentioned before, the elementary school that I went to, like, everyone around me was poor, like everyone around me, like, they all live like in small apartments and like, we're all poor. And so like, that's all I knew. But then at the middle school I went to, it's a intermediate. It's like a gifted and talented school. So you had to audition for it. So can you imagine if fifth graders like we're like, 12, and we're having to audition? Like, that's so crazy to me. Like, I look back at it now. And it's insane. And it's kind of like, like, like, if you tell someone like for example, if my mom like went to tell other people like yeah, like my, my daughter went to the school, like, you'll be like, wow, like, your child is smart. Like, you know what I mean? Like, so it was like a very, like prestigious school to get into. And it kind of gave you like, kind of like a what to call. It gave you like some sort of like social capital, yeah, social capital. And it definitely gave my mom social capital, like my child goes to that school. So I auditioned for that school. And I got in, and my life completely changed. And my surroundings because as I mentioned before, in elementary school, I was around like other poor brown kids. But then the school that I went to everyone there was white, and they're all extremely prestigious and like, live in giant mansions, like they're, like, super upper class, like the top percent, like, you know, these are people whose parents are politicians, and like, all of these, like established people. And I was just so confused. And I remember just feeling so lost, because I'll just like what's going on, like, people live like this, you know, and suddenly being around other skinny white girls also also, like I'm in middle school, like, we're starting to, like change our bodies, like, we're like, we're insecure. We're awkward and being around people who are white. And like Hollister, where halter clothing and all these things like it really fucked with me. So yeah, like, I just remember feeling so lost and my my self esteem to definitely took a hit. And I just, yeah, like, yeah, and it was also pretty hard because in sixth grade, I was sexually assaulted on the way to school, and that definitely took a huge toll on me. So in middle school, I just stopped caring about school, like I would get, like, like, not like warnings that I would be left behind, I would get left back that wouldn't graduate. Like I just stopped caring. When, because I went to a prestigious school like that, like where teachers like they were expected of you to be like, smart quote, unquote, and like academic ly. Like, what's it called? academically? Like minded? Yeah. Like, for example, the kids I went to, like that school. I don't want to mention the name, but that's cool. They wouldn't like they went off to go to Ivy League like they're like, you know, like, like a theater school. Yeah. So we're expected, you know, so since I wasn't doing good in school, and all the teachers would look at me like I was scum, and they wouldn't care for your well being they will just be like, look at you disgust, you know, so not only would I be bullied from other students because they thought I was like dumb or things

like that. The teachers also would give up on me too. And I look back at it now and I think of how like, I was obviously a child going through a mental health crisis, but because I wasn't doing well academically, they didn't care. So that just makes me really sad because like, it was kind of obvious, I was crying for help, but no one really, you know, cared or saw those signs, which I don't understand how they ignored. So yeah, it was pretty hard. And I think like, middle school was also a time when I started to realize I was really different from other girls in my grade. And all the way up to high school. So in high school, because I had a really hard time in middle school, like academically, just like, I also had no friends, I was really bullied. I was like, you know, I was one of the very few plus size brown girls there, you know, and on top of that, also failing, you know, like, being known as a stupid kid, like that just made it worse. So I decided to go to an all girls school that was near my house, it was only a block away from my house. And the school was there, their demographic were all black and brown. So I was like, this is perfect, like, I'm gonna fit right in, I'm gonna have a great time. And I did this on purpose. So I went and, and also, it was a really small school, like, my graduating class was like, 60 students. So I was like, this is perfect. Like, I won't get lost, like in those giant schools, like, you know, like, I'll just like keep on a download. Like, I'll make friends. Like I just imagined it would be like one happy sisterhood. Which is wrong, completely wrong. Like it was not the happy sisterhood I thought it would be. So I went into that school and I was like, crowned the star fresh. I'm going to do well, I'm gonna make so many friends. But obviously, I was wrong. Because the school the thing is with that school, it's an urbanist Sunday school. So it's super duper small. And it's because then it's all girls school. A lot of the students that went there is that their their families are Muslims and South Asian. So they would they intentionally send their children there because they don't trust them to go to a coed school. So like, a lot of these girls, they're like, angry, like, this was not their choice, you know, and they're also surveillance. So um, yeah, so you can imagine like all the girls, I went to my high school, we're all brown girls, Muslims, super duper poor, but on top of that surveillance by our own families, and in a way, even though I had a really shitty time, that high school, I will say, I really appreciated that because although like, I was really bullied and like, we all kind of hated each other. One thing that really made us stick together was just like this knowing and understanding that, like, our household or our families and our culture. But I will say I think even though like I went to a school with people that looked like me, which was different from my middle school, I still had a really, really hard time because that didn't really mean that I fit right in all because they looked like me, which I thought would be given, but no, it's not true. So I had a really hard time in my high school. I just, like, didn't fit in at all, like, I feel like, I don't know, the the music tastes like how I looked at the world, my politics, like all these things, like set me apart from the, my, my peers. And I realized, no, it's because I'm a lesbian. Like, that's why I realize now, you know, like, like, during that time, like, I think I was very righteous, and that I was like, I'm not like the other girls. But I realized that like, No, it's not like, Okay, that was very righteous with me. But I realize like, also, in a way, like, it's because like, I didn't connect with them, because I was a lesbian, you know. And I think that like, when I was a teenager, I felt really sad. Because I felt like I didn't have the quote, unquote, girl experience. And I feel like my feminine nudity was, in a way stripped from me, because I feel like it from middle school to high school, it was really hard for me to connect with other girls and my classes, because a lot of their livelihood was surrounded by the men or the boys that they were talking to, which is like a very real experience, like, that's their life, right? But I just couldn't connect with them. And I feel like because of that, like, I just didn't understand that, that in a way, it just made me like detach from them. And I just kind of connect with them. And also, being a lesbian, like, your, the way you view the world is obviously different. And it's like this own culture that you get, you're born into, in a way, like the

way the music that you taste the book that you listen to you the books you read. And so obviously, all these things like kind of set me apart from like my peers. So it wasn't really isolating experience. And I didn't even know I was going through that. So yeah, it was just a really hard time and I think like I was really bullied because I think I was really queer coded and I think a lot of people at my school like knew I was gay and there's something about me that they didn't like, and I realized this because I was and they saw before I did and I don't know like you would have thought like at an all girls school that there would be like, I don't know, like people like has this idea like, oh, you was all girls school you must have told me like those weird experiences. No, I was hate crime so many times.

15:08

So like, I could get into it. Yeah, or just No, it was just like, okay, so I think by the time I was a senior in high school, I definitely understood that was queer. I didn't know I didn't like feel comfortable, though labeled lesbian, by that I was queer, you know. And, like, I thought I was so attracted to men by understood to a degree that I was attracted to also woman, or, you know, like, other genders besides sis men. And honestly, I did not feel comfortable, like outing myself or being out. Because I felt really unsafe because of people that went to my high school. They were God, how would I explain it? Um, they're very, all right, Muslims, like, very, very conservative. And like, for example, like, like, they were just like, in the Muslim community, we had this thing called the Haram police, meaning like, you know, like, just like, if like the Haram please. Like, they're like righteous Muslims that like, will be like, Oh, you're gonna help produce for that. So if you slip up as a Muslim, like, they will just like, kind of like, hunt you down, tell you like, for example, like, my first day of high school, I was eating lunch. And like, I made a group of friends. And they came up to me in the cafeteria. And they're like, What are you eating? And I'm like, my lunch. Like, it's not Hello. So we're not going to talk to you. So like, I'm like, I'm just eating lunch. Like, though it was that type of environment. So yeah, like, I was just like, really bullied a lot. Because like, I was also very outspoken when I was in high school, like, I was very, I was getting to social justice, like I was getting into politics. So naturally, like, like, you know, I was like, just like, angry teenager, like, you know. So, um, people just didn't like that, you know, and I remember I, like specifically have this memory, where are my best friend's Newspaper Club, I interviewed one of my close friends at the time, who was Muslim and a lesbian. So I wanted to interview her, and for the Newspaper Club, because I thought was really interesting. And more people, just like one should learn about these identities. And so I interviewed her and it published on a school newspaper, and my principal called me the next morning, and she says, I advised that you do not come to school for the next two days. And I was like, What do you mean? What happened? What's going on? Am I suspended? And she's like, No, like, this is for your safety. And I'm scared, I cannot, like protect you. Because a lot of people are me of getting really mad at this, this article that you posted, and I'm getting calls from parents, and they want you expelled. And then I got so many threats from Snapchat saying like, Oh, they're gonna jump me. Like, how dare you writing about this is so disgusting. Like, like, you're going to hell? Like it does not okay. Why would you put a new school newspaper now people are gonna think that's okay. And all of these things. So yeah, I had to be absent for the next two days. And I was so terrified. Like, apparently people were really angry, like, disrupting classes, like a approach, right? Warrior, you know, which is kind of like I think about, like, that's so powerful. You know, like, I get it, right. Like, that's a cool,

Olivia N 18:09

kind of slave. Yeah.

18:11

But it was really scary. So, um, yeah. And, you know, it's funny, because after that happened, like, you know, people forgot about it, a new drama erupted, as you know, being teenagers in high school. But like down the line, a few years later, I got a text message, a DM on Instagram from a student, that who I didn't have, I don't talk to anyone from my high school anymore. Like, after I graduated, I was like, bye, like, fuck, y'all. But I got a DM on Instagram a few years later. And it was a classmate. And she was like, one of the friends of the people who like really hated me. And basically the essentially the group that was like, wanting me expelled, like, wanted to kill me, essentially. And I remember her, she was always really nice. It's like, she wouldn't say anything, but she would. She was friends with them. And she was like, hey, like, I don't know if you remember me. But I just wanted to say like, you know, like, I will always remember you. Because the article you wrote, like, was, like, really impacted my life because it made me realize that I was gay, or I am gay. And I feel like that just like, like, I don't know, I she was just like, saying, like, you know, I really think you and I, I was always really in awe of you. And I just wished that I was brave enough to be friends with you. But I think I was just really scared. And I was so shocked. And I was like, wow, like, that's insane. And I also understood, like, why she was friends with those people. It's for our own protection for safety. And it just makes me really sad, you know, and I feel like it also made me feel happy that like, I feel like I had to kind of risk my safety in order for other people to feel like they could like IRL to like find themselves in a way. So I don't know. I can't say think about her and I hope she's doing well. And I think about all the other people maybe who did attack me on that day. We're also probably gay, you know? So yeah,

Olivia N 20:00

Can you talk a little bit about more about how sighs affected you growing up? You mentioned the switch from like your lower or elementary school to your middle school, where you were still consistently bullying going on and you're in like a white space with like skinny white Hollister girls. And you really struggled with body image. Size. Can you talk about what it was like being plus size growing up in general, not just in a school context, but it can be a school content? Yeah. have most of the tension?

20:34

Yeah. Oh, gosh. Oh, gosh. Okay, so, yeah, I feel like my body has always been, I wouldn't say an issue, but has always been a component in my life. There are all stages in my life, even current. But I remember that in middle school, it was a huge thing. Definitely. Because, like, not only was like when I have a very few brown girls in my school, but I was probably the only fat person in my school. So and also hairy, and just like all of these things, you know, and I was so awkward. And so like, I was like, I was out like a sore thumb, you know, so I was always like, kind of ridiculed, and I always felt ugly. You know, like, I felt like my ugliness was like my existence. And I feel like that definitely followed through my entire life in a way but existed differently in high school, because there are also other fat brown girls like me. So I felt like I felt comfortable, per se, like, I was aware of my body, but I felt like it was okay. But like, I think that in the back of my mind how, like, my, what my experience in middle school was definitely an introduction to how the world views me. And I remember like in middle school, I realized I had PCOS, polycystic ovarian syndrome. So basically, I have more testosterone. And I remember when I realized that, like, so for example, like I had my period, I would have my period for 30 days

consecutively. And I thought that was a normal thing for girls, but I didn't know until I passed out. And like, I would quickly go to the hospital. And that was until, like, my doctor's doctor at a hospital diagnosed with PCOS. So that means you have more testosterone levels than the average female, or the average person with the uterus. And I remember when I heard that physically as like a 13 year old, I was like, great. So I have even more of a reason that means that I'm not a feminine person. Like that, like, like, I just made me feel so distant from being quote unquote, woman or quote, unquote, femininity. I'm like, well, even biologically, like,

Olivia N 22:36

on gendered or did you feel masculine?

22:40

I just felt like, I didn't feel personally masculine. I just felt less than less than Yeah, I just felt like, wow, like, there's something wrong with me, like, I felt like I like when I few femininity, I would always perceive it in a very like, like, you know, like, a very delicate girl. Like, I was, like, petite and beautiful. And like, obviously, something something that's intertwined with whiteness, but like, when I found out that biologically, like, not only physically did I feel like I looked like hyper masculine, or like, you know what I mean, especially being brown, like people, hyper masculine, brown woman anyways, and sexually as well. But I felt like learning that biologically, like medically as well, like, I have more higher testosterone levels, like that is really fucked me up. Like I would just like, I'm so ugly, I'm unlovable, like, I will never be desired, like, like, just just like, I'm just like, wow, like, can it get worse from here? Like, that's just how I felt. Yeah, and I think being plus size, like it definitely also overlapped with my queerness as well. Because when I was 18, that was when I firmly confirmed, like, fully confirmed that I was queer. And I had started to yearn like a queer community. So I had started to go to Open queer events and things like that, and on the search to find myself and find other people like me, because I was fucking tired. Like, after I graduated high school, and like, there has to be people out there, that's just like me, you know, like, I just felt so tired of being isolated. But the thing was, like, time and time again, like, what these events like, I was always fashion. And I would always be really isolated. You know, like, I remember, there's one of my first ever queer events that I went to when I was 18. So I was young and vulnerable, you know? And I remember there was this prolific queer brown artist on Instagram that, yeah, you know, going, so there was this prolific queer brown artists that I like, really looked up to. I like, I don't know, like, I like their artwork, like really changed my life. Like, I just like, really worship them, you know, then, like, I found out they were hosting this event, and that they're going there. Like, I know, there were a hosting event there. Were gonna be there. When I found out they were gonna be there. I was like, Oh, my God is my time. Like, like, you know, I was like a fan girl and you know, you want to see them. Exactly. So I went there, and I remember I like mustered up the courage. Originally, I was with my best friend at the time. My best friend was like, what CES is this? And like, what, at that time, my best friend at the time there was this and straight. But so they're coming with me to encourage me, you know, on my journey. Yeah. Yeah. So like, Oh, look at the like, you should say hi to them. And they're encouraging me. And I was mustering up the courage and I went up to them, like, I put on my arm like, Hi, I just totally Yeah, I just wanted to say like, I'm a huge fan of you. And they looked at me, like, up and down. And they looked at me like I was a cockroach. And they like, extended their arm out and they barely, like, touched me like my hand like they look like they're like dangling it like I was like disgusting. Yeah. And like high like, they're like, literally like, they were like, I

was like I was literally spiritually, physically everything beneath them. And I was like, Well, I just wanted to say it. I really love your artwork, or webpage, my live LA. And I got nervous because they're just staring I'm in the group of friends behind them were obviously older than me, and has more social capital. They're all like staring down at me. Like why, like, why is she talking? Like, why is she talking to us? And I was like, Okay, bye. And I remember being crushed. And I was so sad. And that was my, and things like that what happened time and time again at these career events. And I was like, I don't know, like, I just realized that like, there was just like, it just made me sad, because I feel like I was being rejected all over again. And I thought I would be finally be accepted. But I found myself being isolated once again. And it just really made me sad and crushed me. And I think that's when I started organizing. So yeah.

Olivia N 26:28

Can you talk a little bit more about gender and how gender norms impacted your life? You mentioned a little bit talking about gender and femininity, and kind of like maybe some of the gender roles that were forced on you. When you were raised. In your aunt's household. Yeah, so if you talk about how gender like gender norms gender, your thoughts about it when you were growing up? Yeah, so

26:57

I feel like growing up like in with my new co founder with my parents, they were never really like, like, super like, like, Oh, your girl like they're not like they were like misogynist honestly. Like they were like very easygoing, growing up. But again, like things change when I went to my when I moved to my aunt's house, so that's why I like I was like, always really confused because ladies are not my guardians. So like, I was just like, confusing, but there were always imposed onto me. So yeah, like, I think that around, surrounding being Muslim woman, like piety, and more, like modesty is a huge, like, component to being a woman, especially being a binding woman or like someone that's nurturing and caring. So yeah, like, I feel like that's kind of evolved around like, especially being a Muslim woman. So having those expectations of being quiet, submissive, abiding, like conservative, like, quote, unquote, sweet, you know, and all of these things were definitely imposed on me. And I feel like, I always had this pressure to be good, like to be like a good daughter to be a good sister to be a good person, a good child, or a good woman, not even a good person, just like a good woman, you know, and I always felt this like, kind of dislike suffocation when it came to that, and I feel like anytime I wanted to express myself remotely, whether it was like a boyband that I liked, or like a movie, or like makeup or experiment with myself, like that was just like, How dare you like, that's like, you shouldn't do that as the most good Muslim woman, like good Muslim woman don't do that. So that was really hard for me. And I think that like expressing desire or pleasure, which not doesn't always mean sexually, but I think anything when it comes to desire, like wanting something or agreed, like was something that like I wasn't able to explore. So like wanting things like for example, like wearing clothes that's like was colorful, or all of these things like things that like I feel like teenage girls or, or petting your teenage girl hood is just like, I wasn't allowed to do that. So I feel like a lot of my like life, pretending gender was just suffocation so that in addition to how I felt hyper masculine by my like, body image and also being a brown woman, like in school and all these contexts, like and then also addition to like this, like, more like this, like Muslim moral news, like it was also damaging. And I just started to feel so detached from my body, thus being detached from my gender.

Olivia N 29:41

So can you talk about what you consider to be some of the most important events in your life?

29:51

Yeah, I think one of the most important moments of my life definitely was the moment I fell in love with a girl. I I'm like, I think that's definitely one of the biggest moments ever. And so I remember I. So I remember I had this interview for this and this like fellowship when I was a teenager. And there was a group interview. And I remember I saw this girl and her job, and she was just so beautiful. And like, she was just so sweet. And I remember staring at her, but like, I was just like, why am I so interested in her? Like, if I go to school with a bunch of hijab, he's like, like, is it because like, She's a fellow Muslim that I felt connected to, like, girls like, this is different, like, this is gay. And I remember like, I heard her name. And I went home, and I immediately searched up on Tumblr. And I found her like, I was like, so stalkerish. And I told my friends and like, it sounds like you have a crush. And I remember writing poetry about her, like, I will just I fell in love. This is the one I just saw, like their face, and I just knew their name. And I was like, I'm in love. And so I think that was a such an important event in my life, because I never really felt that type of attraction for people. Like, I never really had crushes throughout my life. So that was like, a huge moment in my life where I was, like, falling for someone. I'm like, oh my god, like, that means I have, like, I always felt like there was something wrong with me because I would always hear my friends like having crushes on people. But I never experienced that, you know, so I was like, Whoa, like, I guess I'm capable of it. Like what? So that was a huge moment. For me another huge moment in my life. I think this is the most important event in my life where I went too far Rockaway Beach with two Bonucci queer elders. So one of them are is trans and she's an amazing, powerful trans woman, and the other is a queer non binary elder, and they both are from Bangladesh. Like they both emigrated here. They're both refugees as well. And it was the death anniversary, the seventh death anniversary. Zoo has Milan and Tannoy maboob, who were both killed and assassinated by Muslim jihadist like radicals for being gay. And they're, yeah, they're hacked to death. And my friend witnessed their death. Like they witnessed them being hacked to death. Which is really sad because those two people who I mentioned Zuhause and Binoy. They were pioneers in the gay Bangladeshi community, like they were activists and people didn't like that. So they silenced them, you know, they killed them. And so we went to Far Rockaway Beach, and this was also during Ramadan. So we went to faraway beach, and we just like stood in the ocean. And we made a little tribute to them, like out of rose petals, we collected or, like, we collected like flowers. And we just like, sent a few dollars. And we said a few prayers. And we just stared into the ocean and commemorated them. And it was so special, because I just felt so touched and honored to be included in it. But also like, I don't know, like, I just felt so like, beautiful and also made me so sad. But it was just like such divine timing. I was on Ramadan. And I just remember this, like commemorating them. And because of them, like I'm here, you know, especially as a lesbian and things like that. So it was like all of these mixed feelings, like thinking my ancestors. And then later that night, actually, I went back home and I went to like, if the community if there was my mom, so I kind of felt funny that like earlier that day, like I was like, commemorating my my gate and chance ancestors to then at night going to like an open community if there was my mom. So it felt like such a day. And I remember seeing my mom and I hugged her and I always hug her. Like it's my last time ever gonna hug her. So it was like a very emotional day for me, and I'll never forget it. What year was this? This was actually 2022. So it was late last year, it wasn't April

Olivia N 33:45

2022. So what would you say? A core what influenced you the most growing up? Was it your parents? Or maybe social media? Or?

33:58

Yeah, I think definitely films growing up because like, throughout my life, I did not have friends. Honestly speaking, I did not have friends. I spent a lot of my life like in my room just like being a girl in my room watching movies. So I feel like I use films as an escape, to vicariously live through other people because I feel like I wasn't living. And I think it was a way for me not only to escape, but like, I don't know, I think oh, like storytelling, you know, movies and films. They're a form of storytelling. And I think it was healing for me, you know? So I think film is definitely impacted my life growing up and I would watch all sorts of film like, I really loved coming of age feels like I would just watch anything honestly speaking. Like, I remember when I was a teenager at a huge Taiwanese, like film, like film. Like I don't know, like, I would just watch a bunch of gay Taiwanese films and I remember I watched this movie called murmur of youth, which is like from the late 90s. And it's about this girl who hooks up with their her coworker when they were both working in a movie theater. And it was just such a beautiful film and Arno and I loved watching queer South Asian cinema and just like watching, like all these gems that people don't really know. I don't know. So that's definitely something that really impacted my life.

Olivia N 35:27

So, do you remember what your first ever exposure to lesbianism was?

35:34

Yeah. Oh my gosh. So my earliest, earliest definitely was when I was in middle school. So there was a gym teacher who was really he was Butch. And you know, she had like, always the bush. I know. So she like, okay, she's so she kind of resembles guy for your gel hairs. univers. Really? Blonde? Yeah. And yeah, like, she was just like, existing, you know, and like, you know, like, Iris, I really respect her. And I feel like during that time, like, people would always make fun of her. You know, like, we're all like, you know, middle schoolers are assholes. Okay, like, she was just like, the running joke, you know, but she was just existing, like doing her job. And I remember we were in the locker room, and the girls were like, Oh, my God, she's in the locker room, like, make sure you're covering herself because she's a lesbian. Like, she's so gross. Like, That's so creepy. And I remember like, oh, like, I was just like, quiet and listening on. I'm like, so this is how people perceive lesbians. And I, like, you know, like, I felt like, like, I'm not proud of this moment. But you know, but I was like, a 30 year old and I was like, trying to survive. And I was like, oh, yeah, that's so gross. But deep down, I was just like, oh, is it really like, I didn't know it was bros. And I remember she was it. She came in and like, I felt really bad. But she was in the back of the, the locker room. And obviously, she could hear this. And I remember she would just read. And it's awful. You know, you hear like all these students, these young girls are saying horrible things about you and treating you like you're a monster. Like they're bigger pressure, which happens a lot of lesbians, you know, like, like how we're made out to be as predators. Yeah. So I remember she was like, so red, and her eyes were extremely red. And I just felt awful. And I just like ran out. And I could see like, she probably saw me also joining in. Right. But that wasn't my earliest memory of lesbianism, but also realizing that people how they view lesbians, you know, um, so yeah.

Olivia N 37:30

So, when did you first start identifying as a lesbian? And how did you get there? How did you arrive to your lesbianism?

37:39

Yeah, gosh, so I think it was just kind of common for a lot of people. But it was in locked down when he came into my list. Yeah, no, no trapped in your room. Nothing. Just look at my walls. A lot of thinking, yeah, for you like a lot of things as demons comes out. You have to you're forced to confront them. So I was like, you know, oh, just like, you know, the other day locked down. And I was just like, really confronting some things about myself. And I was like, wow, like, why am I repulsed by men? I really was thinking that like, you know, because all my friends like, I think I was 21. So I was after my birthday. And you know, like, I I never really dated before in my life. Until recently, you might have my men my first relationship, but I never dated before I did go on a date or two, but I never really immersed myself in it. But I think it's because I was afraid because I knew that I didn't like men. And I feel like I would have like I would confront myself if I were to immerse myself in the dating life. And I was like, why my so repulsed by men like why am I so repulsive? My friends talk about men and boyfriends, you know, like it? Why is it that my friends like daydream about their prince charming, but I don't want that at all. And I was like, Wait, maybe I'm a lesbian. So I remember watching a bunch of lesbian films, like I was watching a pariah. I was watching saving face and I was like, I identify with and I think, oh, lesbian month came around. It was after my birthday. And I was like, Well, I'm a lesbian. And I remember like, my mom, like, we're both bored. And she dyed my hair red, white streaks red. And, and she didn't know obviously, she was a normal lesbian, but I felt like, I don't know, like, when she died, may read my streaks read like blazing fiery red. And I was watching PRI and all of these lesson films. And I was like, yes, like, I'm a lesbian, you know? So it was just such a turning point in my life. And it was really beautiful, honestly, speaking like, this, like being in my red streaks and like, I don't know, it was just like, it was a really profound, beautiful moment for me for sure. But that was when I realized like, I'm a lesbian.

Olivia N 39:52

So can you talk about if you struggled with that, like, Did it feel really scary for you to identify as a lesbian?

39:59

Yeah, I feel like throughout my life, I was always really scared. Like, I remember like, This is so embarrassing, but like, I remember having, I physically remember like, when my parents and I and my family members, we would all pray together. And like, you know, when you pray, like you have to, like, surrendered to God, you had to focus on God. And that couldn't be the only thing on your mind, right? But I remember like, whenever I would close my eyes and start to pray, like, I was just like, imagine girls kissing

40:33

boobs, and I'll be like, Oh my God, God, please. And I

Olivia N 40:36

wouldn't walk into church and be like, I'm going to light on fire. Yeah,

40:39

literally. And I was like, why is this happening? Like, I'm trying to, like pay any attention to doubled or, like, it's coming to me. You know, like, I was convinced I was like, I was convinced like, yeah, like, the devil was trying to swindle me.

Olivia N 40:52

I'm trying to pray to you. Like, I was convinced, you know, it was crazy.

40:56

And I would feel so disgusted with myself. And I would like think about that often throughout my life, you know, and I just feel so awful. And I was just like, yeah, like, like, this will change, like, you know, like, maybe. And I also did think for a huge part of my life, that it has nothing to do with my sexual assault. Like, you know, I was like, you know, like, maybe it's cuz I'm scared of man, like, maybe like, I'm just like, like, something's wrong with me. It's because like, the changelogs this man that's ultimately changed me. Like, I'm just white. Like, like, I'm just so traumatized. You know? So for a long time, I thought, my, like, attraction to woman was the result of my trauma. But I realized, like, no, like, I just was always attracted to women. And this has nothing to do with that. And it just took me a long time to make my peace with that. And I think the reason why I started to really be comfortable with the idea, or with comfortable, like, I'm in like, my lesbianism is because like, you know, like, being exposed to lesbian media and having more queer friends around me. I never really had lesbian friends. But I think having queer people around me who that were really accepting, loving, supportive, really made me feel safe. And I did feel still feel isolated during that time. But yeah, I think over time, just like being exposed to the media, and other people and understanding that this is okay. Made me feel a lot better. So yeah, it took time for sure.

Olivia N 42:26

So you mentioned earlier, about a friend that you had that was straight insists but implying that they aren't now maybe. So can you talk about what it was like realizing later on in life that all your childhood friends or some of them might have been clear? Yeah, we are now.

42:43

Yeah. So I mentioned the high school friend, they reached out to me later, but yeah, like I think about a lot of the people I don't know about the people in my middle school, elementary school, or middle school, per se. But I do think about the people in my high school. And I often think about how the people who are the most homophobic are most likely to be the ones that are gay, you know, and I think about all the time like how, like, like, like, there was this one person that was really close to, and there was always something fruity about them. Okay. But it was really fun. Like, it was really interesting to see like how much they were, like, determined to prove to everyone how conservative how Muslim, they are, like, proving their Muslim ness to others. And it was just, like, kind of desperate, you know, in a way and too much. Yeah. Yeah. And I think it kind of made me realize, like, much later in life until recently. Like, the thing is a lot of people from my middles sorry, my high school, like, they're all married

now. You know, like, it's crazy. Like, you know, like, like, they're all like, some of them have kids and stuff. Yeah. And I'm really young. Only 23 Yeah, so can you imagine? Yeah, I actually.

Olivia N 43:59

Just the southern.

44:01

So, um, yeah, but the thing is, like, when like, it's like, kind of fun. Like, I'm kind of like, like, I explained about the people from my high school, they're very intrigued by me, like, some of them, like, they're just like, fall on my life. Because like, I'm just like, openly dyke and I go to like, these parties, and they can't imagine that, you know, like, like, let alone having friends that are like, male maybe like, they're just like, what, you know, so I'm just out and about and stuff and they're, like, very intrigued because they're not allowed to have that. Like, even though they're like adults, their, their lives are still surveillance by the people in their communities, or like their parents or like their husbands. Right? So like, they see me and you're like, why, like, how are you doing this? And they're very much intrigued by it. So I remember like, there was this girl from my high school again, like this person, like, I'm like, who I said the girl was, like, oh, there's something under there. They like follow me on Instagram and they were like, looked at my stories and like, wow, like, your life is so intriguing and stuff. And I found out they were married. They got married but like they were flirt with me, you know? And I was like, Okay, I don't want to be entangled this mess, but it made me feel really sad for them, you know, and I feel like they saw me living my my best life. And I think they were they want that for themselves, you know? So it just makes me really sad how a lot of people like they're just surviving, you know, and like, they really had to conform to these compact standards, because like they wanted to, like, I don't know, like they they're just expected to, you know, so yeah.

Olivia N 45:29

So, can you talk about how maybe clothing, jewelry, makeup, piercings, tattoos, or body mods or other forms of gendered expression? have assisted with affirming your identities or your lesbianism?

45:43

Yeah, so definitely, when I was coming into my lesbianism back in 2020, the red streaks was a huge thing for me, like being able to like Dye my district read was just so such a life changing moment for me, because I just felt like, I was starting to look like the person I've always wanted to become. So that was, that was a really huge thing in my life. But getting tattoos definitely was such a huge turning point in my life. Because I always felt really detached from my body. And so when I started to get tattoos, I do a ritual where the the last day of every year I get a tattoo you that symbolizes the year that I had. Yeah, so the first had to I had was in 2021. So I got a spiral tattoo, because I wanted to dedicate myself of how much I've changed over the years. But yeah, like, I think like, every time I look back, like I my thighs, were right now, that's all my more of my tattoos that I'm like, wow. Like, I finally did a tattoo like that I always wanted to be, you know, like, I'm this person, you know. So, yeah, it's been so gender affirming for me, but, and also, in a way, like, for me, like being a lesbian has also kind of helped me with my gender. Because for me personally, like femininity is something that was always really warped with whiteness, and delicateness and petite newness. And I was I'm never I'm not any of those things. I don't subscribe to any of those things. But in a way, like being a lesbian for me, like an all having all

these tattoos makes me feel closer and my femininity where I just feel so empowered, and sexy and desirable, and erotic, but in a really beautiful sense. So yeah.

Olivia N 47:28

So have other forms. I know you talked about

47:34

oh, can you mentioned No, go ahead. Yeah. So I just remember about a tattoo. So something else that was a very gender affirming, like the body modifications that actually this past year, I got a tattoo that says gay and Bhangra.

Olivia N 47:51

Oh, that's so cool. So

47:55

I got the bongo translation, because vonleh The language is a gender neutral language. So the term shomo Kumi, that basically it means homosexual, because there's no specific language for lesbian. There's no specific word for lesbian, because that itself is a gender neutral term. So that goes to show how queerness is essentially in Bhangra is gender expansive. So either that was really poetic for me, personally. So even though I really love to customer femininity, I also think of my gender and lesbianism as expensive. So I thought that was so beautiful, you know, so I decided to get it tattooed on me. So yeah.

Olivia N 48:38

So, art, we've talked a little bit about movie, and film, and how that impacted you coming into your lesbianism and feeling more grounded and maybe more safe and affirmed in those ways. But can you talk about maybe other forms of art, you can talk about other forms of art that you've encountered like queer South Asian art? Yeah, we can talk about the fact that you're an artist. And we can talk about two things. You can talk about art that you've seen, and then the art making process? Yeah. And how that's influenced your, your identities or your lesbianism?

49:10

Yeah, so definitely, art was a huge indicator, and also like, sorry, let me rephrase. Art was such a huge component in my journey, coming to terms with not only my queerness, but my lesbianism. And I remember when I was 18, that was the year that I started to really confirm my queerness because that was also the year that I made, like, I met that girl and I had my first crush, like, it was a lot of 18 was a like a life changer in my life. And that's when I started to become intrigued with this part of myself. And I just wanted to learn more, because I really, I knew that deep down like, there was probably a world out there waiting for me a world of queerness like I knew I wasn't the only queer brown person to exist. So the thing about me is that when I'm intrigued like I'm a researcher at heart, so I went down to my computer, and I started to research and this whole Whole world kind of like, appeared before my very own eyes. And that's when art came to play because I always loved art growing up. So I started to learn so much about queer and gay, like gay, queer and trans South Asian artists. And one artist in particular was such a defining like comic coming across his work was such a defining moment in my life. And his

name is Bhupen. Cocker. So he's Indian, and a gay, an amazing painter, and artists. And his artwork was just so bold, and he was just, I don't know, like, it would have paintings of like, two men having sex or to mate and being intimate with each other. And I just thought was so like, bold, and it was just so on hesitation. And it was just so profound in a way and I felt like, it made me feel so struck by it, you know, like, there's no, like shame when it comes to his artwork. And it just really touched me deep down in that like, knowing that this man who is dead now, but like, who lived his life with the man that he loved, and created this artwork, like there's people that has come before me, you know, like there are ancestors that existed long before I even lived, who are gay and knowing that I'm not alone has was just such a healing moment for me. So yeah, and I think like learning about his love story to like, with his partner really not only crushed me in a way, like it's so heartbreaking but so beautiful. Because I feel like first A lot of times for, for lesbians or not only for queer people, but for lesbians in general. Like, we kind of conditioned ourselves to think that we'll never find anyone to love us, or we'll never be in love. And that like we'll just be alone for the rest of our life. Like we just are conditioned to think that. But then I heard about him and his love his lover. I don't know his name. But basically, his, his, his, his lover died. And they're both like, pretty old, like, I believe his lover was in his 70s or 80s. And so he died like really suddenly. And like, literally, like nine days later movement golf cart died. And I think it made me realize like, you're like it's able, you're able to die of a heartbreak, you know, it's possible. But can you imagine that's such a testimony to his love for him? Like, because he was so heartbroken and that he was going to live a life without his love, like he does his heart give up on him, you know? Yeah. And I think that really touched me in a way. And I was just like, wow, like, a love like this is possible. And maybe I'll have that one certain day. And I am in love, you know, like, I have this beautiful partner that I love so much. And it's so tender. And we're both Bengali, which is like a crazy thing. Yeah, they're also Bengali. And it's something so beautiful to like, tell each other that I love you and Bagua. And like it just so tender. And yeah, and like it just like really interesting because like, I'm also the first Bengali person their life period. Yeah, so it's like very healing for both of us. So yeah, it's just like, really beautiful.

Olivia N 53:07

So I'm going to ask you about sex? What were your first encounters with lesbian sex? both directly and indirectly? And what thoughts did you have about it before? And after?

53:23

Yeah. Oh, my gosh. So I'm 23 now, but I this is the first time I've ever been in a relationship because I never thought I would ever be in love. Like, I just, I went into life thinking like, Yeah, I'll never be in relationship. And I made my peace with that. And maybe it has something to do with my self esteem or whatnot. But I also do think it has a lot to do with my lesbian identity. Because I always thought like, yeah, like, I'm just me alone. Like, there's no way I can be with someone like, how am I going to do that, like my parents and stuff like, like, there's no way it can ever happen by my partner and, and actually kind of tell the story of how we met. Because it was actually really beautiful story how we met. So basically, I hosted with my best friend, a queer, sorry, an event for LGBTQ plus Muslims. And it was a queer eat event. And yeah, so specifically for queer Muslims. And we had an art bazaar and like an open mic, and it was just beautiful. And became to the show the event. And I never met them before. They just came as a participant. I met them and yeah, it was just really nice getting to know them and stuff like that. And we didn't really talk much because like, there were so many, like, hundreds of people showed up, which was amazing. Yeah, it was incredible. It was so beautiful. It was last Ramadan.

Yeah, so and I never thought would meet them again, I just thought was gonna be a passing phase. And then on Twitter. I went on Twitter and because I was looking for someone to go with me to Minsky's concert. And I want to do it Okay. Does anyone

Olivia N 54:59

know Okay. I organized on Twitter because I was confirmed.

55:08

That's exactly what happened is exactly what happened. So did I tweeted this morning? Is someone going to let's meet content want to tag along with be the DM be like, hey, and like I just heard that you're going to, like neighborhood go together. So he was just going to go there. And then we went to this cute Victorian bar afterwards because we're like, Torian Yeah,

Olivia N 55:32

it's just in the city. Yeah, it's

55:33

so cute. Lol. Yeah, I forgot to tell me later. Yeah, so notice, okay, never drink after Phoebe. That's a good drink. Okay, sorry. And then it was right after the concert. And we had such a great time. And we were just talking and talking until 4am in this bar, and they turned to me and they're like, hey, like, you know, like, I'm really attracted to you and we kissed and it was so magical and I don't have your first kisses. Um, yeah. I was kiss before but like I didn't like my first official kiss. It was so much goes right after Mrs. concert. It was also the one year anniversary when I was actually institutionalized to a mental

Olivia N 56:29

institution after a literally

56:34

a bar and a Victorian bar literally divine timing

56:45

very dreamy magical

56:56

buddy, and it's okay. And it's just like mentally ill. You know, but but it was really bad

Olivia N 57:09

laughing like laughing like real? Yeah. That's so funny. Yeah. Yep, yep. Not your anniversary being the anniversary

Olivia N 57:27

like when you guys first said I love you or something was like pick a different date when you guys first said I love you instead of like it sharing your institutionalization?

57:36

I don't mind. I like it. Because like, for me, like, for me, like, I think it'd be like, wow, like, that's so good. Like wonder your leader like, I'm kissing a cute girl. Like, you're like this. Like maybe it's okay. Like, I'm not Yeah, that's how I viewed it. Like, that's

Olivia N 57:50

a good way to view because I'm like no, I get that. That's real. I was like, I don't know about those vibes kind of curse.

57:58

I get it. But I think for you. Yeah, I feel I was when divine timing like wow, like exactly your leader. Like, like, I'm living life. Like I met this cute girl that now in love with like, you know what I mean? Like, that's so cute. Yeah, like I think about like, like, I'm a very I'm actually a spiritual person. And like, I think that Allah like did on purpose like with divine timing, you know, like, um, so yeah, like, that's how we met and that's how I love story began back to sex.

Olivia N 58:25

Talk about the mental health stuff didn't come up in your pre interview. Question.

58:41

Yes. Sex. Yeah. Sex. So um, yeah, I never really. I'm sorry. Okay.

Olivia N 58:54

It's like queer Eid. Twitter. Mitski Victorian bar institutional. Love.

59:04

I'm a very spiritual person.

Olivia N 59:09

I'm like, Arrow arrow might come back. Like a star like

59:20

I'll forget about that day.

Olivia N 59:22

Day. Okay, yeah.

59:27

Yes. Yes. Next, yeah. So, um, yeah. I've never really had sex throughout my life. Actually lie. That's a lie. I mean, okay. So in terms of lesbian sex, like I, I think during my life, like I always like we know what's compact. Like, I thought that was my only choice, right men. I never thought I could be with a woman or someone who was not a sis man. So in college, I was saying all my friends engaging in sex with men. And I felt like I had to do that. So I started to actually see a man. And when I was in college, and it was a really horrible experience, because, you know, this was this man, like, he was a very

popular frat guy, and he only wanted to be with me in secret. As especially, you know, me being plus size, definitely, obviously comes into play with this. So it was like a really hard experience, but it was also really eye opening for me because I was like, Oh, I do matte like penis. You know, anything that was my very. My, I feel like I had to kind of engage with that man sexually in order to understand what I don't like, you know, which is unfortunate for a lot of lesbians. You know, like, we have to kind of come into terms of lesbians, I'm fine, like, going under combat. And like, which is really sad to see, you know, like, I wish that my life I knew I had that option of being with women, but because like, I thought it wasn't an option, that it was not realistic for me that I had to force myself to be with a man that like, treated me like shit, you know? So yeah, and then after that, I realized I didn't like it. But I thought, I just assumed that there's something wrong with me, like, I just assumed, like, oh, like, I don't like it. But that's okay. Like, that's a normal experience. You know, like, I thought, like, okay, whatever, like, but like, I, I want to get attention from men. So it's okay. Until I like no, like, I deserve to like sex. I deserve to like pleasure, I deserve to feel good. So that's like, you know, I didn't really engage in sex at all. And I was also kind of scared to engage in sex with other folks, and especially with woman. And it wasn't until like, actually, like, last year, I know, after lockdown that I would, I started to go on dating apps. And I would try to go to hookups. But I just couldn't, it was just really hard for me. And I think it's because I had this internal shame. But yeah, and I started by didn't go on dates. And I didn't make out here and there. But I never really went into intercourse or sex in general, because I had just like, so much shame built up inside of me. But yeah, it wasn't until I was with my partner that I am with now. And the trust and safety that we have that I realized, like I actually have this deep erotic side of myself, that I didn't know because like, my shame was covering that up for me. But once I started to break down that shame, I this whole side of me full of desire, pleasure, erotic newness, the divine rockness came up to me and it was just really beautiful. And I just feel sad that a lot of my fears and shames stop me from seeing this, like, powerful side of myself. So yeah.

Olivia N 1:02:44

So have your views on marriage changed before? And after you identified as a lesbian?

1:02:51

Yeah, definitely. I think marriage itself kind of politically, it has kind of turned me off. Because, you know, I think about, okay, so when I think about marriage, I always assumed that like marriage, for me, has to be with a man. And when I started to come into my queerness, when I was 18, not Yeah, identify himself as lesbian. I was like, yeah, like, if I'm gonna get married, I had to get married to a man, like, who has a beard, and who was gay, and they were both gay, but we live secret life, you know. So I thought that was the only way because I would, when I thought about marriage, I would think about my parents, and how marriage intertwine with my parents and the community. I didn't think of marriage as an individual thing, but like, a societal thing, a cultural thing. So yeah, I just assumed like, I'm like, yeah, like when I grow up, like, I just have to live in secret for the rest of my life, you know, which is a real thing. And a lot of people do it in my community, which is really unfortunate. And but then when I started to understand my lesbianism, I'm like, no, like, I don't have to live like this. Like, I deserve to be happy and live a life that I want. And, and I think also my political side of myself, like I firmly do have, like, conflicting views on marriage, because I do understand in retrospect, that the day that same sex with six same sex marriage was legalized, was a really historic day. But at the same time, I cannot respect an institution of the government that like, when they granted same sex marriage, I'm like, but

the same government also killed 1000s of people during the AIDS epidemic, you know, and purposely it was a genocide and strategically, like, you can say, that, like, you want us to have rights and Gantos us rights and want us to, like, celebrate it, but then at the same breath, kill and murder black trans woman and arrest them, you know, so I just feel like for me, politically, it just doesn't make sense. And I do not celebrate that day, especially what the government does to us, you know, it just feels disgusting. And I just feel like I don't know like, it just feels. It doesn't feel good in my spirit. But I do thing in a way, spiritually marriage, like, if I like to be with a woman and develop a life with my partner, or something that sounds really beautiful. And I think that's something I never thought was possible. And I never thought would be allowed. But I actually came, I started to when I started to, like, immerse myself in the queer community. And I started to see people who will look like me like, I have a friend. Their name is actually I won't say their name, but they're a queer elder, they're Pakistani, and they're like, in their 40s. And they have this beautiful like, like, a marriage with their wife. Oh, yeah, exactly. Like it's possible. And once I started physically, like, seeing that it's possible, I was like, Wait, like, I can have that. Like, I don't have to be this, like, sad marriage with a man and pretend like to be like, just like, I'll just be just dutiful Muslim wife, like, I can have that too, and be happy. And they go back to Pakistan every year to visit their family members. And I'm like, well, like it's possible. You know, it's beautiful. And, um, yeah, so I feel like I view marriage as a spiritual thing. But when it comes to like, the law and stuff, I'm just like, I don't respect that. So yeah.

Olivia N 1:06:18

So this is going to be a difficult question. But I'm going to ask you a little bit about coming out. And does the phrase coming into your identity resonate more with you? And kind of talking about how you negotiate your lesbian identity in different spaces, like to yourself to other queer people to straight people and also to your family?

1:06:41

Yeah, a question hard question.

Olivia N 1:06:44

Or as little or as much as you feel comfortable with?

1:06:46

Yeah. So you know, when the term coming out comes to mind, I immediately think of the day I was outed, because I feel like before when I would think about coming out, I wonder like, yeah, like, you know, that's like a really beautiful thing, like people, they're becoming proud of themselves or stepping into themselves in their life, like, coming out to the world being authentic and whatnot. And I also do like the idea of coming, inviting people in, because like, I don't know, I just think that's really beautiful that you're inviting people into who you really are. But unfortunately, I feel like the term coming out has been warped in my mind that I immediately started to think of the day I was outed. So last year, I was outed, it was actually after Ramadan, the same Ramadan where I commemorate has that beautiful day of commemorating my queer and trans ancestors afar like a week for Rockaway Beach, the queer Eid bizarre that I hosted in like met my partner. So it was like a magical queer Ramadan for me. And the day after Ramadan, I was outed. So I felt like I had such a beautiful gay month like this beautiful lesbian Joy month to suddenly being like this, like whipped away and like, kind of thrown out on my face. And it

was my uncle who outed me he just came into my home one day and he just like violently outburst it to my mom, like your daughter's gay, like in this disgusting voice, you know, like, that's something that I'm disgusting. And I immediately feel I felt such shame and disgust in myself that like, the way he was saying it with his voice and made me feel like yeah, like I'm that I'm disgusting. And it was really traumatizing. It was horrible. And I was just so disturbed straw and disturbed. And also seeing my parents how they reacted like they reacted very thin. They actually reacted really violently, but not towards me, but to my uncle, who they just like, kicked him out. And they, they cut off contact with him. And they like my mom immediately after I was out it like literally a minute and seconds and my mom came up to me she's like, Oh, don't worry, baby, like, I don't believe in those disgusting lies. So to this day, my parents are in complete in denial. Like they think those are rumors. I think those are lies, which is funny, because there's so many signs that okay, you know, like, but they're in complete denial, like they refuse to believe in it. And I think in a way, like their denial protects me because like, from like, they could have been violent, you know, but they weren't. So in a way the denial protected me from it, but also it's suffocating, because it feels like the big elephant in the room. And it makes me feel sad that like they don't want to see that part of me because they feel like it's something so shameful, and disgusting. So I'm still like healing from it, obviously. And I think I'll still be healing for a minute from the rest of my life. Because it was really traumatizing. You know, and I think that sometimes I do feel this waves of grief and shame. That erupts you know, because I just I'll never forget his voice how he said it. And it just makes me really sad. But like, I mean, I then I remember like How when I was out after I was out it like my best friend, FISA, they just, you know, they picked me up. And I just stayed at their home for a few days. And it was just so healing, like, we're gonna go to the beach and I would just cry to the ocean. And I would just get wine drunk and dance and like I just, like, attempt doing every attempt I could to regain my autonomy back. But it was so healing, you know, and I felt like so grateful that I have such beautiful friends around me that makes me feel held. But it's hard.

Olivia N 1:10:34

So, can you talk about how your lesbian identity has been influenced by academics or theory in any way?

1:10:41

Yeah. Oh, can actually go back to our question. Sorry. Yeah, like about what you're saying, like how like, like negotiating my identity. I just wanted to say that quickly that like, yeah, I definitely feel myself negotiating my identity with my parents a lot in my community. Because the thing is, like, I'm an organizer, I know only organized within the queer community. Like for marigold seeds collective, which maybe I'll talk about in a bit. But also, like I organize a lot in the Bangladeshi community. Like I work alongside aunties in the community and involving in arts and culture centered workshops, and my mom, like, ever since I start organizing, like my mom has been inspired. And now she's an organizer too. And so sometimes I work alongside her with and like prop events and workshops. And sometimes we give each other advice and wisdom, it's really beautiful, you know, but in a way, I do have to give up my lesbian identity when I'm around my community members. Because I like when you're a community member, like you, there's a sense of respect. And like, I feel like if they were to know, I'm a lesbian, they wouldn't respect me anymore, and they wouldn't want to be around me anymore. So I find myself negotiating, because I want to protect my community members. So it's really weird how I have to

sacrifice my lesbianism because I want to show up for my community. So yeah, it's kind of tricky. But yeah.

Olivia N 1:12:12

Do you feel like you make most of these negotiations, mainly in your organizing spaces?

1:12:19

Um, I think I like the negotiations definitely come to the my day to day life. Because I do live at home with my parents. I don't feel like it comes up much in my organizing per se, mostly because I do organize within the queer community much more. But definitely my day to day life, like on that day, parents and stuff, you know, like, quoting myself, like being like the pious Brown Girl, brown daughter, Muslim daughter, and whatnot. But for my organizing, there's definitely been a huge shift recently. Because actually, this is a really funny, but there's untying the community. She's a very prolific community member, because she leads I cultural organization, like dance classes, all these things to put on theater plays for the bondage community. And actually, I've been working alongside her because she wants to bridge the LGBTQ plus community. And among that she community. And she knows about my queerness. And she knows about my organizing work, actually. So yeah, it's actually really interesting. The other question? Yeah. Yeah. So are you worried? It's been interesting, per se, because like, actually, I've been actively working alongside her. And like, actually, back in October, like I put up like, I organized and hosted a huge events. And I actually got backlash from the community. And I was really worried. And even my partner was like, Are you sure you want to do this because, like, you're risking yourself, literally, like you're putting yourself out there like we could before with like, we're organizing, like, I imagined as different side of myself. And we're a different world away. Like, I see that I have two sides and two worlds. One world is my community, my family, like Bengali community, and the other world is my queer community and my queer organizing. And that was the first time where I meshed both of them together and combine those two things. And it was crazy, but I wanted to do it. Like, I felt like there's a rare opportunity. And I kind of wanted to dip my toe in it, even though I knew all the risks. So she came up to me and she like, hey, like, you know, like, I feel like we should do this. I know that you are so knowledgeable and have experience. So like, and she like, the thing is, she never says anything about like queerness. She just she says it very subtly, you might know about this. Yeah. And I think she does that because like she knows, I think but I also think she's slightly uncomfortable by it too. But I also do think that maybe she thinks that I'm not comfortable with it either telling her you know, because she's also my mom's friend, which is really cool. I know. It's like so many layers. It's so complicated. it. So she came up to you and we made this event. And it was actually really interesting because immediately we got backlash. And literally, the local Bengali newspaper, they wrote about it and they trash trashed us. They were like, We're disgusting. Like the organization is disgusting. Like they're turning our kids gay. Abuse is huge thing. And people were like, ready to try it. And so we had this event, but funny enough, like we were really scared that like men and women like unvisited uncle's, were gonna come with like a pitchforks. Like, we're genuinely scared that with something violence was gonna happen. But what ended up happening was actually the queer community Shut up. So like, all Yeah, like the queer Bengali community show, like, from my organizing, like for miracles, it's collect, like the queer Muslim events that I've done. The queer bizarre idea for the South Asian in the Caribbean is like, those people showed up, my community showed up. So we had this beautiful event of like, queer, but by golly, folks on stage performing, and we had like queer Bengali elders performing to because

they exist, you know, and the, like, people like they're just scared to be out, you know? So and it was so magical, and I'll never forget that day. But like, that was the first time I felt like I had and my mom actually came to that event, she still thinks I'm straight. Can you imagine? I put up all this, this entire event like yeah, my daughter's straight, like, can you imagine like, yeah, like, she just thinks I'm a strong ally, you know, Ally, for now until I move out. Okay, because the thing is, like, like, I like, I think a lot of it is that like, I am okay with, with this denial, because I'm living with them, of course, and I saved I've really thought about this a lot like my safety. Yeah, exactly. Worth it. Yeah, I'm reliant on the right now, you know, so yeah, like, I think that right now, I'm okay with him being in denial and negotiating myself. Because I live with them. But I think that once I move out, then like, those just have to deal with them on their own. And I think that for a long time, my shame and my guilt, like, I always thought like, Oh, it's my responsibility, like, Oh, I'm disgusting to disappoint them. But I realized no, like, this is something they'll have to work on yourself. Like, this is their responsibility, whether or not they want to accept me or not, and that's on me. So for now, I'm gonna negotiate, but once I'm out of there, and I'm living my own life, that's a responsibility.

Olivia N 1:17:24

But also, I meant like, Are your parents okay? Like, is your mom just cool that your strong queer ally? Like she's cool with that? Yeah, like, Oh, it's great that my daughter is a gay ally.

1:17:34

Yeah, it's weird. But that's the thing with sis heads like they they are okay. Like, a lot of times like when you would like liberal says, cuz my mom was very modern on liberal. Okay. And that's the thing with modern liberals, hats, hats, like, they're okay with other people being gay, but they're okay with the people that's in their circle gay, you know, like, my mom's like a huge trans ally, you know what I mean? But that doesn't mean their child can be trans and gay, you know? So, it's complicated.

Olivia N 1:18:02

So how has your lesbianism been influenced by fear your academics in some way? I know you read? Yeah. Oh

1:18:09

my gosh, yeah. Oh my gosh, where do I even start? Um, I think that reading Audrey Lord to work has really defined my, my identity as a lesbian and her life like her work changed my life when I was 18. Like her poems, specifically litany for survival. It's so powerful or her book. Oh my god. I'm blanking with sisterhood. No,

Olivia N 1:18:39

I'm not Sami.

1:18:42

No. Oh my god. It's like a book of essays. Like, erotica, oh, God, I

Olivia N 1:18:48

know. I know what you're talking

1:18:49

about. Okay. But it's a her book of essays her ology. Yeah. The Anthology is called yeah, I forgot what it was okay. Yeah. But like, our articles, I'm not hard content assets, such as erotic power and all, just like all our Baiser work profoundly and deeply impacted my life and honestly saved my life. Just seeing a powerful black lesbian. Like, I think that like seeing herself calling herself a lesbian made me feel comfortable calling myself a lesbian. And because my entire life, every time I hear the word lesbian, it was always, like, sad with disgust right from that time in the locker room when I was in middle school, or even like lesbian jokes and things like that I always thought was a disgusting thing, right? And even when I identified myself as queer, I still was uncomfortable by the word lesbian. Oh, that's because like, there's so much boldness with misogyny and all of these things. But I think seeing people like Audrey Lorde, who I respect and love so much, and how she viewed the world. I'm like, No, being lesbian is so powerful. And for me personally like seeing how she views the world and how you resonate with that made me want to leave. I identify myself as a lesbian because I love the way I see the world. I love the way they move through the world too. So yeah.

Olivia N 1:20:13

So now we're getting to the part where we're talking about community, lesbian community and yourself. So how does class inform your interactions with lesbian community?

1:20:26

Yeah, so actually, like, I don't even know I can answer that. Because I've never really been exclusive to exclusively lesbian community. I've always been just an LGBT spaces.

Olivia N 1:20:36

Okay, we can talk about that. So we can rephrase the question to talk about maybe how you feel as like, like a class disadvantaged, like lesbian in like a queer space? Yeah, and queer community spaces or meet other queer people? What does that like?

1:20:54

Oh, gosh, yeah, I think that class has definitely been a huge role in how I interact with these spaces. Because I even think about my introduction to queer spaces, like when I was 18, and I met that artists, right, like how social capital plays a huge role and how fashion also plays a huge role in how people perceive you. And so obviously, the class in a way forms how you present to the world, right with fashion, and how we can tap into fashion and all these things. But you know, like, growing up, and even like, my early 20s, and like, when, like, when I was 18, and all these things, like I was poor shit, and I still am to certain degree, right? But it's a different level of poverty I'm experiencing now. But before, like, I was poor as shit, you know, like, now that's cool. thrifting by that I have a choice, you know. But the thing is, like, I would come to square spaces, and I would just be ignored, because I was not cool enough. And I didn't have a following on Instagram, and all these things like social capital, fashion, and all of these things, like I was not given a fuck like it was the people just didn't care about me and queer spaces, right. And so I just, like interacting with queer spaces, feeling rejected all over again. And I remember feeling heartbroken time and time again, because I was thinking, like, I've been rejected from set people my entire life. And now the people that I thought that was going to hold me the most

are yet again, turning me away. And that really fucked me up for a while. And I you know, over the years, like, since I started to change how I appear, and it's because like, now, like, I have a job now, and now I able to support myself. So now, like I was, I have the money to dip into, like, experiencing with my fashion. So in a way my class has helped me with how I portray myself. And now I see that people actually want to get to know me, like, you know, like, now that I have these botnet, like there's like visibly whatever, quote, unquote queerness like dyeing my hair red, like my streaks, or doing my island or certain way, dressing a certain way. Like people want to talk to me now. Whereas before when I was 18 was like super like a lot of acne and like, not really much makeup and wearing like clothes are like, perceived as like ugly and sis hat and whatnot, because I was poor. So but I don't know, like I just didn't like I wasn't able to, like participate in queer fashion, right? Because like I wasn't, I wasn't able to afford it, or experiment with queer fashion. But now people want to talk to me, and I'm able to make queer friends and I don't think about a lot. And also I know, especially in the queer South Asian community, like I do have, I was able to gain social capital because my writings on online or like as an organizer, so people are likely to talk to you more, versus when I was 18. Poor, and people didn't know me, and I didn't have any social capital. So I acknowledge how all these things like how helps me interact with the queer community. kind of bittersweet. Yeah, you know, it makes me sad, but it's also really interesting. So

Olivia N 1:23:55

So can you talk about race and forms your interactions with queer community or Yeah, community or lesbians? Yeah, you have an understanding of how race impacts your gender?

1:24:05

Yeah, so for me, being a brown lesbian, like, I make it an attention, I only interact with bipoc spaces, like I only interact with like, no sorry, Qt bipoc spaces, you know, like, I do not engage with white lesbians or white queer people at all. And I make that a huge intention, like, I refuse to, because I don't really care for weighing gay, like, I just know that there will always be this complex with them. And I do not want to engage with that. And, like, as a lesbian, it's about itself, like existing in this world, like and how people perceive me, people already wants to strip my humanity. And oftentimes, they want to strip me from my femininity and my gender as well. In this world that we live in, and I feel like being brown on top of that adds another layer of how people want to share my humanity. So Um, I just don't want to interact with other white people, and even other white lesbians and stuff because like, being brown and lesbian, like those two coexisting is just so important to me. And I want to be with other people that gets that and gets my essence.

Olivia N 1:25:19

So how to size and form your interactions? Community?

1:25:27

Yeah. Oh gosh, um, it kind of goes back to what I was saying that about social capital and like feeling rejected. Because I think that a lot of times there's a lot of desirability to politics in the queer community that people don't really like to talk about. Because people like to imagine or think that like people like to in the queer community wants to say show that like we're one does have a beautiful happy community and we all love and protect each other. When really there's a lot of politics within it. A lot of hierarchy, a

lot of complexes a lot of superiority complexes, and that always comes with a huge part of it is desirability politics. Like, for example, in the nightlife, right, like, which is a huge thing in the queer community. People clock you based on how you look right? Like how, like, cool you look how queer you look, quote, unquote. And a lot of times it is to smack sis gay man that, like, weaponized is that and surveillances femme ease especially as, especially from ease of color. And but that also kind of seeps into how lesbians interact with each other, especially white lesbians, like, that's why I don't want to counter white or sorry, like, interact with white lesbians, because they have a lot of white like, what's it called desirability politics too. So I just feel like I don't know. Like, I just feel like particularly white lesbians, like they, like they really hang on to their lesbianism so much that like in a righteous way that like it, like viciously projects onto lesbians of color, specifically black and brown lesbians. So it's just like, in terms of like, fashion and appearance, like, Oh, you're not lesbian enough, you're not gay enough. And I feel like because of being plus size, people immediately demonize you. So not only as lesbian Am I being dehumanized and also being a woman, but also being fat. So a lot of times a queer people, like they're not accepting, you know, like, they only accept queer people. They accept queer people based on their agenda. And oftentimes, that agenda is pap phobic, and anti black. And just like all types of fucked up things. So yeah.

Olivia N 1:27:36

So now we're going to talk about gender. So how do you how does your gender identity and form your interactions with other queer people, other lesbians and your own lesbianism? And can you talk about what gender expansiveness means to you?

1:27:52

Yeah, so for me personally, like, what's how I view my womanhood and my femininity, is not in a way that's like sis. I think that my lesbian at some like itself, okay, this is gonna be kind of tricky to explain, because I think lesbian itself, like kind of interacts with gender, you know, it's a beautiful experience, and how I move in, through the world and exist. And what I mean by that is that, like, you know, the way that womanhood is defined is kind of like, defined by men, and how they interact with men. But as a lesbian, I moved to a world seeing it as someone who is away from the male gaze. And how I view my womanhood is just like, I don't know, like, I think it's so gender expansive, because I feel like one day I'll feel like, I don't know, I yet like yes, I am a woman. But other days, I feel like I want to kind of like, go out of my way to present myself more masculine. Or I feel like I don't know, like, I'm either a man or woman or something in between. But like, at the same time, like I just want to exist, and I just want to exist to the world being like I foglia No wonder, no, no matter how I portray myself with gender, or how I feel, I just go in and out. Like, I just feel like I'm more an expansive of that, you know, like, I'm just existing. And when I say like things like womanhood or a woman, like I don't see it as a way that's like so constrained. And I'm in one layer of one dimension. I think it's so multi dimensional. And yeah. So how can I say something? Well, for starters, I don't know if I'm going to make things making sense because

Olivia N 1:29:44

it makes sense. You have to feel like you have to explain in a way that is supposed to make sense to a lot of people.

1:29:52

Okay, cool. I will say that something else about gender is that I think that how I view gender is ruled by my connection to being Muslim. So the thing is like, I feel like when people think about Islam and gender, they constantly think about how oppressed Muslim women are. And unfortunately, like my own my own, like Muslim family, you know, like that I'm not talking about my parents, but I'm talking about Muslim community. They also, you know, uphold oppressive gender standards. But the thing is, I think about the Quran and I think about how Islam is fundamentally. And I think about how we already practice the diminishment of binaries, because God itself, like, we don't view God as a man or a woman, we view God Allah as something that's like, divine, something that's genderless, because he is an all powerful being. And even when we say he, we don't mean it as a man way. So we already viewed things that has no binaries, like angels, we don't view angels and having any gender. So I think about that, and how beautiful and how spiritually beautiful and divine that is. And I kind of apply it to how humans are, you know, and how that's already practice in Islam. And I tie that into how I view gender, but also lesbianism itself, you know, and there's so many beautiful stories of how the Prophet and Islam protected trans woman and protected lesbians, and no one likes to talk about it. In fact, they kind of made their own agenda that's so oppressive and so vile, and so transphobic and homophobic. But in itself, the Quran has been such a like, like, it defines what queerness is to in a really beautiful sense. So yeah, that's how I view gender.

Olivia N 1:31:47

So how does your immigrant status your former immigrant status, or the immigrant status of your loved ones affect your ability to develop or engage with queer community?

1:31:58

Yeah, so, you know, I think about this all the time, because I was born in America, I was born in New York City, but my parents were born in Bangladesh. And I think about all the time if my parents didn't make the decision to move, what would my life be like? And you know, and I could take the American government and I know that the American government has, is so imperialist, and colonial, but in a way, I'm, I can't help I feel grateful that my parents made the decision to move here. Because I recognize I'm able to be out and lesbian and I can, I can fantasize about, you know, someday moving in with my lover and building a life together. But I think about the people back home and Mohnish, who are in fear of their lives with the growing surveillance and politische and fascist regime that's currently in Malina ish to government. And it makes me really sad because like, like, I know how violent the American government is, but in a way, it also gives me its freedom. And that makes me feel so heartbroken. Not only like how this, like disturbing that is, especially as a Muslim living in America, who you know, but also feel so heartbroken for the people in my homeland, that are also queer. And they're always struggling, you know? So, yeah.

Olivia N 1:33:25

What's it like making and meeting lesbians in your city now?

1:33:29

Oh, gosh, I feel like every time you know, it's been, it's always so nice. Like, it makes me feel like it like every time, you know, as you like, I can't help but giggle.

Olivia N 1:33:38

Like, we're here.

1:33:41

Because I feel like it's so hard to meet other lesbians. You know, like, it's so funny to say it because like, we live in New York City, like this is a mecca of gay people, you know, like people dream to move to New York City to live their gay life, but for some reason, it's so hard finding lesbians like I like I'm a queer organizer, and I find it so hard myself to meet lesbians like, that's crazy, right? It's crazy. Yeah. And I think it's because people are so fearful to be called themselves lesbians. And I remember like, when I every time I organized and I hosted events, I make it like, intentional to go on stage and be like, Hey, I'm a lesbian. Because I know there's people out there that are lesbians, but they don't. They're scared to call themselves that. And when you see other people being proud of who they are, naturally, that makes you authentically want to be yourself too. But yeah, like it's like really hard to rare. Like, I feel like I'm 23 and like, even though I've been like organizing within the queer community for years now since I was 18, I still haven't met many lesbians. So it makes me sad. And I think that goes to show how lesbians are treated in queer spaces and how lesbians are exceeding society that we don't want to call ourselves lesbians. So yeah.

Olivia N 1:34:53

So can you talk about that isolation and disconnection from maybe the broader queer community as a lesbian?

1:34:59

Oh, you Yeah, definitely. Like, I feel like whenever I talk about being a lesbian, like people are so uncomfortable, but funny enough, it's queer people that are really uncomfortable by it. And there's a lot of us biphobia and people don't like to talk about it because I feel like they denounced Oh, but by phobia is worse, and they kind of play like oppression Olympics, which is like really unfortunate. And I find that when I talk to my friends or queered by and I talk about, like my lesbian experiences, they get uncomfortable by it, because they have their own projections, and they have their own challenges of engaging in same sex, intimacy and relationships. And so when they see someone else as a lesbian, they're just like, uncomfortable by it. And that's, like, really sad, you know? So, yeah, like, I feel like, people just like, really uncomfortable by it. And like, there's also a lot of misogyny with lesbianism. Like, I think that a lot of gay men are very intimidated by lesbians. And yeah, and I do think this is misogyny, and whatnot. But yeah, it's just like people have a problem with lesbians when all we're doing is just like existing.

Olivia N 1:36:14

So it's gonna be a little bit of a pivot, because I like forgot to ask you, we're gonna go back to your mental health question. How has mental health impacted you? You're going to kind of do like a survey because I didn't ask you in the early life section, maybe growing up thinking about mental illness, mental health, all throughout, like your childhood and then early adulthood, and then maybe you can think a little bit about how it impacts your lesbianism and how you think of yourself and yourself in relation to other queers and other lesbians.

1:36:46

Yeah, so my journey with mental health has always been really rocky. And, um, so yeah, gosh, I don't even know how to answer or where to start. But um, yeah, like, throughout my life, just like being really bullied. And in high school and middle school, and being isolated and having this like, feeling that I'm innately that there's something wrong with me innately, like naturally, there's something wrong with me. But really, it's just that I'm gay. And that, like, it's not that there's something wrong with me, it's just that I'm gay. And that's why I was disconnected from the other people because I just was isolated, but I was made to feel like there's something genuinely wrong with me, like, my, my essence, my existence, and it has followed me throughout my entire life and my mental health, and that really fucked with you. So I always kind of know, had trouble with my self esteem. And I think that isolation, really, like took a toll on me, you know, like, I didn't have my community, and I didn't have a community to me to begin with. So yeah, like, you know, um, even though I was using films to escape, I spent a lot of my time alone, you know, and loneliness. And, and, yeah, like it, like, obviously, like, it's just like, really sad. And I think that really was just really miserable for me. And for a lot of my life, I was miserable and depressed, you know. And I would go in and out of therapy, and I would just give up on therapy because like, I just didn't want to talk about my depression. I didn't want to talk about these things. It because it made it too real. And it wasn't until a year after lockdown. So it was 2021. I, I just had a breakdown because I just couldn't take it anymore. I felt like all the trauma in my life. All this isolation, I dealt with it were just like, consuming me. And even though that time of my life, I did have a community I had so many wonderful friends. I had reached a beautiful point with my family. But I still felt so consumed by my own grief that I felt my entire life. And I felt crazy, because I was just like, oh, I finally had the life I wanted. Why do I? Why do I still feel like this? And it's because like, I couldn't really heal from the grief, you know, from the trauma of being isolated all those years. So in July of 2021, I officially had a breakdown and now was institutionalized for a week. It was insane. Like being in a mental hospital. And I remember in my experience in a mental hospital, like I was roommates with another Muslim woman. And immediately the first thing that was like my roommate at the mental hospital also this verse was telling us to pray to God.

Olivia N 1:39:30

Like I've never literally like Gotham's like, you're like, dang, like new rules. I

1:39:37

was like, I can't do this. So um, yeah. And I remember like my group, the only two Muslims in the wing, the mental health, the mental institution. And I felt like we had this camaraderie with each other or she felt like she had this camaraderie with me when really I'm just just out of it. We're in a mental But um, she was just like, I think she felt good being with another Muslim. And so she was like telling me like, you know, like, I'm, like, be wary, like this girl's a lesbian, like this person's gay. Like, we as Muslims as Muslims, we gotta stick together. And I was just like, Oh,

Olivia N 1:40:17

I just felt like couldn't have had a worse roommate honestly, literally.

1:40:20

And I was like, Oh, I was like, I thought it was, I can't wait to get help. But like, like I and it was just crazy. And also, like, the mental hospital was co Ed. And it was just so creepy. And it was just like, a horrible experience. And I found myself having to trick my, the my doctors that I was better. Like I Yeah, to leave. Like, I felt like I had to leave. Like I felt like I had to play game to leave essentially, even though I came there to get help, you know? So it was crazy. And yeah.

Olivia N 1:40:53

So you checked yourself in?

1:40:55

Yeah, it was voluntarily my parents. They took me there because it was like, I just had a really horrible manic episode and nothing felt real. And I just felt personalization. Yeah, I felt really detached and it was just really scary. And yeah. Are you in therapy now? Yeah, I've been in therapy. And my therapist is a lesbian. She's so great. I love her. My therapist and lesbian and she's just so wonderful. And, um, yeah, it's been really helping me. And, you know, I thought that thing was when I was outed, I think what I was most worried for was myself. Like, I felt like, oh my god, I'm gonna have another mental breakdown, like, something's gonna happen to me. I'm, like, like, I don't think I'm gonna make it. But like, I had such amazing people around me, that took care of me. And I felt like my since the year the past on since I had my breakdown, I felt myself getting stronger. And when I was outed, I was so taken aback by my strength, because I really thought like, Okay, I'm gonna lose it, but I didn't. I'm still here, you know? Yeah. And I really thought like, wow, like, like, honestly, like, if I was outed, like, a year before, or like, a couple years earlier, like, I would have given up like, like, I would have killed myself. Yeah, but because like, that's, I think, like, divine timing is so important. Like, even though like, like, I was outed, like, I think it happened when it happened. Like right after the right after Ramadan when I had such a queer Muslim experience, and being surrounded by all my friends and in my community, like, even though it was outed, it happened when I felt the most comfortable in my sexuality. So joke's on him.

Olivia N 1:42:43

So So where are you meeting other lesbians? I know that you're struggling to find them. Yeah. Especially lesbians of color. But when? And if you do find them, where are you meeting them? How are you finding them?

1:42:59

Yeah. So it was back in November, when I realized, Oh, my God, I need more lesbian people in my life anymore lesbian friends. And that's actually when I decided to visit the lesbian archives. And that's what I met you. I remember, I remember my partner went to Mexico on a trip and I was like, no, like, during this time, I really want to venture out and actually, like, intentionally meet other lesbians. So like, let me go to this. This like, archive, I'm sure other lesbians are there. So I went there. And it was so beautiful. It was such a transformative day in my life, like, being surrounded by lesbian history. And as someone who is like, I just love learning the stories of my ancestors. And I love history. So so much. So going there, and being surrounded by the artifacts and the stories of lesbians, my people, you know, like, was so transformative and healing for me, and also being able to interact with other lesbians, and meet people like you and fish D and all these other wonderful people. So yeah, like, it was just so

amazing. And yeah, like, I'm really hoping this year, I can actually go towards being bars more, and stuff with my partner. And yeah, I'm just excited. And yeah.

Olivia N 1:44:10

So what does identifying as a lesbian mean to you? Hmm, good question.

1:44:18

Yeah. I think being a lesbian for me. Not only means like existing, but also defying against all odds, you know, I think about my family, like my parents, excuse everyone, my mom, my uncle, my aunt and all the people before me or even in front of me, who has plans for me who thinks of Muslim Bengali woman a certain way, but I exist and I'm a lesbian, and I know, probably an ancestor out there of mine or it's also a lesbian. So for me, I don't know it just really just means existing. But I think my purpose in life is to just, I don't know, exists.

Olivia N 1:45:08

So can you talk more about your organizing experience? What do you organize? How do you organize? What does clear organizing mean to you? And yeah, that kind of that.

1:45:21

Yeah. So in 2019, I established a marigold seeds collective. So it was formerly known as the South Asian queer collective, and then it transformed to the south, south Asian, queer and trans collective. Because I realized, like, I was adopting queer or sorry, I was adopting turf behavior by not including the term trans. And I realized, like, oh my god, like, what the fuck like, especially as someone as Femi, and that's femme presenting. Like, I hold a lot of privilege and capital. And that's why people like this Auntie that I'm working with, for this queer project feel comfortable enough to come up to me and asked to be part of this project. Even though there are a bunch of actually open, trans Bengali woman who is more qualified to do the job but she felt comfortable coming to me, because I am sis presenting, and I am by some degrees this because I don't identify as trans. I know like i like most of the time, I do say a label myself as a woman, even though I view it as expensive. So anyways, yeah, so it was South Asian queer collective. And then it was South Korean trans collective. And, you know, being the journey as an organizing, realizing like, I have so much to learn. I decided to actually me and my team, we decided to change it to marigold seeds collective, because we wanted to the collective be more inclusive. So the collective is a grassroots collective for LGBTQ plus South Asians and India Caribbeans. And we decided the miracles is collected to be more inclusions inclusive of indo Caribbeans. So yeah, we're aggresses collective. So what we do is we host like our mental health support groups we host like bazaars, open legs. We just want to curate a community for South Asian and inappropriate queer and trans folks. And we firmly believe that revolutionary is a sorry, we firmly believe that friendship is revolutionary. And that's kind of our motto. And we stand by that because I firmly believe that queer friendship is the key to liberation. I mean, I think of people like Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson, and how it was their friendship that really set the course of queer liberation, you know, and how they came together. And how queer friendship is mostly bonded and formed by chosen family. So the thing is, like, as a queer person, we often are a lot of our experience, being queer is isolation and not knowing who else is out there. And oftentimes feeling we're the only queer person in the world. But what I wanted to do is to provide a space for other queer South Asian and Caribbean folks to not only

meet people who has their identities and reflects them, but to make friends you know. So, and I think back to when I was 18, and how when I came into these queer events, like how I felt rejected by desirability, politics, classism, and all of these things, and I wanted to make these spaces free of those complexes, that's inviting that warm, that's nurturing. And it's also sober spaces, because a lot of queerness it, like they're all like club scenes. Yeah. And I felt like that in itself is also a samba phobic, because a lot of the time brown queer folks like that lived at home with their parents or like practice Islam. Like they can't subscribe to that type of nightlife. But that's the only Squarespace is out there. So I wanted to be able to like show like, like a movie screening or like a queer eat event or things like that. So yeah, so since then, I've been organizing, and it's been really great. And we've garnered like, such a beautiful community. And I met most of my friends that I met all our people that came to my events. And they're like, my closest friends, and like my partner, my girlfriend. And yeah, it's been such a beautiful journey.

Olivia N 1:49:09

So can you talk a little bit about archiving your own life? Yeah, you have a beautiful archive, with lots of lots and lots of very awesome things. So can you talk about the importance of remembrance and your own life and why you choose to archive your own life so carefully?

1:49:26

Yeah. So I've been journaling since I was 12 years old. And I have have like, over 40 journals now. And I think honestly, speaking, I use journaling as a way to cope with life because I didn't really have people to talk to. So I use journaling to record my thoughts and to like, kind of talk to myself, you know, but in a way, I think even though I was lonely and is writing in my journal, I think it created my voice. And that's why I feel like I know myself so well, because I practiced toning, like, practice my voice every single day. Um, so yeah, I've been journaling consecutively. And I practice ritual every single day. And I put all my journals in his trunk, and it feels like a treasure chest, you know, of all my memories, and my whole life is in there since I was like, 12 And I'm like, 23 now. And I feel like I want to preserve my history because who I am my existence is revolutionary, you know, and I think we all are and preserving our life and giving testimony to that is just so beautiful. And I'm here for a reason. And even though I don't may not know what that reason may be, I am here you know, and and I feel like preserving this history of myself is a way that I love myself and practice self love, and give meaning to my life. So yeah.

Olivia N 1:50:49

What does lesbian Joy mean to you? When are you happiest as a lesbian?

1:50:53

Oh, I think for me, it was be enjoy is when I think less we enjoy Honestly, when I imagine those mean joy. It's when I'm journaling all by myself and my room. And I have this candle light that I like, I have this ritual and whenever I journal and this candle that I use my carry lighter. Like, you know, Carrie, she's like a picture of her like to my later yeah. Yeah, and I would use that match to like light my candle, and it's very like Victorian and I just journal away. And I kind of think of Emily Dickinson because I didn't Oh, I didn't think it talked about this before, like, who influenced my life? But Emily Dickinson is my favorite poet of all time besides Audrey Lorde. And, and it's because like, people don't really talk about her love affair with Seuss, or what Susan Gilbert, who was actually her brother's wife. Yeah. But they had this

like, beautiful love affair and it was so good. And it was so heartbreaking and all these things and it also made me want to fall in love and made me realize that I can also find love as a lesbian. But yeah, I just imagined myself as a maid Dickinson and I think of all my ancestors that came before me like Audrey Lord and Urvashi bathe and all of these wonderful people. And I think like being in my body being by myself next to this candle and my journal. That is when I experienced lesbian joy when I could just exist.

Olivia N 1:52:21

Is there anything else you want to talk about? Um

1:52:30

I think I talked to him my whole life. We did it