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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

Olivia N

Olivia N 00:01

Today is January 7 2020 3am, Olivia Newsome interviewing Yanni here at the archives to have permission to record this interview. Yes, you do. D now you can stop at any time. Yes. Can you say your name age and pronouns?

00:18

Jani young 25 They them or she them, but I'd prefer them.

Olivia N 00:23

How would you describe yourself?

00:29

How would I describe myself black? Black person? I guess just I mean, I guess maybe like identity descriptors is for them queer, lesbian, non binary, which is something I've been like fully coming to terms with recently. Caribbean, African American as well, because I'm both Yeah. And what else was

Olivia N 00:56

you notice? How would you describe yourself to people been talking about like their hobbies or

01:01

interests. So I'm someone that's really interested. I do a lot of different things. But I say that I'm also musicians, I sing and I write and I play the bass. And I just released my first EP this year. That's so cool. And also, like, I feel like a budding documentarian. I've always been interested in documentaries, but I'm not gonna I was a teenager I took. I was like, enrolled in workshops, and like how to make your own documentaries, but I never really like follow through with it. And now I'm also working on an oral history project were based in Harlem for like Black LGBTQ elders, and like, that I will be videotaping. So that's like a documentary. But like also dealing with like, impostor syndrome in that realm, too. It's like, something and then being like, who am I to even do something like this? I

Olivia N 01:52

feel that all the time, just like there's no one else. Yeah,

01:56

I Yeah. So like, that's something that I've been like battling with where I feel like, I'm not the right fit for this thing. But then, but then also, luckily, having like mentors and like elders in Harlem, who are like, very encouraging, and filled up, it's important. I also, I do want to share this one because like, my therapist brought it up to me, I thought it was really interesting when like, sounds like a new therapist is a black woman. And she was like, you seem like someone who like processes things in information with your five senses. And I really liked that she said that, because it just it felt like a really valid descriptor of myself and just how I am in the world. Like, I just feel things really deeply and it like, things get processed in different ways. And and we were just like talking about like, neuro divergence and like, just how people are on the road, how they process information, how they express themselves, like someone that and I say that to say like, I feel like also just a fairly deep thinker, which is can be a good thing but I also was really like troubling thing as well. Just being like so caught up in your head. We were like analyzing like every single beat like that. That's me. And she like said this back to me. She was like you analyze to analyze your thoughts. While you're thinking that like You're like your head. Yeah, you know, and it's like, you're like processing every little thing motion. So yes, it's really interesting. So yeah, deep thinker. And yeah, someone who feels the world and processes things with like all of my five senses. I liked that. She said that I thought that was a really interesting descriptor. Yeah. myriad of things. But

Olivia N 03:36

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

03:42

I'm from Harlem, born and raised. My mother is also from Harlem. Born and raised, she's from the East Harlem, but her parents are from Louisville, Georgia. By way of like, my grandfather's side, he has like rooted Alabama, my grandma's like South Carolina, and then my father's from Kingston, Jamaica. And he moved back when I was a child. So yeah, like half Jamaican half African American. And also Yeah, yeah. And also like, and also being from Harlem, I'm like a bit braggadocious about Harlem, because like, I really love my hood. So yeah. My childhood is really interesting. Not in a bad way. But like, my dad moved back to Jamaica, I think when I was like four or five years old. And then my mother got remarried. We're not We're not and suddenly remarried because she wasn't married to my dad, but she got married in 2002 to my stepfather. So like, that was just an interesting like trends. That's like the first major transition I could feel in my life where my mom my dad were not together when I was born, but he was like very much present in my life and then like having a parent who like, I have memories of when I was like a small child to them like me. See? And then once every few years because they don't live in this country like that I always really struggled with in my childhood because it made me feel like I was abandoned because I had a parent who was like present and then was not present but also like very much loved my stepfather that's like an interesting dynamic like went to private school a white private school for eight years of my life where Cathedral of St. John the Divine, yeah, you know, the school. I

Olivia N 05:29

taught like English to like, like city kids. And it was a transition program training them to go from middle to high school. And so a lot of some of the students got placed their stories stories

05:48

Yeah, Cathedral is like right across the park from my house. It's in Harlem just want to make a note of that but you know, realtors in that size like to call that Morningside Heights but it's it's hard to do that for like, you know, when people to move there, so Columbia Columbia is in Harlem, but they say Morningside Heights. Yeah, like, what

06:05

the fuck is that?

06:08

But, but yeah, so that was a really wild experience. And I feel like the last because I'm 25 like the last 10 years really from when I like graduated eighth grade, I've been like processing my experience there. And then it's also like, played a role in like, why I have like a strict no dating white people policy or and I why I have like a very strict I don't want white people in my intimate personal spaces. Like I've met white people sure that I thought were really cool and nice, but I have no desire to like, have intimate relations with white people. And I can directly link that to having gone to a predominantly white private school for eight years of my life, in my adolescence, where, like, your identity, like who you are, is being shaped and it's being shaped by like very affluent white kids where like, I'm going back home to a, you know, five floor walk up, you know, like these kids live in. I mean, I remember some of the houses these kids lived in, had fucking like marble lobbies, like marble floors and walled lobbies with like, you know, steel stained glass windows and shit. Like the realities were vastly different. And then also, being in an environment where like, doing a lot of like micro aggressions, I didn't realize until I was in my teens, just like a lot of shit, but I also feel like it kind of like fueled some like internal hatred loci. Because I also noticed, too, that like, white people genuinely love the things that we create. And I don't know, can't say it's genuine, but they liked the things that we produce, but then don't really like us. But they tolerate us, especially in spaces like that, where it's like, yeah, they'll be friend you inside, but you can see that there's like, a disconnect. But then when I went to high school, I fucking loved it. Because I went to like a public high school. I went to a performing arts school, but it was public. And yeah, it was around like lots of like black and brown kids rich performing arts high school talent limited, okay. So, yeah, that's more like the personal end and the other end. Growing up, I dealt in the arts a lot. I love performing I love performing I would say I was a very like eccentric child. Like, the way that I like to dress was like always really colorful and patterns and then also just felt different in the sense that not different but I think what also added to my eccentric pneus was that I had locks as a child, so like, you know, locks when I was a kid was not really popular amongst like black sheep. Like now it's kids. You know, not with like black kids and black children. So, but, but I'll tell you one thing, you'd be in a white space and you know, the white people love you with your locks. Oh, yeah.

Olivia N 08:44

It's actually because he had to make an ancestry. Yeah, they call you a Rasta

08:48

Oh, 1,000% and my reason I even had locks is because of my mom. And she was not Ross. And she's not Jamaican. She wanted to lock my hair. And I know,

08:58

like, some of you like, I had braids as a kid. And now but as a kid, I went to an all white private school.

Olivia N 09:06

All my life. And so they would always call me like, like a Rasta. And I was just like

09:15

their brain Yeah, guy. Be a very artistic I don't know. I don't really know what to say about my childhood was like, because I just feel like there's so much and I feel like we'd be here forever. But I mean,

Olivia N 09:32

are there certain parts of your childhood that you'd like to talk about? Maybe we could talk about your relationship with your mom. And what that was like growing up with your mom.

09:40

Well, I started with it. I love my mom. I love my mom's cancer stuff like that plays a role because that's that's like the the matriarchal symbol. My mom's intense. She, someone that I will say that I admire because, you know, he was talking about like breaking generational curses or bringing generational traumas because I know a lot about how she was raised and what she grew up experiencing, I can see that she there were certain things that she ended. As far as like how to raise children. One of those is like hitting children, or like children getting beatings, I've never gotten beat never been hit, because my mother was like, I grew up with that, and I don't want my children to so she's never hit me or my brothers. And another one was like living in a household where you can't express yourself. Now my mom was not always the best at receiving critique, or like letting or like expressing oneself. But she does, like, she will always say, and he has always said to me growing up, she's like, if I ever say something wrong, or if I do something that you don't like, she would always be like, just tell me, you know, and they were times like, Man, my mom can apologize for stuff. But on the other side of that, and even wanting her to, like, raise her children in a household where you could express yourself emotionally. I just feel like she lacked in the sense where she didn't necessarily like how to know how to hold space for people's emotions. So it was like a very pragmatic, like, if you if I express what I was going through, and growing up, I was like a really sensitive kid like I was. I'm someone who like, still, to this day, I'm a crier, like, like, I need softness in response to how I'm feeling emotionally. My mother is not a soft woman. Which in some in some aspects of life, I think, you don't need softness, but in in some aspects, I feel like you do. So in like a holding spatial emotional part that was really difficult for me, because that's not like my like, care language and making that up. But I guess it's like a love language, but like, I need like, you know, I need that. So it's like, she broke the cycle of, you know, being raised in a household where, like, you can't express yourself, you can't be emotional with your parents, to them wanting to have that environment for our children, which I think is amazing. But she just didn't really learn how to like, then hold space for that. So like, for me, that was difficult growing up. I definitely had moments where I felt unloved. And I know my mom loves me 1,000% But I think it was just how I interpreted how she would respond to me when I was being emotional. That made me like,

oh, no, like, if I'm being this way, I'll be emotional. Does that mean that I'm not loved? But I wouldn't crush my mom's love. For me. It's just like, it's how I made sense of how she handles emotions as a child. Yeah, our relationship is not bad. Like it's I still live at home. It's like definitely bumped heads a lot. Where it's like, I'm an adult. You know, okay, that would be nuts. Yeah, that would be absolutely not be bothered, like, I'm 25 I don't need a curfew. Yeah. Her whole name is like letting her know where I am. Yeah. Which sometimes I find that annoying too. But it's whatever. 20 Yeah. But whatever. It's kind of cute. Yeah. But, but yeah, so it's like, that's interesting. She's like still so being at home, being an adult. And so like, I guess, in my mother takes me like sticking up for myself for letting her know what I don't like something as being disrespectful. And I'm like, I'm actually not disrespect me. I'm just telling you that I will not be tolerating this. Yeah. You know, but my mother is also like a very fierce protector. She's a very fierce woman. Like, I genuinely believe that my mom and her family come from like, a long line of like warrior spirits because they there's a very like war like energy about my mother and my grandmother, my uncle's my aunts. Like, you know, they're very much warriors. They stand up for what's right. Like my mother is someone who is very community oriented. community minded. She knows how to stick up for people stand up for people and she knows that people are not being treated fairly. And yeah, just like fierce protector like yeah, she also highly intuitive. Psychic for sure, in her own way. So like, fortunate enough that I had like a mom who was like, not anti super supernatural or out there. Like I can openly talk to her about having visions or seeing spirits, like my mother is that is that person. So it's a really interesting combo. And when I say we're like energy, that's not even a negative thing, because I'm definitely like, yeah, I have the energy as well. But I think like having like a warrior mind, but then also being like, very intuitive and like it's like water energy to like, it's very much. My mom and I fight the people that she comes from, for sure.

Olivia N 14:39

You mentioned siblings, you have brothers. What was that? Like? Are you the eldest sibling?

14:44

No. So in stereotypical Jamaican man fashion My father has eight kids.

Olivia N 14:56

Yeah.

15:00

It's not even listen, when people make that face. I'm not offended. No. Family, no one family. That's what they say about Jamaican men and true. All those things. They Those men are the tarios. Like, it's

Olivia N 15:12

got like 15 half siblings.

15:14

I believe it my cousins, all half related.

15:17

I believe it. But the thing is, I don't like using the term half soup. No, because like, I have two brothers from my mom. My older brother was born in 83. I'm 97 and my younger brothers. Oh, four. Yeah, but like those are like my brothers.

Olivia N 15:29

Works in Jamaican families. Like yeah, even though half my family is related to me. Yeah, for Kurt, everyone's on.

15:35

Well, that's also true. That's just like a title thing you in the Caribbean where it's like, your mom can have a close friend. That's her closest and that's just your home. They

15:43

really have no clue how to get to me. I asked once recently, and then she was like, Why do you care? And I was like, You're so right.

15:50

Never gonna ask again. That's mad funny. But yeah, to most of my mom and then on my dad's seventh child. I also have a younger brother for my dad who was born and raised in Jamaica, but him and his mom moved to England. He's also born in Ofourse. Like both my younger brothers like a week apart, okay, yeah. Then I have two sisters from my dad. All have my dad's children to like his first five kids like all they were like adults when I was born. So my eldest sister was born. I think 73 She lives in Mount Vernon. I have a relationship with her. I relationship with both of my sisters and my younger brother. My other older brothers. I don't and I don't wish to have a relationship with him at all. So yeah, it's eight of us. Three of my brothers from my dad, two of them are twins. And then their older brother. They all three have the same mom. They were all born in the 70s Yeah, both my sisters were in the 70s. Like, we're literally all he has like kids in three different decades. Yep. No, four, because seven days he has one born in the 80s. One born in the 90s. And then one born there was that so for? Prolific? Yeah, yeah. But I only grew up like in the house with my two brothers and my mom and then my older brother was born in 83. Were 14 years apart. So like, he was entering adulthood as I was like entering being a toddler. You know, not a toddler and elementary school child. But, yeah.

Olivia N 17:20

Are you super close with your brothers that you grew up with? Yeah,

17:23

very close with them. My younger brother, he actually gonna be driving him back to DC tomorrow because he was enrolled in Howard. Okay, so he's like, looking forward. He's like, I want to go back. And I'm like, I bet because you like the independent like,

Olivia N 17:37

Howard. No, he's

17:39

not crazy about it. I don't know. Like mold. Well, I mean, the issues with their dorms Yes, but also like, I feel like the mishandling of money and like, you know, people pocketing all of his donations and shit that school is getting and yet y'all can't go live like after your your students, then situations, but he's why the school is like disorganized. But you know, a lot of the central colorist fat phobic classes, all the things. I was like, Oh, well, we already know what Howard is about. So I was like, I'm not surprised. Not surprised. But he just was looking forward to just not being home because he feels more independent. But yeah, very close with them. My older brother lives in the Bronx with his wife and my nephew, whom I adore.

Olivia N 18:27

Yeah. So you mentioned a little bit briefly about what it was like going to an all white private school. But can you talk more generally and specifically about how race affected you growing up like growing up black? And then maybe like moving through the different spaces like going to an all white private school and then I guess you never left Harlem but

18:51

then no going back? So what's the first part of the question again? Not dealing with race. Well, yeah,

Olivia N 18:56

what was it like?

19:00

Like growing up black big question. Yes. Massive. Well, I'll start by this I know I've always been black. Yeah. I've been just coming from like a very like Afro centric household, like my mom, my stepdad. And then also because even though I went to predominately white private school, I was still coming home to a black neighborhood and black household like all of my extracurricular activities, like after school would have go to camps all that were in Harlem, like in my neighborhood and it was other product question about your schooling,

Olivia N 19:37

you can talk more about the schooling.

19:39

I mean, the school part was more so just a lot of like comments that were made by students. I had like one recollection I think was like I was in the eighth grade we were in a math class and means other boys name is Thomas we like sitting in the same row. And these two boys were name was one's D and the other one was As will they were like making comments about how me and Thomas his hair looked like pubic hair. Yeah and they were describing it I guess they had seen some girls pubic hair so they were like oh like but they were saying it like as if they're trying to whisper but loud enough sorry that both of us could hear. So like nobody else in the room could hear but we could and basically there's like, oh, like don't don't Yanni and Thomas's hair look like such and such pubic hair. There was a time where all of the I mean, this is like it's like a very stereotypical thing but obviously happens you know, we're boys make like who's hotlist? Yeah, it's such a cliché, but it's so fucking true that everybody

20:38

dieting at my school with like, different categories. I was a two out of five.

20:43

Okay. Wow, I just remember this who's hot list. When we figured out when we you know, saw the list all the black girls were at the bottom. And two other black girls, right above us with a Latinx girls, one was Puerto Rican and the other one was Guatemalan. But she was adopted from she was adopted when it's like two white Jewish, like two white Jewish couple who were like really sweet, really great parents, but she just like was a terrible child. Mad disrespectful. But her parents are mad like very nice. Okay. And then above them all the white girls. We didn't have any Asian girls in my grade. But yeah, so it was like stuff like that there was a time where in our English class or English teacher, his name was Dr. Vitaliy. He is also the Latin teacher. There's a really interesting human being like very old man too. But he really like an English class. And I don't know what the actual topic was. But we were talking about like having gotten the subject but we were talking about the belief and like Christian God, and like heaven and hell. And I grew up in a Nichiren Buddhist household. So like, I sure I was baptized as a kid as a child and like, we went to church up until I was like four and then my mom converted to nutrient Buddhism and then that's how she met my stepfather because my stepfather has been practicing Nichiren Buddhism since 1980, I believe. So my unders like I didn't have this like concept of like, this God into the sky like heaven in hell kind of thing. Like so that's it was now my upbringing. And so in class you were talking about Yeah, we were just talking about heaven and hell belief in God and myself and only like a few other students so that we didn't believe in this like, concept of a Christian God, we didn't believe in heaven or hell, like it just didn't make sense to us. And one kid out of like frustration, basically said to us, like we were all going to be like, condemned to hell because of what because we didn't believe in that and like, you know, at the time they were like, this is extreme like, you can't say some of you can't tell someone that they're gonna be like condemned to hell Ghana that's why the teacher was like need to apologize so me and her and I actually spoke French this day and it was Elon another black lesbian who actually can connect you to let me do that because when somebody asks you on a spike, like who's gay you're like I don't really I got I got you I got you. i That's really terrible either black i I'm so

23:15

every single person has ever been like Tam and it's always during the all my inner circle are all multiple marginalized lesbians.

23:23

Alright, period. I got you. Remind me I will. Name is Ilan. Oh, and they're only sisters lesbian two.

23:39

We were talking about how it was gonna go to the group chat. There were lesbians of color group chat and I was like never.

23:44

Okay, I want that though. I want to do that. Okay, so I got you. So basically, Ilan and I, we're in the same grade. Their sister Ayana. She is three years older than us. But anyways, so me and Ilan were

two of the black people that were told we were gonna be going to hell. And it was like, I think one or two of us like white boys. So anyways, the kid that said his name is Jake, he apologized to the white kids that he offended, but then wouldn't apologize to me or Ian. So it was really interesting that I feel like as a child, I actually understood racism, even if I wasn't necessarily talking about it. I was experiencing it. And because I was experiencing, I was like, oh, no, this actually isn't okay. But I felt like I wasn't able to put words on it honestly, until I got to high school. And that's because when I got in high school, I like started reading like books by black revolutionaries, and was like, really into like the Black Panther Party. And like that was very much like the Black Power movement that was like very much like my, like, father's white people. So like, went into that realm. And that's when I was able to like put, like, I was able to like really name what it was that I was experiencing or like at the time I couldn't really name it except like, obviously you're doing this because I'm black. And it's not okay. Yeah. Um, so just like things like that, just noticing in the school also not really like being liked. Yeah. And as a child like, I knew I liked girls, but I wasn't like I but I felt like okay, so learn about this term last year what is it called? compulsory heterosexuality. You've never heard the person that coined that is problematic, but that what they came up with made a lot of fun sense. Yeah. I was able to, like do what I was experiencing as I got down. But um, yes, when I learned about that, and I think that myself as a child and like, okay, yeah, it was definitely giving, like, compulsory heterosexuality, where it was like, I was suppressing, like, natural feelings that I had. But then I was like, But if, if, you know, it's like, if our worth whatever as like, women presenting girl presenting people is tied to like, being liked by boys being liked by men. And I want to feel desirable or like worthy. I want to like men in order to have them like me back because I want what we're told is deemed valuable. As you know, women presenting girls something folks, femme people. So yeah, like, that was the thing too. We're like, I've had this like real crushes on these boys. And that will like not fucking interested. Yeah, no, at all ever. And that was really interesting compared to when we talked about having these like, attractions when you knew they were not going to be hated. Yeah. But also, it gives like, like, delusions of grandeur. Yeah, it's really like, beloved, delusional. But yeah, but like, also like knowing that like, I wasn't going to be liked and be in naming why? Because I was black. Yeah, we are not desirable. Like all the blond haired girls with either the green Hazel or blue eyes were always desired first, then you'd had your brunette girls. Are you

Olivia N 26:51

kidding about hair color preferences? Because all

26:55

if I when I can think on it, most of the blonde haired girls had very like, alabaster Thai white skin. Yeah. And I mean, like, maybe a little you know what I mean? Like they had like, what? I don't know what the fucking these European people are supposed to look like, type and then you'd have the other white girls who are also obviously why but they don't look how, ya know,

Olivia N 27:17

they're not as like Nordic or so. Yeah,

27:18

basically, you know, so, so seeing that, you know what I mean? It's just like, they were kidding. They're dead serious. And I didn't realize that

27:27

I went to all white school, but I just thought it was just like a thing they were saying. And then it wasn't until actually a couple months ago, where I asked a white person I was like, Are y'all for real? Because you can just dye your hair and so I was like, what's the issue? I'm just gonna

27:39

go in the sun. Yeah,

Olivia N 27:41

but no, they're like really serious about brunettes like blondes thing. Yeah, it's very old to me. Sorry if

27:47

I'm bringing out gummy bears.

27:50

i You want her out?

27:53

I used to hear you're out like

Olivia N 27:54

terrible bad plans are you disappear like a fanny pack full of rainbow goldfish. And like Scooby Doo is that Yeah, yeah,

28:07

I miss Scooby Doo snack. I haven't had those in so long get them I haven't I don't know. Like it's last night. Wow,

28:13

it was an Instacart mix up. I got someone else's groceries and I was like, I'm gonna

Olivia N 28:16

eat okay. I like the whole book. Anyways. So can you mentioned what you mean? Like growing up in an afro centric household a little bit more

28:30

stereotypical Kwanzaa as a kid Yeah. See, like a lot of like black art, like my mom was like, my mom loves to collect like African masks. And I know just being immersed in the different iterations of blackness and then like growing up in Harlem, where we had like the African American Day Parade. We also have like the African festival because the part of home that I live in has a lot of Central and West Africans, like they'll have like their own festivals and like we have the African market so just like

being around as different expressions of blackness and having parents who are like very proud to be black, like very proud you know, like having a mother who my mother's darker than mean but I feel like a dependent you know, she i She might be in sort of like medium dark brown but like her making like very aware of colorism and like having conversations of colorism since I was a child like that's not like a new like it's a conversation that doesn't make me uncomfortable because I had a mother who was very direct with me about my treatment as a lighter skinned person and basically letting me know that like you are not special because you are light skinned. deprogramming Yeah, but also my mother didn't you know tell me her experiences with colorism so like having a mother who was very open with me and but like this is what my experience was like as a darker skinned black woman and having friends who are of lighter complexion. Also facing colorism from like her brothers because she's one of seven her brother's got her grandma my grandmother's complexion and my grandma I feel like maybe like caramel like a dark caramel. My grandfather was dark brown made her and her sisters have my grandfather's complexion and like dealing with colorism by way of her brothers and her brother one of her brothers and he even does this now when he comes to visit we're like homemaker appointed be like I'm this color and my sisters are you know what I mean? Like that kind of thing. As a grown ass adults that's Yeah. So like seeing it, but then also like, have my mom she has experiences with me and just like, making me very aware of that. Um, and then Yeah, but he's having a mother who's just like very proud to be of African descent. Like not something to be like oh no, because it's a weird thing with like being in the diaspora like to be like you're especially in America with black Americans. I like you gotta niggas out here want to be like They're the original native Americans. Too much like young niggas don't want to be African so bad. It's very strange.

Olivia N 31:00

That was that was such a weird time to be alive on the internet

31:04

is still going on right now. Yeah, no, it's not even like it's gone. Right now. A barber.

Olivia N 31:10

I used to have my hair for a very long time until COVID When all the barbershops are closed, and then it grew out. I was like, okay, but I want to go to the barber and he was a Hotep. And he would have like, Hotep TV. I don't know what the channel.

31:25

But it was just like, we built the pyramids. And then we maybe we,

31:30

in West Africa, built those damn pyramids, the pyramids,

Olivia N 31:34

like we like we actually colonize like Europe.

31:38

Not knowing this one because I learned not to cut you off. No, I think it was a big introduction to African civilization. But like when we're talking about the different dynasties in Egypt, it got to a certain point where all those people were mix. They were because they were I didn't know they were also colonized by parts of Asia. They were mixed African, Asian and European. But we not no, no state What are you talking about? Like we're not we're not building them pyramids.

32:03

It's okay. It's okay. Like there's other things you can be proud of. And also Central

32:07

West Africa has a lot of rich history like that's worth learning about. We don't have to be you didn't assume we're not Egyptian.

Olivia N 32:17

Oh my god, other Hotep things, or whatever. My beautiful black queen. Grand risings with ever

32:27

someone wants to pop a valid point they were like warning and the word in warning harp two different etymologies. Yeah, not so let you think you don't want to say good morning because we're not in mourning, but assigning the same fucking word. This whole word to spell should and easy to recover and relax, Graham rising,

32:43

relaxed. I wear my hair natural, the whole tips come out of the woodwork and I'm like, Please, just find a store. I

32:52

have my locks before this. God just cut my locks off. 2021 That's most of my hand was I was a kid. It's like a different set of locks. But that's a whole nother thing too. It's a whole nother thing. It's a little too much.

33:06

It's a little bit too much.

33:07

Just say good morning.

33:08

Just say good morning. Don't say realizing.

33:11

You don't have to say what's the other gentleman is somebody's birthday or strong. Happy Earth straw.

Olivia N 33:18

When they talk about like, what is it? What are the what are the what are the female jobs talk about it's like, submitting to a man and like divine divine femininity. I was just, I'm like, their version of progeny.

33:32

They're gonna say their their definition of divine femininity is literally dislike enabling patriarchy, like enabling patriarchal values holding

33:41

their uterus. They're like I'm pregnant with like spiritual energy.

Olivia N 33:46

I'm like take an anti psychotic

33:51

leave me alone was too much. That's okay. Speaking of

Olivia N 33:55

that's not really spirituality. But you mentioned being spiritual and spirituality and growing up in a

34:01

nutrient nutrient nutrient,

Olivia N 34:03

thank you. And nutrient Buddhist household. What was that like?

34:07

Um, so, growing up in a Buddhist household, went to a lot of meetings growing up. We'd go to the culture center a lot. Cultural Centers downtown like West 50 or West 16th Street. It's not too far from Union Square. I used to hate go into the culture center as a child, like I did not want to go there. Now. I'm gonna get it rolling. It's like going to church going up early on a Sunday. I really want to do that as a kid. I'm sorry. No, I really didn't. I also didn't like that. The way that at the time, the trim Buddhism was described to me as a child, I guess in a way to help us children understand even Buddhism like they, they would describe it as if Nichiren Buddhism was like this magic wand that you can dislike, chant and wave over your life and your life will descend. improvement, everything would just be sweet kind of thing. And I didn't really like how they would describe that to us as a child. And I remember vividly saying that because, um, who would go to the culture center, they would always have like the youth division groups, they'd like separate the youth, the kids and then they would have like different, like, why WD which means like, young women's division, or why MD which is young men's division, like leaders would come in like thing, but for Buddhism, yes, pretty much like going to Sunday school. Yeah. And we would like talk about the practice. And we we like sit around, like with a teacher brigade of two groups, that kind of thing. And I remember vividly saying to one of the teachers, I was like, Buddhism is not some like magic wand, like, I can't just wave this over my life, and my life is gonna get better. Yeah, because like, that's just not realistic. And that's just not life, I have a different relationship with it now as an adult, where like, I do chant, but I chant to, I honestly chant to just walk in my purpose, whatever that

looks like. So it's not so much about like, and that's something that they talk a lot about now. And Buddhism is that like, it's really just to help you fulfill your destiny in life and fill your mission. But that your mission is not just a self serving individual thing, that your mission is also in relation to the other human beings on this planet. So that's my relationship with Nichiren Buddhism, but on a spiritual tip. I haven't been very consistent. I would say, like, in the last few years, like really trying to, like establish like an ancestral practice or relationship with my ancestors. And I've very much gotten my mother in that as well, like she's connected with what is it? What is it Lukumi Lukumi priestess in Brooklyn, that my mother receives guidance from and she's like, going to a Misa tomorrow. But I Yeah, I'm just wanting to like, establish like a connection with my ancestors, because I, for me, is like another way of deepening my connection to just being of African descent. And it's where we come from. I'm not initiated into anything. Now there's my mother, this, this is really just in this in this space of just really trying to establish the connection with our ancestors. And, you know, I don't know, I just I want to like be in a practice where I feel connected to where I'm from, but also like, guided in my path on this earth. And whatever my purpose is, whatever isn't meant to do, I'm just being like, guided by that. So yeah, that's it, but I, my one of my eldest sister's is also like, psychic, and like, speak to the dead. Like, she has a really deep connection with, you know, the world beyond the veil behind the veil.

37:39

And you're also psychic too,

37:41

in different ways. I feel like I get visions through my dreams. Okay. Yeah. i There have been multiple times where I've predicted people being pregnant, and I've been right every time.

Olivia N 37:51

Kind of a scary power to have very strange,

37:55

perhaps pregnant and even perhaps, like, if I randomly like, there have been times where I've just randomly thought about, even if it's people that I'm not even that close to just being pregnant, and I've been right. I've had dreams about people coming back into my life, my family's life and been right about that. So just, yeah, so it's just cool to like, at least just like, if something quote unquote, supernatural happens, I have like a mom or like a sister to kind of like sit with and talk to me just like normal. It's just a normal thing. But yeah, I'm in this space. Now I've just connected with my ancestors and where I'm from.

38:37

This is a little bit of a pivot.

Olivia N 38:38

But can you talk about class and how class influenced you growing up?

38:46

Had to bring it back to private school my like, first indication of classism. Again, before being able to put a name to classism was just noticing the difference in how the kids in my school grew up versus myself or like, I didn't have money for every expensive trip that the school offered, whereas the school itself was already expensive. And I was saying about this recently about like scholastic book fairs. I don't always have money every year to go the Scholastic Book Fair. And I remember one time, her daughter was my best friend at the time. Her name was Charlotte. I didn't have money for the Scholastic Book Fair. But I decided to go anyway. Because he would have the fare like in the in like the dining hall in our school, they would like you know, set up the whole thing. And I'm just like, looking around at books. I was also like an avid reader as a child, like I fucking love to read and still do. And I remember my friend Charlotte, her mom, like I guess peep that didn't have money for the book for it fair. And she bought me a book. And when I came home, and my mom saw the book, and she asked me where I got it from, I was like, oh, like, Charlotte's mom bought it from me, and I didn't think anything of it. And my mom scolded me. She said, Don't ever let anybody it's just like if I don't have money for you to get something don't ever let anybody buy anything for you. I didn't really think about like what that It meant until like, as I got older and I was like, oh shit like that, you know what I mean? Like I could see why my mom would feel offended in that way. Like have someone by their child something because they didn't have the money for it and I again I was a child like I was not thinking of it in that way. Listening to like the kids in my school talk about having like summer homes, a lot of their families had like summer homes like upstate or you know, things like that. I didn't have that. Or like, you know, when it was summertime, their parents could take off for a whole summer my parents were working class like summertime, I was at camp when it was springtime, like and we had spring break for two weeks I was at home by myself because I parents are working we can take off and go to the Bahamas or go somewhere nice. My school for like the Upper School had like a ski trip every year. And I got to go once, which was really great. And I'm like, grateful for that. For my mom being able to afford that. It actually was a lot of fun. I enjoyed we when I was a child, my mother, my godfather, and myself, we had gone skiing when I was like four. Okay, so I have no recollection of it, you know, but I have photos of it. But I went in my teens for the first time I consider it my first time like it was a lot of fun. And even now to this day, like I really want to try snowboarding. And when of my cousins on my mom's side he like go snowboarding every winter. But like but then on the other years like not having money for that. So just seeing again like this a lot of the things that I like racism classism, definitely. I feel like I had an understanding of because I was experiencing it. We just didn't have the words for it. Yeah. Which is why I think about like a lot of like working class people we we really could understand a lot of these like political theories and things are these scholars come up with? Because we're living it vanish. Like sometimes these books don't, right for folks who don't have a higher education to understand, but we're experiencing it. You may not be able to, like, come up with the, you know, had the right words to explain something that all of us but you're experiencing it, so you know what something is? Yeah, that's it. That was just my first indication of like, what classism was and just seeing like a huge disparity between different demographics of people and also noticing just how unfair it is to like, come from a household where your parents like living paycheck to paycheck. Not being able to pay content bill like I want, you know what I mean? Like there's different things, and then being around kids who like don't know what that's like. I don't know. I just think about like being a working class person even to this day. Just feeling overworked. Feeling underpaid. Yeah, feeling like you don't have money for everything that you need. Which is it sucks is also why I'm like a note like I want to move out and have my own place. But like, unless I'm gonna you

know, I'm alone. I am not in a rush because we will be out here paying 1200 for a fucking room. Yeah, I'm not doing that like

Olivia N 43:02

absolutely not refuse. That's like a good price

43:05

for and that's trash, because you're living in an apartment with other fucking people. Yeah. And you pay that like when people talk about subletting, like buying charted out by somebody to sublet your room. And like three other people your wallet, they got the other random people that you don't fucking know. And then I'm like, man who's collecting all this money. You're charging 1200 You're charging between 812 100 \$1,200 per person who's collecting that. You're talking about fuck landlords, but you're acting like a fucking landlord. And these apartments that y'all are subletting your wallet, you're collecting shoot,

Olivia N 43:39

they're living with their partner. So they're paying \$0 for housing and and they're subletting their old room, you're subletting

43:45

other rooms in your place to collect a head off of that person and the rest goes to the landlord,

Olivia N 43:50

and it's like a living room.

43:52

It's not even like a bedroom. I'm not doing it now.

Olivia N 43:56

It's not worth it. For me not doing it. I can live with my parents in the city. I would. I really would.

44:03

Can you talk a little bit about

Olivia N 44:07

how like mental illness and anxiety affected you growing up?

44:12

My first instance with anxiety I was like 1415 So I've been dealing with anxiety since a teen I had like really bad panic attacks all throughout my teens that were like very debilitating. Like that was really troubling because, again, I'm already someone who's like very much in my head. But being being in that being in that kind of like, mental space Yeah, I can think I was like it's just really debilitating. It honestly I mean, I know from like having panic attacks because I felt like I was going to die like that. She was really troubling. Yeah, I don't enjoy it because it having anxiety. And like I hadn't, I haven't had

a panic attack in a really long time. But I do do things IV from you know, now and then. But I don't like that type of feeling of like being out of my body or like not being in control of my body, and not being able to control like my body's response to something where I'm like, rational just doesn't make any sense. Like, I'm thinking about this. And I don't understand why I'm at feeling this way. But yet, I can't control my body's reaction to something. And then also just being a teen, it sucks to have it as like a teenager, because you're really like really figuring out who you are. And like your place in this world. And so it's it's a difficult space to be in or like, I don't know, it's like, it's hard to like, figure your yourself out, when you don't even physically know what's going on with you mentally and emotionally, like you still do not, you know, employee regulate that. Yeah. And then I also know that I'm going through things internally, and I'm experiencing things that are traumatic, but yet, I haven't I don't know how to deal with it. And then I also am tasked with the responsibility of like, figuring out who I'm going to be, because when I'm 18, and you got to figure out, are you gonna go to college? Or you're going to work? Like, what are you going to do? Is this this is too fucking much. Yeah. Like, this is a lot.

Olivia N 46:11

Did your like family have an understanding of mental illness or mental health?

46:16

I don't think that my that just inside. I mean, my mother and my stepfather knew I was doing things anxiety, my stepfather was very much like my comfort, because he can hold space for people on an emotional level or lot better. So like, I would go to him and I was going through something just to like talk and like, allow myself to cry, and he would kind of like, sit with me and let me cry. That's okay. But as far as like that being considered a mental illness, I don't think my mom would consider it that because like, very much old school, yeah. raised by parents from the south, like, yeah, they're my mom's response for a long time to that subject. Just talk it out, and you'll be fine. And I'm like, that's talking only house with for so much after a while. It's like, I'm like, I need help. Yeah. And meds. Yeah. And I didn't start seeing a therapist until like, last year. I just switched my therapist, the therapist, I have no, I just started seeing her December. But before that, over the summer, I had like a white therapist. So like, I didn't really vibe with because she just wasn't very receptive. Like she just wasn't engaging. Like she would just like, sit and let me talk. And I'm like, being vulnerable is not difficult for me. Yeah, I need you to help me figure out why I'm feeling like I need you to engage, ask questions, like, get to the root of things. I'm someone who likes to get I want to get to the root of something. Yeah, you know, and like, if you're not gonna help me do that, there's no reason for me to sit and talk with you. But that was into my 20s. So like, for a long time, I was just dealing with my anxiety, my panic attacks, I was on my own. And just figuring it out, because I didn't really know what around me. And as far as like, parents were can, you know, they didn't have the tools. And I can't blame them for that. But they didn't really have the tools for that. And for a long time, my mom was like anti therapy, she was like, we don't need therapy. And she was like, you just need to talk about it. And that's just a very old school black thing. Like, you just don't need that. My mom has, like warmed up to that because my older brother started therapy a few years ago and that cool. So she's warmed up to it, and I'll even suggest her go into there, but she's already there personally. Like, maybe

48:25

you do. And same thing with my parents as well. Like everybody needs therapy. Yeah.

48:31

But, so yeah, that was really just my experience with mental health.

Olivia N 48:35

We'll talk about it more about your experience in mental health as an adult later on. But when did you realize that your sexuality might be different from what was around you?

48:48

Um I'm not gonna lie. I don't I don't know if I can say like, so much. It was different yet. I know that. I've like growth as I was like, an elementary school like since like, I can recall since like, five. I think also, just as far as like, children tend to explore their bodies at a very young age is like, a normal thing. Yeah, but like, I think so. Like, again, I'm worried about black people. We don't see that as being a normal thing. Like your child being like, what's it like sexually advanced? Yeah, and it's like no, it's not it like it's not it at all. We're just human.

Olivia N 49:29

Yeah, I'm curious.

49:30

That's it. So I definitely noticed this I was like a kid. But I don't know if I ever made like the stark difference between like, I like girls and they don't but I definitely knew that it was something that I didn't want to express because I feel like it was wrong. And I don't know why I thought it was wrong because now being like, I don't consider myself out because I don't believe in coming out but like, now that my parents like know, me who was that they know that I'm gay is because they've asked because they don't believe it. I didn't ever believe that. I was straight. And they've said that to my face. Yeah. Which is very funny. But um, yeah, I don't know why because it very accepting, but I think it was a part of me that felt like I know, there's a part of me that oh, wait, yeah, there's part of me that felt like, Oh no, me liking girls is wrong, but I think it's because I conflated liking girls with being like, fast or like be like something wrong because you're exploring yourself and like, that's not good. Yeah.

50:34

Yeah

50:39

yeah, definitely since I was a child I, in my high school years, it definitely gave me anxiety really come to terms with the fact that I liked girls. But I would, I would have said that the time maybe I was bi because I was like, Oh, I like both. Yeah. But I wasn't really fully. I wasn't ready to like, fully accept the fact that I was truly not straight. And truly not by because again, that like male validation thing, like that's something that I really wanted. Because I didn't date in high school. Like I didn't, I honestly didn't date until my 20s and I had dated men first. But those weren't like, actual real relationships. And then yeah, I had my first career relationship also in my 20s. Yeah. So like, my experience is different. Yeah. But like, it's, um, yeah, I don't know. I kind of I don't know. He's like talking about it. This was one of my mentors recently, where I was like, I wish I had like, fully accepted and fully embraced my like

queerness lesbian, his gayness as like a child and not as an adult. Like, I wish I like fully human to that as a child. And like, their response was like, people learn the things and come and come to terms with it and parts of themselves. And they're supposed to Yeah, and that's just what it is. Yeah.

Olivia N 51:51

So you started identifying, like, when did you start claiming the word list yet?

51:56

Honestly, last year, yeah. Really? Last year, maybe end of 2021? Honestly, I don't know how it sounds. But like, was really after I had this like, one night stand with this guy two years ago? No. I was like, actually, this is not what I want from my life story.

52:15

Because I was in a relationship long, very long because of COVID. And you have to go back to Sweden. It's a long story.

52:23

Right, man? Okay.

52:26

Okay. Okay. So I don't do that anymore. Okay. I don't really have many boyfriends. I have two new ones.

Olivia N 52:38

My dad was like, you're going to hang out with a white person, because I hadn't read it yesterday. And I was like, let me live. But I get it. I get it. It's a long story. Anyways. The fact I love that. I love that he was in Sweden, because then I didn't have to see him. And then I thought about potentially having to have sex with him. When he got back to America. And I was like, No, this has to end because it was different because he was far away. And then the thought of him being like, I would be like, what if I walked in and there were like, Man shoes at my door? What would I do? And my first thought was vomit throw up died. I was like, yeah, so I just thought I was bisexual, like, identified as bisexual for so long. I was like, 11 I was like, I'm bi. I'm like, 9010 90 women. 10% men won't marry a man. Because that's what bisexuals think. At the time. Anyway, that's funny story. When I extend and then you were like, I'm a lesbian.

53:38

Yeah, well, so it was more like sometimes one that I've seen with this guy that I guess, quote, unquote, had been attracted to and found attractive. Like, I think he was also conflating like me not understanding, like, thinking someone's attracted and actually being attracted to them. Yeah. I don't think I really registered the difference. But yeah, he's, like, eight years older than me. But I first met him when I was like, 20s was like, kind of wild. I know. It's kind of wild. It's okay. Yeah, well, yeah. I don't judge my younger self, because I'm the young one.

Olivia N 54:14

Yes. No, because like that was a grown man being

54:17

gross. Yeah. And I kind of peep that he was attracted to me but he was like, dating other people. And then like, he had moved to LA had come back to like, visit and told me and I was like, Alright, cool. Like, I want to have sex with this man. So I did. Yeah, it was like summer 2021. And then after that, I don't know I just felt like us in the sense that I was like, this is not enjoyable for me like I don't enjoy this like I don't, I don't genuinely like enjoy being with men like it just does. Like I feel like an imposter. And summer of 2020 I was dating this guy and he had been we had been dating for like, I think five months like that. And this is some One that I like, I was like, I want to be with this person I want to be in relationship this person, but again, I don't think it was that I think it was just wanting to be desired and yeah, placing my worth again and being desired by men. Yeah, but I remember like one time we were in his room, we were like headed to go out. And it was like summer of 2020. And random thought popped into my head. I was like, I'm too gay for this shit. And then I never revisited that thought.

55:24

I did read it once and you're like, never been literally

55:26

just I kid you not I wish I was making this up. I literally was like, I feel a little too. Like, it just felt like a performance. Being my way. No, like being with men, to me feels like a perform. I feel like I'm having to perform. And I don't like that. Like, I feel like I like how I respond in bed. Like, when I'm expected to do in bed, like just being with a man. All of that just feels out of my comfort zone. And I was like, this does not feel natural to me.

Olivia N 55:50

I also don't respect them. Okay, word. But like, I'll be like when they'd be like, Oh, I seek out men as friends. And I also seek out men to date. I'm like, why would you want to be friends with men when they have nothing good to say that someone who isn't a man can say better? I don't know. That was just like a weird. Not a weird thing. But I feel that way. Like talking to other lesbians. I was just like, what did you think about the menu or dating? Like, did you have any thoughts about that? Like, did you like that? Like, Oh, you like did you?

56:21

I don't know. I feel like they're men that I could have just been friends with and stayed friends with. And that was kind of it. Yeah. Because I can say, with the two guys that I'd actually like the guy had when I sound I'd never dated. But the two guys that I dated, again, were like very, very brief. They were not even six months. Yeah. I wasn't initially attracted to them. Were really interested in them. Because they were expressing interest in me. I've never experienced that before. I was like, oh, like, I don't know what this is. Like, I don't know what this feels like. And sort of just like going along with it. But then also these are men are like, we're not really interested in being in a relationship with me just wanted to like date, until they just found someone else to date. You know what I mean? Yeah. So it was like, and again at wonderful desired thing of like, oh, shit, but like, I'm supposed to want to be in relationship with you. I'm supposed to want these things and, and then when it didn't happen that then like, really fuck

with how I placed my worth in myself, like valued myself, in a sense, where I was like, oh, but then if these men don't want me, then what does that mean about me? And that's such a fucked up way to think you know what I mean? Like, it's a really fucked up way to think But uh, yeah, brings you back to like compulsory heterosexuality where it's just like, it's like that weird value system. Yeah, that was it. Basically, after I was one I sent like, I went off on a tangent. I was like, I'm tired of this. I was like, over it. I was like, I really want to just like fully set into like my queerness. Because I know that I am. And I was like, and I also the kind of spaces that I wanted to be in. I didn't want to be in like this hetero spaces. My friend group was also changing at the time, not necessarily because of COVID we just growing people in relationships, things like that, and realizing that like, people that I hadn't met when I was around, like, 20, I was like, no longer really interested in being around or with and, and then like, once I like was like, Okay, I really want to send to like my queerness. And one of my best friends. We've been friends since high school. He's gay, black from Brooklyn. Okay. Yeah, he was wanting to like put me on to, like lesbian parties, like actual, like queer spaces. Like if it wasn't for them, like I wouldn't know a lot of these spaces. And then I wouldn't have been made the connections and budding friendships that I have now. And also, because I've been like, very serious about like, really want like black queer femme friends, like, Yeah, so like, and I've been putting out like, that's what I want. That's the kind of space that I want to be in. Like, that's, that's what I need and want in my life as far as like, my connections and the people that I build friendships with. And I've want to have these friends long term. Like one of my best friends like really my best friend, and we've been friends since I was 17. She's cute. Or maybe she's not queer, but she's a black woman. Yeah, that I love to death but like I need but yeah, it's also like, I also want more like black queer from friends. And I've been like meeting people and like, also in this space now we're like, I really want to date because I've got on a relationship that like, wasn't very healthy. You know, in September, but like, yeah, just like it was released after that clip. Knightstown I was like, Yeah, I need to be around like, my people. I'm just like, fully accepted embrace myself. That's kind of it.

Olivia N 59:24

Do you remember what your first exposure to lesbianism was? Like when you saw lesbian? Saw like the uncoupling or something?

59:33

Coupling I don't know where like a lesbian. I mean, I know I it's wild that I've known lesbians my whole life. Yeah, they were not talked about about being lesbians. So that's why like that question of like, my first exposure to lesbian is I don't know that I'd ever heard the term lesbian growing up. Maybe I had but didn't register it but like it was not a term that I'd really heard or I had ever personally use. Like, again, thinking about like naming things. was like me knowing that I was attracted to girls as a child but not me thinking buyer think I didn't start using the term buyer since I was in high school. So like, I'd never really use any of those terms. It was more than just Just what I like. Yeah, but like one of my like, close close, like family friends. My like, she's a my mom's generation. Her brother is I think it's there. No, it's her cousin is my aunt's husband. But they all like grew up in like the same project complex in East Harlem. But like she is a very like mask. Black woman always been really cool. Always been really sweet. But I've never seen it with a partner. But I know she's gay. We all know she's gay. Yeah. You know what I mean? Like, another one of my parents, like really close friends. Her name is Stephanie. She's 70. Now, black woman, she's also a lesbian. I've never seen with a partner. I've never seen with anybody

before. Yeah. And then it wasn't until like, a year ago, my mom I said that were like, yes, she had a partner at one point, they live together. And I was like, no, no, this like, so I had a lot of an even as black gay elders in my life that like, again, it was just those things where I was like, you know, these people are gay. They're lesbian, but it was like, we never saw their partners, which I always question to like, damn, like, Why could we never like, the same way that like straight people will just pull up with their partners at places or like, have their partners be immersed in their inner world? Why isn't that we didn't see the same thing with like, our gay and lesbian elders, I suppose to sort of be the ones in my life with a woman that I mentioned who's like, we consider her family because like later, like through marriage, but never seen her with a partner ever in my life, like whenever we'd have like cookouts like, and Wagner which is the project complex, and my mom is from an East Harlem, they have this thing called Wagner day, which is just like cookouts on the project complex with different apartments, like always here, I cook I was always here at family functions never start with anyone. So it was like definitely been exposed to. Yeah, lesbian and gay elders. But not having a name for it. Like it's been like, Oh, this is a very mass presenting woman. And that's kind of it. Yeah. Or like, Oh, like this woman over here. You never see her with a man, but we never see her with a woman. But you don't I mean, like, you know, yeah, but yeah, always been exposed, but just didn't put a name to it. And I really didn't, wasn't having these conversations and really acknowledging their identities as like gay and lesbian people until I fully embraced in step into micronas indigenous and like, vocal about it.

Olivia N 1:02:36

Have you ever struggled with identifying as a lesbian, or you talked about being non binary and gender non conforming?

1:02:47

Not necessarily struggled with, but I definitely it's like, still, like a process of me making sense of these different identities. Because at one point, I was like, Could I identify as non binary and then and lesbian at the same time? You know, like, I don't know what like is protocol? Like, like, No, you can't do this or no, yes. You can't, you know, like, I don't really know. And then, you know, also knowing that like, sometimes you have like lesbians or like, specifically, like gay women who like if they're gay, or they're queer, but then not selling won't say lesbians, and I'm like, damage or this unspoken thing, or we just don't use the term lesbian. But then you'll but then yeah, so I don't know. It's like, I'm still like figuring that out. But those right now just make the most sense to me. I don't know if they contradict each other, to be honest, but it makes sense to me. It feels right to me. I also say queer, but I've also been trying to lean more into using queer as like a politic as far as not because we have straight people identify as queer like, uh, you know, now I feel like queerness is like synonymous with like, like, at one point queerness was like a derogatory term used towards like, LGBT people. But now queerness is like you necessarily have to be LGBT, but you can identify as queer so I'm like, What is my politics around queerness like, not identifying or fitting in with like, this norm of like sis hetero pneus that I tires like my queerness and also I tied it with like my feeling non binaries in my body were like I have no side of the child I've never felt like a girl and never felt like a boy I just exist as Yanni. So, you know so much like struggle with but just definitely more just so just embracing the term lesbian is especially because I felt like a fraud at one point was like, but if I'm not a Goldstar lesbian, like, I've slept with men, like, what if what if I'm wrong of like, knowing that I'm not I genuinely don't want to be with a man but like, what if I'm wrong?

1:04:44

You know what I'm just like,

Olivia N 1:04:47

like, convincingly, but

1:04:48

then like, remembering as like a child. Like when you said that, like, you never want to marry a man like I felt that way. Because I was a child where I was like, I want to date men. I know in the future. I want to have children so I need to be with a man to have children. But I would always joke about social messages. I was like, I don't actually want to marry a man or be with a man long term. But I never saw the other possibility being that I could be with a woman or be with a non man like that never was registered for me. Were like, there's like, not being with a man doesn't mean you have to then be alone. But it was also because I wasn't registering that there was anything other than being straight in my head. Yeah. So yeah, just Yeah. So not so much a struggle just like coming to terms and fully embracing it, I guess.

Olivia N 1:05:31

Speaking of like, embracing your lesbianism and embracing being non binary, can you talk about how clothing like jewelry, makeup, tattoos, piercings or other body mods have helped with assisting your gender expression or your lesbianism?

1:05:45

Oh, for sure. I have a lot of tattoos, a lot of like, really big pieces. My goal when I was 20, I was like, Oh, well, when I'm 25 I'm going to be fully covered. That did not work out. My goal is I'll be 26 and April's now my new goal is by the time I'm 30. Yeah, so myself this I'll be covered. fully covered. Hell yeah. Like I want like I have a Japanese dragon on my back that starts with like, the top middle of my back and it goes down to my hips. But I want like a backdrop like a background for that I haven't been able to do because it's so much money. And I started this tattoo when I was 20. And I didn't get the Dragon fully completed until end of 2021. So I was 20 fours that's like four years in the making, but in the background is still not even started yet. I have a sleeve on my left arm. had like some hand tattoos. I have two neck tattoos. I have a tattoo like I guess it's my stern. Is that your sternum in between your breasts? I don't know what it's called. Oh yeah, yeah, like that. This tattoo? You have like an Ouroboros Yeah, Mateen my breasts I have a some people say the brain I say elaborate. I don't know the right way to say elaborate piercing that I just got reappears but I had originally person I was like 20 Yeah. I've always had ear piercings. I just stretched my ears. When I was like 16 I like shaved off all of my hair. I've always experimented with like just cutting it I don't like physically high want to look like I've been kickboxing for two years but like I really want to get into like lifting weights. I just am like shy at the gym just want everyone to go to the gym by myself but I'm gonna like force myself to but like I know that I really wanted to like have her like muscular. I want to be like my goal with recognize to be stronger. But I know that like I really liked like masculine. Like I don't want to say it's masculine but very like muscular bodies on like, women presenting people like I think again. Yeah, and there's this mask person they're black, they have their own like fitness program and they're like, their goal is to like work

with like trans mass and like non binary people who want like, like your training not because of like maintaining like this like woman feminine physique, but really just to like really build muscle and like strengthen yourself and like, I love that because it's like, their body I see them I'm like, that's how I want to look. Because they had like a similar build, but they're just like very, they just look very strong. And I like that. And I like the idea of like, you know, I don't feel like a man or woman but I just like the idea of not conforming to how I'm supposed to look as like a woman presenting person. Yeah, I love tattoos. Like I just see myself like yeah, I don't have my locks anymore. So like I said bigger Fro more tattoos. very muscular. It's kind of just what I like it'll happen that's how I want to look so yeah, it's very affirming. Like it's even in how I dress and I've always just I've always sure been tomboy to have my moments where I may feel a bit like I like to dress up but like I'm very much like a pants baggy pants are like comfort shoes like very much like street wear every day and I feel like also because I'm just from Harlem and like Yeah, I do love my patterns. I love my big coats I have my ShareLink like I'd be fun like a little like Harlem child to read through I like the idea I'm like still conceptualize like my style but like I really love like DMX and like Alia because the two of them like how they dress and like the 90 is is very much what I like I love silver. I want to get into like change like I'm like interning for a black jeweler in Brooklyn. So I have like a concept of like the kind of jewelry that I want to make you want to be a piercer? No, no, no, I really like making jewelry.

Olivia N 1:09:39

That's what a jewelry means.

1:09:40

Yeah, that's what you said. But it's like metalworking jewelry because this woman she roasted like metal. Um, her jewelry is fire. I'm just gonna like plugger she goes by heavy metals, NYC that sort of brand. But yeah, she was like looking for interns. Like this was like October of last year and I Ain't no no sweat because it's an internship. Yeah, so you get to like, make our own jewelry. And then like if she has like spares, whatever she like, give it to us and she's gonna, like all of her interns are like black women. And it's just really cool. And I also just love the idea of like working with my hands like, I don't know how to like I'm an artist as far as like being a performer but I'm not someone I don't like sculpt or anything. And I want to like learn something, right? Because I work with my hands. So yeah, like I feel like I'm now I'm like really building like my wardrobe. Like how I really wanted to look. I know physically, I'd have to like build the courage to go to the gym, but I kickboxing just cool. Yeah. I just want to like build muscle. And I just have to like get over the like, insecurity of being at the gym by myself. I'm like, no, like, I know what I'm doing. But not.

Olivia N 1:10:44

I know what you mean. I find that maybe you should go to like I go to I used to I do CrossFit. But now I powerlift mostly now yeah, I only powerlifting been powerlifting for like nine months. Yeah, I used to CrossFit. And going to group classes is a great way to lift without the anxiety.

1:11:01

And you do it through CrossFit. You said,

Olivia N 1:11:02

I used to do CrossFit. I live at a CrossFit gym, but I only Power Lift now.

1:11:09

Okay, what's a power lift? We just do standing at the big dumbbells. Yeah,

1:11:13

so a powerlifting.

Olivia N 1:11:15

So you've seen people like lift stuff over their head? Yeah, that's a Olympic lifting. So like that's like snatches and cleans and stuff. So I only deadlift, back squat. And then bench. Those are the three power lifting movements. And so I train those, like I only do those. So simple movements, a very heavy simple movements.

1:11:33

I'll look into CrossFit because I'm, I just have a membership with Blink.

Olivia N 1:11:39

Yeah, do blink. And then look at the group classes that Blink has look at any, like maybe something called like strength, like strength classes, because then you can learn how to lift in look at form, but then you're with other people who are also suffering with you. And then just like learn how to do the lifts, and then do them by yourself.

1:11:57

And you see if they have class, I don't know. Just blink cat class, and

Olivia N 1:11:59

probably probably the angels are probably within your membership. Yeah. group classes are the way that I got over Jim anxiety, because I don't do group classes anymore. But it was one way to help. Because then you can just like ask ask the coach, and if you want to make friends you can there's lots of cabbages

1:12:19

lift? Yeah, I believe it. I believe it.

Olivia N 1:12:24

But um, have any documentaries or films influence your identities or your lesbianism?

1:12:30

Hell yeah. The aggressive fucking love that documentary. So documentary that was filmed from I think 98 2004. It came out in 2005. It follows these like mass presenting lesbians in New York City. Like that's really interesting times like chronicle like the late 90s, early 2000s. They're all black, except one, one of them is Asian. I think like, three of them today are now trans men, so they don't identify as lesbian their pronouns are like he him. And then one of them. Yeah, still is a lesbian, but they're just

very, like massively. The time they call themselves the aggressives. Like it's and I just thought it was such a fire. I find one that document. I've seen it 1000 times. She's a really great documentary.

Olivia N 1:13:21

We have anything here.

1:13:24

And they're, they're working on a follow up right now. So if you follow their Instagram page, the aggressives they're working on a follow up follow up with all the cast members, and they've been filming it for the past couple years now. And they said that it should be released at some point in the near future. So I'm hoping this year,

Olivia N 1:13:40

they'll probably have it like the release. Yeah, city,

1:13:43

or they would have to because they're all in like New York based on the subjects. So yeah, like I'm hoping. Yeah, so the aggressives as far as like, I say, like print work, I would say, mouths of rain. The editor of that book is Briana Simone. It's an anthology of black lesbian thought that book came out in I think 2020 And I heard about Briana Simone through black woman radicals. I did an interview with her. Okay, cool. And this was when I was like, again, it was like after that when I sat down I was like okay, I really need to immerse myself and like just black lesbian history because I was like, Oh, should I really am a lesbian like, I wanted to like read works that were by and for black lesbians. So shout out to be honest, Simone I don't know where she is on Instagram right now. She must be taking a long as break. And it's getting the tight. Yeah, but I bought her book. Mountain Ranch is a really beautiful book. I had read does your mama know black? Black lesbian coming out stories by Lisa see more? Fucking love that book. And then that book alone then put me on to like other black lesbians like Cheryl Clark and Barbara Smith. Alexis de veau. Yeah, like these are people that like I like greatly admired and whose works I fucking love I'm currently reading Yabo by Alexis Deveau. And I love that book so much. So yeah, it's really just like the aggressives and then just like books that I was just reading, and just like these black lesbian women and just like fully immersing myself and like black lesbian history, and I know I want to do something with that. I just don't know what yet but yeah, just like the written works. It's another book written by a black lesbian as a fictional book called the stars and the blackness between them. The woman Her name is Janata. True not I think Petrus Petros, she I got to see her speak last summer at what's it called? The free black woman's library. There's space and they have a space in Brooklyn and she did a talk

Olivia N 1:15:50

with Brooklyn.

1:15:50

Don't ask him I don't live in Brooklyn. Oh, I don't like I don't come in nothing to memory. I'm like I was in Brooklyn. I was in Brooklyn. He was in Brooklyn and she was talking about the book and she signed my book. Yeah, as far as my blackness between them is Janata also is a Trinidadian descent. So like it

follows like these two black girls meeting, believe it was in Chicago and Illinois and Chicago, Illinois, and one of them was like coming to a state for the first time from Trinidad cup, you know, you get some like, African diasporic spirituality in there by way of like Trinidad and then there's also like this burgeoning, like lesbian relationship between these two you know, black teens is really some really beautiful book so now I'm like really just trying to fully immerse myself in like black lesbian works because that's how I see myself yeah, so Oh, and that's oh my god I'm missing out a whole nother documented their fucking love I don't want to say her name because I'm no I'm gonna mess up her first name but she's a black lesbian filmmaker she now documentary filmmaker, but she now is more so in fully immersed in, I guess like her physical. What am I mentor, say? Like conceptual art, but like their friends. So like, I'm excited because my mentor is like friends with some of these writers that I like he's saying that he can introduce me to he's a black, gay man. This documentary. Gosh, was a documentary called, I can tell you right now. And I'm gonna I'm gonna say I want to see it on a recording. Yeah, but it's a documentary about lesbians of African descent. And I came across a documentary, just through like me being on YouTube and trying to find anything I could on like black lesbians. And so her and Lisa see more. And I think like 2009 they were trying to start a documentary on like black lesbian elders, and they were trying to get funding for it, but it never happened. But then the director, so it's called black woman, but it's spelled wo and y n conversations with lesbians of African descent. The documentary came out I think 2011 the director's name is Tiona Maclaurin it's certainly it's not streaming anywhere but I bought the DVD because I have a DVD player at home yeah. Like that documentary for me was yeah, just fucking amazing. And just like seeing all these like black lesbian show, Clark is also in the documentary. But it's like seeing all these black lesbians from like, probably reaching for maybe like their 20s Up until I don't know the age range like the cut off the eldest one but like some of them are like couples there's like a few couples in there. Some of them weren't. There's conversation around like disability and what is what is it like to date with a disability and being black and being lesbians because there's a woman, she's like an amputee. So she was talking about her experience with dating and like, not having like hands and just like, I don't know what the proper way to say that. But so just interesting. Like just seeing these different kinds of conversations. There's another couple they're one of the partners. She's Jamaican, her girlfriend was not but like they really want she wants to take her girlfriend to Jamaica, experience Jamaica and she was like, but you know, much of the one has to make it looks very like mass presenting, but she was like, what is that going to look like for us? Because, you know, we've constantly hearing of stories of like Black LGBTQ people, you know, getting murdered, but yet I really want to go and I want to take my girlfriend with me, Stacy and Chen is in the documentary. And I fucking love Stacy and chin. It's also while that I don't know how I've never fully embraced it. I was gay, but I used to watch her spoken word piece cunnilingus on fucking Def Poetry Jam, like, ya know, what the fuck? I it was like I discovered

Olivia N 1:19:47

Poetry Jam. Yeah. Go to the Nuyorican Poets.

1:19:51

American poets craft. Yeah. She um, yeah, so I don't know what was going through my mind but yeah, I fucking love Stacy. Anshun she's in the documentary. Yeah, yeah, like documentaries, though. was to amend a slide written. I like literally had to pull this book and then just like written works because Yeah.

Olivia N 1:20:09

So now we're getting into the part where we're going to talk a little bit about your interactions with lesbian community and maybe even queer community. If that's more, that resonates a little bit more. So, connections to community. Yeah. Okay. Yeah. So can you talk a little bit about maybe how race and class inform your interactions with lesbian community?

1:20:36

Oh, wow. I still feel like I'm trying to find a lesbian community to belong to so I don't know that I have one right now. But I do know a lot and am fostering friendships with a black lesbians and black queer woman. Yeah. Okay, cool. Yeah, so like, these are all very new relationships, but relationships that I'm interested in, like fostering and like, really building. I don't know how I don't necessarily know well, race comes into play in the sense that I only want to be around black yesterday and some black queer fans. Like this period, point blank. I mean, I do have like non black POC queer friends in my life and like very, very few but that I do genuinely love and rock with and fuck with for life. But like, it just, you know, black being reminded like black queer friends live priority. Class, I'm not entirely sure how it plays a role. So I can't really speak to that. That's okay. So yeah, I can't really speak that only because I just I don't know that I I don't want to sound oblivious because I'm not oblivious. But I just I just don't know that I've had an experience with the two of them at the same time within like black lesbian spaces. Yeah, no, at the moment simultaneous.

Olivia N 1:21:46

It can you separate? Like, we're talking about bars being expensive, and like alcohol and stuff, but if it's relevant, it's not relevant.

1:21:55

Yeah. So I can't see those. Like, I don't know. I like to drink. You're like, some, like if I got the money, I'm spending money. Exactly. This is what it is. One of my friends was also blacker, Pham, whom I adore. Whenever her and I go out, we don't see each other often because she lives in New Jersey, but like, we always go out for like really good food and some nice cocktail. Yeah. And then we'll try to like find parties that are like for like black names for black boys for like queer friends. And like, I've been within like, the last few months have been like, connect with more black queer firms like lesbians. So like now I'm starting to know more a lot about the spaces that are coming up. Are you finding these spaces? Just through people that I've been meeting so like, there's one collective called funky reggae house party that was founded by two black mask presenting people. I don't know if I can say firms because I don't know if they do. But there are two black chrome masks. They're opening up their own bar in Brooklyn. It's opening up in February. Isn't

Olivia N 1:22:55

it like the Indo Caribbean? Like? Yeah, they're

1:22:57

both Trini Yeah, and it's gonna be called the village. Yeah, I thought I did our GoFundMe or something. So they're collect as a collective particularly they're called funky reggae house party. And they threw a party at the event of that the not the event at the space of they're taking over. They threw a party there.

Last month, it was really great. Everybody in there was black. There was like some really annoying ass like these like two white people that came in there like being very obnoxious punk bumping into people like walking shit like that. And what am I like, you know, this person now like, becoming closer as like friends, but they were like, trying to like get them out of there like us. I was like, You guys need to recognize the space that you're in like, yeah, even not for you, you know? Yeah, just really just the word of mouth. Like, I don't know how to find them online. But like, I've just been fortunate that I've been mean like black queer friends who like put me on to shoot where I'm meeting these black queer friends. One of them she's also Jamaican. Again, I want to despises lesbian. Okay, I know she is queer. But I met her last year at the event for the author Janata at free black woman's library. Yeah, and we just met each other because I just really love the way that she dresses. I thought she was like, really cool. And we just started like talking and just exchanged IGs and we've been like, trying to hang out and just hasn't been happening. Yeah. But she like, send share stuff with me. I hope I'm not messing up her pronouns. I think it's she her? Yeah, she likes her stuff with me. And it's like, that's kind of it's just like, just me being comfortable with going through things by myself. And then because I'm now like, forcing myself to be comfortable with going to things about myself. I end up just meeting people and they happen to be events hosted by like black queer friends. And so yeah, I'm just sort of like in putting myself out there. So

Olivia N 1:24:48

like mostly word of mouth and then you like, here are my events. And one of the events is the funky reggae house party. Are there any other events that you were like? Like black events, black queer events, black lives?

1:25:00

No like raw honey, I was put onto that last year. I haven't gone to anything of theirs yet, but like nightlife and queer nightlife I do. I do like to party I like to go out I like to dance. A friend of mine told me about them this friend of mine they're also a black lesbian. I'm so sorry. are also black lesbians. They're from New Orleans. They're really great. I like them a lot from New Orleans. So like in graduate school or not Columbia, I was an artist studying what

1:25:29

it's okay not to know.

1:25:30

Yeah, don't ask me their study I assumed like their graduate program is an arts graduate program. Like immersed in like different art to perfect for the never thought of it. But yeah, so like they're really cool person but they told me about Rohani. They live in Harlem as well. Which I also love because like I need more like folks in Harlem will also touch on too about like nightlife but basically with this person they told me about raw honey because I guess raw honey had thrown stuff in Harlem. I know another black queer femme. I don't know if she's a lesbian. So I said I'm gonna recommend her but she's cleared. My best friend and I had gone to a party that she had thrown last month. She didn't throw up. She was DJing at a club. I think it's called the Paragon. And it was is called the Paragon. Anyway, so her and I were talking outside because we're like, gonna go uptown together. Her two other friends where they're both black lesbians. I don't I just met them for the first time. Like, No, we were just talking

about how like as black queer women like queer femme non binary, folks. Like, if you want to go out we always have to come to Brooklyn. Yeah, we didn't really have that uptown. Like there is a black owned barn that's owned by a black gay man called next and he has another space that's called I forgot to his other spaces called

Olivia N 1:26:47

but it friendly towards like non men.

1:26:50

That's what I don't really know because I look at their photos. I'll see like some non men like very few but it's mostly black gay men. And so it's usually a trade off Yeah, so like me and this person her me her and her two friends were like we want to sort of own collective yeah uptown we're like we do like are involved in nightlife then I also want to like a regular collective as well. We're just like, we can like meet during the day we can like do you know what I mean? Like I don't know just like foster like, during the day? Facts? Yeah. And literally just like foster just builds a black queer femme community uptown because I feel like we really need that so like that's been a glass shot to hit up our group chat today because we like kind of come up with like a name and like the owner of the next bar he said that like because he's friends word of her friends at bar. Yeah. So we're gonna do it. You want to host it at the bar? And he said that he would let us use a space we just have to like figure out the logistics now.

Olivia N 1:27:43

What's the group chat call? Do you have a name for the group chat?

1:27:46

No, we're so coming up with a name. So coming up with the name have any ideas? Oh, hell yeah. I was looking through some of my own like personal archives. So I come up with like, bull dagger. I like to do like reclaiming bull dagger, because it was a US that was used as a word that was used or term that was used against like black lesbians, but like a very derogatory way. So I like dropped in the group chat. I was okay. There's a term sapphire that was used amongst lesbians. There's bull daggered. And then there's like buffet flats buffet flats were like these like rent parties that were during the Harlem Renaissance. Yeah, like thrown by, like black queer women. Yeah. So I was like, something like something like that. So we've just been like playing with words. And somehow, like yarn includes for like, our collective. But also because like, we're from New York, like mean this person. She is queer. She's, I believe, also 20. She's 20. Black. And yeah, from Uptown, I think. I don't know if she's from Harlem, where she's from the heights. But yeah. Just trying to like figure out a name. But I just like throughout those words, because I was like, if we're gonna I even said in the group chat, I was like, I would want us to have a name that sort of honors a black lesbians that came before us and the black women that came before us. So I would want to incorporate a name that they use something and then we can revamp it, but I still want it to be like paying homage. Especially if we're in Harlem and Harlem is a very, you know, historic neighborhood and has a very rich queer history, your very rich LGBT history. Only that I didn't say queers, because I'm also going to like a lot of our elders did not use the term queer. So I also want to be inclusive of like, the terms that they use, but yeah.

Olivia N 1:29:23

Do you have any plans for what those daytime events could look like?

1:29:26

I know just from like, outside of even just connecting with them I have been playing with the idea of sorry, my own collective I wanted to start off like a book club and I'm wanting to show the books that I've been reading the resources that I've been collecting on my own amongst like other black lesbians and black queer friends. So like something like whether we do like book clubs whether it's like all I'm thinking of right now today, like I have a lot of different ideas like I want to do a zine, maybe get like maybe like have like a little like a publishing crew for the zine or like, like contributors. I have a lot of ideas. But I just want I want it to be central to Harlem because I really want to add to the queer culture of Harlem. Yeah. So she like, yeah, so I want to like, I want to add to that I want to add something that we don't currently have. Because you know, Brooklyn has everything we need to have like our own thing uptown to

Olivia N 1:30:23

can you talk about maybe disability, mental illness and anxiety and how maybe it's informing your interactions with trying to build a black lesbian community or black queer community? And when did you learn about disability is something you can identify with even

1:30:44

disability is something that I see the identifying part? That's easy. I can say within like the last year yeah. And really just because of twitter, and like seeing disability activists, specifically, like black queer disability activists. Yeah, I'm not good with names, but I know but they're just spies. Maybe? Yeah, I'm terrified. I just know what they look like.

Olivia N 1:31:06

They have lots Yes,

1:31:07

she's a dark brown. Yeah, crutches in spite Jani city, Barbara. And so I've been seeing her a lot on Twitter. So like, I never thought that if you have like mental disability, like that was even considered a mental disability like, yeah, depression, anxiety, like, I didn't know that those were considered disabilities. And I didn't necessarily feel comfortable saying that because I was like, because yeah, I guess as you know, also ignorant under the assumption that unless there was a disability, somebody could physically see and it may not count as a disability. And I feel ashamed to say that but I guess it's just like, shame how we're socialized to think. So like seeing someone like her be online and be very vocal about disabilities, I was like, Oh, shit, this is something you can that does come as a disability as well. As far as like my interactions, I would say the most part because I've been putting myself out there as far as doing things by myself. That's not something that I really ever felt comfortable doing like yeah, because I've also like struggle with like loneliness and like the idea of doing things on myself is like really daunting at times like I get because I'm I don't consider myself shy but like partially am because I'm not so much like initially introduced myself to people I don't go up to people and talk. If I when I go out by myself, usually somebody will come up to me as far as like, do you want to sit in like the event that I've gone to recently this like, she's not black, but she's a POC, lesbian. I think she's POC on

camera. So was she like her and her friend were there who's Asian? And they were like, Oh, do you want to like come and sit next to us? Because I was like, sitting by myself and stuff like that. But so yeah, I was like, mostly just the anxiety around like going out by myself because I tend to get really uncomfortable, but I'm just forcing myself to step out of my comfort zone anywhere. I'm like, if I want community if I want to meet people, I'd have to go outside.

Olivia N 1:32:50

That's the worst part. Is that to build community you have to meet new people. Yeah. I don't really like new people. You have to build community in a way that people won't do anymore.

1:33:00

But Instagram has been easy because one of my really close friends now the one who like lives in Jersey Pro and I met on Instagram. She's attacked really dope tattoo artists. We have just been mutually following each other. They go by their name is NAS um, their IG is NAS dynasty. And yeah, she's a black queer femme. And we like randomly bumped into each other I guess nothing in life is random, but we like bumped into each other and so HoH Yeah, beginning of last year, I had like, kind of like got into an arguing with my ex. And I was like walking down the streets of Soho, and like we literally bumped into each other. She was coming out of a store with her mom, because they were shopping and we like Leto we were like holy shit. I know you that was like our first time meeting each other but we had wanted to like hang out for a while so like, and we just hung out recently like a week ago we were like yeah, this is a relationship that we really want to like Foster and like grow because she's someone that I can see as being a really close friend and that was through Instagram. So like I've gotten lucky with like meeting really interesting people through Instagram. I think it

Olivia N 1:34:01

helps that you also have an interesting Instagram and like online presence. So I guess maybe like more willing to reach out to you that way. Yeah. So you mentioned earlier about maybe feeling like you didn't know if you could identify as non binary and also be lesbian? Can you talk through that a little bit more and how being non binary and you identify as a femme No, yeah,

1:34:30

I don't like the term I don't like so when it comes to that. The even further descriptors of like fam stud stem I don't like fuck about I don't like it don't care also, I just feel really like passionate about that because my ex identified as non binary, we would have conversations and them feeling closer to being trans mask. So like, I was dating someone who's very, who understood their gender expansiveness, but then didn't necessarily understand other people's interest. Like they had a very Binary way of looking at other people, but not themselves. No. And it troubled me because I was like this is something that I was like I yeah, I tend to also be attached to like very mass presenting women but I'm attracted to anyone but like I found that like, you know, something that I was doing that I really loved and really very much as attracted to but then like, they would constantly point out the fact that like they were used to dating like high fat like they are used to dating women who like dress a certain way to carry themselves a certain way but I did not they would constantly they would bring up like how I was very boyish like the way that I was standing guess with it? Yeah, like stuff like both

1:35:33

dikes your book lesbians.

1:35:37

But But the reason that I kept in your, which was this tiny one, a tiny one, it's in your jacket. Oh, thank you. But like the reason that that bothered me was because I was like, I had already even in my teens had really struggled with not being womanly enough not being girly enough not being feminine. And so because as a teen, I didn't really understand that like if you're if you're I don't know the term queer at the time, but if you're a lesbian if you're bi like there's you don't have to look a certain way to be gay, which is so free, you know, like you don't but as a teen, I didn't know that I felt like okay, and I even felt in my body. I never felt womanly enough. I never felt really enough ever. But I struggled with in the sense of like, trying to understand my sexuality and then not feeling that way. It really confused me. So then dating someone who then like, highlighted a few of my insecurities was a really a troubling experience and really a traumatic experience. Yeah, this person genuinely traumatized me. And were also like, much older than me. I tend to date people that happen to be older than me. So like, that's also a lot older, like this person was eight years old. So that can be a lot. It can be you know, so like, that really fucked with me because I was like, damn, like, I'm attracted to this person who is really coming into their life trans mask identity. They're non binary and like, I think it's like beautiful I really love this person, but then they're making me feel like I'm not womanly enough like they clearly have an idea of the kind of person that they want to date and I was like, but if I'm not that person Exactly. But then when I would see some of the women that they'd be interested in because we were also like poly Okay, daily. I don't know if I identify as Paul I feel like I'd be probably by circumstance and then if I fell in love with someone who was poly i There's nothing I don't see anything wrong with being like okay, well if we're together because so the other like that's not as something I'm against or have trouble with Yeah, but then obviously the women that they'd be interested in who are non black women who then weren't femme so then like that fuck with my esteem to where I was like wanted black you know what I mean? So then that felt with my self esteem because it was like this woman that they were talking to now that I'm hearing this shit I don't care well this woman that they were dating she was in she had a primary partner and with her partner for like seven eight years, but she was on high femme at all like at all at all. Yeah, and I was like, but you're making these comments towards me as like little digs but you're trying to be funny about it but this woman that you're interested in she's on a high femme at all like at nicely at all. She just was like a regular and also she like I don't know I just felt like if you were gonna have this whole thing about one today hi friends I expect you to deal with the bad bits you've edited the bad as much around the highest me and this has nothing to do with like tearing down someone to bring up myself as that's not in this but I'm just like, she wasn't that Yeah. So like and they would constantly like nitpicking with it. I would dress they would constantly joke like oh, you should let me dress you like shit like that. You know what I mean? Like it just really fucked with me. And then I also saw that like, they are very much attracted to like non black women and then it also funded myself so they're black right? They're black but they very much like in love non black women. So like that felt with my self esteem as well because I was like two I don't know why the fuck you're over here. So yeah, so that's why this is don't I don't care about the mass present like term like I don't care about stuff stem fan, but I don't care about that shit. It doesn't it doesn't I don't Yeah, I don't care and I don't let that determine who I'm attracted to. Yeah. at all because

Olivia N 1:39:06

I attracted to masculinity. Yeah, not the term

1:39:09

so then that's why like, identifying so then I say all that to say then when it comes like non being non binary and lesbian, it's because I took like being lesbian meant like, in a very binary sense of like, woman like you have to be attracted to women, you know, kind of thing but then if I'm saying I'm non binary, because I feel that way. Yeah. How does that then reflect like, how I identify my sexuality so I just feel like it was like such like a binary like thing lesbianism and investment. It's not because then you also have like trans lesbians, like you have, you know, like, you have. So it's just it's I don't think that it's like, I don't know, I feel like I'm like redefining it for myself. Yeah. And not in terms of thinking of like lesbianism as like a very binary way of being

Olivia N 1:39:49

know for sure. Like, that's what was really important with this project is to document like how young lesbians are thinking about lesbians lesbianism in ways that I don't know if it's different but Just a little bit more maybe like expansive. Like most of the lesbians in this project are, are non conforming in some way. Most of them aren't sis, and they talk about their experiences really openly and candidly. And that's what I think it's also really important is ways you can talk about gender identity. And do you have an understanding of like, maybe do you think about race and your gender identity ever? Because you mentioned how you want to align yourself with like black queer femmes, not you, but like, you want to create content with other black lesbians and black queer femmes, right?

1:40:36

I mean, because we have a very specific experience, and like, just from like having, like, just starting to have read like Cheryl Clark, and like Barbara Smith, who like really analyzing this identity, that identity of being a black lesbian, or a black lesbian feminist, like we have a very specific experience. I mean, granted, not all skin Folk is ArcInfo. And I also know that I think it was Barbara Smith, who said this, like, your identity isn't your identity doesn't necessarily determine your politics. Like you can say you're a lesbian, or you can say you're non binary, you can say that, you know, but doesn't necessarily, it doesn't really tell me about your personal politics. You know what I mean? So strike, so yeah, like, obviously, I'm sure I could probably come across a live lesbian whose policy is really fucked up, I'm sure you know, but like, I assume that as far as like, what makes me feel safe and comfortable, and she's being around other like black, queer friends. And if I am around like, non black, queer people, I just am hoping that like they're constantly doing the internal work of addressing anti blackness within themselves within their lives. Because if not, then we can't be in the same space together. Doesn't mean that would seem harmful.

Olivia N 1:41:42

No, for sure.

1:41:43

Hopefully that answers that question.

Olivia N 1:41:44

No, it definitely answered the question. Have you have you been to a lesbian related place or event before?

1:41:54

I have not bar because we keep turning me off from the bars by saying that they're most people like white lesbians and white older lesbians. That's why I would like hesitant but as far as you want more, but as far as the but as far as like advanced things, definitely, yes. Gosh, my friend that I mentioned earlier. My name is Stefan they go by they he bade them he him. They've been friends since high school. Yeah, they they're the ones that put me onto gosh, I didn't know about Gosh, prior. The haven't been to run Rohana yet, but I did the funky reggae house party mom, she's really cool. I did go to the woods once. I've only been once but people keep talking shit about it. And I'm like, Yeah, I'm be confused. I'm like, is this the best we do want to go? We don't want to go. And then people will making the joke about I guess I was a lot of like interracial parents and shit in there. So I'm like, What is going on? It's very swirl. Yeah, very spoiled. From what I've heard mad funny, but

1:42:57

what did you think about it? For some?

1:42:59

I just thought it was cool. Gosh, are the woods Oh, the woods on Wednesdays? Gosh, I fucking love because that's my sort of party. I like I like when it's dark is sweating his heart. Yeah. All right. I don't have an issue with like black like, flashing lights. I like dancing. I like grinding up on people. Like, that's my vibe. Especially when it's like, even though gosh is like mixed race is predominant, like, at least for times that had gone on had been mostly black. And I fuck with that. So yeah, that's kind of my, and then just Yeah. And then just being around like other as of recent, other like, queer friends both black and POC. So then even if the space itself is not for us, if I'm if I'm around was like me then like, it was still then feel like that type of space, even if it's not necessarily you know, or if it's just like a gay bar, but we just happened to be in the gay bar. You know what I mean? Like

Olivia N 1:43:54

making a space? Yeah, you could try gingers.

1:43:58

I'll try. It's in

Olivia N 1:43:59

the area. Okay.

1:44:03

That there's six, like, eight, nine.

Olivia N 1:44:09

I don't know. Like down there. I live here. I just like walk on the street and I run into genders. I feel like it's on fifth or sixth. But I can be wrong. Don't quote me. I'm so sorry. But like, they have really fun events. They like to like drag. Cool. Sometimes there's black people. Just bring your own black people got you, but it doesn't feel like it's not like as hostile to the spaces. Maybe like cubby hole if you've been a cubby hole. It's very small. Don't go. Gotcha. Or I mean you could go if you hate yourself. It's fine. It's just I don't you like that. I know you like the dark sweaty thing. cubbyhole not that dark. Sweaty but like, I'm not even kidding. It's like the size of that corner all the ways we went to dance or was it just like Stand and it's mostly white, kind of a younger audience. There's a jukebox okay. And music is bad enough to pay to use a jukebox to play music. Yeah. Yeah, I wouldn't go to Cubby. I would try gingers bring your own friends. Gotcha. I don't know. So gosh, is what you like? And you you really love gosh,

1:45:26

yeah. I mean, I've been having a blast. My mom was actually a while ago. I think it was over the summer, but

Olivia N 1:45:32

don't There have been times when I spoke to NEA they were at gush. And it was like a vampire dark event. Oh, cool.

1:45:43

I love vampires. Yeah, so like that was cool. And then yeah, just the spaces that I've been in recently that have just been like, for like, Blackbird fans, crew people.

Olivia N 1:45:57

So what spaces other than the ones that you want to create? Or also want to want to create Can you talk a bit more about what lesbian spaces you wish existed

1:46:09

literary nights like I would love like because I love to read I would love something that's like, it was not just like nighttime party type thing but like spaces and not networking. Because I don't want like bougie classes like I don't want that shit I just want like a some regular like, like collectives like even if it's like a dressing like political work even if it's a dressing like you know, housing needs like I just wanted to have like, like organizing sharing resources. Yeah, I would love to have like, one of my elders such as a black lesbian and be from Harlem. She had one to like start throwing like salons like how they did like in the form of Harlem Renaissance, but for like black queer people and she had want to start doing that last year. I had to actually hit her up today. I want to ask her if she still wants to do it, but she wants to like host someone like strivers row. I guess because she knows someone that lives on strivers row but yeah, so just stuff like that. So like even if it's not so like a party type thing, but if we're just getting together like the early evening or on the weekend or an afternoon like It's like mingling having a good time like if people want to like maybe like spoken word or like stare poetry or recite assault like there's something worse like we can just kind of like hang then also like, share resources read books had like a book club, like, stuff like that.

Olivia N 1:47:28

There was a life lesson study group here at the archives. Oh, wow. In the 80s or 90s Oh, wow.

1:47:35

Yeah, totally. Like that would be like I would love to do something like host something like that, but it would be uptown. Yeah, it's like a people who've been from Brooklyn like they just have to know like if you want to come like this come up down. Yeah.

Olivia N 1:47:47

Or just identifying as a lesbian mean to you know, it's a big question

1:47:52

is I don't know that I mostly can see right now she's making sense of myself. Yeah.

1:48:03

Understanding myself. That's why I use some of those descriptors that I've mentioned earlier. It's just making sense of like who I am and how I exist in this world.

Olivia N 1:48:13

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

1:48:27

Being around my reflections I love seeing other people be joyous and like being free that's why I love dancing. I feel like when you dance when you're out at night, that's when I feel the most free because you're not thinking anything else except how good the music is and dancing and like drinking and maybe semi outside like smoke little Yeah, so that's what I think of as like joy just like being in spaces for us. It just be to just exist and feeling safe.

Olivia N 1:48:59

Is there anything else you want to talk about?

1:49:02

I really got to talk so much. No, not really. Yeah, I don't have anything off top.

Olivia N 1:49:09

Okay, well,

1:49:10

we're done. Cool. Cool.