

On Selfhood: Young Lesbians Within the Margins
Oral History Project

The Reminiscences of
Maia

2022

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Maia conducted by Olivia Newsome on November 25, 2022. This interview is part of the On Selfhood: Young Lesbians Within the Margins oral history project.

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

Olivia Newsome 00:01

Today is November 25, 2022. I am Olivia Newsome, and I'm interviewing Maia here in New York City in her apartment. Do I have permission to record this interview?

Maia 00:12

Yes, you do.

Olivia Newsome 00:13

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

Maia 00:15

Yes.

Olivia Newsome 00:16

Can you state your name, age and pronouns?

Maia 00:20

My name is Maia. I'm 21 and my pronouns are she/her.

Olivia Newsome 00:26

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

Maia 00:30

Technically, I was born in the Bronx. But we moved when I was about five to Georgia; 5, 6, 7 around that time and I spent the majority of my childhood in Georgia. My childhood was it was pretty okay. Pretty average, I guess, as far as childhoods go. Um, I lived with my mom, my grandma, and my sister who's three years younger than me, my dad um, and my mom separated in 2009 when I was eight, and since then, it was just me and my grandma. And my mom, my dad obviously stayed in contact with us and like, remained a part of our life, though. He lived in New York. So he visited about once a year. And yeah, that was pretty much it. My mom, we were like, lower middle class. And, but I think my childhood was happy and like normal as far as childhoods go.

Olivia Newsome 01:35

Did you like attending middle and high school? Can you talk you about that experience?

Maia 01:40

um, middle of high school was very hard for me. Something my parents didn't take into account when they decided to move to Georgia was racism because they didn't know how bad it was. My parents are both Jamaican immigrants. And they decided to move to Georgia after the stress of living in New York was too much. Post 911, there was a lot of trauma and a lot of confusion, there was a high increase in policing, and our neighborhood had become more unsafe, so they didn't want to raise us there. They thought Georgia would be you know, more interesting than Florida. And because neither of them had been to Georgia before, and my mom's best friend and moved they decided to move there. That made my middle school and high school experience very interesting, because it was just a series of learning new events, and not really having my parents understand what was going on until afterwards. While they knew racism was the thing, they didn't know how bad it could be and how it would affect me.

Maia 02:37

I was bullied a lot in middle school. It was, it was just very interesting, because I not to sound cliché, but I guess racially, I didn't really find where I fit in until much later. Even though I'm like, you know, fully black person, dark skinned. A lot of the black people there had a different background for me, they didn't have an immigrant background, my immigrant parents had restricted a lot of the stuff that I had watched growing up. So I wasn't up to date on a lot of the music trends on a lot of the other trends that would go on my neighborhood, the kids were a lot more like, you know, free and what they were able to

do, they'd be outside from like dusk until dawn, and they would be or from dawn till dusk, and they would just be able to just like run all over the place, do whatever, that led to a lot of them getting into things such as drugs, gang related activity, sexual things a lot sooner than me. But, um, that also meant that there was a real social disconnect and a cultural disconnect between the two of us. And so I got bullied by the black kids a lot for not being hip, I guess, or with the trends. The white kids bullied me for obvious reasons, racism.

Maia 03:56

I also got sister locks when I was 10. And from that point, I because no one my age really had locks anyway, I had really liked them. My family really liked them because we're Jamaican, and my hair was very difficult to take care of. My grandma had arthritis, so she couldn't really do her hair by herself anymore. And my mom worked all the time, so she had no time to take care of our hair. So sister locs was a great compromise for all of us because less pain for me and less work for them. But I got bullied because my sister locks were quite short when I was younger, because even though I had a lot of hair, I guess as a kid, it wasn't like down my back or it wasn't super long. A lot of girls back then were either getting relaxers or had their hair straightened regularly. And so black and white kids are like would like believe me for what my hair looked like. So it looked like we'll be Goldberg they would yank my hair and say it was like stretchy like yarn. And that would like you know, it was like you know, interesting. Also southern white girls, but I guess white girls everywhere do that thing where they're very passive aggressive and Very just cold war tactics and the way that they would bully you, they would never do so in a way that was overtly aggressive. But you know that the way that they were treating you was different. And they would look at you weird or they would like, you know, say things like, Oh, are you really wearing that? That's so interesting. I've never really seen anything like that before. Very much that scene in Mean Girls, where Regina was like, I love your skirt, even though she secretly hates it. That was the exact type of passive aggressive tactics that white woman would do. And so that made middle school very hard.

Maia 05:37

I got good grades, but they did start to slip in math, I got B's which made me very stressed. I also had a lot of anxiety emerging during this time. My first bouts with anxiety showed up at the end of elementary school. But by middle school, my anxiety was definitely running rampant, even though I didn't know what it was at the time. So yeah, but I did have a lot of fun with fashion in middle school. I felt like that was a fun way for me to escape. My mom really loves fashion. She loves clothes, and she really loves dressing me and my sister up. So she loves anything with rhinestones, and like jewels and bedazzled or Blinky, so I would just have sequins and rhinestones on all my outfits. But even though I had short hair, I'd wear a lot of headbands with like, you know, ribbons, and

like jewels, stuff like that. And that was really fun. And people actually liked my style. So, that was one way I found, I guess, some peace and some respite.

Maia 06:35

High school, I got my friend group down more. I found other black women that I really appreciated. But High School is when I really started to emerge in my queerness. And I never had queer friends that I really felt close to. The only queer people I knew were white. And the way they interacted with queerness was completely different from mine. I didn't like it at all. I thought it was very superficial. I thought it was very odd. I thought it was very much fixating on different aspects that didn't make sense to me. And so when I mainly made friends with a group of black and Southeast Asian women, we, they were straight. And so I didn't really talk about my sexuality with them a lot beyond what I had to. And even though when I first got my first partner in high school, who was an odd man, I spoke to them about it a little bit, but not much because they didn't know how to interact with it. They kind of skirted around the topic. They'd be like, Oh, yes, girl. So cute. Y'all are great, but like, it never felt like truly supportive. I only had one friend that truly got it. And she was a heterosexual friend, and we're still friends to this day, but I never felt comfortable talking about my sexuality.

I also got labeled as an SJW (social justice warrior) in high school, which is really funny, because I feel like I was a total liberal them. And if they knew what an SJW really was, they would know that I was nothing like an SJW. Back then even my economics teacher one day in class in my senior year said that I was like a communist. And I was like, I'm nowhere; I didn't even know what communism really was like, I wouldn't get into communism until college anyway. And so I was just mislabeled and viewed and projected on to a lot. And the only people I really found community with were people who kind of looked up to me as like a parental figure, which was a lot of young queer people and that was nice for a while while it lasted. But it was kind of something that followed me into college and I started to like it a lot less in college, because in college, they don't need me. They don't need a parental authority figure. You're in college in NYU, in like New York, where there's so many other queer people you can look up to in a small southern town where I was the only outlet as being who was really vocal and like supportive and strong and her identity shirt. I'm happy to help those kids feel some sense of community. But here, I was annoyed by it. So yeah, that's my middle school and high school experience.

Olivia Newsome 09:16

What influenced you the most growing up? It can be social media, Tumblr, fan fiction, cartoons.

Maia 09:26

Um, I guess growing up in two phases. My first major influence is television. I grew up with television. My family is a huge TV family. We have a TV in every room of the house. My grandma being an immigrant, she watched her soap operas every day, watch her news in the morning, watch. The talk shows the morning talk shows. Like I knew the schedule the TV like I knew my school schedule. I knew exactly what was going to be on every day. And so I would say that was my first primary influence. I watched a lot of cartoons when I was younger, I loved Avatar Last Airbender. I love um a lot of cartoons on Disney and Cartoon Network. I love Chowder Chatter was a really fun one, Curage, the Cowardly Dog was great. I was a huge SpongeBob fan. In fact, my first best friend ever, we bonded over Spongebob and crazy art crayons because our parents were too cheap to buy the crayons. And so, TV influenced me a lot then.

Maia 10:24

Going on later into middle school in high school, social media influenced me a ton. I am obsessed with fanfictions now, but I actually didn't get into bed infections until the very end of middle school and then I didn't really get into like lesbian fanfictions until my sophomore year high school. And so it was very much social media. I was on Tumblr a lot. I was on Facebook back in the days when they would post memes from Tumblr and I funny onto those Facebook pages. And you my sister would scroll through them for hours just laughing. I watched a lot of vines. I watched a ton of YouTube videos. I was a huge YouTube kid. I watched like, you know, Michelle Phan, regrettably, Dan and Phil, a lot of the MUA (make up artists) makeup era girls, and I started getting into lesbian short films. At the end of middle school in high school. I was obsessed with those. So yeah, those were my major influences in childhood.

Olivia Newsome 11:23

What was it like being a young lesbian on Tumblr? What was that Tumblr space, like, in general?

Maia 11:30

So I didn't get on the queer part of Tumblr till I was older. When I got my first partner and my partner was a Tumblr, lesbian at the time. And they were in that whole entire thing. I got introduced to Tumblr, it's actually a funny story. I was in middle school, there was this girl. And she was obsessed with one direction she carried around a folder full of these like, you know, printed out like things. And I didn't know what it was. And she showed me

one day and she told me to read it. And I was like, okay, yeah. And it was the most graphic descriptions of sex with the One Direction members and I was like, why would their girlfriends post this? Like, this is insane. And she's like, Oh, my gosh, it's not their girlfriends. It's called imagines it's fanfiction. And I was like, what? And I was intrigued by anything sexual at the time. I was like, huh, this is curious. So I went home that day, when nobody was upstairs, and I went on my mom's laptop and searched up, One-D imagines and One-D fanfiction. And I was intrigued. And even though I wasn't like, titillated sexually, I was curious, I wanted to know more. I was like, what the hell is this. And that's when I discovered that world. Around the same time, I discovered Wattpad. And all of the stuff on tumblr and Wattpad were very similar. So you would have like, Wattpad for the books and Tumblr for the aesthetics.

Maia 12:52

I was on Tumblr for the aesthetics of most things. And I joke about this with my sister now. Early Tumblr was just eating disorders, wealthy white women. And just like jealousy porn, I would say like, things that made you want, like, I want to have that life, if you didn't have it, it was also very white. So in the early days, I was just scrolling through Tumblr, and like, I wish I had that life. I wish I had this. I would also use Tumblr to find people that I found attractive, and I promise it makes sense. But I was obsessed with a certain brand of like, alternative white boy at the time, who was like, you know, pale with the dark hair and a little feminine. I was like, these guys are so cute. Like, I want one for myself, only to realize that it definitely influenced my tastes and women later on like 100%. And yeah, and then I guess when I got to the queer side of Tumblr, I never actually saw the discourse. I didn't see the discourse until much later I came into queer discourse through Twitter, like queer Tumblr discourse through Twitter, because after the porn purge, all of the Tumblr queers came to Twitter and made that a hell site as well. But I remember seeing the early days of like, lesbian aesthetic stuff like those white lesbians with this fucking skateboards and like the snapbacks and the hats and like posing and like, I would feel like embarrassed looking at them. I was like, What am I like them? Like I hadn't fully felt comfortable in my lesbian identity. I thought lesbian was a bad word for a long time, but I would see these girls and I would get like, you know, flustered not in the sense of like being turned on but just like embarrassed I'm like, why am I looking at this? This is so weird. Like these girls are so got it. Ah, but yeah, I was mainly on Tumblr just for the images and stuff. So I came across a lot of horrible things like a shit ton of eating disorder content. A garbage when I was there when I'm this weird aesthetic was I read only wrote about it was so strange, like, oh, the pale grunge aesthetic of Tumblr was horrible. I was there for that whole era. So, during my Arctic Monkeys, the 1975, Lana Del Rey, Marina era, that was the place that was my ground zero. That's how I found new artists. That's how I found me lyric. I discovered the 1975 through Tumblr after listening to Arctic Monkeys in the neighborhood, and pilgrims was wild a lot of glamorization of mental illness and at the time, I was very mentally ill. So yeah, that actually makes sense. So I was on Tumblr at the peak of when mental illness

was glamorized, and I fed into it. I loved grunge in ninth grade, I wore like, you know, flannels and all black and eyeliner and red lipstick on a daily basis. My Doc Martens that I stole from my mom, I was obsessed with them. Um, yeah, so it was very visual. I was not on the side where people are like articulating their thoughts and feelings. I was mainly only on the visual aesthetic side. And that really influenced me, because I became, I'm a very visual person in general. And I think that really shaped a lot of my ideas about beauty. For sure. Shaved a lot of my views about myself and my own self image, which if you had a garbage self image at the time, Tumblr only made it worse. And yeah, that was really it.

Olivia Newsome 16:27

What were the lesbian YouTubers and lesbian short films that you watched? Can you name them?

Maia 16:35

Wow, I can't remember the titles of the short films, but pretty much name anyone I saw them. I saw them for sure. Lesbian YouTubers -

Olivia Newsome 16:44

the vampire one.

Maia 16:45

Oh, that's not a short film. That's a web series.

Olivia Newsome 16:48

Oh. Okay.

Maia 16:50

So, all right. So I discovered lesbian YouTubers before I discovered lesbian web series. A huge channel on YouTube was the unsolicited project or, and the gay woman's channel, they kind of either changed their name, or they were one channel that had multiple sub dramas. It was these two women, Sara, and something else. I can't remember the name of the other girl. They still make videos, but like, they would meet with so many of the popular lesbian YouTubers at the time, these two Canadian women, lesbians, grown as hell to like they're like, like in their late 30s now, but like, they would just like, which isn't a bad thing. But like, yeah, they were like adults, which was for me, it was crazy. Because people kind of like fashion, lesbianism was like a young thing. Like, Yeah, you heard about the old lesbians. Like, I knew Wanda Sykes. And that was it as far as old grown lesbians. And that was like it but they showed me new lesbians from them. I discovered Stevie Bobby, Ali Hills, Rose and Rosie. Um, so many others. Bri and Christie, which is horrible. It's Bree and Chrissy, not Bree and Christie, but honestly, getting your names right is not important. But um, so many others there were black ones as well, which is really exciting. But even more scary at the time like seeing other like it's okay when white women are lesbians because that's why women, whatever they do, doesn't really matter. But seeing black women be lesbians and like being potentially a black lesbian was terrifying. But so I watched them kind of at a distance because it made it too real for me. But AriFitz who doesn't identify as a woman any longer and that's cool. I'm not sure how they identify now, but they were hugely influential. And they were really showing black, androgyny and black queerness in that way, Jade Fox who I still watch to this day, who was one of the first to bring attention to the divide because lesbian YouTube was very much the white side and the black side and the white YouTubers would not collab with the black YouTubers and vice versa, except in very rare instances. Stevie Bobby and -

Olivia Newsome 18:59

Why was that?

Maia 19:03

To be honest, I think location was a part of it. But also the audience. The white lesbians had sponsorships way before the black lesbians did. And they had sponsorships from big brands. A lot of sex toy brands were the first to feel comfortable sponsoring them. A lot of games Rose and Rosie get sponsored by a lot of iPhone games and stuff like that. I Jade Fox, which is the one that I've kept up with the longest, has gotten so few sponsorships compared to them and has a completely different audience and also talks about completely different things. Black lesbians often could not make being lesbians being a lesbian, their sole part of their brand, like Jade Fox doesn't necessarily want to be limited

by our lesbianism, but talks about how you know, she had to talk about other things as well. Like she did hair videos, she did outfit videos, she did stuff like that, but the white lesbians just wouldn't collab with them or talk to them. A lot of them also either leave in California or in London, and so there was a London gay tubers, like was Rose and Rosie, for example. Some other ones, there was also a group of Australian ones who eventually moved to California. Also, a lot of the white lesbian YouTubers would date each other. So they really had like community with each other then. and so like Shannon and Cami, for example. And then Ali Hills when she broke up with Stevie started dating one of the Australian YouTubers, like one of them, I forgot her name, but yeah, and so there was a big divide. So you didn't really see them a lot. And I'm sure when the YouTube algorithm started becoming more developed, it was intentional. I felt like black lesbians were very much suppressed. To this day, it's kind of hard to find them, but if you knew you knew, like, um, there was that one girl the light skinned with a dreads, I remember seeing her a lot and a couple of white YouTubers did collab with her, like Stevie Bobby was one of the white YouTubers who did collab with and talk about other lesbian YouTubers, which really helped finding them. And so that was cool. But, um, I guess the original question? Yeah, um, I guess so. Yeah.

Maia 21:11

After discovering through the unsolicited woman slash the gay women's channel, I discovered lesbian, the lesbian web series Carmilla. Now, I just saw it once. And like their videos, and I didn't see it that much again afterwards. But speaking of Tumblr, when I didn't tell her because I did follow gay shit on Tumblr, I saw like, it was trending that like Carmilla had won like a Webby. I believe it was a Webby or they won something at a Canadian what like a Canadian award shows that didn't just award just web series, which is huge. They were like, then they started calling it the little web series that could so I was like, Okay, it's like 1am When I discovered it, I watched almost the entire thing. In one night, they had three seasons, and I watched the entire first season on one night, my life had changed, my life had completely changed. I had just broken up with my partner at the time, I was really mentally ill, I was on my third, third antidepressant in a series of what would eventually be five. None of them had worked at the time, I was very depressed, which is wise about what I am anyway. And I stayed home from school the next day, because I was still feeling sick, depressed, sad down, and I'd also stayed up the whole night. But discovering that show really just unlocked something with me, like that show is the reason I was able to fully become comfortable calling myself a lesbian for the first time it made being a lesbian so normal, because the show didn't say, like them being lesbians wasn't the main thing. Everybody in the show is queer. And their lesbianism took a backstage, the main events of the plot, which was what made it feel normal and real. And I had been like, you know, throwing around the idea of calling myself a lesbian for a while, but a lot of that fear and stigma that I had was still present. But after watching this show, I started calling myself a lesbian. It like happened slowly, but surely. But I know that it was

definitely influenced by that show. And by the time I finished it, I become so obsessed with it. And I discovered other shows, because Carmilla premiered and was hosted on the YouTube channel kind of TV that did a lot of other lesbian web series and queer web series. I watched all for one, which was a lesbian web series beamed after the three musketeers, but it was set in college, and they were sorority cross too. And it was like lesbians convenience varieties, like that's cool. That's fine. become obsessed with that. And then one of the girls, Gwendolyn, had another web series that wasn't part of any kind of TV. But it was, I forget what it was called. But it was really good. And it was definitely more well done. I really started appreciating short form content, because at that time, there's been a definite recent boom of like lesbian content and media. But at that time, it was skimpy. It was real skimpy. We had the movies that were made, like prior to 2010, or prior to 2012. Everybody was talking about Carol at that time, but Carol was like the most recent thing that people were really excited about. My ex, which was a big red flag, loved 'Blue is the Warmest Color' if you've ever seen it.

Yeah, understand why it's a fucking red flag. I saw it. I didn't like it. In fact, it made me hate being lesbian more. And so at this time, YouTube, and like the short film, Love Series, genre was popping off like, if you look now there are hundreds of lesbian web, like short films, not as much as web series, but there were hundreds of lesbian short films. And so I just really started watching those and like becoming apps This, and it didn't really click to me until one day, somebody had had an intense homoerotic friendship for a number of years with at that point, asked me how I became so comfortable in my lesbianism, and like my queer identity and was like, I just only watch queer content. Like from that point in high school on, I only sought out their content. I only enjoyed queer content. I only watched your content, specifically with lesbians, like not just the general vague, queer, I need the word lesbian. And it made me feel so much happier and more comfortable in myself. I built my identity online around being a lesbian at the time I started getting into Twitter which was a mistake later on but at the time was really good because the lesbian community on Twitter was really popping off and I have Mutual's that I still talk to to this day, that I made them. And yeah, I just really submerged myself in the world. And it was definitely because of my early lesbian, YouTube.

Olivia Newsome 26:04

How did race, gender and class impact you growing up?

Maia 26:11

So I was a low middle class black woman, but low mid, low middle class, I say fluctuating because after the 2008 recession, my mom was laid off a total of three times. And so we were on and off of assistance, like food stamps. Um, my, my grandma, because she was a retired woman, she always had food stamps. So we would always have that and to like, help us out. But then when my mom was on food stamps, we were really poor and restricted in that way. I just remember wealth and a lack of it being a huge part of my childhood. I used to just question like, why I didn't understand, especially because the

kids around me when they had stuff that I wanted. I wanted an iPhone so bad when it came out in middle school, like, okay, it was years after the first iPhone came out. But when the iPhone four came out, I wanted it so bad. My mom had gotten one. And I was like, Mom, why can't I have one like all the kids in school had one and I just cried, I would cry for hours because I didn't have a fucking iPhone. In middle school. I didn't get it. I was, um, my mom would always get into the good brands too late. And it was because that's when they would be on sale.

Maia 27:30

So like everybody in elementary school was wearing Aeropostale and PS and Abercrombie and Hollister. And I couldn't afford that we didn't start buying Abercrombie. And I mean, we never bought Abercrombie, but we didn't start buying Aeropostale so I was in middle school. By that time. Aeropostale was well on its way out. Justice was a huge brand around like, um, like, it was a huge brand for black women particularly, there's this one girl in my class, who had Justice head to toe like Justice down. And I wanted it so bad, but my mom could not afford it. We went into the store once and my mom could not afford it. But, as we got older, my mom was always somebody who wanted to give me and my sister what we wanted, she really wanted to give us things. And she never wanted to deny us of everything, which I'll always be appreciative of her for. But so she signed up for a lot of store credit cards, a lot of stuff like that, which definitely made her already not great financial situation worse.

Maia 28:31

At one point, we almost lost our house. That was when the 2008 recession was really bad. Our house was overvalued, like most houses were. My parents bought the house at the end of 2007. So literally right before the crash. And so we had to get it refinanced. My grandma had to declare bankruptcy. My parents split a year after my grandma. After selling her house in New York, she had like quite a bit of money. She gave \$10,000 to my dad to get a new car. Then she gave him another 15,000 to start his business flipping homes because that's what everybody was doing back then was flipping homes that didn't end up working out. So that was money lost. My mom did a lot of temp jobs, stuff like that. So yeah, but for a while the worst of it was really concealed from us.

Maia 29:27

I was obsessed with dolls and my mom's love for buying dolls for me, so she bought me Bratz dolls because they were relatively affordable. And thank God that was the case. Never got an American Girl doll. I won that one really bad growing up as a southern girl. If you didn't have an American Girl doll you're pretty much nobody. And I wasn't nobody because I didn't have one. And this one time this girl bought her American Girl dolls to show Intel in first grade. And I was so pissed. Um, I guess moving on to race. I grew up in sub rural Georgia. And even though it was only 45 minutes outside of Atlanta at that time, Georgia is seen as a very black place now, but what a lot of people don't realize is that's a very recent thing. It happened in the last decade.

And when I first moved to my town, my town was majority white. As it stands now, my town is almost 70%, black. And I was there through that transition. Obviously, we know about the phenomena of white flight. But actually witnessing it in real time was funny, when we first moved to my neighborhood, my neighborhood, in terms of house and look, my neighborhood is worth a lot. But as the demographic changed that also changed the way my neighborhood was viewed. When we first moved in there, our neighborhood was pretty mixed racially, we had two South Asian families, a number of white families, and a lot of black Caribbean families. A couple of indo Caribbean families, a couple Latinx families, and we all kind of live there. But as time went on, the white families moved out, the South Asian families moved out. And what was left was a lot of black, African American and black Caribbean families. A lot of people got divorced. My mom called the neighborhood the divorce neighborhood. And that was really funny.

Maia 31:23

Our neighborhood became known for its black kids are black, the black kids in our neighborhood were the most notorious at our school, they would either be very popular, get into a lot of trouble, or both. A lot of them were both at the same time. And so racially, that was interesting. In elementary school, I experienced a lot of racism for my teachers. There were some that were really great, but there were also a lot that weren't. One time I was in a program called Sage, which was the special and talented, special and gifted education program. No, it was something. Yeah, it was the Gifted Education program. And so we were learning about immigration in the United States in the 19th century. And we were talking about, like, you know, people coming to Ellis Island, and like last names and stuff. And I was like, Well, I knew in my family at that time that one of my grandfather was Irish. His name was actually Man McDonald. And he was, Well, damn, oh, well, there was a last name anyway. But he was Irish, and he had lived in Ireland. And so I told my teacher, yeah, my last name is actually Irish. And she looked at me and said, No, sweetie, you're African American. So your last name probably came from your slave owners. I was shocked. That was my first real understanding of race and like a real life sense. Because like, I didn't, I knew about slavery, but like, I didn't know how bad slavery was until much later because shit, Georgia education, they didn't really teach us. You know, it was a war of Northern aggression. It was a war for states rights, all of that. But to be called out as the

only black kid in that class, to be the only one told my name wasn't real. My last name didn't come from my lineage. It came from slavery was embarrassing was so rude.

Maia 33:17

This woman, this white bitch named Miss Pepe, her name was actually miss Pepe. And she was like the coolest, meanest woman ever, very ironic. And so I had to deal with coming to terms with race a lot. When I started going through puberty, that was very interesting. So I was on the bus one day at the end of elementary school, and I was wearing these Capri pants because like that was like the style back then the Capri pants, that scrunched at the bottom, and then you'd roll them up below the knee. And it was field day and we were on the bus on the way home. I was just sitting there with my legs on the bus seat in the back, because that's where a couple of kids who are kind of cool, at least on the bus, were and this one girl who wore Aeropostale, Abercrombie, Hollister every day, she was considered so beautiful. And she was blonde, looked on my legs and said, Maia, you don't shave your legs. I had just become aware of my body like that was a race and gender moment for real.

Like I was like, I didn't have a body until that moment. That was the moment when my body materialized in front of me. And I was like, what? I went home and stole my mom's razors, and I shaved every other day from elementary to high school. It wasn't until high school and I started to comfortable with not shaving and now I shave maybe once or twice a year, maybe three at most. But I was so insecure. Because after she said that the black boy who had sat was sat with us that I kind of had a crush on at the time. started laughing It was like ill I would never be with a girl who didn't shave her legs. I thought I was gonna kill myself. Like that was the time where I was like, really became aware of my body and insecure. I also noticed that I had smaller Oops when I was younger, and obviously things are a little bit different now, but at the time having small boobs and elementary school and middle school was I guess a reason for you to get bullied. So I would wear push up bra sometimes. I'd wear two double stuffed padded push up bras at once to elementary school, elementary middle schools when it got worse Middle School, yes.

Olivia Newsome 35:23

Like were you single digit? Were you a single digit?

Maia 35:26

You mean a single letter?

Olivia Newsome 35:27

No, no number age.

Maia 35:29

single Digit. No, no, no, no, no, I'm in elementary school. I was 10 or 11. Oh, yeah. So it was the fifth grade when this happened. But in middle school, I wore push up bras every day. And I'd wear those tank tops that had the built in bra for extra lift. I would I learned that you shouldn't stuff your bra with tissue paper, you should stuff it with socks because socks hold its shape. And I remember one day, and it was probably the first time I realized I don't like being looked at. And I'm like I wanted male validation. But when I actually got it, it was gross. There's this one boy I was talking to and I was wearing this super cute fitted V neck cable knit sweater that was pink and red stripes. And I had like a camisole underneath it because back then it was all about layers. And I had like my boobs looks huge. Like if you look pic pictures of me, and middle school and high school, you might be in middle school and elementary school, you might be like, What the hell happened specifically in middle school. It's because I would wear so many push up bras and like super padded. And I was talking to this guy, and he was just looking at my chest. And I was like, No. Um, so that was a huge part of the race and gender part because I was thin as a child and obviously thin was in then is still in but like then was really in back then. But there was a different experience when you were a thin black girl. You was never good for you to be thin. Like, yes, but no.

Maia 36:58

You were too thin for your family members, one weak and thin enough, especially if you had like, I had a mom and a grandma and sisters and a sister who was considered plus size at the time. And it was very difficult. And I still feel a lot of guilt and sadness towards this now. But my mom projected a lot of her ideals of being thin onto me. She used to be very thin when she was younger too. But after having kids, she maintained her stomach to two C sections. And she was always dieting, detox pills, detox teas, like, you know, trying new fad diets trying these workout tapes. And my sister when she was she's always been like, you know, like on the chubby side as a kid and like plus size even now as she's an adult. But our family would definitely treat us differently. And one day, it'd be great that Marley will tease out of you to say, well, you know why they'd be reading this. I was listening. I'm sorry. But anyway, what did we good for her to be like, you know, thick to be all of that another day, it'd be bad. She would go to the doctor, they say I needed to gain more weight. They say she needed to lose weight, and we'd go to doctor appointments at the time. At the same time, my mom would be like, you look great. And anything you put on, like you have a lot of body like you don't have to worry, but I was getting bullied to hell.

And back in middle school, I would have breakdowns every morning for a year, to the point where I would be late to school every day where my mom would have to literally try to comfort me because I felt so ugly and everything I put on. That's also why I really prioritize fashion and middle school because I was like, if I was gonna get bullied, I was like, I need to look good. I need to give them less Reasons to Believe me. But of course they were gonna believe me anyway. So, um, I was just dealing with that. That was hard. I remember that. Like I was just very concerned about my physical presence and how I looked physically a lot and tried a lot of things to look better. I was on YouTube beauty YouTube back in the day, and there was a shits on the skin lightening videos that was telling you how to make homemade bleach a lot of the girl this is actually really funny and it's funny knowing this now because like my partner South Asian and learning what was happening I remember watching this like South Asian woman, tell me how to make a skin lightening and Skin Brightening Mask at home and I wanted to do it. Mix Turmeric, mix yogurt, and mix lemon and your skin will look brighter and nicer. I think those dry masks and shit I used to do in middle school is why I have dark spots and scars now, because that shit was insane. It was homemade bleach. I would also like, you know, I would take my mom's foundation and mix it with sunscreen and I like face cream because like BB creams and CC creams are really in middle school. I don't know if you remember -

Olivia Newsome

Yeah.

Maia

I was trying to make a homemade BB and CC cream. Haven't been our colors yet. Exactly. So I figured out how to make homemade ones from YouTube using my mom's foundation lotion. Yeah, I would use my mom's foundation, some body lotion, sunscreen, and like to put it on my face. It honestly looks kind of good. I'm not gonna lie like a dumb, but I would also like to steal my mom's mascara because my mom didn't allow me to wear makeup. But all the girls in middle school it was take FaceTime like it was hydel Jersey Shore early Kim Kardashian like you know, Maybelline Dream mousse mat all over the face, spire lashes, no eyebrows and concealer lips. So I wanted to be able to participate because makeup was currency back then, like we're Yeah, we're in your skin but better era. But back then, makeup was a status symbol, makeup was a class symbol. And because I didn't wear makeup, my mom didn't wear makeup heavily. I would just do my mom's makeup and I was obsessed with beauty YouTubers, and it kind of developed my first love of makeup. But back then I was definitely not doing it just because it was fun. I was doing it to fit in. And I was doing it to make myself feel better. So um, I guess that's multiple things about entering race, gender and class.

Olivia Newsome 41:09

You did a good job.

Maia 41:10

Thank you.

Olivia Newsome 41:11

Yes, of course.

Maia 41:12

Um, yeah, I guess that was it. It was a lot of keeping up. I guess the last thing I'll say, in terms of race, gender and class, my mom wanted to keep up appearances. You can't have a black kid sending them to school looking ratty, you know. And so iron clothes, shiny face moisturized, nice hair. Exactly. Nice hair lip balm all the time, because my mom used to get on to me because my lips used to be dry as hell in elementary school. So lip balm and lip gloss all the time, lotion your toes or ever actually have feet. And in middle school. If the black kids caught you looking at you, you were gonna be bullied. The rest of the year, it was awful. Um, I remember. I remember trying to figure out I guess another thing with race and those school interests diverge. There were black interests, and there are white interests. And I was always in the middle and trying to keep up based on who my friends were at the time. I had to constantly, you know, rotating friend groups. And I also had friend groups for different places. My friends on the bus ride home because the bus was a real critical place of my childhood. were different from the friends that I ate lunch with at school. I ate lunch with a lot of white people. But on the bus it was black kids because that's where my neighborhood was, it was a black neighborhood. So Mindless Behavior in one direction existing at the same time at the same time as Justin Bieber. I was a music kid at this time. I'm a pop music connoisseur. I still am. I still love pop. I love it. But I was getting into Mindless Behavior. And I hated one direction. I was a huge Justin - Justin Bieber fan, but you had to stay caught up on all of them. So I did. And yeah, I think that was very interesting.

Maia 42:52

Never went to my first concert until my freshman year of high school, because I never could afford a concert. I didn't even know how these kids would go to a concert. Kids. We've been going to see the Jonas Brothers, Hannah Montana, Selena Gomez. I was like, Are your parents actively looking for concerts to take you to because I didn't know about that. I did have an mp3 player. I didn't have an iPhone. I didn't get to listen to music. I got to listen to music on my computer at home, the Family Computer through YouTube. That was it. And the Disney Channel and Nickelodeon music videos so they used to show

in between the commercials. But I felt nice. Like I was trying to align myself I also got emo friends in middle school because that was the height of emo. So I was trying to fit in with them listening to I actually liked Black Veil Brides. My friends are really interested in 'Pierce the Veil.' I couldn't get into them. I listened to Sleeping with Sirens. I really liked Sleeping with Sirens at the time. And so it was constantly trying to make up for like, you know, trying to fit in. But my secret love at the time was a genre that I called any music back then. But now I'm sure it would change. But Marina and Lana Del Rey changed my life. I discovered Marina and the Diamonds I think at the end of elementary school, early middle school, and I was obsessed. Lana Del Rey summertime sadness when, like, you know, charted top of the charts that one summer in middle school, I think goes between sixth and seventh grade. Then young and beautiful came out with the Great Gatsby movie. I was so obsessed. I was also listening to the radio serially at the time my grandma's brother who was her half brother, so I called him. His name was Uncle something but like his uncle. Yeah, so right. But he was my great uncle. Technically, he came to our house to visit for like a month, because he lives in Canada. And he listened to the radio every night. And I was like, I want to do that because I was having nightmares about the time we learned about the Holocaust in school, and that changed my life forever. I couldn't sleep for a month. I couldn't sleep for a month. I was like why were they teaching us we watch all the movies we watch the devil's arithmetic, the boys and The Boy in the Striped Pajamas, Auschwitz, all of that. I was traumatized. I had to ask my sleep my sister to sleep in my bed with me because I didn't want to sleep alone.

Maia 45:03

So listening to radio at night was how I did that. That's how I started listening to pop. I was listening to the top 40 Every night power 96.1 was all I listened to. And it was so great. So I was doing all of that. And so I was into EDM and into pop music at the time. So I had to like, I guess what we call it now is I'm cold switching, I learned how to close with from very young age, I knew how to fit in with the black southern people, I knew how to fit in with the black Caribbean people. I knew how to fit in with the white kids. And I just did it as like a sense of survival. And so I learned all of these different aspects of pop culture so I could fit in with them. And so I could like, minimize the bullying as much as possible. And me and my sister also just listened to a lot of music together. Like we listened to a ton of EDM together. We loved a lot of electric dance music at the time. And we Yeah, that was just it. So I guess like race, gender and class, it was constantly figuring out how to survive in places that were not built for any of my race, my identifiers at the time, and also finding good things in figuring out how to survive.

Olivia Newsome 46:16

Thank you so much. Next question I'm going to ask you is around. No, I can ask that one. Have clothes during makeup, body modifications, piercings help assist with your any of your identities or your lesbianism?

Maia 46:37

Yes. Now, I've wanted to get more into like, you know, tattoos and piercings and stuff. But one thing that I've really thought of recently, something that my girlfriend talks about a lot is that tattoos and piercings are class symbols. And it's funny because like, obviously, like the 1950s, 60s, 70s, it was a lot different. Back then a lot of lesbians got their tattoos and piercings. In underground spaces, it was seen as counterculture. But tattoos and piercings are very much especially mainstream in the queer community, but also mainstream outside of the queer community. And it's expensive. And as a black person, you want to get quality tattoos, so I have yet to get one because it's very hard to find other tattoo artists that can do black skin and do a good job and I also am poor, so I cannot afford it. But I was obsessed with piercings in high school because again, that was the height of the grunge era and a huge part of grunge was having a piercing, the septum piercing was everything. I would get fake septum piercings, and I would wear them. My grandma, a traditional Jamaican woman, was like you will not be wearing these. Why do you want to bore your nose like, like a hog? My dad was like, super against piercings. But my mom was always loved and supportive. Anyway, I wanted to express myself. She loved my grunge era. She loved what I was wearing black lipstick and red lipstick she thought it was so cool. And doing like you know, makeup and stuff like that. So my mum always supported me.

Maia 48:04

So that summer after I broke up with my ex, the end of 2017, I was just so sad. And my mom knew I was sad and she kind of knew why but she had kind of been me from dating this person, but I did it anyway, she knew that I did anyway. And so she also knew was that I was also on antidepressants at the time, because combined with the relationship and the deterioration of my mental health. I was not doing well. And so my mom was like, You know what, let's go get it. I know you've been wanting it. Let's do it. I got my nose and my septum pierced the same day. I felt whole. I had felt like I had finally found myself. I had something interesting or fun about myself and I loved it. My mom let me dye my hair. I had still had locs at the time, but my mom was obsessed with dyeing her hair because she really wanted that Rihanna red that was popular at the time. And so she let me dye my hair. Um, I didn't ever really bleach it but we would just put on semi permanent colors and like I would be like you can't see how my hair is blue in the sun like It's like blue and purple like you can't tell. No, nobody can tell because it wasn't there, it was dying over black hair. And so at my junior prom she let me dye my hair red. are lots of us at the time. Gave me an ombre deep burgundy red that matches my prom dress and it was gorgeous. I loved it because she was a professional like you know, hair dye or at the time and I was obsessed with it. So I wore a lot of makeup so I didn't do a lot of body mods at that time

beyond my piercings but I wore a lot of big makeup. junior and senior year I was wearing like a full look everyday because that was at the height of 2016

Olivia Newsome 49:46

What did that makeup make you feel when you put it on?

Maia 49:49

Excited, fun, safe. If people were going to make fun of me for my skin tone, if people were going to make fun of me for my hair, they could not make fun of my makeup. I was eating them white bitches down every day. Because my makeup was pretty, my makeup looked nice. I knew how to blend, I knew how to make colors pop on my skin tone, and I got compliments. Everywhere. Everywhere I went, my teachers would compliment me, my classmates would compliment me and match my eyeshadow to my outfits. This one look, I remember in my hair, I would have braided my hair the night before. So my locs were curly, and really pretty. And I did this cobalt blue eyeshadow with a purple crease, and more cobalt blue sweater and a leather jacket. And I felt like the baddest bitch like I still had that picture to this day, I got compliments on it, because I looked good. And I knew I looked good. I would post my makeup looks on Twitter, they would do well, too. At that point, I had learned so much from the school and beauty on YouTube, that I was pretty damn good. And the more I practice and the more I've worked and schooled better, I would like you know, the better I got. So that made me feel a lot more confident. I also felt like that was an early part of my idea.

Maia 50:59

I think the idea of using the word feminine was a little conflicting for me. But at that time, I started to understand and I still believe it now in terms of my gender presentation, I strongly believe hyper femininity is an expression of queerness. And it's also have also made a lot of community with trans women, they get it they get that hyper femininity is not the same as sis heteronormative femininity because I think femininity in that way has to be acceptable. You're feminine enough to be acceptable, but also blend in because a feminine person has to be seen but not heard. But it's hyper feminine women that get demonized by those bombshells that you see in 1950s movies that were luxurious or war or red or pink and had the most extravagant outfits. They were demonized. Think of Sharpay, things like that. I think that kind of look is very queer in its presentation. And I felt like I was exploring that at the time whether or not I realized it. So I really loved playing that up. Because a lot of the feminine women around me that were sis and heterosexual but not were, like, do the same thing. They wouldn't express themselves in that way

because they want it to be acceptable. I didn't care if men found my eyeshadow too bright or unappealing. I did it because I loved it. And you know who liked it, but women did like it and they love complimenting it. And I love that attention. And it worked out in my favor. So yeah, it made me feel safe, it made me feel confident and made me feel happy. And I enjoyed it a lot. And yeah, I would still get more piercings.

Maia 52:37

Today, I'm still planning on getting more, I do plan on getting a tattoo at some point, yes, I want to get my bellybutton pierced, it's gonna happen either by the end of this year, or by summer of next year. Um, now that I got rid of my locks, I experiment with my hair a lot more. But like, also, beauty and like modification in that way. I'm interrogating my reasons for beauty more. I don't wear as much makeup as I used to. But in terms of hyper feminine dress, I still do that a lot. I still enjoy it. I love finding out about like lesbian drag queens, because like people kind of forget that lesbians have a long history of existing in the drag community both as drag kings and as drag queens. I've enjoyed doing that and like joining it. I'm still trying to figure it out, but like, yeah, yeah, I hope that answers that question.

Olivia Newsome 53:32

Do you believe in coming out? Have you come out multiple times? Does the phrase coming into your identity resonate more with you?

Maia 53:41

Um, I believe in coming out if you want to do it, I believe that I had to come out to myself first. And then to my mom. It wasn't my choice to come out to my mom, I probably was never going to tell her but at the time, my ex, the you were just first talking and my mom was a lot less relaxed as she would get in my later high school years about who I hung out with. At that time. She wanted to know who they were who their parents were where we'd be going, I suppose because my ex at the time was older than me. Red flag number one. Um they were born in 99. So two years older at the time -

Olivia Newsome 54:25

How old were you?

Maia 54:26

I was 15.

Olivia Newsome 54:27

And they were 16/17.

Maia 54:28

Yeah. So even though two years isn't much now that I'm 21. The difference between 15 and 17 is astronomical though in your second year of high school versus just about to graduate is crazy. But nonetheless, I um, so I want to be like my ex had asked me on a date and they were going to pick me up in their car. And I was like, Mom, I'm going to hang out with this friend from school. Can I go? And my mom was like, Who's this friend, where'd they come from. And I was like, um, well, like, you know, they like a friend like, you know, we met at school, but like, we also like to talk on Twitter a lot. And then my mom was like, Um, let me see them. They had an undercut. They were diggity-dyke like, at the time. So my mom was like, Are they gay? And I say, Yes, Mom, they are gay. And I was like, I was like, Mom, why are you being homophobic?

Maia 55:29

Like, I was just so freaked out. And so like, I kept asking me to hang out, because like I was having a relationship. Like, we had already hung out once before this. No, no, we hadn't hung out yet. We would go to a concert with one of my friends and my mom would know about it. One of my friends, my best friend and I would go to see the wombats and concert. Yes. So they would go with us. And I had my first kiss at their concert, they kissed me at that concert. And just so they want because I thought it was just a friend hanging out. And they're like, I just want you to know that, like, you know, I wanted to let you know that. Like, I want this to be something more. So it just kissed you. I was like, okay, my friend who was with us at the concert. Like she was taking a picture. And then the people behind us were like, Oh, my God, oh, my god, do you want me to take a picture? So they took my camera that my friend was holding and took a picture of us. So there's a picture of us kissing on my old laptop. It's really funny. I didn't know how to kiss her at the time. And so I was just like taking off back and being taken off guard.

Maia 56:31

So we want to hang out more. And they wanted to take me out on a date. And they're like, I want to take you out to date. Where do you want to go? I was like, Zach's fees are the exact season and like, what I want to take you to a real date. I was like, I don't know. I don't know any restaurants like Red Lobster. Like, I don't know. And so my mom was like, I kept asking her, and so we were driving in the car one day and she's like, Maia, are you gay? I broke down crying. I was like oh noooo I like girls and I like boys! My mom was like, how could you be gay you so girly? Like? Well, but I was like, um, bi at the time she's like, but there's still I was like, you know, tried to assure her, I was like, well, there's still a chance that I could, like, you know, be with a guy and like, you know, it's okay. Like, I you know, we were both sobbing and she's like, it's okay. You know, it's okay. I'm not mad at you. It's fine. But like, and so I was shocked. And like I learned later on. In fact, she just told me last week that like, she told her, her one of her friends once like, you know, I like I accept her. I love her. She's my daughter. I'm always gonna love her. But like, you know, maybe she'll just like, you know, realize she likes guys in college. And she told me that her friend said, Well, if you're hoping that she like guys in college, then you don't really accept her, do you and she's like, something clicked for me then. And I was very lucky.

Maia 57:57

My mom, being a Jamaican woman, raised in the Bronx, had very patriarchal ideas. I'd love to and accept me. And that was the most important time that I came out. The second most important time was when I came out, which happened before this, but I think its second most important in terms of ranking was to my best friend. She was a straight woman. And I had a crush on a mutual friend that we had. That friend had come out to me in seventh grade, and I had a crush on them at the end of eighth grade. And by ninth grade, when I came out to my best friend, I was like I'm queer. I think I'm clear. And my friend was like, I was so afraid to talk to him. And she's like, why would you be afraid? Of course, I would have said to you, I love you. You're my best friend. We're like sisters, and we're best friends to this day still and I, I felt safe, then I felt okay. I felt like I was going to be okay. But I don't think you need to come out to be valid. My partner has yet to come out to her family. And while I was definitely cautious of dating somebody who wasn't out to her family when we first started seeing each other, it hasn't been that much of a problem. I'm going to be visiting them. They're her family for the first time in like a month.

Olivia Newsome 59:23

How do you feel about that?

Maia 59:24

I'm scared. Because at this point, we've entertained the idea that they have to know something is up. We've been together for three years. We've lived together for two of those three years. And we're just besties who do everything together all the time. And so -

Olivia Newsome 59:37

Do you think you're being set up?

Maia 59:39

I, like low-key, I'm worried. I'm like maybe it's an ambush. And so I just gotta hightail it out of there.

Olivia Newsome 59:46

I'll call you a little uber [Olivia Newsome giggles]

Maia 59:47

No for me like, but if not like you know, her parents like me, and they like me as a friend. Like a good friend for her. I keep her safe. I keep her encouraged, you know, part of me hopes and feels like it'll be okay. Like, you know, but I think coming out is a constant process. I have to come out in every single one of my classes.

Olivia Newsome 1:00:11

Yeah.

Maia 1:00:11

Um, you know, there's ups and downs to presenting in a way that most non-queer people don't see as queer. There's the perfection, the protection, it affords me I can come out when I want to come out, you know.

Olivia Newsome 1:00:24

Yeah.

Maia 1:00:25

But oftentimes, I feel like I also have to validate my queerness.

Olivia Newsome 1:00:29

Yeah.

Maia 1:00:30

I'm a lesbian, I'm not a bisexual, I'm not a pansexual. I'm not any of those other things. I am a lesbian. And it's often like, you know, it's gotten much easier than most in recent years.

Olivia Newsome 1:00:39

Yep.

Maia 1:00:40

But most people really used to think especially when I was growing up on the internet, like, in the early years, most people usually use a thing that, like, only androgynous and masculine presenting people were lesbians, and other people were just bisexual. And that obviously created a lot of stigma for by women. And it created a lot of stigma for feminine presenting lesbians.

Olivia Newsome 1:01:01

Yeah.

Maia 1:01:02

And but in recent times, there's often been, obviously a huge like, you know, shift. The general public, obviously, is more comfortable with feminine lesbians. And at the same

time, though, you still have to come out, you still have to tell people that you're lesbian, otherwise, they'll constantly assume you're not.

Olivia Newsome 1:01:17

Yes.

Maia 1:01:18

And so -

Olivia Newsome 1:01:18

We're just queer in general.

Maia 1:01:20

Right, exactly. So I feel like I have to assert that here I am, as somebody who's being a lesbian is such a huge part of my identity. And I have to come out constantly and have to assure people I'm not by I'm not paying, I am a lesbian. I like it's only non-men like, dyke diggity-dyke like, you know, like, but it's constant. And I often have to like, make the choice, because sometimes I don't feel safe. Me and my girlfriend come out every time we hold hands in public, to all of the people in the surrounding area. For a long time, you're very scared. At one point, we weren't even following on our first date, when we were holding hands after we went to The Met for our first date. And this guy followed us and called us dikes, we had to run into the Starbucks and high for like, you know, two hours. And you know, we were just like, I know my girlfriend has to come out without ever speaking, which makes me fearful for her. Because there's a lot of times where people assume stuff about her that like, they shouldn't assume, and they have no right to assume. But I don't think you have to come out. But I think coming out is unfortunately a real part of our culture. I know there's a lot of reasons why people want to make coming out not a part of our culture. But here's the thing, if you're not the dominant group, in this society, you walking into a room, like as a black person, I come out as a black person, every time I walk into a room. Yeah, I come out as a black person, whenever they see me in person, after only having interviewed me over the phone. Yes. And, like, you know, coming out is really telling the world who you are, or being forced to show who you are, right? It's consensual or non consensual, but it has to happen. And it does happen. There's no way you can not do it. And it can be a great experience. It can be an intimate experience, where you just share it with somebody you care about and trust. Or it can be

a very public and humiliating experience, where it's forced out of you where it's assumed you wear somebody out to you.

Olivia Newsome 1:03:20

Yeah.

Maia 1:03:20

And you have to confirm or deny. So yeah, my feelings about coming out are very complicated. I don't think you have to be. I don't think coming out makes you authentic. I've never believed that. I am not out to all the people in my life. My grandma doesn't know. My dad doesn't know. And, you know, I had to come out to my sister, to be honest, I don't remember that happening, but eventually did. And that is like, you know, a thing. And yeah, I think coming out is a very complex post process. It's a very personal one, but it's a constant one. It's very constant. And it's not always consensual. It's not always something one would choose, but depending on how you present, depending on the spaces you're in, you have to come out. So yeah.

Olivia Newsome 1:04:10

What were your first encounters with lesbian sex? both directly and indirectly? What attitudes did you have before and after? indirectly? We'll talk as little or as much as you want about the direct part.

Maia 1:04:23

Yeah, okay. Um, indirectly was porn. I grew up in the age of the internet, the age of the internet before parents knew about parental controls. There was this doll that because I was a doll girl, my mom bought me dolls. Every year, there was this doll called Live girls live girls who were very popular. They it was the first time I've seen a doll with an afro. The black home had a curly gorgeous Afro begged my mom, there's also talk. So I think they did something, but a whole part of their rollout was that they had a website because this was the age when kids were getting introduced to the internet, so they're like, go on this website.com. Now, honestly, I think parents probably have or should have sued the brand because I haven't heard from it since. But if you're a kid, and you throw away the box immediately after you bought it, but you know, a huge part of this doll is online, and you type in live girls.com. Live is spelt the exact same way as live. And camming was a very huge thing on the internet at the time. So I get shown a camming website, my sister who's like five at the time is next to me. And so I typed the scene and immediately it was like, titties in porn. We scream and x out. And we were so shocked. But I was curious. I was curious. I was really curious. Also, at the time that Kim Kardashian sex tape was very popular.

Maia 1:05:47

So, this is like 2007, 2008. And so sex was a thing I knew in my mind. And I was like, the sexualized woman was a huge topic of media, like, specifically, that's why I brought on the Kim Kardashian thing. People were very much talking about this tape for a long, long, long time. So when my sister was gone, I woke up the next day early on the computer, because I woke up a lot earlier than everybody else in my childhood. At that time, I went on the Family Computer. And I went back to the website, because I was curious. From then on, spurred a literal, decade long addiction of just like online porn. I discovered lesbian porn pretty early on, because like live girls, it's just focusing on the women. And I realized I liked looking at women. So I would just type in girls, I discovered Pornhub for the first time. But before Pornhub was red tube, red tube, I think it's like a conglomerate of Pornhub. Now, but that was before Pornhub became the king of Internet porn. There was a bunch of other smaller websites. I had also discovered the 900 channels on the TV. Now, those are Pay Per View porn. But the titles, I would just read through the titles, and I was like, that's really interesting. That's really interesting!! [both of us fall off the couch laughing our asses off]

Olivia Newsome 1:07:09

I would like to know about that!

Maia 1:07:10

No, exactly. And I knew I couldn't click it because it would purchase it. And if I purchase porn on TV, not only will my parents be poor, but paying extra - Oh my god. So 1000 Ways to Die was also popular, and they had an episode that was a lesbian episode, where this one girl died eating a candy bikini off her girlfriend. She choked on that. And that really stuck with me for some reason. And so I don't know when but I eventually started looking up lesbians or like girls on like Tumblr, I might Tumblr on Pornhub. And that was forever. When my dad left the house. Like when him and my parent, my mom separated, he bought me a phone just to call him because if you have parents and you know, your dad's out of the house, you're supposed to like call him and like, you'd be like singing on the phone like, Um, yes, you did. I love you, dad, like all of that. But the phone had internet. And it had a certain amount of internet I could view and I found the most niche porn to this day. I've never seen anything like it because again, this is before Internet porn was centralized into porn. Hmm, yeah. There was like, the main the biggest lesbian porn website at the time was sapphic erotica. It was like softcore porn, so nothing too much. But lesbian. And I was like, this is very interesting, as well. It's interesting. Like, no, I also looked at a lot of solo stuff. Um, yeah, that was interesting as well. Eventually, I started watching heterosexual porn a little bit. And I wasn't too interested in it. I was looking at the

girl the entire time. But that's when you saw the more extreme stuff. So that was my first interaction with indirect porn. Then when I got on Tumblr, we were on some over the porn, weren't we, like, you know, after the aesthetic was also the porn. So I liked the aesthetic during the day, and porn at night. So that was very appealing.

Maia 1:09:08

My first direct interaction with lesbian sex was with my ex in high school, the one who's two years older than me. Now, at the time, obviously, I carry a lot of interesting feelings at this, but at the time, I didn't know exactly what it was. I had felt very undesirable all throughout middle school in high school. I just cried like, Why aren't any boys interested in me? Why don't I have a boyfriend? Like, I want a boyfriend. And then when I was I was gay, I was like, and like, you know, my ex showed interest in me for the first time the first time and somebody had shown interested in me, because I had that homoerotic friendship, but like, at the time, they were very hot and cold as me and then they eventually got a boyfriend and then another boyfriend. So I was like, oh, fuck it, even though we like spent a lot of time flirting and talking about our future that we wanted to have together and going to the same school together. So then when my ex showed interest in me, I was like, wow, so they could like really be interested in me. I am not exposed to sex, okay. Like, to me having sex in high school was tacky at the time. But, you know, I could describe this interaction as being non consensual because I didn't fully know was happening. So the first time me and my ex ever did anything sexual before we we could, we had what could be described as full blown sex. They had invited me over to their house picked me up from Bandcamp, because again, we had a car, and my mom couldn't pick me up. So they invited me back to the house and we were chilling, I thought we were just gonna chill and watch TV. Like, I didn't think anything crazy was gonna happen.

So then they like, you know, we sit on the couch, and they're like, Oh, I'm just gonna change it to something we're comfortable. So they change from like, a t- shirt and jeans into like, shorts. And like a sports bra. And then they're like, oh, you know, I still want to get more comfortable. So they changed from like, shorts at a sports bra. It's like super tiny spandex shorts. And like a lacy Victoria's Secret bra. And I was just like, Okay, I was not interested in having sex, like with them at the time. Like, I was just like, okay, and they're like, oh, so would you want to watch the TV? I was like, Do you like Spongebob? Like, again, like, you know, I was. So then you're like, Oh, do you want to like, hang out with my room? Like, my brother's not home, you could just want my room. I was like, Okay, we're telling them their bed. This room is like, a four by five room. Like, it's just bad, really? So fortunately, on the bed, and they're like, do you want to like, you know, make out and then I was like, Okay, I guess. So we were making out. Eventually, they like whip out their titty. And they're like, you get like, you know, suck on my titty, and I was like, I guess. Now I'll say this. At the time, even though that wasn't what I was expected. I was like, Okay, this is kind of fun. Like, I enjoy giving somebody pleasure, like, because they seem to really

enjoy it. And then I was just like, you know, petting, petting over those shorts. I was just from Bandcamp. And I was wearing like black spandex Nike shorts, and like a black tank top. We didn't go much further than that that day. And I think we did that again one other time.

Maia 1:12:18

But then one day in August, because we had gotten together over the summer, when in August, it was like the first or second week of school, or like one week before the first week of school or something. Um, I was a photographer at the time. And I was like, I can take a like, you know, photos of you, we can do a photo shoot, and they're like, Okay, I have this really cool place that like I used to go to with my mom all the time. It was just really pretty, like, you know, shallow river in the woods. And so we were like taking no, nothing crazy happens in the woods yet. And so we were like taking photos. We were taking photos and they're like, oh my god, it'd be a really cool idea. If I like got in the water. And we feel like it'd be really aesthetic. They're wearing like a black dress. And I was like, okay, the photos cannot really good. Like, I'm not gonna lie, but photos look good. But they're like, Oh, my house is like, only 10 minutes away from here. Like, I can't really wear this like dress because it's like what like Do you mind? And so like, they take off their undies, put it in the trunk, hop in the car, we've actually got a house just like 5-10 minutes away. And they're like changing. And like, I have no recollection. But somehow it was from them changing to us making on their bed to then having sex on the floor. Because funny fact, we had sex on the floor because their granddad was home cutting the lawn. But their grandma didn't know that we were home. He came home after we had already come home. And so their granddad was a racist, like a traditional white racist. And the last time my ex had brought their black girlfriend home at the time, their grandfather was also homophobic. So they didn't like that my ex was gay. But the fact that they had a black girlfriend was crazy. So my ex didn't want us getting caught. So we did on the floor. It was kind of interesting, overwhelming. I didn't. I guess it was like a performance for me. Like, you know -

Olivia Newsome 1:14:13

Can you talk a little bit more about that. Since you mentioned that your first sexual acts with this person were nonconsensual.

Maia 1:14:19

Yes. So I knew sex was a possibility because again, they had introduced foreplay and other stuff at the time. So like, for a while, I was like, did I want this or did I not? But fun fact, on the side, I liked really cute underwear in Jamaican culture, you have to have nice

underwear because they're like, if you dropped out a row, you don't want nobody to see you like your shitty underwear. And so I had decided to wear a lacy booth on that day. So part of me was like, did I know this was gonna happen? Did I want this to happen to me? I don't know. But so I did. We were on the floor. I was shaking the entire time. The entire time I was really anxious, I was having an anxiety attack because I didn't know we were gonna have sex. Like, I didn't know we're gonna do all of that. And so like, everything went really fast. And like, it was kind of like, I guess, like, rough, I guess, because I was stressed one I was stressed, I was having an anxiety attack. So of course, things are gonna be smooth sailing down there. It's gonna be a little, you know, stiff, like, let me know, because I know your experience. I don't want to make you like -

Olivia Newsome 1:15:30

No, I'm okay! I'm okay!

Maia 1:15:31

Yeah. And so it's like, things are going to be smooth sailing, but like, you know, they just like, you know, kept going, like I say performative. Because, like, did I make sounds that were, I guess, a pleasure? Sure. But it's because I felt like I had to because they're like, you know, you know? Yes. Because at one point, they're like, you're not really saying anything, like, I'm not sure if you're like enjoying it. So it was just like, you know, okay, because the first time they did that was when they had, like, you know, suck on my titties. I don't have sensitive nipples. So I was pretending I wanted their validation a lot. And that became a core part of our relationship of sex being a way to get their validation, because they're mentally ill, they had BPD. And they had, like, you know, kind of use that to manipulate me into feeling a bit. For people with BPD listening, I'm 100% aware of the stigma. In fact, I learned a lot about it, because I cared a lot about my ex. So me saying they have BPD isn't to contribute to the stigma. But they had told me that people had abandoned them and isolated them a lot.

Maia 1:16:34

So, I just wanted them to know that I love them so much. And I wanted to take care of them. Because all I wanted, all I wanted was to be loved. I wanted the perfect traditional relationship. I wanted to go on dates, I wanted to go to the movies, I wanted to go on picnics, I wanted to go to a concert, I wasn't expecting to have sex it like, at what at this point was like, a month into our relationship. And so I just went with it. And I was like, okay, is we done now, like after, like, fingering stuff that was like, you know, but again, I was performing. So they take their performance to mean that they, you know, less keep

going. So, so they're like, you know, I can make a few even better if you like, let me eat you out. And so they just were like, like, you know, please don't eat me. I'm just like, let me I promise you, it'll feel so much better. So I was like, of course it right. Yeah. And I was like, Okay, fine. I'm not a huge fan of being eaten out. So like, you know, forgive me, but like, I was just like, okay, because, like, for me what I know now in my sexual maturity, and having had other sexual experiences, I prefer, my God, I hope my mom doesn't ever listen to this, but I prefer penetration, to like, you know, clitoral stimulation. And so like, again, I'm performing because like, this don't really feel like anything. I'm just like, Yeah, and so eventually, we stopped because, like, they were like, you know, they had a sense of sexual bravado at the time.

They're like, you know, yeah, I make all my partners come, but like, nobody can make me calm. And I was like, you know, I was not coming. Like it had been like, forever, and they're like, I'm gonna stop, because I'm tired, because my jaw hurts. I was also so scared, and like, you know, frightened and a little anxious at the time that I had, like, scratched the shit out of their back. But of course, they took that as me thinking I was having pleasure. So we hung out with one of my neighborhood friends afterwards, because they drove home, they drove me home. And then one of my friends in the neighborhood was walking and like, you know, we stopped to say hi to them, and like, I introduced them to my partner. And I remember feeling really embarrassed and upset because like, they showed that friend, the scars are only scratching them. And you're like, Yeah, guess what we did? And I was just like, you fucking idiot, Oh, I don't want to tell people about this. Like, this is embarrassing. It's embarrassing.

Olivia Newsome 1:18:51

It wasn't a great moment for you. You were having an anxiety attack because -

Maia 1:18:54

Yeah.

Olivia Newsome 1:18:54

scratches of pleasure.

Maia 1:18:55

But for me, the lines were blurred, because I was like, you know, I'm very delusional, I can really convince myself of things because I was like, Okay, no, I was having a good time. It was closing. Right, right. I don't know. Especially when my only interactions with sex had been porn. I had no formal sexual education that was intimacy based. I grew up in Georgia. My mom never told me about her sex life. Only to find out later that her sex life was so early courses, which was not great. I'm like damn, I guess it's genetic about like, you know, we'd be suffering or whatever. But I was just like, damn, okay, so I just confused myself for a long time. They were secretly a pillow Princess which no offense to pillow princesses, love to my pillow princesses. But they were definitely a pillow princess that would try to like you know, so at the beginning it was done having sex with me but then it was done just wanting me to perform acts on them. And that was fine because I didn't really like them touching me anywhere. Very really rarely did I actually get pleasure from them touching me, but I did get a lot of validation from making them come. So I did get a lot of validation for making them come, which they said that nobody else had, like being able to do easily, but I didn't like the second or third time we were together, so I'm like, I got this shit down. Um, so. Yeah, um, but yeah, um, I guess that's a long winded way of saying my first indirect and direct encounters with lesbian sex.

Olivia Newsome 1:20:37

How have your views on marriage changed before and after you identified as a lesbian?

Maia 1:20:41

I always wanted to get married, I still wanted to get married. So, nothing's really changed. Um, I've always been obsessed with weddings. I've always been obsessed, like, Okay, I did think though, that I was never gonna get married because all of the women in my family had been divorced or never married. My aunt who never married was with this broke down baby daddy for 10 years, absolute garbage, not even 10 years, they were together for like 20 years, never married. My mom and my dad split just before their 10 year anniversary. And my mom's never been married since she's been in a handful of relationships. But none of them have been really successful. My grandma got divorced. What I learned was that I didn't get it. I don't know my family. And she was having an affair with a married man for a decade. And he kept promising that he would marry her and he never did. My grandma was heartbroken. My grandfather already cheated on her. But she cheated on him too. They kind of cheat on each other. And then they got a divorce. And so I was like, Oh my God, my family is just doomed. We're just going to be women. Nobody ever wants to get married, especially in middle school and high school, when no

man desires me. I was like, I guess I'm never gonna get married, but I really want to get married.

Maia 1:21:53

Then I met my partner. Oh, well, first, I met my ex and I wanted to get married. I told them that I wanted to get married. Obviously, we were in high school, but I thought we were gonna be together forever. They did not want to get married because their parents had been divorced. And then they were married, divorced. And then they got engaged at the end of they got engaged at the end of their high school career. So like when they were a senior, and they were upset. They said the day that their parents got divorced was the best day of their life. So their parents were drug addicts. And they were also abusive to both them and each other. them as in my partner, not them as their parents. So then I met my current partner. Their parents have been married for over 20 years, but not happily. And so they harbor a lot of feelings about the idea of marriage before we were together.

They're like, I never want to get married because they thought they were bisexual. I was like being married is a deathtrap. Being married is a prison sentence. And then when they started dating me, they're like, Okay, nevermind, I can see myself getting married. So now I really do want to get married. Let me say this. I think there's a strong attitude in the queer community that queer people only want to get married, so they could have validation in the eyes of straight people. I think that's fucking stupid. I think if you know anything about AIDS and HIV history, you know why getting married was so important. Many people did not get to say goodbye to their partners, they didn't get to visit their partners in the hospital rooms, because hospitals would leverage the fact that only family members of the patient could be allowed. So a lot of gay people really fought to earn the right to be with their partners. Also, when people died of AIDS, and they have family members that they've been, you know, separated from for many years who didn't like them, who probably kicked them out on the streets, those family members also had control of their assets.

So if they gave anything during your lifetime, if they had anything of value, their partners who they could have been with, from anywhere from a year or two decades, had no control or say over what happened. And yes, should we live in a society where marriage shouldn't be required as an institution in order to have general rights with your partners? Should you be able to have rights to like your friend's stuff? If you have platonic relationships, where if something happens to your friend, you should be able to control what happened? Absolutely. But we don't live in a society like that. And while wills exist, a lot of people under the age of 30 do not have a Will you never know when you're gonna die, especially as a queer person. So marriage to me is very important. Marriage security, marriage is safety. I don't care if I have to get divorced and I'm going to divorce. But I believe very strongly in marriage as a very political thing. I don't care about getting married for other people's acceptance. I want to have a ring on my finger. I want to have a

wedding dress. I want to have a ceremony or as it says little girl I grew up watching, you know, wedding shows. It's just something that I want.

Maia 1:24:49

But now knowing queer history and the importance of marriage and queer history, I'm even more convicted and wanting to be married. Because, yeah, it really matters to Me. And so I can't say that my feelings have changed. If anything, they've grown more nuanced. And I've learned more understandings of the importance of marriage. I also read that people who aren't married should have the same rights as married people. But that doesn't make me want to get married any less. I don't necessarily want to get married for religious reasons, because I'm not religious like that. I just want the ceremony of professing your love to your partner in front of the people you love having a gorgeous piece of jewelry to show that you are a married person. I also think as a feminine presenting woman, one of the strongest pieces of safety you can have is a ring on your finger. And a lot of women who wear fake engagement or wedding rings, just for safety, because for some reason, that's the only reason men feel comfortable not talking to you, if they think that you're married to another man. So if people think that I'm married to a man, that's totally fine. I just want to be married for a lot of good reasons. I see, we're more pros than cons, in my mind.

Olivia Newsome 1:25:58

Has your lesbianism been influenced by theory or academics in any way? If so, how?

Maia 1:26:03

I would describe myself as a lesbian academic, I dream to be a lesbian with many degrees. I want my masters and I want my PhD. I think lesbians and academics have been some of the most overlooked yet influential groups of people. When you think of lesbian writers. When you think of lesbian theorists, they have contributed so much to the community, and I deeply appreciate them. I studied a lot of queer theory in college. It's a huge part of the degree that I have because I have a self created degree in Individualized Studies. And a lot of my queerness has been informed. I think one of the most important things that I think really sums up my idea towards queerness and lesbianism specifically, is José Esteban Muñoz.

Olivia Newsome 1:26:56

On Queer Futurity?

Maia 1:26:57

Yes. I always forget what the actual name of the book is called, but it is on queer futurity. And he says, We are not utopia. Yes, cruising utopia. He says we are not yet queer. queerness is something we should strive to be that's not a direct quote, but we are not yet queer is and queer. This is something you should strive to be. I think a lot of queer people today, view queerness as a very sedentary identity and don't know how to grow in it. And I don't mean grow as in like sexualities. Fluid, gender is fluid. No, I think queerness is political. Queerness is personal. Queerness is radical. And if you do not view your queerness as any of those things, and you are not really queer, you can be gay, but you don't have to be queer, you can be a lesbian, but you don't have to be clear, and queer should be striving towards a world in which all of us, all people, all parts of the queer community, trans people, disabled people, black people, South Asian, Latin, X, indigenous, all of them, all people who are further marginalized by things other than their queerness we should be striving towards a world and towards a vision of queerness that is as expansive and it is exclusive to those people, and more queerness is something to keep looking towards. We are not yet queer. And while I'm a lesbian, I am not yet a lesbian. I am constantly striving towards this picturesque idea of Utopic lesbianism and utopian queerness where we all get to live in this space of utopia. And that is how I view my queerness. So I would say that my queerness and my lesbianism is very much influenced by academics, and theory. I love learning about disabled queer theory, I love learning about black queer theory. I read a book last year that was eye opening.

And it was by a Canadian indigenous queer person. And it was a piece of prose, and I believe it was like, my brief body. Yes, I It's called guess my brief body. And it was beautiful. It was a piece. It was prose. It was creative nonfiction, which is the discipline that I'm learning. And the way that piece was written is the way that the author talks about queerness. I really loved and appreciated it. And I really learned a lot of different ideas. And so I would say my queerness is heavily heavily influenced by theory and academics. But in that sense, I am not elitist. While I think we could all stand to learn from queer theory and queer academics, I know that it's not entirely accessible, both in the language that they use and where toes like hosted. So I try to teach as much as possible. On my Tik Tok, I made a video a while ago where I said like, you know, I told other people and I probably need to revamp it, but like, say that if you go Ever want a piece of like queer theory, or queer history, I'm literally at one of the best institutions in the world that has access to so many of it. If you want a PDF, let me know, I want to make this type of stuff as accessible to people as possible. Because I can't always hate on people who don't know queer theory when queer theory isn't available. I'm privileged enough to be at a college where I am able to learn about the theory and take, you know, classes from queer

professors. Like, you know, they were there when it was written, they were they knew the people even in some instances. So yeah, that's how I feel about that.

Olivia Newsome 1:30:35

How does class inform your interactions with the lesbian community? Big question.

Maia 1:30:42

A lot of lesbians, like the cosplayers these days, especially in New York, talk about it. So I've interacted with several white and white adjacent as in if you don't know much about them, you could assume that they were white, who are very wealthy, who like to pretend that they're not wealthy. I know people who went to private schools in Dubai, and still will talk about how poor they are, to this day. I'm sorry, if you hear this, I'm sorry. You know who you are. And like, I'm not gonna hold it against you. But like, I think it's wild to be a person who, every week my bank accounts on Eat, my don't have wealthy parents still have homes in different countries, my parents couldn't even afford to send me to private school. Yeah, I went to a public education, and one of the most stupid states in the fucking country, and to hear people like, you know, talk about this stuff, it's annoying, I wasn't able to, and I'm still not able to afford clubbing, drinking drugs, alcohol, you need money to afford that stuff. But they like to pretend that it's not because it's just a daily part of their culture. To them. That's how they participate in queer culture, by participating in the scenes. And I just think that that's, you know, crazy. So, in terms of class, I've had to understand that, like, you know, I am a poor lesbian, I'm not the poorest, there are a lot of lesbians who are way poorer than me, I am privileged enough to not be kicked out of my household. My family, my mom still loves me, my grandma, because she doesn't know still loves me, my dad, because he doesn't know still loves me.

Maia 1:32:20

And so provides me with moderate financial support, despite their, you know, very modest financial access. And so, um, it makes me bitter. It makes me resentful. I noticed one very popular white lesbian on Tik Tok, who has a body full of tattoos, who gets, you know, a lot of attention. And it's like, I think it's very interesting because they like to, they like to present as humble as they are. But it's like, you were able to come to New York, as an influencer with no real job, and afford an apartment here. And you get new tattoos all the time, you go on trips all the time. And I can't build community with those people. Some of them I've been able to build some aspect of community with, but I'll never be able to fill the community with those people who pretend I have wealthy lesbian friends who are forthcoming about their wealth. And that makes being friends with them a shit

ton easier, because at least there's that level of honesty. But being in community with queer people requires honesty. And if you're going to lie about what type of class background you have, then how can I build community with you and other ways? So yeah, that's how I'd say it's informed my interactions.

Olivia Newsome 1:33:35

Can you talk a little bit about how race informs your interactions, the lesbian community as a black lesbian?

Maia 1:33:41

Um, so, yeah, um, obviously, a lot of my primary interracial interactions with white lesbians and not with lesbians were white lesbians, on Tumblr, black lesbians, we're not getting these days. In fact, people would make fun of the way that black lesbians express their sexuality and I was a part of it for a while until I understood that there's a little wild, black lesbians are over sexualized and under sexualized simultaneously, just like we are as black women and non men. So I find it isolated. When I go to queer spaces, I went to this one place that me and my friend were really excited to go to and nobody talked to us. Nobody interacted with us, despite us being like, how to speak if you would say to me, like if you tell me, but like, nobody talked to us. And near the end of the night, I just felt frustrated and upset. I would see cute people and I would like you know, look at them and it was like I was just I was not there.

You are invisible as a black person in queer spaces. Now, I can say I guess compared to my gay counterparts as in like gay men. Lesbians can have it a little bit easier in certain instances because there's a little bit more racial acceptance, but not always. White lesbians have Always had racist tendencies. And just because we live in a world that's, you know, post Black Lives Matter moment everybody's trying to be woke, that doesn't mean that they've left those things behind. And a lot of the times, I'm not included, I'm not seen as desirable. But on the flip side, I'm over sexualized, I'm projected onto I'm seen as somebody who can be super dominant and take control of a situation just because I'm black, which is very interesting. Because like, if you know me, like, you know, that is false. Not to say that, like, you know, I'm not like, you know, other things, but like, I don't think that they should, like, you know, project these ideas of what how I perform my sexuality are to me, they do that anyway. And so yeah, I would say that's how that happened.

Olivia Newsome 1:35:46

Can you talk about how your mental illnesses inform me your interactions with lesbian community in New York City?

Maia 1:35:55

I'm struggling to go out with the feelings of inadequacy anxiety. Oh, definitely social anxiety, because like, I guess, what's, what's fun for you as a black person, when you have social anxiety or anxiety about how people perceive you, often, there's no treatment for it, because it's not in your head. It's 100% Real, people don't fucking like you. People don't desire you, people aren't interested in you. And so you have anxiety about experiencing that. And it'll happen, but sometimes it won't happen at the same time. So I constantly find myself being worried about how I'm perceived. I constantly worry about, like, you know, whether or not people think I'm attractive enough in these spaces. And I just think that that's been very interesting. I recently found out that I was ADHD, despite having ADHD for most of my life, I was finally diagnosed with it. It's so funny to see the lesbian communities in spaces where they sell Adderall for extra coin, because they get more they've been diagnosed with ADHD for a while. So they can like, you know, do all this stuff and like, get money from their diagnosis, they get attention, they get sympathy, they get empathy, whereas you don't. And so when you don't have the energy, especially because now I'm in the influencer space, I often don't have energy to keep up with it being an influencer is very demanding, you have to be making content constantly. As a black lesbian, I don't get to make content of just me looking there sitting there and being pretty some black lesbians do and honestly, props to them. So happy for them, but I'm not one of them.

Unfortunately, I have to usually say stuff for people to pay attention. And I don't have the energy to do that all the time, especially because I work a job and I'm also a full time student. So definitely contributes to my feelings of inadequacy in these lesbian spaces. And they often just don't get it as an abuse and sexual abuse, like, you know, victim, who at the hands of a lesbian, that's very interesting as well. Because, you know, I a lot of people don't always understand that, because I was afraid to talk about it for the longest time. But like when lesbians have been incorrectly seen as more abusive than their normal counterparts because of some really shitty taken data that was back done in the 80s, or 90s. That's still quoted today. And I've often been afraid to talk about that. I'm not as sexually promiscuous as my counterparts or sexually, promiscuous has a negative stigma. So rather, I'd say I'm not as sexually active as my counterparts, I've only had two sexual partners in my entire life. That gives me a lot of anxiety because I feel like I need to have sex to be valid and have had sex with a lot of people, because that's a lot of things people attribute to lesbians.

Olivia Newsome

Poly and partnered!

Maia

Exactly, exactly. But I also have a lot of anxieties about my body, my body image, because I've had a lifelong struggle with body image, social anxiety, and then sexual trauma. So all of that does not make for the ease of interacting with these spaces.

Olivia Newsome 1:39:11

How does your immigrant status, your former immigrant status or the immigrant status of your loved ones affect you and your ability to develop or engage with lesbian community?

Olivia Newsome 1:39:21

Okay, so um, I'm a US citizen who was born a US citizen, so there's no risk of me being deported. But my family members are all my dad actually isn't a citizen. He's just a permanent resident, but my mom and my grandma are both US citizens, but they are. They were born in Jamaica. So I think that's very interesting, because I guess that's more of a cultural thing than a direct immigrant status, immigration status thing, but I've always been worried about how that'll affect me. At any point, they could really mean it, especially in my youth before I knew my mom accepted me, but they could just send me to Jamaica. Go and be like, you know, if you want to be gay, be gay there and figure it out. And that would have been traumatic.

My partner, though, is not a US citizen and just recently became a permanent resident. And it affects a lot of things. One, she was very afraid about coming out, or her parents finding out that we were together before she ever got her green card because she could be deported, as her parents could choose to no longer allow her to be dependent and send her back to their country of origin. And so that was a lot of worry. She could be arrested or attacked in the streets. And if something happens, like, you know, anything, anything at all, especially when we were first together, because her immigration status was so precarious, that first year we were together, anything at all could have compromised our relationship and the way we lived as lesbians at that time together. So I think about that a lot. I'm lucky that I guess, it doesn't affect me directly, directly in that way. But it does affect the person that I love. And it affects the way that we can be

lesbians together. We often had tough conversations early on in our relationship. She literally said to me, you know, like, at any point my parents could find out and they could just decide to send me back to India. Or we could be deported if they choose not to accept our bid for permanent residency, because at the time that was still up in the air, what would you do, I was like, shoot, I don't know, like we joke about at the time, but like, I did agree, like, if something happens, I will marry you. We've known each other enough, you can get to, like long enough. Like, it's genuine love, I'll just marry you. So you can get your green card here and like to deal with any consequences that come with that. Or like, you know, figuring out how to like to visit back like you don't wear shoes like from and like. So that was a lot of issues of a lot of worries and concerns. So yeah.

Olivia Newsome 1:42:05

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

Maia 1:42:11

It's really pretty easy because I got to college. It's pretty easy to find friends in college, especially from our career other queer. However, it's not easy to always find people that you're going to have a great relationship with, which I think is the it's the challenge of finding any friendships in a city, but especially queer friendships, I prefer to make friends with queer people, I really don't see any interest in making friends with like, you know, straight people, or cisgendered people. So I would say that. Also, because everybody knows each other, like lesbian, the lesbian world really is small. Everybody knows everybody. And you might be cool with somebody now and find out one side of the line that everybody hates them, which is something that happens pretty regularly. And so you really have to think about the interactions that you have with people and be worried about who you hang out with. And if who you hang out with is a bad person. If you who you hang out with is, like you know, classist, racist transphobic, I really don't want to associate myself as myself with any lesbians that are trans, exclusionary. And so that's very difficult to navigate. And it isn't easy, but I'm sure it's easier here than it would be if I were still in Georgia.

Olivia Newsome 1:43:30

Have you experienced or felt any isolation or disconnection from the broader queer community?

Maia 1:43:36

Yes, as a black lesbian, I feel a lot of disconnection and isolation because, like I talked about earlier, people don't always consider you to be desirable. And I find that lesbians don't just want to make friends with other lesbians just because they want to be friendly. Every friendship you make as a lesbian is always mediated by the fact that that person might be my potential love interest. I feel like yeah, very rarely do you just make friends just to make friends like now that I'm in a couple it's easier to make friendships make friends, but it's often with other people who are in relationships. If you're not in a relationship, if you're single, and if you're meeting other lesbians who are single, I feel like you know people want you to. Can we work together as a couple first and then if that doesn't work, then we can be friends. And that causes a lot of issues and strain. So now that I'm in a couple that also makes it difficult to find lesbian community because like, people don't see you as worth being friends with if you can also potentially fuck them.

Maia 1:44:40

So -

Olivia Newsome 1:44:41

And you're not polyamorous.

Maia 1:44:43

No, I don't identify as polyamorous and that is my partner. Our relationship isn't an open relationship. So with all of those factors, it really brings desirability down lower. Like sometimes the minute like it helps me and my partner all the time. But the minute that we tell people that we're in a relationship, they just stop talking to us, like other lesbians, other queer people, they'll just stop talking to us. And it kind of sucks. So a lot of times we don't tell people that we're in a relationship, because we just want to have somebody to interact with, especially if it's for a short time being, like, if we're just at a party, if we're at a bar for somewhere else, we're not always going to advertise the fact that we're together, because we just don't want to be alienated the whole night, because it's happened so many times before. But obviously, if we're longtime friends with people or planning on having long term friends with people, we usually tell them that we're in a couple of minutes, fine. But getting to that point is not easy. Because again, the majority of lesbians that I meet in the city are relationship minded, first, friendship minded second.

Olivia Newsome 1:45:48

Where and how are you finding other lesbians, especially the lesbians of color?

Maia 1:45:54

College, primarily, and then the internet second? Definitely the internet. And I've been able to filter me and my partner actually have been able to filter the lesbians at our university through social media, because we can see who has a POC, and who's a lesbian, for your Instagram, Twitter, and tick tock. So that's the primary way really, and then just like, running into them at these events running into them at these spaces. Like, if we happen to go to a bar and meet some lesbians of color, then we exchange socials numbers, talk, meeting them to other friends, like friends of friends, like, you know, I've been introduced to a lot of lesbians of color through other friends. And yeah, it's, it's not easy. It's not always direct. You always have to find people through other means, rather than just finding them off the bat.

Olivia Newsome 1:46:48

If you're in lesbian spaces now, are you noticing any specific subcultures this can be like online, maybe on Tik Tok, Twitter or in person?

Maia 1:46:57

Yes, online and in person, poly people are a subculture of their own respect. It's not me, but like, they're definitely a culture of their own. A lot of alternative lesbians while obviously alternative style and fashion. And culture has always been a part of the queer community. It's kind of emerging and like evolving into a different way now. Black lesbians, our own subculture, our own thing, lesbians of color, also our own thing. second generation immigrant lesbians, also our own nation, our own group and our own subculture. And honestly, I think, as many identifiers as there were, are in the world as many ways as you can describe yours, yourself. There's a lesbian subculture for that. And you can see them in person, and you can see them online, especially.

Olivia Newsome 1:47:49

What was your first experience visiting a lesbian related place? Or an event? Like, what did you expect to find? Did it fit your realities? Or was it completely different?

Maia 1:48:01

That's kind of a hard question. Because I feel like I've been in queer spaces that weren't necessarily official queer spaces. And so it's not official. No, I guess like, yeah, I understand that, I guess. Hmm. So I've hung out with queer people, like, okay, so I call it the first night that I like. One of the first nights there was a group of us hanging out with my now girlfriend, but not at the time, and some other queer people in the inner group chat. And like, that was interesting. Um, you know, sometimes online, when you meet people, being queer is enough. But then when you meet people in person, you're gonna need to have more things in common with them than being queer. And that is the theme that I find in all of the queer spaces that I enter.

Being queer is not enough to have connections with these people. And it's not enough to find them interesting. So, um, my, I think, my that first interaction, I guess, I was just like, you know, wanting more, I guess I kind of expected like, you know, the minute I enter a queer space, I would be considered like, you know, desirable, because the only thing that was limiting me before it was that I was a queer person in a dominantly heterosexual space. But then I realized how stratified aspects of queer desire are, and that you have to fit into so many different categories to be considered desirable. And so desirability, politics especially, is a huge part of queer spaces. And like, you know, I am not the most undesirable in queer spaces, like, you know, textbook wise, like, you know, people who are fat people who are disabled people who are not conventionally attractive, have an even harder time finding community because so much of community is predicated on desirability, but with the things that I do have it's already been I'm difficult and even unnerving to me in those spaces. So yeah, I think just entering those spaces for the first time made me realize how much desire really was important and how disappointing that was. Because here we are, like, you know, be who you are and all that stuff, but like, be who you are doesn't really matter what it's like, looks matter more.

Olivia Newsome 1:50:27

Can you talk more about a specific lesbian space that you first went to maybe a lesbian bar, or you can talk about a group of lesbians, maybe sitting on a couch drinking soup.

Maia 1:50:38

So I think the reason why my time with quips places is very recent, because I came to college at the end of 2019. So, early 2020, the pandemic happened. Obviously, that changed a lot of access to queer spaces, right. I was also under age at the time when I first came to LA. So I knew about other people who went to queer clubs and queer bars,

but I didn't have a fake ID and I could afford one, which is another way how class affects you. And so I missed out on a lot of these spaces. So I didn't go to my first lesbian bar until I was 21. And it was kind of me, it was fun, but it was lame. I'm lesbian bars are still white majority, I am a black woman, I wouldn't have music, I wouldn't be dancing. When I think of a bar. When I think of a club, I want to have like, you know, dancing and fun and like that, I don't want to just be standing around drinking and talking, I find that very boring, but a lot of these white lesbian bars here, that's what they do. And so that was disappointing. Um, cuz covers are wild, I have yet to go to a place that required a cover, but I know they exist, which also limits my ability to go to lesbian spaces, because again, class thing, if I'm already going to be spending like 2030 \$40 on drinks for the night, I can't afford a 2030 \$40 cover. And then plus you have a cute, I have to have a queue up like you have to be dressed like you know, like, there's a lot of expectations. So I think I've had a very limited experience with physical spaces. And I've been disappointed by them. But even in that I still managed to have a good time just being disappointed by all the factors of desirability, class, and race.

Olivia Newsome 1:52:33

What does identifying as a lesbian mean to you?

Maia 1:52:37

Freedom, peace. I often think about how much harder my life would be as a black heterosexual woman. A lot of my friends are black heterosexual women, and so many of them have been made to feel like love is not a possibility for them. And while it was genetic, I had my first relationship in high school. Whereas a lot of my black heterosexual friends did not have their first relationships in college. And that's because black heterosexual women do not or not ever have their first encounters with desirability until college. Um, I think being lesbian has freed me from a lot of issues of the male gaze of confining to male validation. While you can still conform to those things, as a lesbian, it's a lot easier and a lot, there's a lot more pros and like issues, to not wanting male validation and to not conforming to male validation. And that way, I've found a lot of freedom and a lot of happiness and a lot of community. I just feel like you're more in touch with the world.

Because you're marginalized by more than one way you have to look at things from multiple different perspectives and multiple different things like, you know, angles, and you have to consider a lot more than the average person does. Being a black lesbian really adds on to that because like, it just really imbues you with a sense of nuance. I'm so in awe, a lot of our lesbian for parents and the people who were lesbians before us, the work that they left for us to learn and to come into contact with. Every time I do I'm just so

astonished that like, you know, here we are on the internet thinking we're having big thoughts for the first time ever. This is the first time ever anybody's put a word to this feeling to this interaction to this phenomenon. But our lesbian for parents have talked about it for centuries for decades. Before they talked about it in private, but in the latter half of the 20th century, they finally got to publish their thoughts and their feelings and I think that's so beautiful to be connected to such like a larger history where that existed, finding out more constantly like lesbian history is constantly being on earth and so much of it is non traditionally recorded, and lesbians as a whole are the steward of the stewardess is the stewards and stewardesses of of queer history. And so many of them have been involved in history keeping archival work, like, you know, writing academic spaces. And while they've been so discredited by both the queer community and everyone as a whole, including heterosexual people, they really have been the people to preserve so much of our community's history. And I'm so in awe of that. So being able to be connected to such a rich culture, and such a rich historical experience is exhilarating. It's exciting, it's beautiful. And just every day, I find more things to be thankful for that I'm a lesbian. I've never felt like maybe in my youth, I felt bad about being a lesbian, I felt stunted or limited, but I've only ever found freedom in like the label of being a lesbian. And I continue to find freedom. And that just makes me very happy.

Olivia Newsome 1:56:00

What does lesbian joy mean to you?

Maia 1:56:03

Lesbian joy means to me. The freedom to love in a way that can be so authentic. Now, it's not inherent to every single person as being experienced, because you know, we still live in a world that is mediated by things like desirability, race, class, all of those things, gender, gender, performance, all of that. But when you're able to really ascend and to mature in your interactions, loving as a lesbian, both platonically and romantically, yeah, is so beautiful. And that is like the epitome of like lesbian joy, being able to have nuanced experiences that nobody else can understand. Like, even though it's kind of like a sore spot of the community, homoerotic relationships are kind of beautiful, you kind of like grew up in a world where like, you see female friendships as something, and I only use female in that sense, but like, you know, because a lot of us that experience, homoerotic friendships were like, you know, I still identified as women are still identify as women, we, like, you know, you see that, like friendships between women and non men are something that are competitive, and something that are opportunistic, and, but like homoerotic friendships are so beautiful, in a way, you're learning the language of love for the first time through friendship.

And I think that's what makes a world. So like, as non men, we have the ability to be friends, in a way that isn't mediated by gender. When we see heterosexuals, we see them

like, you know, oh, men and women can't be friends, like men, and women can't love each other like that. Yada, yada, yada. But like, so much of I feel like the foundation of true lesbian, love and lesbian joy is friendship first, which is why we're able to have such rich platonic relationships and such rich romantic relationships. So I think that lesbi enjoys the ability to have just interpersonal relationships that ascend much farther than the traditional ones that sis hat people are limited to. Is there anything else you want to talk about? Oh, I think something that's important to me is that and something that I focus on a lot now is that we're in a new era of lesbianism, I'm doing a project where I'm talking about lesbian pop culture. And like, lesbian pop culture has only existed for a little over 20 years. Pop culture describes the mainstream, and this is the first time we've been in the mainstream and being able to create our own culture and histories. And why the lesbian community has always been divided. I think that like, you know, I think people focus on the division a bit too much. I'm not gonna lie and say that, like, you know, lesbians haven't been exclusive of trans people, specifically trans women, and haven't been exclusive of, you know, disabled people, and have, you know, people who are racialized as something other than white.

But so much of our lesbian history has also been built on intersectionality and community building. And that's a lot of the history that gets buried. I encourage people to find out more about these, like, you know, things because, like, our lesbian for parents really cared about community building, like, you know, and people like think that it was like, you know, these isolated factions. Yes. Did lipstick lesbians exists? Did TERFS (trans exclusionary radical feminists) exist? Absolutely. But there were also plenty of people who weren't like that, who still aren't who are alive today. Who like say, I remember having so many friends with these people interacting with these. People go into community events with these people.

And I just want to urge other lesbians to realize that like, you know, it is not a part of our history, or the only part of our history to be divided, and to be alienated in these groups and factions. It's also a huge part of our history to be very connected. And to build dialogue. I think lesbians need to do a better job of thinking about lesbians who exist in the Global South, I think American lesbians and lesbians who exist in the first world have a huge problem with that. And we need to be reaching out to our siblings in the global south who are struggling, who do not have the same opportunities, who do not have the same privileges that we do. And I think we should just, like really just learn, do you know how many like, you know, lesbians, have history from the global south have contributed so much to our like lesbian culture and our knowledge of ourselves and identity in ways that we have not even yet to touch on as like a mainstream group.

Maia 2:01:06

Other words and other ways of defining lesbianism other ways of building lesbian community. And I think that's a completely like, you know, underrepresented part and I

think it's part we need to pay attention to, as so many people in the global south I think of like the amount of Iranian lesbians that I know and know of as we continue to see what's happening in Iran right now. If sis het women are being treated as poorly as they are in these places. Imagine the people who aren't so sad and the things that they're dealing with. And that's not a reason to feel any form of elitism over that, because I do not believe in what's the word lesbian, queer nationalism or gay nationalism. But we need to think about how we can't keep positioning ourselves as like the woe is me, we are the most, you know, we are the most broken down, we are the most marginalized, we are the most oppressed, there are people who are living in different situations, and they are well worth figuring out more about them. I also think we need to do a much better job of like, you know, being inclusive of trans and disabled lesbians, I don't think you can identify as a lesbian, I don't think you deserve to identify as a lesbian, if you do not consider trans women to be a part of our community. If you don't consider trans non men to be a part of our community. Like, I think that lesbian is far more expansive than people want to believe that it is.

And lesbianism is not limiting. While they're obviously you know, being a lesbian is like not being with men. Some people might see this as a limit. But I know me, myself and other people, many of us see that as an open door, as like, you know, an ever expansive thing that allows us to love in multiple different ways, and to experience love in a way that society didn't ever want us to experience that but we're still granted that opportunity to do so. It's a gift. And while we'll always you know, be maybe not always but while we're marginalized now and might be marginalized for the foreseeable future. It's also such a gift to be lesbian because there's so many beautiful things about that.

Olivia Newsome 2:03:20

Thank you very much. Have a good night.