

On Selfhood: Young Lesbians Within the Margins Oral History Project

The Reminiscences of
Lucy

December 2022 - February 2023

PREFACE

The following written story is part of the On Selfhood: Young Lesbians Within the Margins project. While most of the stories are oral histories, some participants chose to write their responses down. Lucy responded to questions over a period of 3 months however she wanted to. Lucy chose a narrative, story-based response using the questions as prompts to formulate her life story,

Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are the written life story of someone. The following story was fully written and approved by the storyteller and unedited but reformatted by Olivia Newsome, the project coordinator.

Lucy's Biography

Hi! My name is Lucy Theuri, I am 19, and my pronouns are she/her. I live in Indiana, but was born and raised in Ohio. I like playing violin and have been since I was 5 or 6. In 2020, I started to pick up more hobbies, and I'm still working on learning to crochet, paint, and skateboard. In my free time I like to do these while listening to music or watching movies. One of my favorite things to do is to go to the movie theater by myself. I especially like when I want to go see 2 movies at the same time so I get snacks and spend the whole day there. Right now, my favorite movies are probably Fight Club and Heathers. I'm currently a psychology major and minoring in cognitive science. I really enjoy psychology and am working toward a Ph.D. so I can be a college professor.

Section 1: Childhood, Adolescence, and Coming of Age

I was born in Cincinnati, Ohio and was raised in the suburbs. I went to predominantly white schools all my life and was the only black girl in most of my elementary and middle school classes. It was pretty hard to be growing up in such white spaces and not really having anyone to talk to about shared experiences, especially because my parents are from Kenya. My parents divorced when I was really young and even though I switched between houses a lot, it was a little better because they lived 5 minutes apart. My sister is 11 years older than me so she was in a high school in Kenya while I was at home with my parents.

I felt isolated because of that, and because my sister is 11 years older than me so by the time I was growing up, she was already in boarding school. I went to a private Adventist boarding school and while I made amazing friends there, the environment was the worst for me. The only part I enjoyed was being with my friends all the time but since I was coming from a public school, the transition was really tough. By that time I already knew I was queer, and had been out as bisexual to a few close friends but not my family. It was easier being out at a school that was far from home, and I found some other queer friends as well. We formed our own small community although we had to hide our identities because our school was very homophobic.

I have always known about queer couples because of shows like Modern Family and Glee, and from just being on the internet and YouTube. I think YouTube and music videos influenced me the most. The artists that I looked up to were queer (Pentatonix, Hayley Kiyoko) and even though I was raised in a home that wasn't accepting, I felt accepted when I watched them. I think I was first aware of queer identities when I would watch Glee with my sister. I saw Santana and Brittany together just like a straight couple, and never really thought of it as abnormal. I also remember watching the Hayley Kiyoko music video to her song "Girls Like Girls" and I realized that was what I wanted in the future.

That's why I think representation is so important. Even though I grew up in a religious household, my sister made sure that I knew that it was okay for me to be whoever I wanted to be. Growing up Adventist was a struggle, because I couldn't do some things in middle school because they were on Friday night and I would have to go to church in the morning. I didn't really realize that I was just going along with what my parents wanted until I graduated high school. I was only going to church because that was my only option, and I went to church in high school because it was required. I remember one time when I was 13, and my dad asked me if I wanted to be baptized and I said yes. My mom was so happy and I don't think I would have gotten baptized if nobody asked me if I wanted to.

I enjoyed middle school more than high school and I think it's because I went to a public middle school but a private Adventist high school. I met my best friends in high school who are also queer, but I

had old friends there that were not accepting at all. The school was a boarding school in rural Virginia, so the teachers and some students weren't kind to people of color either. I used to hear microaggressions all the time, and the administration didn't try to help the students of color. Race affected me a lot because I was a black girl living in the Ohio suburbs. I was one of the 2 black girls in my grade, and was living with white people all around me. People used to laugh at my hair, even when I had it in braids, and would make fun of my nose and African features. I was so upset and permed my hair to try to fit in.

In middle school, I came out to my friends as bisexual, but was never really sure about my sexuality. I knew I liked girls, but I didn't want to label myself as a lesbain, "just in case". But the stigma surrounding lesbians was really strong and I was scared of labeling myself, so I just came out as bi. It was easier to be out at school and hide it from my parents because I went to a public school. It was also easy in high school because I was so far away from home.

Section 2: Burgeoning Queerness and Lesbianism

I think the first time I realized my sexuality was different was when I was watching Modern Family and my dad got upset at the jokes about the lesbian couple and changed the channel. There were also just comments on gay marriage on tv, in church and online. I remember watching a video compilation on YouTube of queer marriage proposals and weddings and I thought that this is what I would want in the future.

I was lucky enough to find other queer people at my high school and middle school. 7th grade was when I actually came out to my

friends, and it comforted me to know that some of them were queer as well. So I think 7th grade was a time that I was really in a queer space which was around my friends. I met most of my friends before I knew they were queer, we joke and say we kind of subconsciously found each other. I remember when one of my friends said she is a lesbian and wasn't sure how I would react because we were in such a conservative Christian space.

I realized I was a lesbian after being out as bisexual for about six or seven years. After graduating high school, I was thinking back on all the people I had crushes on, and realizing that I never really liked them, just wanted them to like me. This was during my first year of college, so fall 2021. It was kind of hard to deal with because I thought I was bi for so long, but I was so sure about my new identity.

I honestly think my first exposure to Lesbianism was on YouTube, probably like other people the same age as me. I remember watching music videos, and especially BuzzFeed videos that would show two women together or have someone talk about their experience with homophobia as a lesbian. I had been out as Bisexual for about 6 years before I realized I was a Lesbian, but I had been questioning my identity for a while.

When I was younger, I was a little too scared to call myself a lesbian. But during my first ever semester of college, I was thinking about all the men I had had crushes on, and realized that most of those crushes were just me wanting them to like me. It was a hard thing to deal with at first, but it made the most sense to me.

I think 'coming out' is different for everyone. Coming out could simply just be saying "I'm a lesbian" or just finally just become

comfortable in your identity and not afraid of hiding it without saying it out loud. Personally, I had to come out to myself a few times. When I thought I was Bi, I had to 'get used to' being out because the way I used to think about coming out was immediately telling the people closest to you and I was uncomfortable but I thought that was what I was 'supposed to do'. There are never rules in your sexuality or a 'right way to do it' but that was the way I used to think. And then I had to come out to myself again, and by that time I realized that I don't have to tell anyone if I don't want to and it was all about being comfortable with myself.

When I was younger, yes, the term Lesbian was scary to me because of the way people treated the word. I had never really met anyone that called themselves a lesbian. But eventually I realized that there's nothing wrong with the word at all, it's just the way people treat it. Dyke was definitely scary to me because it had been used in a derogatory way for so long.

Section 3: Influence of Marginal Identity on Lesbianism and Queerness

Race has a big role in my identity as a lesbian. A while ago, I would have been ashamed to be a black lesbian, but now it's one of my favorite things about myself. Unfortunately, there is a lot of homophobia in the black community, and some racism in the LGBTQ community.

Section 4: Community-Based Questions

It's a little harder, and I only have one lesbian friend here. I live in Indiana, which is pretty conservative so I normally interact with my friends online. It takes a lot to branch out and find lesbians in this area as well. I also live with my mom because I go to the same college she works at, so it is harder to be open about my sexuality here. There is definitely a lot of isolation from other communities.

Sometimes online I see discourse in the LGBTQ community, specifically between lesbians and bisexuals but I try to stay away from that. On Tiktok, when I see people arguing normally about lesbians and bisexuals. I used to watch so much of it but now I try to stay away, because that discourse really just hurts and isolates both communities in the process.

They're normally topics I would probably hear in real life, and I think that labels are sometimes a little forced on people in the queer community, and sometimes enforced by other queer people. I have never really been to a lesbian related event or specific lesbian space. During my first year of college, I was in a club called no labels and it was so fun connecting with other queer people and I met other lesbians. Unfortunately, I moved away, but it was a great place to have a community.

Identifying as a lesbian to me simply just means not liking men, and that's really how I realized I was a lesbian because I thought about actually having any of the guys I used to like be interested in me, and I didn't like it at all. But obviously being a lesbian is different for everyone but I still would love to have platonic close relationships with

men, just not romantically at all. To me, lesbian community means total acceptance with kindness, and no judgment. Lesbian community is a beautiful thing to have. To me, it means total acceptance with no judgment, and kindness. It really is a nice thing to find community in people who identify the same as you.

I wish there were more lesbian spaces for teens, because most are for older lesbians or for lesbians over 21 like bars and clubs. There should be more spaces separate from GSA and queer organizations that are just for lesbians to be in a judgment free place. It would be so great if it was for a whole community or city, rather than for separate schools as well, to create a bigger sense of community. Lesbian joy means complete acceptance of yourself and others around you. Oftentimes lesbians feel guilty because of the stigma surrounding us and the word lesbian, but true lesbian joy is feeling comfortable being fully yourself.