

**On Selfhood: Young Lesbians Within the Margins
Oral History Project**

The Reminiscences of
Amanda

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. Amanda responded to questions over a period of 3 months however she wanted to. Amanda 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.

Amanda Reimann's Biography:

Amanda Reimann, 23, She/Her, Lesbian
Sweden.

Hopeless romantic, perfectionist procrastinator and anxious but with a massive ego.

Loves: Strawberries with sugary whipped cream, sweet sparkling rose, Eurovision and spending all my money at the local thrift store getting my silly little outfits.

Hates: Getting my hands dirty, bugs, every single sport there is and getting sweaty.

Sometimes I make art.

Section 1: Childhood, Adolescence, and Coming of Age

I'm born and raised in Sweden. A country famous for IKEA meatballs, ABBA (underrated queer icons if I may say so myself) and the northern lights. I grew up in the south of Sweden. Well, I say the south of Sweden, but the south of Sweden is still in the very north of Europe.

For most of my childhood, I lived alone with my dad in Sweden's third biggest city, Malmö. Malmö is a beautiful place. Sure, it has its problems, but so does every city. Politicians love to talk about Malmö as a crime-ridden place filled with dangerous immigrants... but when I think about Malmö I think about happy memories of my childhood. I think about playing in our "dangerous" neighbourhood playground with my friends and running around being stupid.

My dad raised me pretty much by himself during the first part of my childhood. Sure, I visit my mum every other weekend and longer during the summers but I very much so was my father's daughter.

We didn't have much but it is understandable. My mom and he got me when they were very young. I doubt either one of them had any idea what they were doing or how to be a proper adult. But they did their very best - and I love them both extremely much. I'm forever grateful for everything they have done for me. But back then I didn't care either or understood that they were struggling. I mean the struggle meals, hotdogs cut up and the cheap ramen noodles, were my favourite meals - so I were just a happy, naive, blissful kid.

My mom lived in Båstad, a very small town 2 hours away from Malmö. While Malmö is a multicultural big city with a lot of different people from different nationalities and economic backgrounds - Båstad is a very, extremely, only rich-upper-middle-class-white-people town. In Båstad people will look at you if you only slightly differ from the norm. I remember people looking at me when I

was younger in Båstad. Nothing bad, no. But they looked. You see, my dad was adopted from Thailand - and my mom is your traditional Swede (read: white) so I did look a lot different from the rest of the kids in Båstad. But, it's not all bad. Båstad is a very pretty seaside village with nice beaches and a tourist hotspot in Sweden. Nice vacation place - but I rather die than live there permanently again.

Anyway so I lived with my dad in Malmö during most of my childhood - and I love my dad. I always had fun at home. He was my best friend, and I was his. The school was harder for me though. Not the studies or academics. I had no problem getting decent grades, teachers liked me and I've always been that boring kid that likes to study. My problem was the social part. I never fitted in.

Back then the word autism didn't exist in the same way as it does today nor did anyone around me understand severe social anxiety at all. I was told that I was "shy" and that I would "grow out of it". I didn't grow out of it... and it first now, in my early twenties I with help of a psychologist and therapist have started to figure out why I am the way I am. I'm still getting my proper diagnosis but with a 99,999% chance, I am somewhere on the autism spectrum. I've also been diagnosed with both depression and anxiety... there were talks about ADHD but I don't know. I'm from a family with a long line of mental health issues - so nothing surprises me anymore.

Being on the spectrum, but being undiagnosed, is not easy for a kid. I remember knowing something was wrong with me. Something made me different from the other kids. I didn't get the social cues, how to make proper friends or why everyone else seemed to have everything figured out but me. I was a very quiet kid. Quiet and shy. Always in my own head, sitting in my corner in the classroom. I don't think I was ever openly bullied. It was just known along my peers that I was... quiet.. and weird - best to be left alone.

Not that I cared through. About being alone. Because I knew when I came home I had my dad - my absolute best friend. We would talk about everything. He would get us sushi and alcohol-free cosmopolitans and I would gossip about my school drama and he would gossip about his friend-and-work-drama. Then he would try to learn me all he could about euro-pop 90's music and I would fall asleep far too late every school night. .. oh how I miss being 9.

And if dad worked late hours I would turn to my other best friend... the internet. I spent countless hours on the internet during my childhood. I spent all my days reading obscure Harry Potter fanfics on fanfiction.net. I was there for the early days of Youtube with the British crew and fell in love with Dan and Phil. I hung out on weird game/chatrooms like Panfu, Habbo Hotel or Club Penguin.

To be raised by the internet.. is probably not good for a kid. I highly doubt it. But it was fun. I loved every minute of it. You were never alone on the internet. Never bored. Always stuff to see, and to do. And on the internet, in chatrooms or hiding in youtube comments, I never had to pretend to be someone I weren't. I was free to read my horrible fanfics and do whatever I wanted.

My dad worked a lot. He had to - being a single dad is not easy... which meant that I had no other choice than to become independent from a young age. I learned everything I had to on the internet, I entertained myself with books and tv and did the best I could so my parents never had to worry about me.

Section 2: Burgeoning Queerness and Lesbianism

"Do you have a boyfriend yet?" My dad always asked and when I always looked disgusted he always followed up with "ok.. do you have a girlfriend yet?"

Everyone always knew... and I mean, looking back at it, it wasn't that hard for people to figure out. Some people talk about the "lesbian walk" - and I'm

pretty sure I was born with it. My favourite fashion accessories growing up were a sparkly glitter tie and a (horrible) fedora... during the dance in PE I always begged the teacher to let me dance as a boy because then I got to have girls as dance partners instead of the icky boys. Nothing about baby me was straight...

Everyone knew that. Except me.

One of the first ever memory I have in my life is me and my dad seeing my first-ever pride parade. I didn't understand at the time what it was... so I did what I always have done when I don't understand something. I asked my dad. He told me very briefly that it was a "party of happy people celebrating their right to be and live how they want". I don't think I understood but I remember looking starry-eyed at the parade and being mesmerized. I still, to this day 15-something years later, remember a sign. It was a kid, similar to my age, holding up a sign with the text "my 2 moms love me".

I had a very hard time accepting my sexuality. I mean - I always knew that I liked girls. I remember growing up thinking of course, everyone likes girls. What is there not to like? My brain works a little bit differently than everyone else. But in my brain boys were always squares. Harsh corners and sharp edges. Girls on the other hand are circles. Girls are flowy lines and soft to the touch. Does that make sense?

I loved girls so much. They were breathtakingly beautiful, said the funniest jokes and smelled nice. But it made me nauseous. Girls scared me... so I got defensive. Tried to become a tomboy - desperately tried to be "not like other girls". I cut my hair short, played video games and hated the colour pink. But I didn't understand why.

As a kid, I never understood why gender mattered. I didn't get why boys should do this and girls that. Never understand the whole concept of gender...

nor did I truly understand the idea of having a preference for romance. If you liked someone you liked someone no matter what.

So I did what so many have before me - I came out as bi. It was the easier choice. The first time I ever came out was to my dad. I must have been like 9. Probably earlier? It has always been his favourite story to tell everyone. He was in the kitchen and I stood in the doorway, nervous and fidgety.

"I think I like girls... and boys too. Is that ok?" I said.

All dad did was simply nod and resuming to cook our food. He didn't care. He already knew. Everyone did. But I didn't like that he didn't care. Truth be told I do not remember this but apparently, I become angry with him for not becoming angry. Really angry. Started to scream at him... because I apparently had read on the internet that parents always reacted badly to their kids coming out.

I know now that there is no perfect, or ideal, way of coming out. At least I don't think so. There is also no real way or "this is how it suppose to happen". Nor does exist a right way for the person to respond to the coming out. But what I do know is that it doesn't always have to be like the movies. No one has to get overemotional or angry. It doesn't have to be a big thing. Sometimes it's boring and dinner is more important.

It took a while after that for me to come out as a lesbian. A really, really long time. I grew up. I dated boys, had a handful of boyfriends and did my best at being their picture-perfect girlfriend. They were good boys. A bit boring but all-around good guys. But never truly liked them. No matter how much I tried, no matter how much they liked me... I just didn't like them.

The word lesbian scared me. It might sound ridiculous. Lame. But it did. I knew, of course, that lesbians existed... and I envied them. In my mind, there was

nothing cooler than lesbians. But it still seemed unthinkable for me to be one. I still craved validation from men. I still wanted to be loved, seen and heard by them.

Accepting the fact I liked girls weren't the hard part. It was accepting the fact that I didn't like men that made it harder. We live in a patriarchal society built around men. Everything revolves around men. As a young girl you are told to strive for male attention... and oh did I strive for that sweet sweet male attention. Growing up as the lonely fat brown kid and suddenly becoming this teenager with big boobs that guys suddenly wanted? To finally get a chance to get that validation? For me, it didn't matter that I didn't care about my boyfriends. It didn't matter that their touch made me want to puke or romantic gestures made me ill. It's extremely sad thinking back at it. I'm so sorry for the younger me. Sad for everyone trapped in chasing that validation for their self-worth.

21.

I was 21 when I finally came out as a lesbian. I lived by myself in Malta, a tiny island in the Mediterranean Sea, by then far away from my home in Sweden. I remember staying awake one night scrolling on Tiktok. For some reason, Tiktok were filled with lesbian content. Filled with lesbians living their best life, lesbians being cute and being exactly everything I ever wanted to be. Maybe even tiktok knew before me. I cried a lot that night. Hysterically crying and laughing alone in my tiny apartment. I don't know what made me realize it. It was just something that.. snapped. I called my dad the next day... and then again, just as last time in my childhood kitchen, I nervously told him that yes - yes I think I might be a lesbian.

"I know Amanda. Everyone knows."

I cried a lot after coming to terms with my sexuality. Happy tears. Suddenly everything felt right, you know? For the first time in my life, I could picture a

happy future for myself. I always dreaded my future because I always had imagined a man being my future... but suddenly I realized that I never had to deal with a man again. And I could be with exclusively women. A soft warm woman who understood me in a way a man never could.

My biggest nightmare has always been to marry a man. To live in a boring house with some boring man with a boring job and have boring children. Marriage and relationships always sounded like a chore. I never understand why you would like that. I never understood why my female friends loved to talk about their boyfriends or dreamed of their future together. I never understood that people actually liked their partners.

That changed drastically when I started to seriously start dating women as a lesbian. I did date some girls in my bi-days. It was never serious. It was always more of a fling, like a distraction for the next guy. But now as a lesbian, it become serious. It becomes something real. For the first time in forever, I had meaningful relationships and got actual proper feelings for someone. I fell in love - I got heartbroken. My views on relationships changed. Now there is nothing more I want than to be in a happy relationship. I dream of the day that I can get down on one knee and ask that special someone if she wants to be my wife.

I never thought that love was for me. Didn't think I had it in me to be romantic. Didn't think I deserved to be happy. But now I know that, no fuck it. I do deserve happiness. I deserve that happy ending... everyone does.

Section 3: Influence of Marginal Identity on Lesbianism and Queerness

I am going to be completely honest with you. Talking about race makes me uncomfortable - and don't get me wrong now - not in a way of making me uncomfortable that makes me not want to talk about it more so in a way of "who

am I to talk about this”? But I also think talking about what makes us uncomfortable is the only way of making it less uncomfortable.

My dad was adopted from Thailand by a Swedish/German-family. My mom is your standard white average Swede. So I guess, technically that makes me.. mixed-raced? I hate that word through. It sounds more like I’m a dog. It might be because of a language barrier. In Swedish, you would never say mixed-raced. That word simply doesn’t exist nor do Swedish people overall talk about race and ethnicity in this way.

But of course, my race and ethnicity affect me. It’s part of who I am, who people see me as and part of both my struggles and overall life.

I had an ex ask me once. If I see myself as a POC... and I couldn’t answer her. No idea. I think I mumbled a vague answer and tried talking about something, anything, else. Because what do you even answer? I mean I am, technically, 50% thai-asian-no-one-knows-really-because-he-was-adopted-so-we-don’t-know.

But my dad was also raised by a Swedish/German-white family.. so we don’t have anything connecting us to Thailand more than pure genetics. Is that enough? On the other side - I’ve also faced casual racism because of the way I look. Everything from snide remarks from friends, insensitive comments from family members, or people yelling that ”I’m not a true Swedish” to my face. Is that enough? I have no idea.

So I had that ex ask me that question.. and it’s far from the worst question I’ve ever gotten. Dating overall when you are a minority sometimes feels like a minefield. I’ve had girls wanting to date me because I was ”exotic”. The casual compliment of ”you look so different :)”. I even had the occasional ”your skin is so nice :)” referring to my skin colour... It’s concealed as a compliment. Like

something I should be thankful for.. but in reality, it just makes me extremely uncomfortable.

Fetishizing and sexualizing because of someone's ethnicity sometimes feels like it's a big part of the lesbian scene. Or at least, that is my experience of it. Sometimes I've almost felt more like an accessory to the girls I've dated. Like it's a plus that I look racially ambiguous.. that it's good that I look "different" but not too different to scare their family. It's like they are going a little bit "wild" dating someone like me. Or, I've also dated girls, that have a long track record of only ever dating people looking like me.

I understand people have a preference for dating. I have my own preference for who I like to date or who I find attractive. But there is a difference between having a preference and being weird about it. Please, stroke my massive ego and give me compliments. I love it when people find me attractive. I'm terribly vain. But there is a difference between getting "I find you attractive ;)" to "You look like Pocahontas or a sexy Dora the explorer ;)" because my skin colour is slightly tanner than theirs.

I don't know. Maybe it's a social thing I don't understand. I talked about it before, and I will talk about it more. As previously said with me being on the spectrum, I've been struggling socially my whole life. Making friends is hard... keeping friends is even harder and dating is.. not great. There are parts of it I don't understand. I do my best, believe me. I try so hard every day to be friendly, nice and understanding. Try laughing at the right jokes, try keeping the right amount of eye contact and be "normal". Sometimes I succeed with my masking - making people believe in a facade - but sometimes it's harder. Especially when dating.

It's common knowledge among my friends that I date.. some periods a lot, some less. But I do like dating. I like being nervous, going to the pub and meeting

a cute girl from Tinder. I like the butterflies and the feeling of "maybe this is it - maybe I've finally met the one"... I'm a hopeless romantic. I can't help it. Blame my Leo Venus.

So I do good on first dates. Overall first dates are always good. And then the second date is also good. Third? Ok. But slowly over time things always seem to fall apart. I can't keep up masking in front of my date forever. Can't keep forcing a conversation, can't keep trying to be someone I'm not. Sometimes I get a meltdown when I'm socially or mentally overstimulated, sometimes I need a lot of reassurance and become extremely needy. Sometimes I can be a bitch to be with.

"I liked you at first... but then I got to know you." My ex casually said when we broke up. She had liked me, at first, but then it got too much.

I am still working on myself. I still have plenty of stuff to figure out. There is still so much more for me to learn. Small steps. My identity as a lesbian, as queer woman, is a work in progress. It would be insane for me to have all the answers already. Sometimes not knowing, not understanding and being open to learning as you go is the best way.