

Imm1_anastasia_interview_2023-02-05_001

Sun, Feb 05, 2023 6:10PM • 1:37:04

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

lesbian, people, queer, high school, gay, read, kid, friends, feel, queerness, college, big, parents, talk, middle school, joan jett, nice, understand, books, part

SPEAKERS

Olivia N

Olivia N 00:02

Today is today is February 5 2023. I'm Olivia Newsome interviewing Anastasia virtually over zoom. Do I have permission to record this interview? Yes. Do you know you can stop recording at any time? Yes, please say your name, age and pronouns.

00:22

I'm Anastasia brannis. I'm 20 years old and I use she they pronouns

00:29

How would you describe yourself?

00:32

Um, I would describe myself as creative. I don't know if we're doing adjectives here. But as

00:46

as creative and as loyal. I guess. That's the baseline.

Olivia N 00:53

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

00:58

Yeah, I'm from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, specifically in South Philly Queen village. And I grew up there as well. And I would say I had a pretty nice childhood. I have a brother and a sister. And then Mom and Dad. Parents are not divorced or anything. And I grew up going to public school in Philadelphia, which was definitely interesting. And then I moved to private school in seventh grade. So that was a very different. That was like the switch in my childhood, I would say, um, but yeah, I grew up being like a very appreciative city kid. And then when I changed schools, I went to school in the suburbs. So even more prideful of like, being a city kid,

Olivia N 01:52

if that makes any sense. Yeah, so can you talk about your relationship with to your siblings? Are y'all close?

02:03

Yeah, um, I have a younger brother. And He's two years younger than me and a sister who's seven years younger. I guess we're kind of close. I don't know, my brother's a very, very much a teenage boy. So it's like, as we're as close as we can get for now. I'm sure one day that will be more. My sister. We used to share a room so we definitely weren't close. And we're not not close now. But she's just like a kid. So I'm in college. So it's kind of like a weird long distance relationship. But we always get along. I definitely am her source of like media, which is nice.

Olivia N 02:45

What about you and your parents?

02:48

Yeah. Um, I think I'm close to my parents. Like in the grand scheme of things. I'm definitely close with my mom. I do tell her all the things, maybe not everything, but good amount. And my dad, um, we definitely have our moments, but he's somebody I can go to to talk about, like, academic things, just like, I don't know, food for thought kind of things. And my mom is more logistically useful to me in a way. That sounds like a weird way of putting it, but I think I'm also logistically important to her. So it's okay.

Olivia N 03:28

So can you talk a little bit about what middle school was like and more of your schooling, you talked about the transition from public to private, but did you like middle school?

03:41

Yeah. So actually, when I was actually in sixth grade, I wasn't sure how deep we're going. But we're going deep, so I might as well. My parents were professors. So when I was in sixth grade, my dad went on a sabbatical. And we lived in New Zealand for six months, which was a very, obviously, I'm very privileged, I'm very lucky. But it was a very strange time for me to move across the planet for like, a short period of time. So I went to public school and fifth grade are in sixth grade for half of the year. And then we moved across the world for six months. And then we came back and I went to a different school. So that whole time was definitely really strange. And I definitely, like learned a lot about myself, like, maybe more than I feel like, like my sister, like, she's in one place, you know, so nothing has really changed for her. But middle school, I really figured stuff out about myself, like in terms of sexuality, just like interests. Um, I was like, an art kid forever. Like, I like took art classes as a kid. And that's what I wanted to do. I still like to draw all the time and I did when I was a kid like a lot and that was like my passion. I did dance when I was

Olivia N 04:59

a kid. In middle school,

05:01

so I was just like, very artistic. And that wasn't really the goal of my middle school and high school. They're very like stem. Not even just stem, but just like reputation oriented, which has never really been for me. Yeah, but middle school was really strange. I just like was trying to figure out how to express myself in this very suburban school. Everyone was kind of like dressing the same looking the same thinking the same, like there was a lot of that which I know is just kind of an inevitable middle school high school experience. But I just didn't really feel like I was like those kids because of being from the city and just mentally I guess. Yeah.

Olivia N 05:52

So what about your high school experience? Is it was it similar to your middle school experience? Like, what were you like? What were your friends? Like? What did you like to do?

06:02

Yeah, um, my high school experience was definitely vastly different to middle school, middle school, I was really struggling with mental health in a different way than I was in high school. It was more like, I was kind of gaslighting myself. Like, I wasn't sure if this was something I was making up. And in high school, I like finally had to deal with these things. And, you know, there were some bad moments there. But it was like, for the best at that point. Like, I'm grateful that I did it even so early as high school to like, finally deal with my shit. But yeah, I was still friends with the artsy kids friends with the gay kids, as it always goes, you know, is the sort of thing where one of us came out. Me, I was the first friend. And then it kind of just kept going. And yeah, I had a nice little high school friend group, I definitely, I was friends with the kids for the city. Um, and, yeah, high school was very hard, I didn't have the best grades at all, especially in subjects I really didn't care about which there's a lot there. But I really thrived in English classes and art classes, which is kind of still what I thrive in. In my high school, as I mentioned before, it was like, it was like a college prep school. So everyone was really into getting into schools and scores and numbers. And that never worked out for me. And I just kind of kept that stuff a secret. Like, even with my high school friends, it's just not something I ever wanted to talk about with them. Like, they kind of knew I had like, worse grades than them, but they never really knew like what that meant. Because like, some of it was really bad. And some of it was like, you know, a B, which I don't consider very bad. But some people do. Um, and I guess the only other like note is like more of this, like weird city kid. Thing is I took like Amtrak into high school every day. So I would take like, two buses to the train station, and then the train and then a bus from the train station. So it was like a journey every day, back and forth, which was something like people from my high school didn't understand. Because they were a lot of these kids who get either they got a car for their 16th birthday, or they get driven by their parents every day. So it was just never a concern of these kids to like, figure out how to get around by themselves, which made like, hanging out with people kind of difficult, because I was like, Oh, I'm gonna take this bus to your house, like out in the suburbs? And they were like, I don't understand. You know? But yeah, I think that's sums up my high school.

Olivia N 08:40

So can you talk a little bit about how gender impacted you growing up?

08:50

Yeah. I definitely have had like a tumultuous relationship with gender. I think my whole life. I always kind of felt like different as a kid. And I don't know that I was ever like, a tomboy, quote, unquote. But I do remember kids, like in elementary school, you know, are you like a tomboy or girly girl and I was like, very conflicted in that mindset. And I did not understand, like, at all. And that was like, from a very early age. And by middle school, I had this like, I don't want to be like these other kids kind of mindset, which I think I still have, to some extent, like, I don't think I can, I I'm still not sure how to get rid of that entirely. But definitely, like in middle school in high school, I was just surrounded by these people who I just like, aesthetically did not want to associate with like, among other things, and I was just like, I can't look like them. Like, just in terms of like, how I'm expressing myself as like, I can't look like how these people look. And I didn't want to be fair. Oh, Jesus, my light just turned off. Sorry about that. I don't know what that's about. Um, And, yeah, in high school in ninth grade, I cut my hair off, I had like a pixie cut. And that was like a big deal for me, because I really wanted people to take me seriously. Like, I don't know, maybe just like, have my own choices for one. And like, I wanted to be seen as queer. And that was a way to do it. And like, not entirely, obviously, you can't base everything off of how people look. But it was very special to me, at that time, and still now to look queer. And yeah, and then I guess it's kind of changed since high school, it's been really nice. Being in a college environment really surrounded by queer people and understanding that I don't have to, like assign myself to be a tomboy, or girly girl or anything like that. Um, and definitely I know, this is something a lot of people experience is you get to college, and you take a gender studies class, and you read theory, and you're just like, okay, none of this matters. Like, it's all just terms. And that's kind of where I'm at. Now, you know, I'm a little confused. At the end of the day, I don't really know what my future gender expression and I don't know, labels holds. But I think I've like come to accept that for the first time in my life. And that's definitely not something I understood in high school. And I think, as a high schooler, as like an out high schooler, I felt like I already knew so much. And I was like, there's there can't be more to know. And there is there is and I think I like finally at a point where I'm realizing that this is like a lifelong thing. Yeah.

Olivia N 11:46

So can you talk about how mental illness affected you growing up? Yeah, I'm,

11:58

like I mentioned before, when I lived in New Zealand, when I was in sixth grade, I really, I think I was depressed for the first time in my life. Maybe not the first time. But definitely like the first noticeable time. And it was really like a turning point for me and realizing like maybe this isn't how everybody thinks. And that really carried through in middle school. And in high school, I started getting panic attacks, which were really bad. And they still are, but have I've learned since but for a while, it was really like this thing of me battling with my parents saying please, like, this isn't normal. This isn't okay. Like, it took me a long time to like, pluck up the courage to ask to go to therapy. And even after that, like, you know, my parents don't quite understand mental health the same way that maybe I do, and maybe my generation does. They were like, you know, why isn't everything solved? You've been to therapy for X amount of time, why isn't it just gone. And I have to, like, kind of keep explaining, like, it doesn't work like that. And after a long time, I did get medicated, which, like I could talk about for a long time. And I think there's always conflicting feelings about that. Like, its reputation is very strange. But at the end of the day, like, I think creepy to accept, and this doesn't go for everyone. But I do think it goes

for me, like, you know, my brain chemistry is different. And it's like an important thing to take care of yourself like that. And who knows if it's lifelong or not. Like, the important thing is like, I'm a functional person in this moment, and like, I wasn't always, and definitely in high school, it really got bad, and I was not medicated. And I was, like, my parents were not taking me seriously in that way. And, you know, I got the advice of like, oh, you need to breathe, you need to learn to meditate XYZ. And those things are helpful, for sure. But sometimes, like, at the end of the day, we need a little more than that. Not everyone, but definitely in my case. And yeah, I think the pandemic kind of made things a little bit stressful for me. I had a difficult time, like, moving out to college. I think some people definitely felt that way. Just like you're being cooped up in your parents home, and you get kind of used to it. So it was definitely like a harsh change for me. And it felt like more than my peers, but I don't know how much that's really true. But definitely it was useful at that time to like, have mental health resources. Yeah.

Olivia N 14:42

So can you talk a little bit about what influenced you the most growing up?

14:48

Yeah, I guess that's like, that's like so general. I couldn't think of all the things but um, I think music is a big one like media, music, movies, and I'm definitely where I grew up, specifically Queen village. It's this neighborhood that used to not be gentrified. Like when I was a kid, it was, I don't know, all sorts of people live there. And as I've grown up, like my elementary school, when I went there, I think I was like, one of like, few white kids in high school and my sister went there. And it's like, a predominantly Jewish and white school now, which is kind of wild to happen in like a 10 year period, basically. So my neighborhood is like, so different. It used to be like near South Street, which is like a famous Philadelphia street and there used to be like punk shops and all sorts of stuff. And there's a lot of cool stuff around, but it's definitely different. But anyways, despite that, my influences like there's a lot of like, really cool independent artists around who I feel like I really learned from like, I was like, super in love with my like tattoo teachers growing up, like that kind of thing. My parents really encouraged me to listen to music, like neither of my siblings have quite the same passion as I do. Like, I was obsessed with the Beatles as a kid and I always like wanted to know like, the music story as well as like the artists story and how they kind of coexist, which is definitely how I still function. And yeah, when again, sixth grade, that was it. That was the turning point on I got really into Joan Jett. Who was like the the big turning point for me, my dad's from New Jersey, which is not that fun, but he had like a whole like folklore tale about meeting Joan Jett. And that was like my dream as a kid, it still is my dream. I'd love to meet Joan Jett, but I was just like so in love with her and like her gender expression. And just like the way that she's just a badass like in this like, very male dominated field and that completely like changed the way I looked at music and like media. Yeah, I just think I'm mostly influenced by all sorts of art, like, watching like the craft, very young. I don't know why I was showing these movies very young. Again, like you can definitely see like the queer influence in all this as well. Even though I think it was utterly unintentional by my parents. The craft was like a big one. For me. Practical Magic. I was really into witches as a kid, which is a classic again. Um, and yeah, I think like seeing these like women in movies, like, despite the flaws of the movies, like I couldn't pick that up as a kid. You know? I was just like, wow, I want to be like, Dress cool and look cool and do whatever I want. Like all these girls.

Olivia N 17:48

Yeah. What about religion? Did you grow up? Religious?

17:55

Yeah, that's an interesting one. Um, so my dad is Greek Orthodox, and my mom is Jewish. So we celebrate both like, as a household however, me personally, I am an atheist, but I guess I'm ethnically Jewish. So do with that as you will be? Yeah, we I grew up going to church for like holidays. Occasionally, on Sundays. We went to synagogue for the High Holidays as well. And I did not have a bar mitzvah, I was offered one. And I said no, which I, but I was baptized as a child. So it's a very strange thing. And when I was a kid, my parents really wanted me to learn modern Greek, which strangely is like a very difficult thing to like, find somebody to teach you. Everyone teaches ancient Greek, which is useless. The local, Orthodox Greek church, like had a program that my brother and I went to do, but they didn't really teach us Greek. I can't speak Greek, which is very sad. And it was kind of just like going to Sunday school for a couple of years without my parents knowing so that was like a weird thing. But I was a super atheist child for some reason. Maybe this goes along with mental health, but I like I've always been very like introspective as a kid, which I feel like it's a strange thing for like, an actual child, but I would like sing songs and prayers about God. And I would like, never say the words I would like mouth, but I refused. Like as a kid, which I don't I couldn't tell you why, but I was just really not into it. So I definitely have, like, religious family and like a decent amount of religious experience. But it's really not how I like live my personal life.

Olivia N 19:44

Was there any tension between you and your parents? You were this young atheist? And your parents are both religious people.

19:54

Yeah. So my parents, my God, just like my parents are I'm definitely not that religious, although I think that might have changed, like in my lifetime, to be honest with you. I think they both just feel this connection to their cultures, which I am kind of slowly learning to appreciate. Definitely, like, my mom doesn't live near her families. So I think like, as she's gotten older, like Judaism has become not like, she's not really like believing in God. But I think she finds like comfort in, you know, being able to go to a service and say the same prayer, she said, when she was a kid and like a completely different place, which I do think is beautiful. And I'm like, kind of learning to understand that. And my dad kind of has a very conflicting feeling as his parents are much more religious. I think both sets of my grandparents moreso my Greek side are religious. And do I kind of have this like backdrop of God, like, even if they really try not to have it be that way, I think it's just like, so ingrained in them. And we've definitely had moments like that for Greek Orthodox Easter, which is like a big deal. You, you go to church at midnight. And I had a couple years where I refuse to wear a dress to church. And that was like a big, that was a big thing. Like I was I was like, yelled at at 1am. It's like, not a fun time. And I had to stand my ground. And like, I'm very lucky for that. And at this point, they've all kind of given up on fighting me on it. But there are definitely moments, especially with the Greek side, like showing up to, like family events and having to look a certain way having to cover certain body parts and just still kind of look a little conservative, if that makes sense.

Olivia N 21:53

So when were you starting to realize that your sexuality was different from what was around you? You mentioned that you were the first friend to come out. You had a young understanding of maybe queerness? Or can you talk a little bit about that? And how old you were?

22:11

Yeah. Um, again, 6/7 grade, kind of the same 1213 Um, I had a boyfriend in seventh grade. I kind of think I think I was just realizing like, everyone was having these crushes. And I was like, why don't I feel this way? And this was like, a boy who I like, we talked about music like he like, showed me like Lana Del Rey. You know, like, it was just like a cute we just like hung out. He like we listened to like Grimes together. It was nothing crazy. So I was like, Oh, this must be like a crush. on him. He asked me out and I was like, Okay, sure. Um, I never kissed him, like nothing ever happened. And then I like, broke up with this boy. Um, and I just like, It all clicked for me. I like, had this girl I had a crush on in seventh grade. And I was like collusion, I think I'm a lesbian, like. Yeah, I think that's like, really, when it clicked for me. And I kind of slowly came out to people after that. Now that slow because I was like, pretty much out by like, freshman year of high school. By the time I was like, what? 1415? Um, but yeah, I think I forget what your question was a little bit.

Olivia N 23:28

How did you know about lesbianism? Like, as a thing you could identify as?

23:35

Yeah, um, I did grow up with gay neighbors, which I did not realize until I was older. For some reason, it did not click in my head that these people who were like living together of the same gender were married or dating. But I think really, the answer to that is the internet. Um, I would say that I did not say the word lesbian for a long time. I think that it's, I'm overstating this a little bit. I think the word gay definitely felt more comfortable to me until definitely until I was like in high school. Um, but really, it was just like, I was like, Alright, I think I'm gay. Like, let's do some Googling. You know, I didn't have a computer. I had like my parents like hand me down iPhone three on like, private mode on incognito mode on like Safari. And I was like, okay, like lesbian movies. I'm like, my favorite story, which is a weird one is I Googled lesbian movies. I used to share a room with my sister. So I'm like, on a bunk bed. I'm on the top bunk. And she was like a baby. She was like seven or something or like eight. I don't know. She's like asleep and I was like, Alright, I'm gonna watch whatever the first lesbian movie is to come up. And I watched like Blue is the Warmest Color, which is like, three hours long and it's like porn, and it's like terrible. And I was like, coalition. Like, I don't know if I can do that. But at the same time, some Hello, something clicked with that because I was like, Alright, I am attracted to these people at the end of the day. And like they're kissing and that, like makes me feel some way. And yeah, I was definitely too young to read that or to watch that. But, like, I don't regret it because it definitely like showed me something that I don't really know how else I would have found it. I probably would have ended up googling porn or something like more intentionally. And yeah, and then definitely, like, from there like I'm, as discussed, like, I, I love the media, I love consuming all the different things. I'm like, Alright, let's be in books. Let's be movies. Let's be music like going on Tumblr. Like who are famous lesbians like I'm just I was just going on a rampage. I read Chelsea girls by Eileen Miles was like my first gay book in like, eighth grade, I found it in my high school's library. I like wasn't even supposed to check it out. And I did. And I loved it to death. And I like obviously, there's a lot of like sexual stuff in

that book that I did not understand at the time. But it really wasn't important to me because I was so like, happy to read something about women loving women, which was something I'd never seen before. And I was like, this, like makes me feel a certain way that all the like straight media I've consumed all this time, like just never has. Yeah, like I remember my mom being she was like obsessed with Fault in Our Stars for some reason. And I read it and I was like, I don't really care. Like, I just it didn't work for me. And I think, because I figured this out so young, like, I haven't even read so many of the like, classics, because I just don't even seek that stuff out anymore. Which I think is great. But yeah.

Olivia N 26:55

So where on the internet? Were you learning about lesbianism? You just said you went on the internet? What were you? Where were you?

27:04

Um, where was that? I, this is very embarrassing. But I had a lord fan account in seventh grade, because I wasn't allowed to have Instagram because I had like I was I'm the oldest child. So I still had the protection. My siblings don't have that. Anyways, so that was like how I made an Instagram. And there's lots of gay people on the internet, especially in these like pop girl circles, which like, I do not know, going into it. But I definitely like, I'm loved Marina and the Diamonds and Lana Del Rey, like, that was my shit in middle school. And like, all those people are like, I don't know, they're all gay. It was completely unintentional of me. But that just happens to be the demographic. And you know, you make internet friends online, you guys like slowly come out to each other. And it was like a big deal. And I like really valued my internet friends at that time. Like it was hard to come out to friends in real life. And especially because again, I was the first one. So I was like, I need people who are like me, and that's how I found them. And more than that, I think Tumblr is a big one we all know about when they used to have porn there and you weren't even looking for it, it would just kind of pop up and you're like, Oh my god. Um, and obviously that does something. So I think I really just like would Google exactly what I was thinking, like on incognito mode? Like I not like weird shit, but just a lot of like, what are the essential lesbian books like, were like, oh, Giovanni's Room, that's a big one. Which is a bookstore in Philadelphia. I was like, wow, I have to go there. It's a queer bookstore. I was like, I have to go. And I like went there. And I was like, holy shit. Look at all these like gay books that I'm not even searching for. They're just here. We're just the whole point of the bookstore. And I, you know, look through the movie, look through everything. I just was like, taking notes. Of all the things and like, I feel like once you learn, kind of what queer coding is, and just like when even queer coding but just like when things start to remind you, of queer things of queerness like, whether or not it is like, is Joan Jett really gay? Like, I don't know, but she like has a role in like my lesbianism and and definitely, like a good amount of people's. So there's something about this like androgyny that, like you start to seek out and like find and media and all sorts of stuff. Like, you know, I went back and I rewatched the craft and I'm like, holy shit like this is kind of like a little bit gay. Like, the way they dress the way they present themselves, like their relationship with men that is so flawed like you start to realize it so I kind of just like kept adding up.

Olivia N 29:57

What were you doing on Tumblr specifically? You, and What years were you on Tumblr?

30:04

I was on Tumblr, from 2013. I want to say until 2008 teen? Yikes, not. The thing is I wasn't a very like, actively I think I used it in a different way. I was not a fandom girl. I know I told you about my musical, whatever the monitorship. But it wasn't that intense for me. I know for a lot of people it was. I feel like I watched a lot of bad things happen, but I was never a part of them, which is good. But I really use it for pretentious shit. Loved the poetry, loved the pretty pictures. That was really what I was there for. I'm, I'm the kind of person where I will read the book, watch the movie. And then I will go on Tumblr, and I will look like I would watch. I don't know, blues lovers color. And then I go look it up on Tumblr, and then I went through and like would reblog crap. But yeah, I think more of like the internet friend thing for me was mostly an Instagram thing, honestly. But I definitely like had a few Tumblr like interactions with people.

Olivia N 31:27

So would you say that Tumblr was one of your earliest interactions with queer spaces or online spaces? Or did you have early interactions with queer spaces that were physical or in person?

31:43

I think I'm gonna have to say yes to both of those. Because I think Tumblr was the young queer. Like, I've definitely felt more connected to the queer people in queer spaces that I saw on Tumblr, just because I think, you know, part of it is like it's catered to you and I was looking for what I found, basically. But they're definitely like, we're background queer people in my life that I really didn't notice. And like, once I realized I was queer, like, that became significant to me. And like, I live close to the gayborhood, like, where Giovanni's Room is, I'm like, that became like, very important to me, the older I got, but it didn't matter to me when I was a kid. I didn't know what that even meant. But the fact that like, people were openly queer, in my neighborhood, and like starting to spot like gay people around, like, that became very important to me, or even like, little stuff, like seeing people with tattoos, seeing people with piercings, like, whatever kind of queer coding I could do, like I would.

Olivia N 32:46

Did you have gay friends growing up?

32:51

Um, yes. Like my high school friends were gay. And like my middle school friends. Eventually, were my high school friends who are gay. But other than that, no, definitely not. I have this. My first crush in third grade, who I still believe is gay. I don't have this not confirmed. And I don't know their pronouns. And I'm guessing it's not she her. They cut their hair in fifth grade. And that was like a Whoa, moment. I was like, holy shit. Like, I'm in love with you. They were like obsessed with the Beatles with me. And like, I do think that was like, a super queer moment for both of us. Like, maybe one day I'll talk to them about it. But like, I think that was really gay of us as like kids. Which is great. But no, I don't have any like, childhood friends who are gay. This is that's just me.

Olivia N 33:48

What was it like being an out gay person or an out lesbian in high school and having queer friends or gay friends?

33:56

I think honestly, the best way to put it is that I think people from my high school thought we were cringy. Now whether or not we were, I think is like a mixed answer. I think part of it. Yes, we were like babies. We were figuring it out. Like, for sure. And we were on tumblr and like, doing awkward shit like that. And like, not everybody else from my high school was doing that at all. Like none of these straight suburban people were doing that shit. So like to them it was just all awkward. But like, I don't think that's entirely true. I think we were pretty cool in some ways. Like I think it was cool that we had each other to like, talk about all this media and we would like go like, when Portrait of a Lady on fire came out in theaters, like I went with my friends. Like that's great that I could do that. Like when I was younger. Like that was like a really defining moment for me, and as I finished high school, like in my last like year and a half or two years like they're starting to be like queer teachers at my school, which like, was a huge deal to me. And like, I had an art teacher who was like, super gay. And I, like, just wanted to, like be near her, and like, talk to her about it. And she was like, open to that which was so like, wonderful. And I started to be able to like fine queer stuff in just general like, readings in high school we read passing by no Larson. Gradebook. Yeah, that was in my 11th grade, English class, like they had like, introduced a new curriculum halfway through, which was great. And we read passing, and you know, nobody in my class, like, they were like, this is whatever. I was like, this is about gay people. And like, I still stand by that. But it gets up for debate. And like, I said that in my high school, like, I'm the only gay person in this class, like, I'm gonna say, yeah, look at this. This is like queer. And I think that's pretty cool. And I don't know that all of my high school friends are like that, I think I might be the most. I don't know. Not flamboyant, but just vocal about this. I don't know that they all feel that way. And that they did that in high school. But I was very proud of being gay. And it wasn't like I like told my whole high school or something like that. Like, that doesn't make sense to me. But if anyone was wondering, they were free to ask, you know, it was always something I was happy to talk to people about. And like I did, I did have people talk to me about, like, how they were feeling about their gender, about their sexuality, which like, I think is a nice thing. So

Olivia N 36:43

you mentioned a little bit of struggling with identifying as lesbian. When you were younger, you mentioned how gay felt more comfortable. So can you talk through why lesbian, or dyke or any of those words ever felt scary for you to identify with?

37:01

Yeah, I mean, I think first of it, first of all, like, it was just hard to identify with anything. Like at all, it was just like, why am I feeling this way? Like, what does this mean? Um, but then I think, really, when I started to struggle with the word lesbian, right, when I cut my hair off, like people call me a dyke on the street, and I was like, fuck, that's scary. I was like, shit, because that's like a weird feeling. And I am in a queer and trans writing class right now. So I was actually just talking about this. But like, it's the strangely validating thing, where you're like, Oh, my God, I'm gay. Yeah, everybody knows that. Nobody thinks I'm straight. That's so cool. But at the same time, you're like, Are people gonna hate crime me, like, what's happening? Um, and I definitely had moments in high school, where, you know, nobody was like, calling me a lesbian or anything. But there were like, moments of straight girls like seeing me as a predator. And I was like, Oh, I don't want to be that, you know, I had like, summer

camp, I went to like, summer camp in eighth grade. And I was like, I'm gay. Like, it took me like, half of the two weeks to say it, and I said it and then everyone wouldn't change around me. And they like, it was never the same. And like, I didn't go back the next year, because I was like, No, I don't like the way I'm being like treated here. Yeah, now that I'm saying this out loud, I think it was the predator thing, because that came up a lot. Like, whether it was just like in class, or people would be like, Oh, I don't know, just like the way people talk about lesbian characters. Like the way people talk about like butches specifically, is like, sickening. And I was like, I don't I didn't know where I still don't really know. Like, whatever femme butch, whatever, but like, I was really conflicted on that. And the way people perceived me was definitely not always positive.

Olivia N 39:07

So how did you end up? How did you end up I don't want to say resolving, I can't think of the word right now. But lesbian is predator was like a really big part of like your high school experience. And maybe you're struggling with lesbian, or dyke and also like less biphobia and slurs. Right. And so now you loudly and proudly claim and identify with lesbians with lesbianism, obviously, or you wouldn't be here. So can you talk a little bit about, like, what changes happen? Like when did you start feeling comfortable with identifying as a lesbian? It doesn't have to just be your childhood. It can be like you now.

39:56

Yeah, I feel like at some point, I was just like, you know, I don't really have Question. If I like men, I don't know why I'm like leaving this up for interpretation. Like, I don't think I do. Um, and then I think more recently, like, especially at historically Women's College, like, we have this problem of like, that sounds silly, but like transphobia basically, there's, there's no good way to put that. And it's definitely, like a great thing for anyone, especially queer people, especially queer lesbians to be in a space with a lot of non binary and lesbians who use even he him pronouns. And it's like, this word makes me comfortable period under sentence. And I feel like I finally know, like, if I want to identify as something else in 10 years, like my lesbian identity doesn't just like, go away. And it doesn't go away for like, people who are changing their pronouns, or if they like, I don't know. I definitely think they're, it's a weird thing that does have this like, idea of we're right on it. But like, I don't really know that I feel that way. I'm not going to be offended if somebody says they're lesbian. And then like, I don't know, like, maybe one day they hook up with a man and then they still say they're a lesbian. Like, that's just not my problem. At the end of the day. I just don't feel. Yeah, I just don't feel very strict about it anymore. I just feel like if it's a word that's making me comfortable, like I definitely don't feel like bisexual or pansexual connect with me. I definitely like use queer sometimes. But I think the word lesbian is powerful to me. Oh, Jesus. Sorry, can you hear me?

Olivia N 41:49

I could hear you the whole time. You can? I could hear you the whole time. Yeah, you're totally fine. I

41:54

just don't, but that's okay.

Olivia N 41:56

I think it just seamlessly transition from air pods to you speaking. So it's okay. Um, you're talking about lesbian? That's powerful.

42:06

Like, yeah, I just think it's like a powerful word. And I think, again, like as, like this person always, like seeking out media. It was so nice to have this word that I was able to use, like, as a search term, literally. Like, I didn't want to find bisexual women, I didn't want to find like, hypothetically gay women, like I want to find like lesbians, like, you know, um, and sometimes you have to search for that. And it's like, you know, like, I'm not really interested in reading a book about somebody who's married to a man and then like, has to find out she's a lesbian and like, ditch her ex husband, like, I want to read about the people who know, you know, and part of that is like, knowing how you identify. So

Olivia N 42:55

you mentioned a lot, kind of overall about like queer coding and queer aesthetics and how that influenced you growing up like, looking for tattooed people looking for pierced people, and so pierced people with piercings. Can you talk about how clothing, makeup, jewelry, tattoos, piercings, or other body mods are forms of gendered expression have assisted with affirming your identities or lesbian lesbianism now?

43:26

Um, yeah, so I think that it's key. I don't know that I would have figured anything out. Without that. I can't say the same for everybody else. But um, like, in my case, figuring out I was gay, meant that I finally got to express myself. I'm like, I had, I bought a leather jacket in middle school. And I was like, I'm the coolest person in the world. And I was like, 411 and middle schoolers, I was tiny. And I wear this little leather jacket around, and I was like, I am a fucking badass like, and that is really powerful for a kid, or really anyone. And I think part of that was feeling like a queer person and feeling like these queer people I like knew about in media again, I guess we're just gonna keep talking about Joan Jett. But like, she was like a big one for me. And I think Tumblr was was big on that, too. They're just like, trying to look like the pictures that I saw of other people. And they were like, associated with this, like, coolness, this queerness this like, mystery, and I was like, I can do that myself. Yeah, and I think during the pandemic, I lived in an apartment with my high school friends for the first semester of my college because it was like not on campus and I did not want to live in my parents house anymore. And that was like the first time I was like, okay, I can really do like anything. I Want now. And I definitely, like started experimenting with makeup that was not something I did in my parents house, they just are very minimalist people, which I'm not, I like to be decorated. I like to tell people how I feel. Um, and, you know, I got nose piercings, which I love. I've always been really into like jewelry. And I started getting tattoos on in college. And I'm, like, really happy about them. And like, I've always been an artist. So to me, it's like this just, I just like to be decorated, as I said, and like, I like to have other people's art and like things that have meant something to me or not. I'm on my body. And I think clothing is of a part of it. And yeah, I don't know, I think it's just a nice thing to be like, constantly inspired and to constantly have new ideas. And I think queer people and queer fashion is like, it's a massive part of that for me, whether that's being at my school now and just being surrounded by queer people who are like, totally, like, changing the way I feel about how I can normally dress and like not being in that high school environment of like a bunch of I don't know what people wear like Lululemon leggings on like, Brandy

Melville T shirts, it's like, you learn that that's like, not the end extent, um, which is wonderful. And people here dressed like freaks all the time. And it's great, because I'm happy for them that they have somewhere where people won't judge them. And people won't measure their queerness based off of how they dress. But at the same time, it's also like recording in its own special little way. So, like,

Olivia N 46:53

So you talked a lot, as well about queer media and media consumption, especially when you were growing up as really pivotal to your identity formation. So what about now, I'm going to ask you a two part question. So give me a second. How have like art, media, like television, television, wow, TV, movies, other forms of art that you've been consuming now as like an adult lesbian, assisted with your identity formation or your lesbianism? And then also, you mentioned when you were younger, that you were an artist, or are an artist, and I will, I didn't know if you anyways. And then if you could talk a little bit about art making as a process, and how that relates to your lesbianism, and then your gender identity and stuff. And so that however you will, you can answer it in two parts or at the same time. So like art consumption versus art production. Yeah.

47:59

Um, I think I started with the art production, I feel like, yeah, because that has just been something I've done forever. Like, I don't know, when I started that, that was just always something I was very into. And I think that came before my queerness. So it's kind of like, always been this outlet for me, whether that's like drawing, or I, I so I was really into fashion as a kid, like, way more than I even am now, even though I still do it. Um, and I write, and that writing has become more useful to me as I've been older, but like, definitely, having all of that like, as an already, like, something I used to express myself. Like, was really useful to me, like when I learned, like, when I figured out my own queerness like, whether that's just like writing about my problems or like, just like, realizing I can draw women and not feel like disgusting for or making my own clothes. And like, if something's not queer, or doesn't look how I want to, like, I can just make that happen. Um, which I think is sick. And I still like that all the time. And like, I think words are the most powerful thing. And so I think, especially like, in college, I'm an English major. And writing has become very, very important to me. Whether it's creative or not, like I think just having the right language on for what you're trying to say is key. And I'm happy to like keep learning about it. Yeah, and then as for like consumption. I cannot express enough in words or at all. How much consuming queer media was important to me and queer coded media. Because you can't always have what you want with the actual queer medium. It's just true. For now at least, but definitely like, being able to hold on it definitely changed me, as I've gotten older. Not that it's less important, but when I first came out, and when I was first coming to terms with my own sexuality, you know, finding anything, anything with a lesbian character was so important to me, just to see myself reflected in the character, um, just literally anything. But as I've gotten older, you know, some of this shit is bad. Some of it's not like good movies. And I'm like, I feel like I'm at a point where like, I have my own, like representation in my life, like, whether that's through like friends, or my partner or whatever, that I don't feel like desperate for queer TV. But, you know, like, I like on a little rampage right now. And I'm obsessed with like, learning about lesbian literature. And like erotic literature for the first time, I feel like, I don't know, I was just never into that before, I was always scared to read things that were too sexual for such a long time. And I'm like, just obsessed with scouring my school's library and finding everything published by like, a lesbian press in like New York in the 80s. Like, I'm just going to read them all, I have like a

massive stack in my room. Um, and it's not that I guess I couldn't read something if it was straight. Like, it's not like that. It's just like, I think the history of lesbians is so rich and vast. And I want to learn more, and it's not really something you learned in school, like, even in a queer and trans writing class. You know, it's not like about me specifically. So I have to go off and do that myself. Which I am willing to do. Um, but it's definitely important to me. I'm reading stone Butch Blues for the first time. It's killing me, it's killing me. I'm crying so many times, but it's like beautiful, and I'm so happy that I'm reading it. And like, I think straight people should read it. But the problem is, all this stuff is so so much of the time it's on a small scale, or just doesn't mean as much to people just read people. And like, I just feel like I need to read as much as I can. Like, I just don't know how to word that. And even if I'm not reading things, or watching things, like I just like to know the names of important people, or have important movies and books and everything, like I just want to feel like knowledgeable on queer history, which like, I'm not sure. You know, I have so many gay friends at this point. But like, that's not really something they all like pride themselves on. Um, but for some reason, to me, it is maybe it's part of like, why I want to work in an archive or something probably definitely. But I'm just like obsessed with the I'm obsessed with like uncovering all of this stuff, because it's just endless. And you can say that for really any like marginalized group. If you dig long enough, and an archive or subtext, you will find things, which I think is great.

Olivia N 53:19

So can you talk about your first encounters with lesbian sex, both directly and indirectly? You kind of spoken a little bit about the indirect thing, because you talked about Tumblr porn, but if you want to if you want to talk more about it, you can.

53:37

Yeah. I think it was, it was just confusing to me for so long. Um, I just felt like, that was that's not something I talked to, like, you know, I was saying, I'm close with my mom, but we don't talk about sex. That's like, a no, no, no. Um, so that wasn't really something I could go to my parents for. It's still not not that I even like, honestly, I really don't want to, but, like, I'm not sure that I could have that conversation with really any like adults in my life, which I think a lot of queer people feel. So that's something you have to talk about with your friends. On which, in high school, that was kind of a difficult one because we my little gay friend group, we all kind of didn't date anyone. And we just like, we're friends with each other. And we all had like weird crushes on each other. But like, that wasn't nothing came out of it. So pretty much none of us knew what we're talking about. And we just had to, like, pick up the courage to ask each other questions, you know, over time, or to just Google it. Again, like the Tumblr, Tumblr porn, the Incognito Mode, like that was like the only thing I knew, um, you know, it doesn't come up in sex ed like yeah, my high school tried to be like weirdly inclusive about it. I don't know. They probably just like said something about LGBT people or something, no one's like telling you how to, like, have lesbian sex, you know? Um, nothing like that happened. So I guess. And then, I don't know if I'm supposed to like, I guess I'll just reveal things, but like, basically, like I had sex for the first time when I was 18. Yay. Um, and it was really important to me like, it wasn't like the best sex in the world or anything. But I was not like a touchy kid. I'm still like working on that. I maybe that's part of that is like the predatory lesbian thing, or just so scared to be like, physically vulnerable with people like not even in a sexual context, just like, holding a friend's hand is still like so taboo to me. And that's like something I'm working on. And it's like, so much better than it was when I was in high school. But I was

like, Really touchstar, to be honest with you. And I think all of my little friends were too because we just didn't have the same chances to do things as straight people, even if, you know, it's the kind of thing where it's like, nobody's being homophobic, necessarily. Nobody's like, oh, you can't bring your date to the dance if you're gay, but it's like, people don't do that. So it's like this weird undertone of homophobia, maybe. But yeah, having sex for the first time. Like, I was just so happy to be physically vulnerable with somebody. And I think maybe this is like, oh, husband stereotype, but like, girls are so nice, you know, like, people are so nice. And they just want you to, like, take your time. Like, that's, it's wonderful to meet somebody who will, like let you do that. And like, let you be, like, learn basically. Um, I don't know how else to word that. But yeah, like, I think that's like a beautiful thing that I am able to say. And I know we all have, like straight friends and gay friends. But I think a lot of our straight female friends have just such fucked up losing their virginity stories. And that is just not the case for me. And I'm really fucking grateful for that. Um, and yeah. Oh, she talks about it now or daughters. Yeah, go ahead. Yeah, I have very different like, I've, maybe this is like, too vulgar. But like, I've learned so much since I was like, 18. Like, obviously, I'm, and I'm definitely like, more comfortable with like, my own body and other people's and talking about it. And like, definitely, college specifically has given me this outlet to, you know, you start to talk about like, weird, especially in an English class situation, so much of that sexual undertone of books you kind of just ignore in high school, you know, you know, it's there. You don't talk about it. Like you read Romeo and Juliet. And you're like, remember some like stuff there. But you know, that's not like, on the table. And in college. It's like, no, it actually kind of is, which is great. Um, and I feel like I'm just starting to learn about like, specifically lesbians. Like lesbian, sexual, like readings, I don't know how to put that. And I'm just like, interested in it, because there is so much subtext and so much that is obvious that I have just never gotten a chance to explore before. And I'm totally like, interested in that. Yeah.

Olivia N 58:32

What lesbian, like erotic or sexual readings? Are you encountering? Yeah, I'm

58:40

not all of it is good is the thing a lot of is like, fucking creepy and weird. And some of it's just like, not good writing, but I'm just like, interested in kind of just learning about it. I guess. Like, I'm reading stone which blues right now, which definitely has like, a lot, a lot. But just like, even in like, the scenes where they're talking, like, they're first introducing just to like, the strap, right, like, it's just so interesting. Like, you know, I really have not read a lot of stuff where it mentions a strap. Like, I don't know if I've actually ever have, that might be my first thing. And it's just like crazy to even see that because that's like, obviously, that's like something I've experienced, but I've never really read about it. And like the way that they describe it to her as like a young person is not something I got, like, a sex toys. Seemed like literally the scariest thing in the world. The scariest thing in the world as like a 17 year old like 18 year old, like nothing could be scarier than that to me. And so just like having it slowly be normalized over time, like whether that's like, even just like Instagram ads about sex toys, like it's a nice feeling and then have like, once you're old enough and like you know, you have your queer friend group like kind of everyone has their own experiences with that. And it's nice to like, have a group of people where everyone can talk about and there's not like a shameful thing. Or even like buying a vibrator for the first time again, I don't know why I'm the leader of my little high school friend group, but apparently I am because I did it. And then they all did it. because I'm just that cool. Um, but like, that was cool. You

know that the internet can provide something like discreet packaging, and then you learn a lot of things. Yeah. Like, oh, and what lesbian erotica have I read? I didn't answer your question. Um, I don't know. I'm just like really interested in like the and Bannon, BB banker series. It's like the dumbest name in the world. It's like this 50s 60s and 50s, like Pulp Fiction stuff. And then they republished it in the 80s. And it's like, bad, but it's like, kind of fun at the same time, because like, I don't know, there's like, reviews by Dorothy Allison that are like, holy shit. Like, I read this. Like, when I was a kid, or not kid, but like, when I was young, and I would like buy it at the drugstore. And like, secretly, like, bring it home. And I just think that's crazy. Yeah, and I think, I don't know, I've just been trying to find stuff like, found a copy of. I can't remember what it's called. But it's by Anna Louise Ninh. Who's she's a creep, as for sure. Um, but it's just like, interesting to read about women writing about women, like explicitly, when are you offered that? Like never, literally never, like? We I feel like it's such a common thing to think of like, suburban housewives, or like soccer moms reading those, like, gross little porno books from like CVS, but they're all straight. And it's like, yeah, I just want to find the lesbian equivalent. I'm just like, really curious. Like, why can't I read my little like, legal smart, like, at the beach? Like, saying, that's just how I feel? And I'm just really curious about it. So

Olivia N 1:02:17

can you talk about how your lesbianism has been influenced by theory, your academics?

1:02:23

Yeah. I think gender studies was like, the thing I wanted to like, not not like I wanted to major in it. But I was like, when I get to college, I need to take a gender studies class. And I think that's also something people have told me for a long time. Maybe it's because I'm just gay. And they just like put me in that category or like, like being like, young, little feminist and talking louder than everybody else. Um, people are just a call, you need to choose to take a gender studies class, like, I don't know if that's relatable, but that's, for some reason, adults kept telling me that as a kid, so I was like, Fine, or well, and it was okay. I think part of the interesting thing is, if you actually lived it, it feels so trivial. Sometimes, like, I want my brother to take a gender studies class, like me taking one is not like world shattering, like I need, like the men, they need to go take it, and they need to go like read Judith Butler and like, I don't know, everyone. But yeah, as I've like, not been strictly in gender studies, like it's always coming up. Um, and especially at this Mount Holyoke, you know, people are always like, waiting for the moment for there to be like a woman mentioned just so they can jump on it. And, um, there's good and bad to that, for sure. But, like, in terms of queerness like, it's kind of just like a close reading project forever. Um, you know, in high school, it was passing and it was no, it was Jordan from The Great Gatsby. Getty like, I don't know, some people thought so. I really, sometimes I have to, I have to stop myself. I kind of hate reading into it. Like I kind of rather just find the canonically queer things in the world. I kind of hate reading into classic literature and pretending like they're gay, that just like work to me. But yeah, it definitely feels important. And I don't really understand the theory on gender. If I'm being honest, like, I don't get it. I couldn't explain it in this interview. But I think part of it is just like realizing there is so much theory and realizing that people really do study this and that it's like, important to academics and it is important to what you're reading even if you don't understand like the minut details from it's just like being able to acknowledge like, I think college is makes everyone like art I hope makes every one like, watch a movie and you need to think about the race, you need to think about the gender like, that's just like fucking important. And it's like what you do with that from there, it's like, can be different. But you, I

think, just you need to think about these things when you consume stuff, even if it's like crappy media, even if I'm watching Love Island or something, right? Like, how, what's the story with these women? You know, why is it that when somebody in love Island says thereby, it's like a whole thing? You know, I don't know, just just little things. So,

Olivia N 1:05:36

now we're getting to the section where we're talking about the influence of your own identities on how you think about lesbianism and lesbian community. Yeah, so how does your gender identity in the form your interactions with lesbian community, and can you talk about defining lesbianism to yourself and how that relates to how you understand your own gender? Big question, you don't have to have any definitive first part. Okay, how does your gender identity inform your interactions with lesbian community, or other lesbians essentially, in your friend circle as well?

1:06:17

I think like, when I was younger, I was again, like, I've kind of just described this a couple times, but just like, I was trying to explore, like, be more masculine and like being more feminine, like, what does that mean? And like, it always felt kind of awkward around like, I have these lesbian neighbors who like, I don't really know really well, but like, they know, my parents are, um, and I was like, holy shit. Like, this means, you know. And I always felt super awkward around them. And I still honestly I still do when I like, feel like I look really gay on a day. I'm like, Oh, they like know me. They're like, No, I'm like a baby gay. Like, they're like, I'm embarrassing myself. Um, and, I don't know, I guess I really just haven't been a part of that many like, strictly lesbian communities until college. And then it's just been really nice to be kind of to already have explored so much. So many people come to college and they come from like, homophobic households closeted childhood closeted high school, but like they knew or they or they have a complete, like, 180 when they get here. So I think I'm, it's just nice to be a person people can refer to and I think I am really into, like, the academic sense of this and just like, knowing a bunch of random shit, and like having book suggestions and movies, suggestions when somebody wants them. Um, but, like, influences. Again, like, I'll say it again, like, Eileen Miles was like my big one. Like, they, like actually one of my favorite memories in high school. They did a poetry reading at a college nearby. We're actually at the University of Pennsylvania, I guess that's like a big school, but LM escolás. It's in Philly. So I like went by myself. After school, I took the training, I sat in the front row, all by myself, like me and a bunch of college kids. I'm like, five foot, you know. And I was like, in 10th grade or something. And I drew a picture of their dog for them. And they signed my book, and I totally choked up. I'm, like talking to them. And strangely enough, they are going to be a judge for the famous poetry contest that happens at the school every year. So I will see them again this year, which I'm excited about. But I get really like obsessed with one thing. And then I'm like, I need to read all of it. Like, I need to figure the whole story out. And Eileen Miles was like, one of the first people I did that with, and I was like, I'm gonna read everything by them. And I did, I literally read every single one of their poetry books, and they have so many poetry books. I went to the pen library and went to their rare books section to find my oldest stuff. So yeah, I think just like these, like punk, lesbian poets were really like a big deal to me. Like, I don't even know their names, but just like everyone in that kind of vibe, especially in New York, I think because just like the city thing, again, like it was just something I can relate to. And like, especially when they were involved in music and art, like I was just like, wow, this is, you know, not how I'm living my life. But I just I love it. Like I like think anyone who is an artist,

especially from a kid, you're just like constantly being like told like the starving artist, like lifestyle is your future, just like over and over and over again. And so to like, read about these people who Yeah, they're kind of starving artists, but it's like, Look at them go, in a way. Um, was so nice. Even like Patti Smith, who's not gay herself. Have I believe but like, reading just kids was like a big deal to me it's kind of similar in a lot of ways to Chelsea girls like Same place, same time. And I don't even mean like talking about Robert Mapplethorpe, I never really connected with him that much. But just like, I think the punk scene was really important to me. These people just like wreaking havoc and saying whatever the fuck they want, like I love I still do and like I you. Like, I don't think I look particularly punk or anything, but I definitely totally identify with these like politically charged people who are saying what they want and like, they don't even need these labels. Like, and maybe that's like a goal for like another time. But that's not how I feel right now. But, um, I definitely think it's powerful. And I love it. And yeah, I think I just always had all these like queer things to look up to, like I knew about the lesbian Herstory archives for a long time. I entered that for them last summer virtually, which was a little sad, but I did. But like, telling people, I'm a part of that. I love doing that. I love doing that. And like it always sparks conversation, especially with other people who are lesbians or like queer women at all. And I work to Giovanni's Room The bookstore last summer, and that was so great, that was so great. I haven't worked in like a really like openly queer space before. And the great thing about that is like you can, once you're like in, you can keep coming back. So like, I'll work there next summer, I'll work there over my spring break, like all good things. And I think the last one, honestly, is my college. Um, you know, not everyone here is gay, obviously. But most people here are gay. Um, and that was a big thing for me when I came here, when I was applying to colleges, like not everywhere. But Mount Holyoke in particular, this was where like, this was my top choice for college. And I remember touring and like, hearing people with different pronouns was super cool. And seeing people who, like, Look openly gay, that was awesome. And, again, like, the archives were the big thing for me, and I work in my colleges, archives, and it's like, my, my, like, love, like, I love it to death, like being in the stacks and getting to do stuff. And really like the power that you hold, like, in old schools, history is just like, cannot be described, like being able to go through and find stuff and find out, you know, people from your school were gay, like back then, like, you know, maybe all the stereotypes about women's colleges were true, like back in the day. And I love that. I'm, like, obsessed with the fact that I am a part of like, a long line of queer women at this point, like, I'm not like a big, high school, I was like, not a big like, alumni advocate, and like, I'm not sure that I'm gonna keep giving my college my money, because they already have enough, but I am proud of like, the history of it. And there are flaws. But like, at the same time, it was crazy to be part of like, a historically queer place. Just there aren't that many of them. So I am really proud to be associated with that until I keep learning about the people who came

Olivia N 1:13:21

before me. So can you talk a little bit about how mental illness and mental health and form your interactions with the lesbian community is gonna be like making meeting and maintaining and keeping friendships. You can also talk about your mental health, activism and advocacy.

1:13:42

Yeah, um, I think just kind of being confused with yourself is like a big one for it. And definitely, like anxiety, for me, is like my biggest thing, and it can get out of hand. And it does make it difficult to like, maintain friendships, at times maintain relationships, and like, it can be really scary for people you're

with whatever that means, to like, watch, you have a panic attack. And that has happened to me. So many times, I cannot tell you, but every time it's scary, and like I don't have a complete fix to it yet. But it's like, I have a partner now who is like lovely about it. And there's definitely some like weird guilt there on my end, but I think part of that is just going to take a long time. But I think the only other thing is that it's always this fear when talking to like older queer people, not even just lesbians, but just older queer people. Like I just feel so much like a Gen Z, like Kid advocating for myself and my anxiety which like at the end of the day, you know Every one has anxiety to some extent. Um, and I think just getting people to take you seriously. And I think in college again, like it's just this weird fight constantly not fight but like, mental tension, like, with people, like how can we be not even liberal but like leftists and whatever, without being like, unproductive? I'm, I'm hoping I can word this right but you know, how can we be in classes and talk about, like, anti colonialism and like all this stuff without just like saying buzzwords, you know, and I think it's a big problem that like all liberal arts colleges, but it's definitely makes it difficult to talk to adults about these things I think a lot of the time, I mean a class about comedy and horror, like kind of about black people. I don't that's not the title of a class. It's really interesting class. And the professor is so great. I had her last semester, like, I love her. And like, I was talking to my dad today about this. And he just like, can't understand how, yes, it's a niche course. But he doesn't understand how, like these concepts of like, why are we even watching horror movies? You know, why specifically, are black people and women like hurt in horror movies? Like, what role are they having? He doesn't understand how that can kind of come to a bigger context. I know, this is a specific example. But bear with me. And I think that goes for, like, all sorts of stuff in school. And in terms of mental health, I'm losing myself a little bit here. But just Yeah, I think it just becomes difficult to reason with these, like, older people in your life about, like, kind of newer ideas, I guess. And queerness is part of that. Um, and I think mental health is a big part of that. And like, how can they I think medication was a big one for me that I have talked about already. Like just getting people to understand that like, no, maybe like, there actually is something wrong with you. And it's not like the baseline. Everybody has anxiety thing. It's not like a breathing moment. Stuff like that. I think it's just about like, how can I get this respect to this mutual respect? No matter what, and how can I not just feel like this young like, idiot, almost. And I think when I worked in the bookstore this summer, that was really helpful to me. And I think to the people around me, because I was this young person, I was like, the youngest person who worked there. And, you know, we made jokes about it a lot. But at the same time, like, I think I benefit from hearing about their stories, and they benefit from hearing from mine, I think that's really the only productive way to go about it.

Olivia N 1:18:01

Can you talk more about maybe your mental health advocacy that you do? Maybe on campus or?

1:18:09

Yeah, um, I think I know. Sorry, thinking long and hard on that one.

Olivia N 1:18:19

If you don't want to answer that, we can totally go to a different question. For sure. Okay, maybe maybe, yeah. Well, I have a different question. So can you talk a little bit about making and meeting lesbians in your city now?

1:18:32

Yeah. Um, I think part of it is like, you just have to be bold. I think that's the only way like, part of me being out at a young age. Like I was like, asking people out in coffee shops, which I know is like a lot. But I was just like, you look super cool. I want to be your friend, what's your phone number? And that has worked for me. So I think part of it is just like literally physically networking. But also you need to like, go to these queer spaces or like even like Tinder, you know, like, I think queer dating and queer friendships have an intense overlap, and I would be a liar if I didn't say that. And you just end up inevitably, like, if you have one person, you have them all, you know. I'm not 21 yet really excited to be 21 this summer. But I know everybody goes to they're still gay bars in Philly, not lesbian bars, as far as I know, which is really sad. But I think people go to these queer spaces and they come to Giovanni's Room is like a big one and Giovanni's Room advocates for all these other events, whatever that may be. But I think to me in a city, it's really just about, like having the courage to talk to people that you need to talk to store owners like if you want to work there, which I've done And, like, you just have to say that if you want to know somebody's life story you need to ask. And I know that's like a difficult thing for many, many people to understand and to do. But I think so much of the time, it's not about finding these queer spaces, and it's about, like, a little bit of trusting your gut. And just like putting yourself out there. And like finding your niches, like think I think that helps with it. And like, once you kind of understand where you want to look,

Olivia N 1:20:33

it becomes easier. Have you felt any, or experienced any isolation or disconnection from the broader queer community?

1:20:47

The broader queer community? I guess you mean, do you mean as a lesbian? Right? Yes. Okay. Um, yeah, I think so. Sorry, I had to think on that one. I think I definitely try to stick with having I mostly had female friends my whole life. And I'm like, I think from that a lot of female queer friends. But there is like, a very isolating moment, in, you know, suddenly, everybody has a boyfriend, or you're somewhere where there's like, only gay guys. And that is a really weird feeling. Because people feel such a specific way about lesbians, like, really, they do. Um, you know, I can't talk to how gay men feel about the stereotypes towards them. But like, lesbianism has is very specific, like, you know, you don't want to be the big mean lesbian. And then at the end of the day you are, which is a difficult thing to come to terms with that I'm still doing. But sometimes you're in a space where, you know, maybe nobody else is actually a lesbian. And it's like, being able to say that you are lesbian, around all these people who don't identify as like, is a scary thing for those people a lot of the time, like, you have just made a statement that is like, controversial by accident. And yeah, I think it's definitely a strange feeling, or even having, even like, when I came out, my parents really, I mean, they don't understand queer people, period. I'm not because like, they don't even have experiences. It's just like, it's not how they identify. So I think there's just that piece of isolation there, which is fine. But when I came out, like, they really don't know anything about specifically queer women and lesbians. My dad was like, You shouldn't watch Brokeback Mountain by why that's not for me. Like, I think there's just this assumption that all gay people are the same. And because so much of like, when people think of, like gay people, they think of like, Oscar Wilde, like, you know, when you thinking of like, historical gay people, I could list a million historical lesbians, but that's because that's what I'm like searching for. But my parents, my

grandparents, they can't do that. And they really will grow up at anything that they feel like relates to gay people, especially like when you tell them they're gay. But they're not going to tell you lesbian thanks, because they don't know that. And I think that can be a very isolating thing to have to advocate for these women, I don't even know who like might be dead, might be, like, 100 years ago, and I'm advocating for their, like, queer identity in the 21st century to like, strangers just to make myself like, feel better. And I think that's a very strange thing that I think a lot of lesbians have experienced.

Olivia N 1:23:53

So what does identifying as a lesbian mean to you? Big question.

1:24:01

Yeah. Um, I think originally, it meant to me, I a women, woman, woman, loving women, period and sentence, that's really what it felt like. And I think over time, it has become more than that, to me is more of a gender fluid identity. Because I think I think a lot of lesbians from the past may have identified differently if they were born at different times is like, the reality. Um, you know what that means? Like, I don't know. I think it has this strictness to people of an older generation. Like, I think when my like hearing my grandparents like say the word lesbian that is so hard for them. That is so hard. I mean, like my my parents like can Don't say the word lesbian, like, it is just so hard for them. Because it just has this like, rigid. Not even just that it's rigid, but it just like doesn't have this as playful association that gay men have. I think that that's a bigger conversation. But um, yeah, I think to me, it's become this gender fluid identity. But I don't find as much pride in saying, I'm queer saying I'm gay. Like, I really find confidence in associating with people who are lesbians and being a lesbian myself. Like in being able to say, I don't know who's wisely Feinberg, or like, God. Now I can't think of any famous lesbians, Eileen miles. You know, even reading Colette and being like, alright, she's probably by but I'm obsessed with this lesbians story, something like that. Like, it's just this consistency that feels so nice. Or having a character in a TV show who like only dates, women like that is like such a nice feeling to have to be able to feel like relating to this, like huge subgroup of people, or like, whatever, everyone's read Fun Home, that was great. Reading that for the first time and hearing the word lesbian, you're like, Whoa, hearing the word dyke is like, at some point, you realize, like, you know, people have been using that word forever. And maybe that is like, actually how people feel. Not in a bad way.

Olivia N 1:26:40

So what does lesbian community mean to you? Like, what does it mean to be in community with lesbians, and maybe of the past and of your like, of your present? Like you and your lesbian friends? What does it mean to you?

1:26:53

Um, I think, to me, being an artist mean community. I mean, this is stupid, but like solidarity, really. And I think part of it is also like, knowing these people in your life, like, maybe this doesn't go for everyone. But it definitely goes for me, like having these people who don't really openly talk about being lesbian, like, maybe they're older people. But like, they they are. And it's just this nice, like, you know, that they have your back and you have theirs kind of thing. Yeah, I definitely have some people in my life, like, whether they're professors or like, adults around who, you know, we don't talk about the fact that they're gay, or the fact that I'm gay, but like we both know, about each other. And it's this nice thing,

because I know, like, they understand when I'm like, Oh, my partner, or they say the same thing about their partner. And there's no real questioning there. Which I think is just, it's just nice to be secure. And I think the same thing goes for lesbian friends, you know, the way that but like, lesbian dating works in a specific way, like having Tinder on a historically women's college campus of 2000 people and being lesbian is crazy. Like, it's a crazy world out there. And like, that is something that like, only a specific group of people understand. You know, my roommate, she lovely, I love her. She's straight. She's like, the only straight person I know here. And she will never understand like the extent of like, seeing somebody went on a date with like, in the dining hall. Like, is just like an endless cycle of like, my favorite story is when I lived in the apartment, with high school friends, we weren't even all lesbians. But we were all queer women to some extent, we all got like Tinder, and we matched with the same person. And we went to spirit Halloween. And we all ran into that person. Like, we were all together. And this one person was like, there and like recognized all of us, but at the same time, like, that's just what happens. Like, that's just what happens. And like, it's a funny thing, and you get to laugh about it with your lesbian friends. You get to say that it's so funny that that happened. And you know what, I'm sure we could be friends with that person. And it would have been fine. Which I think is great.

Olivia N 1:29:18

That's my worst nightmare. Seeing people. It's very scary. I don't date. It's part of the reason I refuse to date within like, my college group. Yeah. But there's still like one or two degrees of separation between you and like, any date in your age group. Yeah. Okay, so can you talk about like, what you and your lesbian friends do for fun? Like where do y'all go? Y'all do for fun? What do y'all do to hang out?

1:29:51

Oh, I'm scared. It's gonna be like a little boring. Boring. You watch her movies. Yes. Lots of fun. Be watching. I feel like it's number one, whether that's like, in somebody's apartment or dorm or like, out and about at a movie theater. I just saw big thief with a friend who was by so not exactly a lesbian, but I'd say that's a very gay activity to do. And it was cool, because there were so many lesbian couples, they're all making out which I was jealous because I didn't bring my girlfriend, which was a little sad. But you know, me and my girlfriend, we went to see, we didn't see Julian Baker that was super gay. Yeah, it was a little boring, but it was very good. But I think just, yeah, it was all sorts of stuff going thrifting going to the bookstores. Just like being any color to each other's company. You know. I haven't really, I'm not like a big, like college activity person every once in a while. I'll go to them. But nothing crazy. It's definitely this, specifically where I am right now is such a small town, there's really just not that much to do, especially when you're not 21. So it's a lot of, you know, asking the 21 year olds friend to go buy alcohol, and then we go from there. But it's all fun. Yeah.

Olivia N 1:31:21

So what community spaces or lesbian spaces do you wish existed?

1:31:28

I think I mean, this is very wishful thinking. But I think like, I would love it. There were lesbian bars everywhere. Again, I feel a little bit silly, because I'm just not 21 But I want to go to the lesbian bar so bad. And I've heard these like, amazing stories, right? Like everyone talks like it's like a dream come

true. Going to like the lesbian bar in New York. You know, happen. You have a couple friends from New York, and they like, take their face and go there. And it's like, holy shit, like, that sounds crazy.

Olivia N 1:32:02

I hate y'all with your I know you want the community but I'm like, please, please, please announce yourself as a child.

1:32:08

I know know what you're doing. There's

Olivia N 1:32:10

to like flirt and stuff. No.

1:32:13

They're not like children, children.

Olivia N 1:32:15

Okay. Okay. Okay. Like I was like, no, because it has I'm like, announced your childhood.

1:32:21

No, I agree with that one.

Olivia N 1:32:25

But I know what you mean. But they're going to have fun. And it's like some of the only lesbian spaces you can like.

1:32:29

Yeah. I'm like super jealous, though. Because I think I do wish that for younger queer people. Like I don't feel very like isolated. Personally, I'm like, lacking in a lesbian spacious because of my school, and I guess who I am. But I think there should be like, a little lesbian bookstore or something around like, definitely, Giovanni's is a big deal to me. They just me growing up big deal to me now. And the problem is, it's the only queer bookstore in the city. And that's great. But like, it's in the game of like, just gay people who are already there. Like, we need to put it somewhere where people actually need it. Like, I love it to death, but I wish there was one like in North Philly or something, I don't know, just like, somewhere else or in the suburbs, even like, who knows? Like just somewhere random? There should be one like you're here. Why is there no was like, Why is there no gay bookstore in Western Massachusetts? Like there's gay people everywhere? Like Northampton, where Smith College is just pretty sure it's like the lesbian capital the US or something that's like a thing. And there is no SP bookstore. Why not? I think I just want more of that, because I'm so big on like, books. And that's how I've learned so much. And I think more people would like learn about it. Because not everybody wants to take the time to like scour the internet for that, like I will. But you know, if you're not a big reader that's not for you. So you just want to walk in a bookstore and just Okay, look here all has been books great day, like done, you just buy the one like, that's what happens in Giovanni's all the time like when I worked there, people will just come in and be like, wow, I've been like searching for like a trans book,

and it's just here. Like, that is like, priceless, that needs to happen for everybody. I don't know how to achieve it, but that would be great.

Olivia N 1:34:22

So what does lesbian Joy mean to you? When are you happiest? As a lesbian?

1:34:28

Um, it's a little tacky. But when I'm with my girlfriend, yeah. I think it's so wonderful. Like to love somebody and to um, you know, the other day we went bowling with a bunch of friends and we actually didn't end up going bowling because I was a weightless, which was super sad. I know. We like thought we were achieving something and it was super lame. And we got there and it was like, the worst people in Western as like, white trash like, gross, like stinky straight people everywhere, not a good vibe. And my girlfriend's not white. So I was like, fuck, like, I'm gonna watch out for you. And we were like holding your hands and I was like, holding hands, which is like a sad thing, but they were like, Well, no, it's gonna be okay. Like, I have your back, which I was like, wow, okay, that's so true. Like, I would obviously, like, do that for you, too. And I think that's, like, fucking beautiful. Um, and I think that's when I feel my most lesbian. There's for lesbian joy. I think for me, it's just I think the biggest one for me was when I went to the Dyke March. I went last summer for the first time. And I was like, wow, I didn't realize how important it was for me to see the word deich in not a bad, like place. I was just like, wow, this is like crazy to me. I didn't realize like how influential that was going to be and it really fucking was. So I think just being in these openly lesbian spaces and having people already comfortable with themselves. And I know that's like a little bit of what we're doing, because you can't always have that. But if you can, I think it's so nice to be around people who aren't like, super stressed out about their own identity.

Olivia N 1:36:27

So is there anything else you want to talk about before we stop?

1:36:34

No, no. Is there anything else like random? You want?

Olivia N 1:36:40

So

1:36:47

I'm very proud to be a lesbian. I'm happy that this is like where my gender and sexuality has like led me. Yeah.

Olivia N 1:36:59

Well, thank you. Yeah.

1:37:00

Thank you.