

Skylar: So, today is November 15th, 2018, and we are in Portland, ME at the Glickman Library in study room 3. My name is Skylar Hebert, S-K-Y-L-A-R H-E-B-E-R-T and I am one of the student researchers.

Name and location

Emma: My name is Emma Chapin, E-M-M-A C-H-A-P-I-N, and I am the other student researcher.

Skylar: And we are going to ask you to spell your name...

Meredith: My name is Meredith MacEachern, M-E-R-E-D-I-T-H M-A-C-E-A-C-H-E-R-N

Emma: We were wondering how to say that.

Meredith: Everyone does.

Skylar: So we just want to remind you that you can refuse to answer any question and can end the interview at any point. After 90 minutes or so, if the interview seems as if it might need more time, you can decide to conclude or could ask for a follow up interview. So we are just going to ask how old you are?

Age

Meredith: I am 25.

Emma: So to start we would just like to get some basic background information on you, where did you grow up?

Meredith: Sort of all over the place. I was born in Calgary, Alberta, my parents moved down here to Maine when I was quite young, we then lived for a while in South Africa and then went back and forth between Maine and Canada for a while, and I did my undergrad

Background

in Nova Scotia. So, up until my masters degree I was living in the Maritimes.

Emma: So you are well traveled, yeah, we saw South Africa as an area of interest for you, so we will definitely get into that. That is very cool. Are you an only child?

Meredith: I am.

Emma: Awesome, and what did your parents do?

Parental information

Meredith: They're both archeologists. Mom specializes in turn-of-the-century arctic archeology, and my dad in prehistoric Central Africa.

Emma: Very cool is that why you traveled so much as a child?

Travel

Meredith: To a point, they did most of their archeological work without me. But dad taught in South Africa for a while, so that was why we were living there.

Emma: Very cool, very cool, I haven't been that far away from America, so that's very cool that you were able to experience that. So what is your sexual orientation and your gender identity?

Sexual orientation, gender identity

Meredith: I identify as cis gendered and bisexual. I've had my share of sexuality crises so I did identify as a lesbian for a while but I identify now as bisexual.

Emma: Cool, and that fits for you, you feel comfortable?

Meredith: I do, um, there's a lot of discussion in communities these days about bisexual versus pansexual, I find bisexual answers

questions pretty completely, but.

Emma: I could see how that'd be true, yeah.
So, how old were you when you came out?

Coming out

Meredith: I, in a way didn't get a choice. I realized I was interested mostly in women in maybe seventh or eighth grade, maybe thirteen years old. I had a massive crush on one of my best friends, um, unfortunately and I could've kept it a secret into high school, until I came out to a couple of people I considered my friends and they told everyone else in school which was not the plan. It did not end well. But I came out to my parents a little bit before that as sort of a presumptive so they heard it from me.

Emma: Good thinking. What was your parents' reaction?

Parent reaction to coming out

Meredith: Much better than my schools' reaction. My dad, it was over the dinner table, my parents were always very outspoken about, um, you know, the only thing that could really rile them up was the use of slurs and reductive or generalization of any group. And so, they had spent when they were in school a lot of time in the LGBT community that was sort of slowly starting to verge and integrate and so um I knew they didn't have a problem with it, but there was still that sense of fear of rejection and anger, regardless of how rational or irrational it might have been. So when I came out I started crying, I was really upset, my mother was just dead calm and she was like, "that's nice, that's good we support you, finish your salad." And my dad kinda said "duh" and then as he always had been able to do, identify the girl I had a crush on, which I had not told him."

Emma: Parents can see right through us.

Well I'm sorry that your school didn't take it very well, students can be really rough, especially at that young age. How did you manage to keep it together through school?

School reaction to coming out

Meredith: Um, I didn't to be honest. I had a lot of mental health issues and regular health issues a lot growing up. And what essentially happened when I came out is I started getting, I was already bullied a lot, I started getting bullied more, I got a couple death threats, people would steal my uh homework and my projects and like draw really sexual stuff all over them right before I was supposed to turn them in. And the girl I had a crush on, who did it turned out have a crush on me, but was very much still in the closet, never spoke to me again. And so I ended up going down a pretty dark road.

Bullying

Emma: That's really unfortunate, was it a small school?

School in Brunswick, ME

Meredith: It was, I mean it was Brunswick, it was maybe a thousand kids, and from, I have not been back there in a very long time, and even in the time I was there it got more accepting, not so much of me but of members of the LGBT community in general as I went through school. By the time I graduated our president was an out gay student, but it was, yeah, at the time I was there, there were a lot of slurs being thrown around and a lot of stereotypes being thrown around, so.

Emma: Yeah, so you told us that your sexual orientation has been kind of a journey for you, so did you first come out as a lesbian?

Defining sexual orientation

Meredith: No, I came out as bisexual, and then throughout late high school and university identified as a lesbian 'cause I just had no interest in men. After I graduated a

little came back, so, you know, there's a self consciousness around it but I think it's a, it's a journey, so. I'm pretty comfortable with bisexual right now.

Emma: Good, it's good to find something that works for you and it doesn't super matter what other people think.

Skylar: So, can you tell us about your undergraduate experience at Acadia?

Meredith: Yep, um, so, Acadia is a school up in Nova Scotia, it's, you know, there's not like, the school system, post-grad school system in Canada isn't the same as the States so there aren't as many really small private liberal arts schools, there's not an ivy league, and so Acadia after Brunswick was a really good place because there were a lot more people sort of of my socioeconomic class and my experience. And there was actually a massive pride community there, it's in a very small town in Nova Scotia, which is a very rural area, it's a very poor area, it's a very conservative area, but Acadia's pride community was actually a significantly large one and I would say a good half or more of my friends there identified as some member of the community. And that was massive, because I was still sort of defensive about my sexuality, coming in and when I did decide to personally come out to a couple of my close friends, I got like three different "me toos" and "sames" and then as I went on it was just, I didn't actually you know, I'd go to meetings, a lot of my friends were members, um, because I was still really shy didn't participate in a lot of the public events, but I felt like I didn't have to really worry about it. There was one incident where a friend of mine was bullied by one person for being trans and the person in question was basically driven out of the

Undergraduate at Acadia, Canada

Canada

Pride community

About Acadia community

Coming out in college

Pride meetings

Bullying

residence hall. Which, you know, sounds like a bit of an over-reaction but I didn't think it was, and it kind of did confirm for a lot of people that it wasn't an acceptable way to treat someone which felt, sort of, it kind of led a lot of people including people who were less open and participatory know that even if they didn't want to take it really publically they didn't have to worry about it, too much.

Emma: So you said you went to meetings, were those pride meetings?

Acadia Pride Association

Open meetings

Meredith: Yeah.

Emma: Was there a specific club?

Meredith: It was just the Acadia Pride Association, I think, the name might have changed and it was just open meetings to plan events, it kind of sometimes functioned almost as a group therapy place to establish, you know, awareness weeks or initiatives there was a lot of fundraisers involved. So there were usually three or four major public events and stuff like that a semester, so.

Town, college demographics

Emma: Is that for the town or for the college?

Meredith: It was for the college, but this was a town of about two-thousand people and a school of about five, six-thousand, so. It dominated (laughter).

Community

Skylar: So, did you find yourself becoming more comfortable with like going to these meetings and building community as time went on?

Meredith: Yeah, very much so, you know, for my own schedule I couldn't make it to every meeting but a lot of my friends were in it, um, and so yeah I always was sort of at least

marginally connected to the association which, it felt really good because that had never existed in my high school or anything like that.

Skylar: Do you think that's why you connect with that particular area more?

Community connection

Meredith: Oh definitely, for a number of reasons, but that was definitely one of them, yeah.

Brunswick

Skylar: Could you explain some other ones?

Socializing

Meredith: Oh, well in general I just fit in a lot more at Acadia, it's a very different, that whole area is very different from places like Brunswick, in particular, Bowdoin College, which where I never really fit in, um, so I just you know after high school which was pretty miserable I made friends and got more confidence socially and even when I didn't feel social I didn't feel like I was being left out or looked down upon for just wanting to stay in my room for a while. So it was a really important and formative part of my personality I think. A little late in the game, but.

Major

English major, focus in creative writing
History minor

Indigenous history

Skylar: Any time is good. So what did you major in and why did you choose that?

American social change

Meredith: I majored in English and I had a minor in History. My English focused on creative writing, and my history minor focused on um revolution and societal uprising to an extent, variously like indigenous history in Canada and I took a bunch of courses in various American social change and stuff like that.

Stonecoast MFA program

Skylar: Sweet, so we noticed that you were enrolled in the Stonecoast MFA program. Is that still something you are doing?

Meredith: I graduated in July.

Storytelling

Emma: Congratulations!

Trauma Recovery

Skylar: So we found your review on the Stonecoast website, we found a couple of them...

Mental illness

Meredith: (laughter) great...

Depression, anxiety

Skylar: ...And we learned that storytelling has been a big part of your trauma recovery. Do you feel comfortable telling us about this?

Schizoaffective disorder

Inpatient, outpatient treatment

Meredith: Um, so, besides taking a lot of abuse and bullying in high school, I was diagnosed with a couple different mental health problems early on. Depression anxiety being one, and then a diagnoses that kind of shifted through various forms of schizophrenia and schizoaffective disorder, um and that was early onset so I spent a lot of high school actually in inpatient treatment for psychosis and in an outpatient psychosis program. And you know, psychosis, besides the stigma it carries, can kind of like internally traumatize through delusion, through hallucination, and can open, can make you vulnerable to more abuse, so you know, in university I was also sort of emotionally and sexually abused over a long period by someone I trusted. But storytelling from an oral perspective, it was you know, my parents read to me and I read growing up but there was a lot within my extended family and friend group or their friend group oral type of storytelling for various reasons that I can't necessarily identify why they appreciated it so much. And then I grew up with other people whose cultures and communities relied heavily upon it. Um, and so, when I came to do my masters degree, Stonecoast requires

Emotional, sexual abuse

Oral storytelling

Creative, academic thesis work

Oral storytelling to deal with trauma

both a creative thesis essentially and an academic thesis work. And I decided to do it on, because it was in a community of writers, on sort of the unique capacity of oral storytelling to help deal with trauma, because it specifically allows someone total agency over their story that isn't hemmed in by literacy, or by their ability to disseminate literature or disseminate writing, it all, all it takes is a voice and as a schizophrenic I haven't even always had that because psychosis can affect your ability to communicate properly. But, oral storytelling, you know, taking any form from just talking to a friend to talk therapy, to organized community oral storytelling. Um, sort of, when done properly, gives entire agency to the teller and gives a responsibility to listen to whoever the story is being told to and to just keep quiet and try to recognize the validity of the story and sort of the subjective truth of it.

Responsibility of story teller and listener

Skylar: So I'm sure you found that empowering, you know, to go from dealing with psychosis and schizophrenia to then being able to tell your own stories.

Meredith: Yeah, it's like a lot of other things, the story about people about people with psychosis tends not to be told by people with psychosis and so you know it's important that however they, or we, manage to communicate is important and morality tends to be more immediately accessible to more people not to everyone, but to more people, than um, especially like a polished academic or prosed type of work.

Mental illness

Coping strategies

Emma: So that's actually a great segway into another topic of interest that you listed which is mental illness, and this is an interest to myself and Skylar as well. So we are looking forward to kind of diving into that. We know

Psychosis

that you are still young, and depression, anxiety, psychosis is kind of an ongoing battle, so can you tell us about some strategies that you use that relate to your mental illness?

Meredith: So yeah, I mean I am still working so I am by no means always good at this.

Emma: Of course, yeah.

Meredith: ..For psychosis it is more specific, you have to be on antidepressant, I mean, sorry, antipsychotics for some period of time, usually require a lot of inpatient and outpatient treatment, and in my experience, one of the most important strategies from day to day is being able to recognize psychotic symptoms as symptoms as opposed to in-meshed reality, um, and once you can do that even if they are occurring, you can ignore them more easily and rationalize them, to some extent, and that ability both from what I've experienced and from what I've heard from other people is it takes a long time but it can be really really helpful to not letting the psychosis run your whole life. Um, I mean depression and anxiety, I can talk a big game about talking to people, which is I think one of the most important things, but it's also the hardest to do. I think a lot of people both have a sense of pride and wanting to look especially in today's culture, independent and on-top of things, and anxious only to the point that you look efficient and productive and stuff. Especially in an academic setting, but another element of it I think is to an extent, on social media and stuff it's becoming less taboo to talk about some of the more common things, but it's still a really controlled, curated, and public space, so the way we talk about it still tends to have a lot of unspoken rules. So when it comes to depression and

Antipsychotics

Inpatient, outpatient treatment

Recognizing symptoms

Depression, anxiety

Communication

Independence

Social media

Stigma

Act of speaking

Safety

Talk therapy

Therapist

anxiety, I think talking about it is important, but I think the act of speaking on an individual level to someone you trust allows more of a sense of safety to be able to break down if you need to. Um, and, be honest about, it doesn't always feel that way, but to be honest about how you feel, and into clinical ways, talk therapy has really helped me. I have been with the same therapist since eighth grade..

Accessibility

Empathy

Emma: Oh, good for you.

Meredith: ..which means, that I can come in and she has an incredible memory and if I say something she will remember something I said when I was sixteen years old, and that kind of thing. In my case, she has made it more accessible to me than would normally be possible financially and everything. But I think, almost an issue with how we talk about it, is a focus on, and I say this more as someone with psychosis than just someone with depression and anxiety, is a focus on empathy, which sounds weird but if taken too far I think empathy can self center and you're just asking how does this relate to me when someone else is talking and you're not going to be able to do that. Even people with psychosis don't have the same experience as one another, they can be radically different so we don't know how each other is feeling or what they are experiencing and I think a good step to be is to sometimes take yourself out of it, and recognize that your pain is valid if someone else can understand it, but their pain is valid even if you have no idea what they are talking about and to admit that you don't know, um, I've been, I know I've been on both ends, I've been frustrated because I couldn't understand why someone was acting the way they were and I've been frustrated when someone insisted they knew how I felt

Experience with psychosis

Empathy

Validity

College

Mental illness

Stigma

in a situation where they couldn't, because they didn't experience psychosis. And so I think we are always trying to navigate what's in the middle of that place where we can admit that we don't know or we could be wrong, but that the other person's story and experience is still a valid and important one.

Navigating life

Emma: Yeah, that was a really good answer, thank you.

Workplace

Emma: I know that especially in like the college setting and among people our age, depression and anxiety are kind of getting talked about more, and people are recognizing that it is a mental illness, however psychosis still has so much stigma around it, that makes it less accepted and less recognized, so, how do you find, how does that stigma and that illness affect your everyday life?

Undergrad

Depression, anxiety

Psychosis

Meredith: Um, I mean, there's a lot of navigating what you tell people, work life actually, um, is one of the most difficult to navigate, because a lot of, not a lot of, I won't say that, that's such a generalization.

Symptoms

Workplaces, as you say, we are tending to see more of an understanding, and in classrooms, of depression and anxiety of something that impacts your life enough that sometimes you might need to call off from work. I had a lot of profs, in my undergrad who were phenomenal in making sure their students knew that if they were seriously depressed or anxious or something like that has happened that they recognize that as an illness and it meant an excuse for missing class. Psychosis is harder to navigate because you are seen as pretty unpredictable, even if that is not necessarily the case. So, you know, you have to kind of plan for if I have a symptom that crops up one day, how am I going to handle it, what am I

Isolating

Treatment

Behavior

Symptoms

going to, how am I going to lie if I need to lie about what's going on, um, in my case it usually means that I don't leave the house and this doesn't happen as much these days, I can't, I don't leave the house, I'm not going to go to work, you know. Psychosis doesn't necessarily look the way people assume it does. If I, these days, since I'm, you know I've been in treatment for a while and I know how to handle it, if I had a break, there just tends to be a lot of like um, flatness and non-responsiveness, and, occasionally a bit of strange behavior but nothing you'd really notice, um, but, you know, in the past I've wandered off for hours at a time out into the woods, outside of undergrad, or I've exhibited really weird twitching behavior, I've talked about stuff that doesn't make sense, and that's the kind of thing where the behavior crosses the line from just unhelpful in a work setting or a social setting, to perceived as potentially dangerous or unstable. And it does, like, it affects, when, because you know, all psychotic people are not psychotic all the time, I'm not, but when you are, it obviously, it affects, "can I go to work?", "can I go to class?", "can I leave the house?", but in really bad circumstances, it affects "what do I tell the doctors?" what do I tell, like um, I had a really bad incident once and a guy in the house called 911, and I had taken an overdose of my medication, and he said he told them that I was schizophrenic and I had taken an overdose, and they sent the cops instead of an ambulance...

Emma: Oh man...

Meredith: ...and police, including in Canada, are really not great at dealing with that kind of mental illness. So luckily there was someone there that did diffuse the situation but it could have gotten really bad. And so it's a constant

Psychotic people

Common questions

Overdose

911

Police, stigma

Planning ahead

Adapting to symptoms

Relationships

Behavior

Rejection

sort of strat-, if you're in a situation, or if you are in a time where your mental health isn't great, you are constantly kind of trying to plan ahead for something that you really can't predict all that well, and in the meantime trying to adapt to symptoms if you don't think they are going to get any worse, at that point. And, it also affects relationships, that's the other really important thing, when do I tell someone that this might come up in the future if we are going to be even like friends, if we are going to be roommates, if we are going to be close coworkers, or if I am going to be in a relationship with someone, when do I bring up, that, my behavior might change or I might need to seek further treatment, and that for me has been the most nerve wracking because I have been rejected not just by potential romantic partners but by friends and by close friends, who decided that I'm not, that they don't want to risk, remaining close to me, because of that potential, um, circumstance.

Emma: Yeah, um, so you mentioned that often times you will stay home and not go to work. Do you live alone?

Meredith: No, right now, I lived alone for some time, all during undergrad and afterward, but I came back because Stonecoast is based in Maine, and I roomed with my mom for a while. I'm still there, um, until I graduated in July and hopefully will have moved up to Canada in the spring so I'm kind of in between with her right now.

Emma: Are your parents a good support system for you?

Meredith: They are, they divorced when I was younger, like in high school, but my step family is, my step mother's family is also

Living circumstances

Stonecoast

Parents

Step family

Step mother

Balance

Falling in love

phenomenal, mom gets sort of the day to day stuff, dad doesn't. Dad worries a lot, and doesn't always express it as worry and more that he can't handle, like he can't fix the situation, he's a fixer. But, my step mother balances him out pretty well because she's had similar experiences and so she's kind of more able to say, "you need to calm down and stop viewing this as a reflection of any one involved in this situation, rather than just the situation," so they balance each other out better. But my mom gets the most of it, unfortunately.

Close friends

Dating

Emma: That's good.

Skylar: So, we see that you mentioned the topic of love, romance, sex, and pleasure as an area of interest. Can you tell us, we'll start, about falling in love?

Crushes

Meredith: Sure, I actually have, I don't, it doesn't happen to me very often, um, I'm usually pretty happy just sort of being single and having really close friends. I like, I didn't get that a lot in high school so close friend groups have always been kind of a priority for me. And then when I do, it gets so much worse, in the sense that I fall really really hard. Um, but, it tends to take a really long time too, I tend to be close friends with someone, for some time, before I even consider, not consciously, but just like before I start going, "oh, hey, this would be someone I'm interested in", then it goes down hill really quickly. I think one time in maybe my second year of undergrad I fell really hard for a girl I knew, pretty surprisingly quickly, and we did end up becoming close friends, but it was one of those times when she was helping me out I had a dizzy spell and she touched my hand and I felt a spark and stuff, it was very cliché, but, you know, it can be frustrating, because it

Romance, sex

Major relationships

High school

Drama

Undergrad

doesn't happen very often so when it does it feels like it's more important than necessarily it should be. But at the same time I feel like I can be really happy without any romantic or sexual situation in my life as long as I have people around who I really care about.

Closeted, questioning women

Skylar: How many would you say, major relationships have you had in your life?

Coming out

Meredith: I guess, three, three maybe. Some of those maybe wouldn't fall under like girlfriend, but one boyfriend. One serious boyfriend. But more as in really difficult, like the first one in high school was difficult and it's sort of, status as a relationship wasn't really there but at the same time it had sort of a beginning and fall out of a relationship and then a break up. And that's how it felt to me, and the drama sort of like exploded out to the rest of our friends trying to variously get us talking and back to that kind of thing to others trying to keep us from talking to each other and then in undergrad there was another one. And again, I tend to have an unfortunate tendency with women to fall for closeted women, or questioning women who don't really, and you know, I think, no one is allowed to pressure anyone to come out of the closet. Again, I was forced out, but when you are out, when you finally have gone through everything it takes to, for your first major coming out to yourself, it can be like exhausting to try to deal with anything like that. And so yeah, at the end of undergrad I dated a great guy for a while and then we broke up. It was probably I think partly for that reason, the least dramatic because when you're in one of those straight passing relationships you don't feel a lot of the pressures that come along with that and luckily for me the lack of drama on that end came from the fact that he never gave me

Dating

Straight-passing

Bisexuality, fetish

Sexual identity

any shit for it, but he also he wasn't threatened by it, he was supportive of it, and he didn't say or do anything stupid about it.

Emma: "it" being your...?

Meredith: Bisexuality, yeah, you know a lot of guys, they can fetishize it, they talk about you know turning you straight, all of that stuff. He actually knew me while I was ID'd as a lesbian for a while and so the only slight hiccup in that was when he told his parents we were dating and they were very confused because they knew me as a lesbian at that point. But one thing I told him at the beginning was "you better not view this as you really impacting my sexuality," you know, maybe a year before that was when sort of the relationship with this other girl had kind of like definitely ended. And he didn't, which was good, but I've also definitely known guys who felt that that was negotiable aspect of my identity. And the truth is you know I do tend to like, fall for and be interested in women way more than men and unfortunately that tends to make them feel special when it does happen.

Crushes

"Going downhill"

Pattern

Emma: So it's interesting that you describe falling for someone as "going down hill", most people wouldn't look at it that way. So can you tell us how you kind of got to that mindset?

Self-fulfilling prophecy

Meredith: I think it was just sort of unfortunately a string of closeted or taken women, um, you know there were a lot of bisexual and lesbian women at my undergrad and I had crushes on them that just weren't going to work out, they all came with girlfriends, it was, that was one very sort of strange and often joked about element of our community there was that there were no

Relationships

Role models

single lesbian girls or bisexual girls they all had girlfriends. Um, and so, it wasn't so much that I associated female relationships with going downhill, as I did my relationships with going downhill. And just that kind of pattern of like falling really hard for someone and then being unable to meet me and in several cases you know like a year or two after it happened they came out publicly and I was just, you know, sitting there like "of course". Yeah, no, I think it's just I hadn't necessarily had a horrible track record, a lot of the people I knew then I'm good friends with now and we've repaired a lot of stuff, but I think it's also a lack of just happening and experience that tends to make me anxious as it begins which is probably some sort of self-fulfilling prophecy.

Community

Parties

Skylar: And those repaired relationships, are any of those folks from the high school experience that you had?

Relationships

Meredith: No, undergrad. I was really lucky though, I had a lot of good role models we could say, during undergrad, of women in relationships with each other and ending relationships with each other. One of my roommates near the end was a lesbian woman and she and her girlfriend were together and are together still and the community there was tight, and so there were you know the drama that happens when you have a reasonably small community and the people are getting together and breaking up and then dating each other's exes and everything like that, and so we lived right next door to one of her exes so she was there and the girlfriend was there a lot and their ex was right next door and they were always really cool with each other, they partied with sort of the same group, so that was great, I didn't really go out and party but whenever they

Sex

Sexual experience

Abusive relationship

wanted to get ready we'd have like a big gang of bisexual and lesbian girls in my apartment hanging out and chatting, and it was really nice so even without the romantic element I felt like I got good relationships from that community, and important ones, ones that did demonstrate you know, this does not have to end badly, you just had a bad set of experiences.

Emma: Yeah, so being surrounded by young, out, LGBT people, did you ever have any flings?

Meredith: I didn't really... I'm not a big fling person, I'm not a hugely sexually driven person, I'm very cuddly. I did have a lot of like, cuddles (laughter). But, no, um, in general, I'm not that sexually experienced, which you know, I don't feel too weird about. I don't like undressing in front of anyone, that kind of thing, there are some other hang ups I have but I have been lucky in the sense that most of the people I have had any sort of physical or emotional relationship with have been cool with that, and have not, I've never been um, with the exception of my abusive relationship was with a man, I've never been pressured to undress or do anything that I didn't want to do which I think I really lucked out on. I think there's a lot of, because it still to this day, is not, it's become more mainstream, but you know people aren't getting LGBT sex education or anything. I think there is a lot of insecurity about what do I do, how do I do this, am I going to be any good, even more so than anyone who is having sex for the first time or even the second or third time. You know, is the other person going to enjoy it, are they going to like me, um, and that kind of is just dialed up when there is this element that you're not even really sure at the beginning how it

Pressure

LGBT sex education

Insecurity

Abusive relationship

Early twenties

Spring, summer

Close friend group

works, and then you know there are so many things to do, and so you're constantly sort of back to square one. But I have been lucky in that sense, that I've never really been shamed about my physical participation in sex. I enjoy it when I can.

Dating

Emma: That's good, do you mind if I ask a few questions about your abusive relationship?

Meredith: Nope, go for it.

Warning signs

Emma: How old were you when that happened?

Meredith: Oh, hang on, gotta count backwards...Early twenties. And it kind of sort of seeded and grew over the course of a year and a half. But the focus was actually, the really bad stuff was actually in the spring and summer when I graduated undergrad and I stayed in the area for a while and worked and lived there and yeah I had just kind of graduated university for the first time.

Diagnosis

Borderline, narcissistic personality disorder

Treatment

Stigma

Emma: How long did the relationship last?

Manipulation

Meredith: We were friends, for a good, over a year. He was one of, he was in my close friend group, sort of six best friends who were always together kind of. Idealized friend group. And it just, there were three girls, and three boys in the group. And over the spring it just, something happened I'm not sure what but all three of the guys decided they wanted to date me at the same time. And one of them ended up being my boyfriend, that was the guy I dated who was wonderful. One of them is still one of my best friends who is also a great guy and took the whole thing really well, and the other was this other guy who um really there hadn't been any warning signs

Sexual assault

Boyfriend

Manipulation

and had been what was considered a really good friend and we, he was ultimately diagnosed with, the diagnoses he showed us, the official thing he got when we took him to a psychiatrist early on in his sort of personal decline, suggested he had either borderline or narcissistic personality disorder. And he wouldn't get treatment for it, which is a massive problem of course, and you know we had other people in the group who had encounters with similar stuff and they were like you know you can just get treatment it's not a stigma but he had a very, he ended up having a big manipulative streak. So essentially what happened is I ended up, because we had already signed a lease, living in a house with him and my boyfriend, and another of our close friends upstairs and the other two were just around the corner. And that had seemed like a dream before this had all gone down. And, he just started um, before my boyfriend and I got together he sexually assaulted me once and then because we were poor university kids, my boyfriend took a job over the summer where he was gone pretty much from mid morning to eleven o'clock at night and I was working on grad school applications so I was at home most of the time and he was too and he just you know, he could manipulate everyone around him so we didn't notice he was telling this friend that this person hated them and then acting as their go between so he could act like he was trying to fix it so he isolated the apartment from everyone else and then whenever my boyfriend was gone he was just like an emotional and physical leech. Eventually he crossed the line because he'd use suicide threats to manipulate people further, he told my boyfriend, I went away to visit family for the weekend, and he told my boyfriend that he was going to kill himself if my boyfriend didn't break up with me. And my

Suicide threats

Break up

Friend support

Suspicious

Monitoring

Abusive circumstances

boyfriend had a breakdown because this guy had been one of his best friends for some time and he had genuinely believed he was going to kill himself, though he probably wasn't at that point. And so I came home and he broke up with me, and he broke down and told me why and it was like I had been for the past three four months at that point trying my best to like heal this, and it was like a switch flipped and I called the two girls and told them what had happened and one of them threatened to take his eye out with a knitting needle and we ended up kicking him out of the apartment.

Hindsight

Emma: So no one else in your friend group knew that that this was going on while it was going on?

Trigger

Meredith: No, I told them, one of the girls had suspected it because she had come out shopping with me and when I had to go get new clothes this guy would like follow me into the changing room or insisting on like checking the clothes for me and he didn't think she had noticed but she had. And she told me that later and she said she wasn't really sure what to do because she couldn't tell if I was like, if I had invited him to do that or not, um, which I didn't blame her because she had also been through abusive circumstances before and everything. So no, what I ended up doing was I realized I think, when he did that, when he threatened my boyfriend that you know, he wasn't going to try to get better, he was just out for himself, so I called those girls up and said this is what just happened, this is what has been happening, and I want him out of the house. And they were totally supportive of course.

Warning signs

Speculation

Mental illness, jealousy

Manipulation

Emma: Sometimes when we are in situations like that, when we are inside it we almost

don't realize how bad it is, did you kind of find that when you got out of it you had this awakening and you realized?

Feeling stupid, weak, dumb

Meredith: I think we all did, you know I think it was twenty-twenty hindsight, very much. And I think it can also get particularly shrouded if you really had, because it was like, it was a bizarre change for him. We weren't sure what had triggered it, or anything, but we, looking back before any of this had happened we actually couldn't identify any warning signs.

Relating to people

Emma: Interesting.

Mental health crises

Meredith: He had seemed perfectly supportive, he had not been manipulative, he had been funny and fun to hangout with and, you know, there could be any number of reasons for that and I won't speculate on them. It might have been a sudden, like, shift in the brain, you know with a mental illness or it could have been jealousy, or it could have been you know, fear of abandonment, who knows. But, it was, that was the one thing we all identified with was kind of how hard it was to let go of everything that had happened before and recognize that we couldn't get that back, because he didn't care about it. But we had to have a meeting and get together and sort of lay out all of the things he had told us and identify all of the places where he had like, told completely different things to two different people to set them against each other and it was, you feel really really stupid. You feel, um, weak and dumb and he was really good at identifying important parts of other people's identities and relating to them, so, you know with me and another of our friends we, I identify as bisexual the other friend sort of had questions in that direction and so he claimed to, and then to like another

Closure

Strange experience

person he was telling them like no never in my life, and we don't know which is true but it was just whatever story he thought someone else wanted to hear. And with me, like I had been through so many mental health crises in my own time, I wanted, it was that I wanted to help him but that I kind of knew rationally what you needed to do, and so I was trying to get him to do it because on some level it was going to help, but that's not going to help if they don't, if they are actively like using it to get what they want.

Emma: Yeah, they need to want to get better, unfortunately not everyone always does. *to Skylar* Do you have any more questions about that?

Skylar: Yeah, did you ever find any closure, and if you did do you think that was because of your own experience with mental illness?

Meredith: Um, it's hard to say, we kicked him out, and we haven't heard from him since. We had a very strange experience, we told one of our professors what had happened because we were very close to him and he was always very supportive and we ran into him about a year ago, the professor, and he was like "I was over in [this place where he used to live] and I ran into him," and the professor was clearly really freaked out by that, but apparently he is doing fine and we don't know anything else he blocked us all on, you know, he made a couple threats on his blog and then blocked us all on social media. So I wouldn't say I got closure, I think distance and you know, therapy, I showed a lot of symptoms with PTSD and my paranoia came back, but because I was scared that he made a copy, because he used to live in the apartment, that he made a copy of the key or he was going to come back or something, I

Therapy

PTSD symptoms, paranoia

Memories

Canada

couldn't be in there alone for a really long time but the distance gave me sort of a sense of like disgust and disrespect. So he didn't feel as threatening and I kind of felt that if I ran into him again, knowing what I knew, you know I wouldn't have a problem like, hitting him, or doing whatever to like get him to go away as soon as possible.

Boyfriend

Moving

Emma: Yeah there's nothing wrong with that, that's totally valid.

Meredith: Yeah (laughter), so it didn't give me closure, I didn't feel, I felt like I still have to look back at pictures on Facebook with a bunch of my friends in it and he's there and I remember we had fun, we were close, you know we had those sort of nights at three a.m. where everyone is howling, laughing and like having a good time and you know, it's tied inextricably in with the rest of the memories of those friends. But I, through distance got more of a really, a sense of sort of revolution that, so I didn't take the threat of him as seriously. In a good way, like he couldn't intimidate me without trying anymore.

Getting back together

Political activism

Emma: Do you still talk to the other four friends?

Meredith: Um, to some of them, yeah. I mean to all of them to some extent, they're all back up in Canada so I don't really get to see them very much. But the guy and I broke up not quite a year ago and we are still actually good friends and the other three, I'm still in contact with them.

Indigenous persecution, genocide, colonialism

Marches, donations

Emma: So the event where your boyfriend broke up with you because of this abusive guy, after he left the apartment you and your boyfriend stayed together?

Toronto activist community

Meredith: Um, I actually moved out of the apartment and stayed with one of these other friends for a little while because it was generally agreed I shouldn't be in the same building as him, and we needed to figure out how to get him to break the lease essentially, and leave. And then, you know, my boyfriend was incredibly upset so I guess we stayed broken up for maybe two weeks just because we were dealing with all of this other stuff and then we kind of got together and talked and decided that no, there was no point, like we enjoyed our time together and we were going to go for it again, so we did.

Activist influences

Emma: Yeah, good for you and it's cool that you can still be friends with him.

Anti-American sentiment

Anti-military, non-western

Skylar: So we are going to flip the switch a little bit. The topic of political activism that you highlighted, so, do you have any political activist history?

Meredith: Um, there was a fair amount of it on campus though in a very small scale because of the size of the town, a lot of pride events, a lot of, especially in that area, events around indigenous persecution and genocide and colonialism. And my parents are both very much on the activist side of things and always have been, so you know, I attend marches and when I can I donate to stuff, and it's just, you know, I try not to shut up about it. But I always think there is more I could be doing, and especially, that's one thing about living in Brunswick is if you're not a Bowdoin student which I think is where a lot of the young political activism takes place, I'm not allowed to participate in that so one reason I am hoping to move up to Toronto is a much larger activist community.

Puerto Rican independence

Social justice

Skylar: Absolutely, and what influenced you in

doing that besides your sexuality and kind of being part of that community?

Emma: Or if it is your sexuality that's also valid.

North American, Greenlandic

Skylar: That's true, yeah.

Meredith: Very much so, yeah also, my parents, there's actually a pretty strong streak of anti-American sentiment in my family, so I was raised with a lot of suspicion toward the country as sort of a federal institution. A lot of anti-military sentiment, um, a lot of just non-Western sentiment and the respect needed to non-Western views of the world. And just, you know, my dad probably to some extent because he is a little over-protective regrets telling me a lot about this, but he was the kind of guy who back like in his twenties was getting in fist fights with nazis.

Indigenous population

Canada

Media

Emma: Good for him.

Indigenous political activism

Meredith: That's what I say, no he's like "maybe be careful" you know after twenty five years of that he can't really say that anymore but, it's just kind of engrained and my step mother's family are heavily involved, they are Puerto Rican and are heavily involved in Puerto Rican independence and sovereignty and stuff.

Red Dress Initiative, Red Dress Movement

Emma: Awesome, so what are some social justice causes that you will lay down for? Which causes are you like really passionate about right now?

Murder of indigenous women

Meredith: I mean, I think I'm both passionate about certain causes and passionate about the way I should be passionate about them. For example a lot of my friends and the people I grew up with, people who influenced

Mi'kmaq

me growing up, friends of my parents, are indigenous, both North American and Greenlandic, and that's a subject that, you know, I grew up with, but that really doesn't enter even mainstream activist conversations a lot and so what I try to do is, if I am in a space where there aren't a lot of indigenous people I'll bring it up, but a big problem, especially in Canada, I'm not as familiar with these conversations in the U.S. because you know, I was raised in Canada and I grew up in Canada I've spent most of my life in Canadian circles, there's a lot of just dead silence about it, not because people aren't talking about it but because Canadian publishing and Canadian media and a lot of other mainstream methods of communication actively avoid broadcasting indigenous voices and so in that situation you have to sit down and shut up. One of my best friends, in undergrad was a Mi'kmaq woman who got increasingly involved in political activism and I remember when of our sort of, when we were first starting to become friends, there is a major initiative in Canada called the Red Dress Initiative or Red Dress Movement where among other things, displays of red dresses are put up in public spaces to represent murdered indigenous women because indigenous people make up about three percent of the population of Canada and indigenous women make up a massive amount of the percentage of murder victims, which are then not investigated by the police or the RCMP. One was set up around our English building at Acadia and was torn down by townies, like they grabbed the dresses and tore them down overnight so that was you know, a massive spite against the indigenous community in general but also the area and then you, you know, through her and some of our other mostly Mi'kmaq, because it's Mi'kmaq up there, its Mi'kmaq land, through

Inter-community tension

Indigenous genders

Differences in indigenous groups

Reductionism

Supporter

Writing

her and through some of our other friends, I saw the anger but also the inter-community tensions about like how to handle it, because I think with a lot of people when they talk about indigenous activism or indigenous anything there is a huge amount of reductionism down to a single group and that's really not at all, like, people talk within questions of LGBT community, people talk about indigenous genders, you know like "they had 16 different [genders]..." it's like there were hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of communities, nations, spiritual beliefs expanding centuries and changing and developing, and there wasn't a single indigenous group which agreed upon a single set of genders or sexualities. You know, there are massive differences, so you know it's that kind of reductionism that both the reductionism and forced silence of indigenous activists and speakers and everyone else that I think really, what influences that conversation right now.

Emma: That's very interesting I did not know that. So is that kind of, um, are you planning on giving that some time and attention when you do move back to Canada?

Meredith: Yes, as a supporter, you know I did, I actually wrote a lot about it um from a personal perspective in undergrad, but I always have believed that you know, both theoretically and in practice, you know, my voice is not the important one. And so, as a writer, one of the biggest issues in Canada today is the use of indigenous identity in stories by non-indigenous writers. There is a guy named Joseph Boyden, for example, who is a massively famous Canadian writer, who claimed to be indigenous, came out he wasn't and he had been writing all of these books from indigenous perspectives and the

Indigenous authors

Oral storytelling interviews

Oral storytelling agency

Lifting up voices

Psychosis

problem is, it is kind of a zero sum game, it's not just that one guy received money for you know, this identity and this story that he couldn't actually claim to which did not claim him either, um, but that, there is a bias against indigenous authors in the publishing industry in Canada, you know so the stories aren't going to get as much focus. So, I also touched on it in my oral storytelling interviews, two of my main interviews, one was with a close friend and one was with a woman who I have known all of my life who is a Kalaallit, a Greenlandic elder, um, and, what I try to do with those is let them speak for themselves and not editorialize or edit, or change, or draw any conclusions that weren't their own from the stories. Because I think that is an important part of oral storytelling is that it gives agency just to the person to correct and explain and not, um, get their words, even like with good intentions, messed with by anyone else. So you know I talked to them about specifically stories or narratives and the kind of thing that you could talk about from an academic perspective and then I could sort of work from that but anytime when they were talking specifically about like, forced movements of indigenous people, or the residential schools in Canada, or the mental health pandemic among indigenous groups, you know that was them talking and I kind of was not, I explained to my advisor I'm not allowed to touch that, even if it weakens a potential academic argument.

Emma: Was this during your MFA?

Meredith: Yeah.

Emma: Interesting. Are there other ways in which you've used your voice as a writer to lift up these other voices that haven't been heard?

Writing community

Seeding the ground

Writing about psychosis

Masters thesis, novella

Publication

Meredith: See, I personally, I will do it with like my voices that aren't being heard, especially on the subject of psychosis. I think the problem with, this is a huge talking point in any writing community, is do you write voices that aren't yours. And there is no quick answer to that. My view when it comes to current modern issues like indigenous issues, issues raised by black Americans and black Canadians by refugees and immigrants or in my case, by, for instance transgender people, you know, you have to acknowledge them and talk about they are there but to sort of claim to be lifting them up, if you're still the one talking, you're not really broadcasting their voices, at best you're just repeating their words maybe with a citation. You have to seed the ground, and step down and start talking. You can't be, you know, be the person talking, you can't even really be the microphone, you have to be the ground they're standing on or protecting the ground they are standing on. So I do use my work to talk about psychosis a lot, it enters pretty much everything I write in some respect in part because it influences my concept of reality and I think that is a point of view that a lot of people don't see and that a lot of people try to write, a lot of people try to write psychosis and get it. They usually use it as like a horror convention or something like that, so that's what I try to focus on in my own writing.

Emma: Yeah, and that doesn't help the stigma at all. Are you publishing anywhere right now?

Meredith: Um, I'm working right now on a novella my master's thesis is kind of in a limbo where it needs a lot more editing, my advisor wants me to publish it right now, I

Poetry

Post-Apartheid South Africa

Visitors perspective

South Africa

Homophobia

Bisexual, lesbian women
Rape

Crushes

LGBT community

Pinkwashing

don't think it's ready. That's an argument for us to have over and over again, um, and I have actually, ironically, a horror story that doesn't have anything to do with psychosis that is being looked at by another advisor for publication. So I'm working on some longer works right now and I've gotten, I've published some shorter poetry and stuff in undergrad and with the Stonecoast Review oral storytelling thing. But I took kind of, after, I have taken kind of a break to not write for a couple months so I've just gotten back into it this month.

Emma: That's fair.

Skylar: So one of your topics of interest that you wrote in was Post-Apartheid South Africa. I remember you saying something about being there with your parents, was that it?

Meredith: Dad taught at a school there for a while, yeah, and I went to school there, so obviously like I can't speak, I can only speak from a visitors perspective, as someone with, who you know I went to school there I had a lot of South African friends but it does kind of like...you know a lot of concepts of LGBT tends to be reductive and Western. Um, there's a massive amount of homophobia in South Africa with one of the major problems being corrective rape of bisexual and lesbian women to "fix" them to turn them straight. And you know, I was there in elementary school mostly, the subject of sexuality didn't come up much. My first crush was on a friend of mine in South Africa, but you know in a little kid kind of crush kind of way. But it kind of did, it didn't really influence my concept of my own sexuality because you know with little kids it wasn't talked about as much, but I think it did kind of form, looking back it did kind of form the idea that you know, I personally don't

Lesbian women in South Africa

Friction between communities

Homophobia, brutality against women

White saviorism

Imperialism

Reductionism

Languages

Vame, Cameroonian language

Names

Oral culture

think there is a singular LGBT community. There is this idea, I think it's called "pinkwashing" that suggests that anyone who identifies along that spectrum is somehow connected and should come together through that. But you know, issues faced, we can't imagine, anyone around this table, issues faced by like a Zulu or ... lesbian woman in South Africa. And as a result, with a lot of other communities there is a lot of actual friction, you know between other countries, populations, and Americans concepts of LGBT identity. And you know, I worry about my friends there a lot, and that isn't to say it's not a death penalty case there anymore, but it's still a massive homophobia and brutality against especially women, is still a massive issue there. And you know, there's a, you can have conversations about that kind of violence and then you can have the entry of sort of an LGBT version of white saviorism come in. You know, or manifest destiny or whatever else, thinking we'll go and save them from this idea, there are a lot of countries where those ideas were introduced by imperialism but there are also countries all over the world where it did come about organically and there wasn't sort of a prelapsarian in paradise of everyone's gender and sexuality being accepted and again, those really reductive concepts for American communities and societies are hard to grasp and they tend to just ignore them.

Skylar: In your bio on the Stonecoast MFA, it said that you are studying, or have studied two different languages. Was one of them based off of the fact you have a connection with South Africa since it was an African language?

Meredith: Vame? Vame is actually Cameroonian, not South African. My dad did

Written phonetic alphabet

Western concept of literacy

Names

Inuit language

Canada, Inuktitut

Iglulik

Greenland

a lot of work in Cameroon and my middle name, which I did not give because my entire name is way too long, was named after a close friend of his and that's the language, the dialect they actually spoke it's Vame the dialect is Plata and it's part of actually my interest orality and oral culture because it is an unwritten language and an unwritten culture. The only written accounts of it were taken by colonial accounts by French missionaries but dad did speak, he's very rusty at it, he did speak it and it was important because it was a language that you can really only speak. You know, it's not written down, but I wanted to kind of learn it to be a little closer to the man I was named after who has died, he died a while ago, but also because, it's kind of difficult, I want to learn it but my only recourse for learning it right now is through written phonetic alphabet essentially, it's just something I'm navigating personally, but also tied into at my roots, like my sense of something doesn't have to be written down to be valid and important and you know, Western concept of literacy and everything like that.

Inuit film, music

French

Spanish

1776 the musical

Emma: So real quick, can we have your full name?

LGBT community

Meredith: Uh, sure, um, full legal name is Meredith Elizabeth Lamoine MacEachern and the middle name is Gskai.

Emma: And what does that mean?

Meredith: It doesn't, it's just it was his name, yeah.

Revolutionary War

Emma: Well that's beautiful. And you also have interest in the Inuit language?

American founding fathers

Meredith: Yeah, my mom works up in the

arctic, so like um, Inuktitut is the Canadian language in general, and there are a ton of different dialogues you know, Iglulik has its own dialogue, Iqaluit has its own central dialogue and stuff, and then Navarana and Balika and Magssanguaq who are friends from Qaanaaq and Greenland speak Kalaallit Greenlandic or sometimes Inughuit Greenlandic, which share because of the discourse between Baffin Island and Greenland historically a lot of similarities. So I'd like to, I love languages in general, I study French and Spanish as well but, Inuktitut you know I watch a lot of, I was exposed to a lot of Inuit film making and music and stuff so it's the kind of thing I just, I want to learn more of in general.

Anti-American parents

Bisexual identity

1776 on Broadway

Emma: Interesting. Are you fluent in any other language besides English?

Meredith: My French was a lot better before I came back to the States (laughter), I was very conversational fluent in French, not professionally unfortunately and then I am slowly learning more Spanish so I can speak more Spanish with my step family because right now, the conversation, I can speak sort of the way the whole family will switch back and forth between Spanish and English I can do that in a very casual setting, but you know.

Broadway, New York

Emma: Yeah, there's a difference.

AIDS

Emma: So I was very interested to see that you listed 1776 as an interest of yours. I remember falling asleep to that movie before I even knew what it was, so I was very excited. So, you mentioned 1776 which I know has some sort of backing in the LGBT community.

Fanfiction

Erotica writing

Meredith: Yes, I have a very complicated relationship with that musical.

Emma: Great, tell us about it.

Relationship with gay, lesbian dynamics
Sex

Meredith: So, we watched that for the first time when I was in eighth grade as part of the Revolutionary War segment. And uh, yeah, it's a 1972 musical about the American founding fathers and what we have to understand about eighth grade Meredith is that she was raised by very, in a lot of ways, very anti-American parents, who had raised her very carefully to understand who the founding fathers really were, so I like came into this hating them. You know, I still have some of my notes that I took during class and they are just curse riddled, they are just really unpleasant. There are some cartoons in there, like you know. My teacher was very understanding luckily.

Puberty

LGBT identities

Founding fathers

Emma: I mean there are definitely some historical errors.

Thomas Jefferson

Meredith: Oh yeah, but in a way the problem was I was still, I knew that I was bisexual at this point, I was still very deep in the closet and so I was, the movie, I don't, I have not seen the play, it started out as a Broadway musical, so I have read the script and it doesn't seem as engrained in the script as it was eventually produced in the movie so the movie has some very erratic elements to it.

American history

Emma: Does it? I've only seen the movie.

Meredith: No, the movie does. Yeah, um and I actually wrote a paper in eighth grade sort of on the context of 1776 and of 1972 and at the time you know, especially in New York, Broadway was more of a haven than other places, and that a lot of, a number of actors in this movie who are also Broadway actors, have rumors around them about being gay,

having AIDS and everything, and so you know I was doing research, and I'm not going to lie this was my first exposure when I found fanfiction. It was mostly, slash male-male fanfiction and that was my first exposure to any kind of same sex erotica or writing. And it became this really uncomfortable but passionate sort of fascination slash hatred with the movie that dominated a lot of my life at that point because I was trying to, I was still figuring myself out, I was still figuring out my relationship with you know, gay and lesbian dynamics, and sex, and you know, I'm turning thirteen fourteen starting puberty and everything and at the same time I really hate these people and as I kept doing more research it became a sense of you know, conversations about LGBT identities being dominated still by white American male cis gendered ideas of it. And how those conversations sort of stopped there in a lot of ways, and so in a way, the movie kind of opened some doors to me in what you were allowed to talk about and but I always up through high school, I did, it was kind of obsession writing these papers about the dominance of the founding fathers to this day on something that for all we know some of them might have like identified on some level as not straight however we would understand that, but, you know, they really don't have much of a place considering their politics you know. Thomas Jefferson advocated for the genital and facial mutilation of anyone found to be engaging in same sex activities. But they dominate these conversations in certain areas anyway, and so it kind of jump started both... I watched that movie so many times just trying to figure out how I felt about it. It became kind of obsessive. In a way that I couldn't explain to anyone because I wasn't out of the closet at that point, I got teased for it, because it seemed like a weird thing to be

Self identity

Anti founding fathers

Hamilton

Lin-Manuel Miranda

Narratives

Theater of the oppressed

Broadway, inaccessible

Wealth

watching a lot but I couldn't explain these really conflicting feelings I had about this movie. And about American history and the founding fathers in general. So, yeah, but at the same time that happened right when I was you know, coming out to myself and discovering my sexuality and it just got all knotted up in a really uncomfortable way.

Sailor Neptune

Emma: That's really interesting, how do you feel about that movie today?

Anime

Meredith: Eh, I don't really watch it anymore, my dislike and my own sense of self identity have sort of managed to separate, and I am very anti-founding fathers. I hate Thomas Jefferson, like, that was my...

Pokemon

Emma: Thomas Jefferson is very problematic.

Meredith: He is a horrible person.

Emma: Yeah, so what about Hamilton, the musical?

Japanese vs. English dub

Meredith: I have really complicated feelings about Hamilton, too. And my problem there is sort of more simple. I love the music, Lin-Manuel Miranda is a brilliant musician and the acting and singing was all fantastic. My issue is still that these narratives are still dominating stories that you can tell about, like, using Lin-Manuel Miranda's talent alone imagine the stories you could tell about people that no one ever sees. And it's kind of, I listened to a really interesting video essay about, that touched on this idea of the theater of the oppressed, which is the idea that theater can express the discontent and the feelings of marginalized groups but not on Broadway where all of the tickets cost thousands of dollars and the access to it is so tight and impossible to get to and it's all

Straightwashing

Lesbian stereotypes

Femme

driven by like, wealthy, you have to have wealthy producers and wealthy patrons and everything and you can't produce theater of the oppressed under these circumstances. You know, as a groundbreaking hip hop musical, Hamilton was absolutely that, but it was still about the whitest thing in American history. And just in my personal opinion, I love David Daveed enormously, but casting a black man as Thomas Jefferson doesn't make Sally Hemmings dancing around him in a skimpy outfit any less horrifying. And so you're still using a history that is so ugly and fraught, and so yeah, complicated relationship. I love the music I listen to that music so much, but I wouldn't pay for a ticket to it, to be honest.

Exposure

Anime

Emma: Yeah. I get that. Interesting. So, along the same line of media in general, you also mentioned Sailor Neptune.

Meredith: Yep.

Cousins

Emma: So neither one of us has ever seen Sailor Moon, I do have a little experience with anime in general, but can you tell us about your relationship with that particular anime and that particular character?

Androgyny, asexuality

Meredith: Yeah, absolutely. I was not actually a big anime kid either growing up or now really, except for Pokemon, I still love Pokemon, but I did, we didn't get a lot of TV channels, growing up at all. But I remember being at someone else's house at some point and the English Dub was on. Where as in, if you don't know too much about Sailor Moon, in the Japanese version, two of the characters are a lesbian couple. Neptune and Uranus, and in the Dub they didn't change really any of the interactions but they changed the references from girlfriends to

Queer authors, LGBT media

cousins. Which comes across as really creepy because the dialogue has not changed significantly. But the American Dub didn't want a lesbian couple so they changed them to cousins.

Fanfiction

Emma: Oh I did not know that.

Psychosis

Meredith: Um, but, Neptune, you know, I was sort of coming of age in the early 2000s, um, early-mid 2000s, so concepts of women who loved women, lesbian, bisexual women, still were pretty heavily stereotyped and Neptune, as a, in the Japanese version, explicitly lesbian woman, was very very very femme. That was a concept I had never been exposed to and I do, you know, I am quite femme and that is always how I have kind of felt, but she was sort of my first exposure to like, honestly, she's the kind of person I aspire to be as a child. She was graceful and artistic and composed and self controlled and completely confident and comfortable in this relationship with Sailor Uranus, who I had a crush on.

Audre Lorde

Gender and sexuality

Political activist music

Love songs

Emma: Of course.

Pronouns

Meredith: Of course, um, so, you know, in, you know, that sort of navigational period of figuring out who myself was she was just kind of, I didn't really watch most of the anime, because the rest of the characters kind of drove me nuts, they were annoying, but she kind of acted as this weird sort of marginal sense that somewhere in the middle of all this was someone I could be like and be acceptable as to myself and you know, other people were like that somewhere. And then my cousin, actually, identifies, she doesn't have a, she doesn't label herself in any specific way, but she's very andro, she doesn't, she is kind of on the asexual

LGBT movies

spectrum, again she doesn't really label herself, but we encountered the exact opposite. We don't look anything alike, so we go out together and everyone thinks we are a gay couple because she looks really butch and I look really femme and so we joke that we are the reverse Neptune and Uranus.

Emma: Good for you guys. So you and I are about, are pretty much exactly the same age, so I know when I was eighth grade- early high school kind of coming to terms with my own sexuality I did a lot of reading by queer authors, Alex Sanchez, some others, were there any books, or music, artists that kind of helped you explore sexuality in a way that was kind of a little more private?

Meredith: You know, I didn't, I don't have a lot of memory of books specifically that dealt with that. Stuff online, you know fanfiction to some extent but also just independently published online fiction I could find stuff there that I could more relate to and discussions of it, but part of the problem was, at the time I was inpatient a lot and psychosis can really interfere with your ability to read. At least it did interfere with mine, it can scramble up text and stuff so I actually wasn't reading as much at that point. My step mother identifies as bisexual as well, and so when my step mother and father got together sort of late high school early undergrad she was able to introduce me to a lot of like Audre Lorde, and um, because she, she gender and sexuality she has her MA and PHD in all of that, in that specific subject, so I got a lot more out of her. And then, music wise, I mostly listen to a lot of, through my parents, political activist. Like irish punk rock, apartheid era protest rock kind of stuff. So that wasn't really my focus, but I remember whenever I heard especially like a love song I liked, I would listen to it and

Rent

International movies

Provincetown, Massachusetts

Memories

Excentrics

Outside of mainstream

LGBT groups

Drag groups, bars

Pride store

Nightlife

just change the pronouns around. Earlier on I'd actually hear it and I'd like it and I'd, if I heard like, you know, usually it would be a man singing a song about a woman, before I had really come out to myself I would change the pronouns and that just with this weird paranoia that someone would hear me and guess that I was bisexual or LGBT. I would kind of rewrite songs, sometimes I'd write them down so I could change the pronouns more easily in my head, but. Yeah, I started watching more movies that involved LGBT characters, with one being A Love to Hide which was a French movie about a gay couple in Nazi occupied France but books weren't as accessible to me at that point unfortunately.

Exposure to LGBT

Cousins

Emma: What were some other movies?

Meredith: Let me think... I did get into Rent in high school. Definitely, and let me think, my memories are fuzzy at this point I'm afraid, so I can't, I may not be able to answer you fully, um, just a lot of like international movies had more of that, and there is another French movie and I cannot remember the title, it wasn't Blue is the Warmest Color. It was actually considerably before that, but I can't remember the title.

Emma: That's fine.

Family

Skylar: So, you mentioned Provincetown, Massachusetts also as an area of interest is there anything you wanted to talk about regarding that?

Andro cousin

Meredith: That was just a really brief memory in general, um, that was, again, middle school to early high school my mom went to a conferencetown up in Provincetown... (laughter) a conference up in Provincetown

Bisexual cousin

and took me with her, it was just for the weekend, and I later learned through one of my history professors that Provincetown has always been kind of a capital for what you'd sometimes call excentrics out of the center, out of the mainstream artists and stuff and you know, it's still a pretty big hotspot at least in Massachusetts I know for LGBT groups.

Cousins girlfriend

There are a ton, or there were at least then, I haven't been back in a while unfortunately, a ton of drag groups and drag bars in that area and as a, at that time still a pretty young kid, I think I was out to my mother at that point but not to like the population, you know there's this whole pride store with all of the different flags and stuff you can buy and the nightlife, it's mostly a walking town, there aren't a lot of cars on the road, so the nightlife just people streaming around town and just drag shows everywhere and everyone was, a lot of people, I mean everyone was out but everyone was really friendly and there was essentially a little kid and I looked shorter and younger than I was, and everyone was just super nice and friendly, and it really made me even before I had completely gotten to know who I was, um, felt really accepted and at home which was really cool. And I just remember grinning from ear to ear, I again do not have very good memories from those times but like that whole night was just like a lot of fun. I remember my mom laughing because she was startled at how much fun I was having. But, and then, a little while later, another one of my cousins is also bisexual and she and her girlfriend drove down and were doing like a tour of New England and I told them they had to go to Provincetown.

Step mother

Dating

Safe spaces

Skylar: That's awesome.

Emma: That's awesome, yeah, especially when you feel like you're kind of the only one

Activism

and a little small, it's good to go to a place where suddenly there are a lot more people who are out there, so for sure. So we have about 14 minutes left, and we've covered a lot in the last hour and fifteen. Is there anything that's come up as we've been talking that you want to elaborate on or throw out? Or mention?

Meredith: Yeah I think my family in general I cannot say that all of them are particularly accepting but you know I came out to my family in high school, a little while after I was outed at school. But I've been out to one of my cousins, Kathleen, who is the Andro one and we were born I think like nine months apart so we have been really close for a really long time, um, and then she sort of started, she doesn't label herself but she started...and then her younger sister came out as bisexual and has been dating her girlfriend now for several years, so now her girlfriend is like part of the family and it's been sort of important to sort of see other members of my family feeling like everyone who kind of comes out in that family pushes back a bit against the number of family members who might not approve so at this point it's a much safer place to be and I think the introduction of Naomi, Elizabeth's girlfriend was massively important because everyone loves the shit out of that girl and she's the best and so they basically adopted her at this point, with no idea what would happen if they ever broke up. I hope they don't. But that's been really interesting and then the introduction of my step mother who has identified as bisexual for a really long time and that was really important to me and her whole family knows that and they don't care. They don't care about me, I was, again, IDing as a lesbian when I first, when they first starting dating and I first got to know them and at this point,

Step mom

Family

Support system

those are some of my favorite people in the world and I always feel one hundred percent at home and accepted and loved by every one of them and that was in part because my step mother growing up in Massachusetts as a bisexual Puerto Rican woman is one of the bravest people I know and she's, that's kind of in a way her life's work with marginalized identities and everything. She's been a really important, part of me, like, not just my acceptance of myself but my acceptance of sort of the swing between lesbianism and bisexuality and you know, the self consciousness I got when I did date a guy for the first time when I was like 21 years old. I feel just like I can talk to her and that she also created before I ever came along, a safer space to be, without even knowing it. So I think I always got a really got a really strong sense of, when you can, and when you have a safety to fall back on, is to take more of a risk and I think that's important in every aspect of activism is that, you know, even if you do identify as part of some group that is frequently or always marginalized, if you have any sort of privilege, or any capacity for risk that isn't, that you have something to fall back on, I think it is important to kind of push out a little so you can make a little more room for the people after you. And I kind of hope that my cousins took a bit of room from me, I wanted them to be able to if it ever happened, and I know my stepmother made room for me. So.

Emma: How old were you when your step mom came into your life?

Meredith: Seventeen, eighteen maybe, so like, right after all the shit went down in high school. So she was understandably really nervous you know, she started dating a guy with essentially an adult daughter at that

Advice

Middle, high school

Romanticisation, representation of LGBT relationships

Relationships

Abusers

point, though I wasn't really acting like an adult, and I think she told me she was terrified. And you know, my concept was my father did not cheat on my mother, you know they had been divorced already when dad and Marianna met, um, I was like this woman hasn't done anything to me so there was never really any friction and I went for the first time to visit, my dad knew her family well at this point already, this was maybe in my second year of university to visit them one fall. Immediately they all were like, she has a massive family, she has three sisters, and in-laws and nieces and nephews and she also has two step parents who are really close, all of her parents are really close to each other and I was getting told like every five minutes like you are family, you have a home here if you need it, if you ever need anything you can come to us and they have like totally been there, they have never broke that, so.

Figuring out relationships

Trauma

Emma: That is such a good feeling. Awesome. What else. So now that this has all kind of come out, we can take a breath, exhale, are there any last minute things we still have nine minutes, I do have a good closing question if we are ready for it. I think that especially as as much of an adult as you are, which you know, are you ever really, what advice would you give to younger LGBT people who are in like middle school or high school?

Meredith: That's difficult because I know that there are situations where just hearing "be yourself" "you'll be fine" because I didn't have a good experience. Middle school and high school, it will, I hope you will never have to think about it again. I know that I felt like I was never getting out. Now not only can I barely remember most of it, I have no connection to it and it has not been a problem and it feels

like everything right now, and I promise you it isn't. And you shouldn't make it everything. The other advice I really want to give, especially people in my situation, is I think we do need a lot more romanticisation and representation of LGBT relationships in media but I think a problem I encountered was I didn't get sort of a flip side of that, which was, when you do finally come out and are ready to enter a relationship with someone who aligns with that part of yourself, it might not work out, and in fact it might end really badly. And that's not you doing anything wrong, you haven't gotten anything wrong you haven't made a mistake, unfortunately because people who are gay lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, whatever umbrella they decide to identify as you know because we have been marginalized, for a lot of people it just hurts and they get through it, but for some people it hurts and it turns toxic. There are abusers in our community. There are people who aren't ready to come out and to instead take it out on you. And so, if you are going to be vulnerable, you do need to just look out for yourself and if you enter a relationship, if you come out, and you're like wow I'm a lesbian I've finally figured it out and you enter a relationship with a woman and she mistreats you, you don't have to put up with it. Things aren't going to magically align because you've figured it out. You still have to find someone who will respect and love you and it's not better just because it's what technically works for you. And that was a problem I encountered, like I thought okay I know who I am right now, I know what I want, so this is when everything falls into place, and it didn't. That wasn't my fault, and in that case she had her own issues and it wasn't her fault either, but you have to give yourself time like anyone else in any other kind of relationship. It's not, you're not wrong, you didn't miss

something, you didn't make a mistake in your identity or your feelings, it's just there are a ton of people out there and the way these communities have been treated does carry trauma with it and trauma can create things that are corrosive and violent unfortunately. So I think we need to talk really regularly about how that impacts these communities and our communities and however they intersect so that people can be educated and be safe and at least lessen the likelihood that their vulnerability will be taken advantage of.

Emma: Wonderful, that's a much better answer than "life goes on," "it gets better". So thank you so much, we will be sending you an electronic copy of the audio, as well as a copy of the transcribed interview once we have finished transcribing it. So Skylar is there anything else you want to add?

Skylar: No, that's perfect, thank you.

Emma: Thank you so much.