

FLO EDWARDS

ANNIE: [00:00:00] Okay. Um, my name is Annie Karim, a N N I E K a R I M. We are at the university of Southern Maine, Portland, pace and Smith.

ROUKIA: My name is Roukia Hussein, R O U K I a H O U S S E I N.

ANNIE: Can you spell it?

FLORENCE: Yeah uh, I'm Florence Edwards, F L O R E N C E space.E D W A R D S.

ANNIE: So how old are you?

FLORENCE: 40.

ANNIE: What pronouns would you like us to address you by?

FLORENCE: I've been kind of adopting they, uh, but I also use she

ANNIE: okay. Um, so what would you use to describe your yourself? For example, are you lesbian? Gay? What term do you use to label yourself?

FLORENCE: So just for my sexuality? yeah. You know, I think that something that happens over the years. So I remember before I was comfortable coming out, I was like slipping out, like, oh, I am bisexual. This was like in high school, my friends completely like laugh, fell on the floor. They're like, you're the gayest person I know. And I was like, oh, um, so then I like adopted lesbian.

And then I also like, always kind of had queer with it. Um, very shortly after, like, I was bisexual for like a hot, hot minute, you know? And even after I didn't use the term bisexual, I had actually engaged with like sex with men. And, but I still felt like my relationship that I wanted to have long-term would be with a woman.

So I felt like lesbian and queer really [00:02:00] embody that. And so I still use that.

ANNIE: It was more about like the emotional connection where your whole heart felt more comfortable.

FLORENCE: Yeah. Or just what I would lust after all not always the heart.

ANNIE: - laughter- yeah Women are pretty great.

Um, so where did you grow up?

FLORENCE: Um, so my folks, uh, we grew up in long island, why I grew up in long island. They were like the city. So when I say long, I mean, New York, we moved to Maine in 93. I was 12. Um, so I always think like, where are you? Like get your driver's license, your first one and lose your virginity is like where you're from, like saying he also, you say Maine.

ANNIE: Yeah. Okay. That's, that's a really good way to look at it. I won't lie. That's really good for an immigrant. That's like, okay. It makes sense. Um, so how was it

FLORENCE: being black in Maine?

Um, I think it's like being anything that is slightly like, are obviously other, so, um, but [00:03:00] overall I felt, I think I'm one of those people who I'm not gonna be bothered by other people's perceptions.

So, and I, I think I have that there was something where like, it's hard for me to make like eye contact and like a room full of people anyway. So I'm not really gonna like, look at people like that. Like I don't see everybody's face unless I, like, I actually know. I see your face in a crowd, but if I don't, then it's just like blurs of faces.

So I think for me it was there's challenges, but I feel like I would have had those challenges anywhere. Um, because anytime you want to like, get ahead and you need like a white man's approval. So like wherever you are in the United States, I feel like you're gonna like hit some roadblocks. Um, but yeah, so I think it was just, what was it like?

It was probably like, it would be anywhere else where, uh, people of color, the minority.

ANNIE: So I have like, I'm really interested. Do you have like one moment [00:04:00] in your mind where like you felt like you were treated in a certain way or the experience went a certain way because you are black?

FLORENCE: Oh yeah. I could probably list a lot, but I really think about it.

And the first time I really remember I was actually in New York and maybe it was second grade. Maybe it was third grade, one of those years. And, uh, the gym teacher, white male, he like separated the teams into basically the black students and the white students. And I only really complained about it because we lost.

And then I like complained to my dad and I had like, meaning to talk to the principal. Like, I don't know, but I only really complained because we lost like one, I would have been completely fine with it, but for some reason I was like, wow, well we lost. And then I saw that we were divided in half by color.

So that was probably like the first real experience. Um, and though when we came to Maine, [00:05:00] um, I was at king middle school, so I did a year at Lincoln and then I did a year at king and at king, well, I guess in Lincoln, So I had like this rolling stone and I'm really going to expose myself. So Janet Jackson was this amazing album where the single that she led with was a Joni Mitchell, like cover and remake.

And so she was on the cover and her husband at the time, which we didn't know, um, was holding, like covering her breast, but he thought it was pornography and wanting to take my rolling stone. And I was just like, no, is this the rolling stone magazine? This is not pornography. So you're not taking my magazine.

And so I don't know if he would have done that if I was anything else, but who I was,

ANNIE: wait, I'm sorry. Who was this?

FLORENCE: That, that this team. It was a English teacher. Mr. Dyer.

ANNIE: Oh my goodness [00:06:00] okay.

FLORENCE: Yeah, but that was at Lincoln. And then at king, I wrote this fictional like story. Cause we had to write a fictional story. Happened to just

read the story about, want to say it was like maybe a south central base growing up in the hood kind of story. And so I wanted to like emulate that in my story.

And then during parent teacher conference, they were like, oh, you guys must have had like the worst like upbringing. It must've been so great that you moved to Maine. And so they thought that I was writing a true story.

yeah.

ANNIE: But like to think about it, like, why would you assume that this is based on my life event,

right yeah. Yeah. So, um, so our, we already answered that, um, about your challenges. Um, so let's get into education. Where did you attend? Middle and high school?

FLORENCE: So Lincoln was like seventh grade king was eighth grade [00:07:00] and then high school was Portland high.

But before I started Portland high, I wanted to my parents. Wouldn't why didn't want my parents went me in the AP, math lineup so I had to do, um, a semester of math, summer math course at Waynflete. And that was like the best math class I've ever had in my life.

ANNIE: Laughs

FLORENCE: Say that you ended up, um, so I did a summer math class there and then Portland high.

ANNIE: So during that time during linking chain Portland high, did you identify as a queer lesbian or, bi?

You sort

FLORENCE: of, so that's where I like became of age in that way. So like I had like a moment where I thought I was bisexual. Um, and what I realized now is that if I like the guy was because I was like, oh, I wanted, I want to wear those pants.

Like, oh, I like that. Yeah. Those sunglasses that's me. Like, it was more of be like that. [00:08:00] Yeah. Like I wonder like emulate or embody part of my

swag. And I didn't realize that even sometimes before. 'cause I don't like other like masculine present, uh, presenting women. Um, not sexually, like they're cool to hang with.

I want to be like, Hey, let's like, no, no,

ANNIE: it's weird to you

FLORENCE: but, and so if I ever like found myself attracted to them, I was like, oh, I just want to, like, I just want what they have to be part of what I am.

So like, tell me your secrets. Tell me how you do it.

like where do you shop?

ANNIE: laughter

ROUKIA: laughter

ANNIE: You, so you'd already been out at that time or you were trying to understand yourself.

FLORENCE: Yeah. I came out first in like school, so I feel like everybody at school knew I was queer. And then I came out to my parents like senior year and I had gotten in trouble because I was skipping a lot of. Just for fun. So, and [00:09:00] then, yeah, and I was forging. Okay. So I was forging these letters of like visiting schools, where my excuses, they were really good for.

Okay. They were pretty good and they were so good that when, um, like I brought my down to the principal office and they're like, Hey. And I was like, well, how did you know? I just want to know, because like I spent time like crafting these letters. So how did you know? And they're like, oh, this like, ah, I was like, it was like the tiniest little thing.

Okay. Right. So I, I think if I wasn't like a straight and narrow person or through my adult, young adult years, I would have definitely done forgery my path to crime. Like I was so drunk.

at least you're good at it, you can

ANNIE: do it if being a dentist doesn't ever work out, you know, you always got a plan.

FLORENCE: Right.

ANNIE: Um, so while you're trying to understand yourself during that time high school and, you know, pretty tough time for a person to [00:10:00] understand themselves or figure themselves out, were there people around you that were out that were out queer?

FLORENCE: There was one person. Um, and I can't, I don't know. I can't remember what, like her title was like what her label she chose. I want to say it was bisexual, but you know, don't quote me, I don't really remember how, um, but yeah, and she, we weren't at any of the same classes, but we had a study hall together. And that ended up being my girlfriend for a little bit, so, yeah.

ANNIE: Crazy, crazy, crazy world .So, um, were there any like, uh, gay, straight Alliance groups or any sort of similar groups going on at your school during that?

FLORENCE: Not at the school, but I think I saw a flyer or maybe one of the counselors that, cause I would like chat with the counselors because it was better sometimes than being in an actual classroom.[00:11:00]

And not that they were always helpful, but

ANNIE: definitely not just for the chat.

FLORENCE: Yeah. Just for the chat. And um, so either I saw a flyer or maybe a counselor mentioned Portland outright. And so, and this is when they were at what I call the cinnamon building, but there's a, I can't think of the intersection because the streets kinda changed names shortly there, but it's right by, I think there's an Indian restaurant on the first floor.

And then if you cross the street, there's a Japanese sushi place that has a really nice outdoor garden, but I always forget the name of them. And I think they do a hibachi, but I'm not sure, but yeah. So, but there's cinnamon. That's like painted on the building from like, I don't know, a hundred years ago. So I always just called it the cinnamon building.

ANNIE: And did you ever take any sort of like activity? Did you ever go to a meeting with Portland?

FLORENCE: Oh my God. Yeah, I did. I, there was like, there was [00:12:00] Tuesdays like drop in and then there was like, I called it like the therapy session and the basically, so you could drop it and not talk about anything and just like, hang out.

And then, then people who would like smoke cigarettes would be smoking outside. And that's where all the cool kids were. But then there was other, I think that was on Friday nights where you get like, or my, I might have a reversed. So like the therapy session was like Tuesday and then like the hangout was like Friday night.

So I usually went twice a week when I start. But the therapy session I started to skip because it was just like, you know, there's a lot of kids who were being kicked out of their house or were homeless, um, or just like in very abusive, traumatic situations and people being sad and makes me uncomfortable. So, yeah.

ANNIE: Completely understandable. Um, so yeah, you definitely- did that make you like going to, um, [00:13:00] probably not rights that make you feel more included, more part of like a community.

FLORENCE: Yeah. You know, I have a friend that we met while I was at Lincoln and she was at Moore and actually I just had her over for Thanksgiving.

So we've been friends for 28 fucking years and, uh, yeah, so she's real cool -straight. And, and, um, so how was I getting there for me? I don't know how it was bringing her in, but, uh, what was your question

ANNIE: about, um, creating a community?

FLORENCE: So she will tell you that I was just like the angriest teenager ever.

You're happy now. Like, I'm so thankful, but like you were angry all the time. So apparently I was very angry all the time, but outright, I didn't feel like I was angry. Like I actually was, if there was like a cool crowd, I kind of fit into it. And then I also started a [00:14:00] WMPG. I did their blunt when I was in high school too, but I think I started Portland outright before I started Blunt.

ANNIE: You started WMPG that far back?

FLORENCE: Hmm

ANNIE: That's amazing.

Cause I want up on there and I like saw your whole little bit. It's awesome. It's really cool. So, um, where did you, where did you, where did your education go from there? Where did you attend college?

FLORENCE: Yeah, um, I went to lake forest college and that is in a Chicago suburb.

Um, it's in lake forest and it's about a half an hour by train or, uh, Chicago. Um, so I did that for four years. I majored in biology and economics with a minor in classical studies. And then I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do. I did a, the pre, the pre med sequence is also the pre [00:15:00] dental sequence at that school.

And I think it's probably at most school. So I did that, those courses as well. Um, and then I was, I was thinking about dentistry. So I did shadow, um, the, my parents periodontist for a minute and. I was like, and I got a reference letter, but I wasn't sure if I was just doing that because my parents wanted me to do it.

But then when I got out of school and I got like a regular job and basically it wasn't a really good job market. I can't remember what happened. I think the war started the, um, the gulf war part two was happening. Um, and so, so for about a year I worked and then I studied for the dental admissions test.

And I also started to prepare for the military because I was like, well, this isn't really what's happening. Like Maine kind of sucks of course of back here now. But [00:16:00] like, I was like, oh man, sucks. I should leave again. And so, and I didn't think I was going to get into a dental school cause like I'm I'm okay. Smart. You know, like. I had that like, oh, you know, I need to be here. Okay. I'm mean, I feel like half of life is just to like show up, get some stuff done. Um, so I took that test and then I also took tests for the military. And then I did the interviews and I went to Howard for the interview and I was like, oh, this is where I need to be.

So Howard is like historical black college university. And actually, I didn't even know the HBCU was a thing until I was already in the classes and somebody

said it and I was hanging out and I was like, what, what is an HBCU? You're from maine huh.

ROUKIA: They are like "you're in it".

FLORENCE: And I don't know what HBCU is. Like, you're in one right now.

I was like, oh, okay. And so, so I did Howard for almost five years. I didn't finish right away. Cause you have to [00:17:00] like finish your clinicals. And I didn't finish my clinicals and my dad actually died in 2010. And so he had ALS and, um, you know, it's just, I just wanted to spend that time, like it started to deteriorate really fast for him.

And, uh, so it took a little longer. Um, but those are, that's where I went. Oh, you know, I actually, I went to UNE, so yes. So for sure. All right. So I did Lake Forest college 99 to 2003 and to keep the student loan. And I didn't even have, I had like maybe 20 K of student loan debt. Like I did pretty good with that.

Um, considering I didn't have a full scholarship anywhere. Um, I was not that good at field hockey to get a scholarship.

And so I did you and either teachers or certificate for, I guess, 18 months or so. And while I was finishing up that certificate, I was like, and I actually taught at Bonny [00:18:00] Eagle high school for a semester, man. I did not like teaching high school. I was probably like the thinnest I've ever been teaching high school there. I was just real, like stressed out. Um, so I was like this, isn't it like? So I quit that. And for me to not like, be like eating regularly, like that, that this wasn't my deal. Then I went to dental school and did that.

And I finished technically on paper. I was right in 2009, but actually didn't finish until 2010, but my degree says 2009 and I like, they didn't change. It was like, they just had it in a safe, like they knew you were going to come back and do it.

ANNIE: oH, wow. So teaching just wasn't it for you.

No, but I

FLORENCE: chose that path because I was like, well, I like weekends off.

i like holidays off, i like the summer off. I think this is what I should do. Yeah.

ANNIE: That's literally why I looked into it. Um, [00:19:00] so at like, uh, what was the first call that you went to? I'm sorry,

FLORENCE: lake forest.

ANNIE: Lake forest. So at lake forest and, uh, one and I mean, you, and he was only like 18 months, but, and Howard, did you, or were you a part of any LGBTQ club, any sort of Alliance, anything like that?

FLORENCE: Um, I think, like I said, I wasn't very smart, but, uh, but I show up, but I, I, um, I was busy, like I had to like actually study and, and then I also had the party, so like, and I think I went to like one sort of like, it seemed like they didn't, they had like an Alliance at that undergrad. I don't really remember.

But they did have like a theater program and I'm not a theater person. Yeah. Yeah. I dunno. Like, I,

ANNIE: I don't like, yeah, the theater, I mean, it's theater, but like, it's got to be like an, alliance and like, you know, that would have been nice. So you already told us that you [00:20:00] what you studied. Um, did your, so while you were in school, I feel like --were your teachers able to give you a provide to the history of queer people?

Like while you were going to, um, forced like, or, uh, Howard, where it was about a talk? No,?

It wasn't mean why would they come up in biology? Why would they come up with like, any,

ROUKIA: did you take classes that like focus on-

FLORENCE: no, every class I took in undergrad, either it was from my biology. My economics major or my minor in classical studies.

It's not something that I can write down on paper. I never took, I was one of the, I'm probably like the only black person that I know who went to college who didn't pay like a black history course ever. Like I have no idea. And I'm a little

like ashamed of [00:21:00] that sometimes, but then I'm not because I'm like, well, what are you doing with that?

I mean, it's nice for conversation, but I feel like,

ANNIE: why are you expected to do it?

FLORENCE: Yeah. Like, pardon me like even now, like I don't, I hardly read books that are fiction. I only read things that are historical or like, or based in biology. Like I like to like have actual facts and expand your, your own stuff.

ANNIE: Like sort of knowledge. It doesn't have to be now. So I totally get that. Um, so you said that you decided to look into the army after your undergrad. How was your eye so interesting. How was your experience as a black woman in the military?

FLORENCE: It actually kind of sucked in a lot of ways. Um, so my dad was, uh, basically what did he do? So he was in Vietnam. He wasn't drafted. He actually like signed up for it. He did Navy did Marines, then he did army. And then he like finished out neither the [00:22:00] coast guard or the reserve army reserves.

He actually, I think he did both. And the only thing he didn't do was the air force. Yeah. So he was like, I basically took a hunting class so that I could hang out with him and like go hunt with him. I, I eat meat. Yes. But like, I do not care about sitting out and being cold. And then shooting something like, I could give two shits about that, but I liked hanging out with them and it's easier for like a young person to learn a new trick than it is for somebody older to be like, oh, we're going to do.

I don't know what young people do. So, um, so not having him in the army or for my army experience, I think was challenging. Um, and then it was also during, I served during don't ask don't tell, and then when it was repealed and, um, and I had a living girlfriend with me at the time. Um, so it was really like, I had never [00:23:00] actually been a closeted person.

Like I had been a person who didn't know, I was like so queer. I was like, you know what I mean? But oh, not everybody looks at girls and thinks these things.

A&R: Laughter.

FLORENCE: Um, so that was like, I just, it was, I was closeted and then was uncomfortable being closeted. Uh, and cause I feel like I didn't know what I would say that would let people know this thing. And of course, if you're a woman, most people get treated more harshly for. Being closeted in the military are always the women.

And then if you're a black on top of it, it's probably even worse, but actually they don't really want white women to have short hair in the army. Like it's part of their regulations for like your physical appearance. And so if, depending on where your station, they can really give you a hard time if your hair is too short in the army.

ROUKIA: even in the army?

FLORENCE: Yeah. Yeah. So they probably [00:24:00] ease up on it now, but before like you really, if you were a white woman that was really hard for you to have a short, really, really short haircut and not be like, I have a husband. So like, then it really signaled you out.

ANNIE: No, for sure. Yeah. Wow.

ROUKIA: Do you think like you were not, were closeted out of choice or because you,

ANNIE: You literally had to be.

FLORENCE: Well, I had to be, yeah. Like

ROUKIA: there was no other way?

ANNIE: Wow. Um, You didn't have anybody in your unit that knew who you are, who you really were or what your life was like outside of the army. So wow. Did that - sorry go ahead

yeah, but then,

FLORENCE: uh, but then it was repealed. So then I felt more comfortable. But then I also, where I was stationed, like there just, I was a dentist when I was in the army, so I was a captain, so I was an officer and there you're not allowed to

fraternize, so [00:25:00] you're not supposed to hang out with people who aren't officers basically.

And where I was, the only people of color in my unit were not officers. So it was also kind of like, oh, well not only even when I was able to be out, I do that. But then I wasn't really supposed to hang out with people who look like me. They weren't my rank. So these are the people that you're around all the time.

I mean, you're with patients too, but. These are, it's easier to, you know, make friends with people that you're working with. So,

ANNIE: so, I mean, I guess I don't want to assume, but it's kind of safe to say they'd cause problems for you being queer in the army because of don't ask, don't tell even after it sounds like there was some sort of like an underlying issue.

FLORENCE: Well, I'm intersectional just in my existence. So if my queerness doesn't bother you, then race is going to bother you. So yeah.[00:26:00]

ANNIE: Is that, how did that shape your experience as a person now? Or do you think it shaped your experience as a person now?

FLORENCE: Yeah. You know, part of me, sometimes I feel like some people are real soft and they let certain things get to them or they let certain things keep them from achieving what they need to achieve. And as Beyonce would say the best revenge is your paper. Like, if you can't eat, then you just ruined yourself. Right. And I always feel like if I can crack a joke and I have a nice smile, so really mass I've been like, oh, I can't like smile my way out of something. But at work, I actually have a picture of my face that I'm smiling.

hahaha I saw it it's

ANNIE: online.

FLORENCE: so it makes you, I think it can make you tougher if you are able to succeed ways that are valuable [00:27:00] to you. Like whatever success is for you. And if you feel like you've achieved those things, then sometimes you look at other people and you're like, I don't, you can't whine about this. If you're going to cry, go in the bathroom.

Nobody wants to hear that. Yeah. So it makes me, um, slightly desensitized, but, but I see that somebody is having a struggle and I would give them tips, but I don't like cry babys. Like, I don't have time for that. No,

ANNIE: no, that's fine. You seem like a very busy person. I don't think you would, honestly, you have some, like you have a lot going on.

FLORENCE: Right.

ANNIE: Isn't that? Um, so your favorite had mentioned something about DC. So when, and why does DC fit into your life?

FLORENCE: Howard is in DC. So that was great. And that's where I learned a little, like, so that's when you learn that like main meters have gotten better. And I don't know if it's because more of new Yorkers and Massachusetts people are here, but Mainers still, you still see them. Like they don't put clothes on. Like they, [00:28:00] they, they just don't wear clothes.

ANNIE: Like during the winter, like in general?

FLORENCE: In general. Yeah. Like they just like, I, I have even somebody I work with now, she like comes to work in her slippers and then we changed it and I'm just like, girl, like. How are you going to meet somebody just in your slippers?

A&R: -Laughter.-

FLORENCE: And you're not, I don't know, anyways, the grocery store on the way home or etsomething, you know, it's like, I don't get it. Um, so in DC I definitely felt like fashion was everything. And I remember I had this one patient she was at, so we get a lot of the undergrads as our patients too, but we also get the community. They have a really nice program for people who are HIV positive or have aids where they get like really good healthcare and free stuff. So, um, we, you get a lot of those patients as well. And then they have a night clinic where it's mostly like Hispanic people and I don't really speak in Spanish. Dolor is Pain. [00:29:00] And, um, so in DC I learned like how to put some better clothes together. Like I didn't really learn that when I was an undergrad. Like, I don't know if I, I just didn't process in DC. I definitely understood that. And I had just gotten rid of my, um, my locks, but everybody, a

lot of white people in DC have blocks, especially like the, the, the, butchier version or stud or whatever, masculine presenting version of queercwmen.

A lot of them had locks. So I was kind of happy. I didn't have logs so that I didn't just blend in. Like, I don't want to like, look like everybody else all the time. Um, so that was interesting. And I wanted a lot more about being like a person of color and being queer, because that was probably always my thing.

I just felt like I didn't really fit in with white queer people. And that, that sounds weird. Like, I don't want to get white queer [00:30:00] friends or whatever, but I felt like that was like an opportunity to, cause I went to like a, all, they have a chocolate city pride, um,

-Laughter-

that was, uh, quite, quite an experience.

That was great. So that definitely helped me understand and navigate some of those social and unspoken boundaries because it was really easy for me to like aughterpick up a white girl, but I had to like learn how to like pick up black girls. So that was, that's what I got out of DC.

ANNIE: Can you, can you tell me the difference between the two, like as a, like, as a queer person? I do understand. I completely understand what you're saying, but like what, what, what, what was it the difference that you see. Between being around white people, white queer women versus being around queer black women.

FLORENCE: Well, like the hippie version [00:31:00] is different, so they are definitely more into, um, Egyptian or Ethiopian or even I don't, I didn't really, I'm not a spiritual person like that.

Like I, I believe that there's energy out there, but I don't like, know the names of all the energies. So, but yeah, I learned about like San COFA, like that phrase, um, that I learned from the queer community and I still find it harder. Like, I feel like it's easier to identify like a white queer person, but sometimes people of color who are queer they're more what, so I felt like the white community they are really against being closeted, but in the people of colored community, we don't consider it being closeted. It's more of like there's a time and a place to talk about it. And it's, so it's more of, if this person never

mentions their boyfriend and [00:32:00] they're female, and so clearly they might be queer.

Um, it's and it's, I dunno, it just seems more subtle and it's more nuanced versus, and I think that just because there's just more layers, right? Like, um, you're navigating more social boundaries. So, but yeah, I feel like in the black queer community, it's not like I can, I don't have good gaydar, so, but I, I always feel like if I like you, then you're probably interested too.

And that's my approach.

ANNIE: All right. And the social boundaries that totally makes that really does make sense. Um, It's kind of safe to say you were kind of involved in the queer community in DC, or you were involved in the community?

FLORENCE: Yeah, I mean, in involved in the way, I guess I did, I volunteered at like Whitman Walker.

So that was the first time they would like actually go to bars and like set up a little ?Table and like ask for donations or do a little raffle. So that was, [00:33:00] I wanted to go out and be in queer spaces, but I didn't necessarily want to get drunk every time I was in a queer space. So that was a way for me to do that and kind of meet people

ANNIE: At Whitman Walker.?

FLORENCE: Yeah

ANNIE: that's really cool. So I like, that was really my second question. You were involved in the bar scenes in DC. Can you tell us more about the environment in general? Because I know it's going to be different than here, what it is in Maine. So,

FLORENCE: you know, Maine has a really nice scene. Um, so there used to be. So when I was in high school, there was Zoots. And so Zoots had an after out and it's on, it was on forest have kind of where what's that restaurant that's there now? Um, I don't know, kind of across the street from where the black hair places. Um, I don't know the names of anything apparently means it's like, I just, I can get you there, but I don't know the names of stuff.[00:34:00]

Um, so Zoots, and so that was basically, um, it was a mixed crowd, but it was like after hours, so you could stay, so once they stopped serving alcohol, then they would let in the 18 and up people. So that was the first like club experience that I had. And it was great. So I think it was two levels. Um, and it was packed when I was in there.

Yeah. Um, there is queerness abound and people doing some club, kid stuff, you know, definitely, probably wasn't like a New York level, but it was, you know, for me, that was pretty cool. Um, and then what else? There was sisters. I really like lesbian spots. So sisters now is like a Asian bistro. Um, and that was great.

Um, and so I got, I had some had my sisters, my sister's 10 years older than me site. I would use her driver's license to get into places. So, you know, being in Maine, you know, you black with black, like it just blends. Right.

ANNIE: nobody is going to ask you.

FLORENCE: If somebod [00:35:00] asked me the birthday, I knew it was her birthday, so it wasn't like stunned or anything. And then my mom always like, would call us by each other's name by accident.

Right.

So I was used to being called my sister's name. So it was great. It was perfect. You need a fake ID, get a siblings anyways. And so they were sisters. Um, and that was great. A guy couldn't go in his sister's unless he was with like another woman. So it was really like old school lesbian and it had pretty good like patio and it was two levels, but it was more like just a couple of steps. So like, it wasn't like a whole floor, but kind of like, there was like a den kind of basically. So that was fun. And then there was, um, you might know it, it sticks if you remember, but it was the underground, um, back when I went there. Um, and that was great. Cause you had like the two dance floors, the two bars and it would actually be packed. Um, and then, so I always [00:36:00] loved coming back here. Like Maine in the summer was really, really nice, you know, the popular, even in Portland, the population like doubles. So yeah, like you should not be in a relationship.

When you were in your twenties, I say,

ANNIE: I'm going to write that down and I'm going to quote you.

FLORENCE: Yeah,

ANNIE: "no relationship on your 20's" hahahaha a,

FLORENCE: nothing serious. Like maybe you want somebody for the winter, but you got to get your winter person in the summer. You can't be hunting for your winter person in the winter.

Cause you're going to get trapped. You haven't met your summer, the winter person in the summer, then just, you know, you're done,

ROUKIA: next year.

FLORENCE: Yeah next year

but you probably will refuse or out on the prowl. So there was STIG, there's an underground. And then there was, of course there was Blackstone's and Blackstone was like the place that you would go just to get your first drink, because they were stiff as hell.

And I would basically not spend more than 20 bucks when I went out. Like I would only wow, because in my pocket and my ID and that would be [00:37:00] it and I would have great evening. Um, but yeah, you went to Blackstone's first before you went to the other locations because they had this. Just strong, strongest, and they still have the strongest strengths.

ANNIE: I'll keep that in mind.

FLORENCE: And then where the flask is, that was, it was somewhere else. And before it was somewhere else, it was somewhere. So somebody bought it and made it somewhere else. And when it was somewhere was a piano bar. And then when it went somewhere else, they got rid of the piano. So that would be like the karaoke spot.

And that was kind of like cool and fun and everything. Like for some reason, people, I guess, quick people like karaoke. So the mix of the spots in Portland and in DC, there was, um, I can't think of the name of it, but it's got like the oldest lesbian bar, like still running on the east coast and that was in the Southwest Southeast by the Navy yard.[00:38:00]

So, um, so really nice neighborhood. And, uh, depending on where you park, you kind of like see the Capitol and the distance and. It's clean. And so there was that at night, I like lesbian spots, like, so it has a dance floor then just as like places where you can like stand and chat. Um, but there's like, there's definitely like bigger clubs there.

But I think I was at that point where I was starting to, cause I was like mid twenties and sometimes it's just nice to like, have a drink and like try to meet somebody. And I feel like in places where there's just like, all you're there to do is like dance and maybe do some ecstasy and some Coke in the bathrooms.

Then you're probably not going to like have a conversation with anybody, but it's fun if you just want to like, actually just like dance your little ass off, like, you know, that's great. But yeah. So in like DuPont circle is like the queer neighborhood in BC, but that's like very, I feel like there were black lesbian spots or black queer [00:39:00] spots, but they, I didn't really, like, I only went to them during pride. And so I don't remember everything and I know, yeah. I just don't like when I party, I don't like, remember all the details, like

ANNIE: if you had a good night.

FLORENCE: Yes, exactly. Um, a little blurry

so we had

ANNIE: already talked a little bit about your coming out and discussing your sexuality and thinking of yourself as anything other than hetero, not that that's the norm or anything, but who was the first person that you shared that information with? I feel like it's always really important.

FLORENCE: Um, I probably told my sister first, so I mean, not the people that I was actually like hooking up with because clearly that those parties. Yeah. I think I told my sister and while she was in Denver, uh, while I was in [00:40:00] high school. And so I went to see her and she. You know, I don't know if it's, it's definitely not politically correct. I know that. So she was definitely a fag hag for a period of her life. Um, she was married all this time.

Like she actually, she, so we're 10 years apart. She's 10 years older than me. And so she's been with her husband since I was in the single digit. So I think they met when she was 18 or 19. So I've known her husband more, more, more

than half of my life. And, uh, so they were in Denver and she had this like gay couple that she hung out with.

I can't remember how they met, but so they were fun. So they told us like what kid club we can go with use. They actually had like a, an 18 and up like club. And that was really fun. And what I liked about Denver was that made some times when you're in like black spots, the music is like so black, [00:41:00] but when you're a black person who. Mostly in like white spaces, like you like white music or what's considered white music, you know? So like, yes, I knew Beastie boys. Well, so like, you know, there were things where like I was comfortable, um, but I probably wasn't as comfortable and like hardcore hip hop, because like in the nineties we definitely had some like really that's where hardcore music was around of course, P Diddy as well. So I like repeated music

ANNIE: of course, of course.

FLORENCE: Um, but yeah, so yeah, Denver was really fun and being in like, uh, they had, uh, they have a really good, they had the, a club that was in a church, like an old school church, so the windows are great. Um, but yeah, so she was the first person I told. And then, so she took me to gay spaces when I went to visit and that was great.

ANNIE: that is really great. So she was really accepting and welcoming and , but understanding. [00:42:00] That's awesome. Did you, so after that, after you had made that initial move and you had said that I'm BI or I'm this or that, um, did you find yourself coming out more and more to other people in spaces? Or did you stay confined or did you keep continue keeping that to yourself?

Like did other people around, you know, that this is information you now we're sharing?

FLORENCE: Yeah, I think I foreshadowed when I said, when I was like telling my friends I was bisexual.

Um, I'm just kind of queer. Like, I, I think I'm a person who can go into like the woman's section and buy women's clothes and then go out with my friends and somebody, I ended up a straight friend who was. Why do you always wear men's clothes? I'm like, bitch, this is all women's women's polo. And these are women's pants.

Like I just queer things up. Like that is just how my body is [00:43:00] figured. I get a certain style. Yeah. But I often wear men's pants too, but, um, but like I do mix it up, but there have been times where I had a friend who was like, why are you wearing this? And I'm like, it's actually all women's clothes. I'm actually thoroughly offended.

Like I shopped on the one side of the store, um, for this purpose, like some laces, like, um, the polos, uh, Ralph Lauren polos are they're very good.

ANNIE: Very good. Very, very good. Expensive.

FLORENCE: Yes. Well there's outlets and never opay full price. But yeah. So I think I'm one of those people who's just kind of always been queer.

Um, but sometimes people don't think I'm queer and depending on the situation, depending on like, you gotta be able to read people. Like, if you don't know what situation you're in within five minutes, then you're really fucking dumb and, you know, whatever happens to you should happen- you know? no no but Um, but [00:44:00] so like sometimes at work I say spouse, um, I feel like I try to be gender neutral about things.

Like I don't use her pronouns, um, just because maybe I'm old school and I'm aware that maybe I haven't completely read the situation because I've got my like dentist hat on. So I'm just kind of like focused on making you comfortable. And that's part of my service. Like I want you to be comfortable. Um, so I don't always like come out, but like, I feel like people look at me and kind of have an idea.

ANNIE: Just like like that?.

FLORENCE: So,

ANNIE: um, so because it's safe to say that you received somewhat of like welcoming responses from those around you. Um, have you seen those reactions change over time? Like have you seen people's reaction to you dress this way or act a certain way or be a certain way? [00:45:00] Has that changed over time?

FLORENCE: Yeah. So when I had more hair, I was definitely people like women who have hair. That is so, so true. And so when I got rid of my locks and I kept it like short and I even had it like shorter than this. Um, so I, I felt

like I got way more HES and sirs when I had short hair , having short hair. Um, and way more clearly you are probably queer, um, So I would say that's it.

And I felt like it was easier to like hit on girls when I had more hair. Like, I felt like that. I said, I get, I guess I see them less like rough around the edges or something. I don't know. So

ANNIE: do you think, that's you believing in that stereotype or like that image that people had been trying to set for women and you as well?

FLORENCE: It could have [00:46:00] been, but I felt like I was the same person. Um, except I was colder in the winter when I had like, I still insulated guys crazy. Like he was scarred, just put a little hat on. Um, so, but no, I, I felt like, I felt like I still looked attractive, but, uh, I felt like it was, it was more of a, um, people were just a little more, they were harder to open up is what I would say.

ROUKIA: When you were receiving like the hes or the sirs from total strangers, do you think it was out of disrespect or just. Ignorance or, or was it like, just confusion? What, like,

FLORENCE: right. Uh, depending on the situation, it's definitely been all of it now, whether I actually felt disrespected is one thing. Um, cause that's all you can control how you feel about something.

And so I feel like if you're calling me a sir, that's actually you trying to be respectful. Like it's like calling somebody ma'am, they're like, oh, you're your art, that's [00:47:00] already a respectful phrase. So I don't think when anybody says that they're really being disrespectful unless you're like in drag and you're a man and they're like, sir, usually, that's like your friend and they're like just throwing you shade.

Um, but so yeah, I've had situations and I remember I was, I had a fellow student, he was like a year ahead and dentist. And he kept like using he or something while he was like talking to me and there was somebody else that was also, it was like, we were like in a circle of people and like hallway chatting.

And so I corrected him and I was like, no, I'm a she. You can use that. And then he continued to, like that I felt was disrespectful, like with somebody like stops. But usually if somebody just says it once, but I felt like he just had to like keep

throwing in this pronoun. Like, so then I had to correct them, but I usually don't correct people.

Like, I feel like it's like star Trek, you know, everybody's a sir in star Trek. Right. So I'm like, I don't care. Like as long as you're like actually being nice, I don't [00:48:00] really care. Um, there was one time with my mom. We were in DC or Virginia and I felt like maybe that was a little disrespectful. Like we were at a liquor store, but, um, but I didn't, I don't know, like I didn't let it get me down and just because somebody is being disrespectful, doesn't it.

It has to matter to you. Um, but overall I felt like it's, if I'm waiting for like a taxi at the airport and somebody says that I don't think they're being rude. They're just like people process really fast. So if you have these three markers, well, then you're a dude. If you have these new markers and you're a lady, like, that's it.

Like I do that too. \

ANNIE: So it's just easy. It's just, what's easy assumption. I feel like that's what makes people feel safe, like right away looking at you and being able to assume that you're this or you're, that just makes them feel safer. Um, so I know we've already talked a little bit about that one queer person or that one [00:49:00] out of person that you had known in high school. Was that your first love?

FLORENCE: Oh yeah jenna keith jennings yeah, that was definitely my first love.

ANNIE: Can you tell us about, so what can you tell us about your journey to be what, because I feel like it took a long time. Like it must have taken quite a bit to be in that first gay relationship. And especially during that time where it was not completely accepted. So how can you tell us about that journey for you? How was it to be in a relationship that young and to be in a gay relationship at that ?

FLORENCE: There's some people who are just born the way they are. And, um, I felt like we, like, I didn't hold like part of it too, was that once I realized like, oh, well, if I tell my mom that this [00:50:00] is my girlfriend or my dad, then they're probably going to be concerned that we're.

Hanging out in the basement for awhile. Like, so then you lose some of your privacy.

So you get interrupted all the time. Like, Hey, I shouldn't be alone and start down. Why is it dark here? And like, yeah. Yeah, exactly. So part of me was like, well, I don't want to like, stop my action from happening. Um, so that's part of the reason why I was more closet, I think with my folks. And I think they just didn't really have any queer people in their lives.

And I had heard them say a negative queer thing a time or two. Um, and, and I was really hoping my sister would have kids, but she never had kids. So, but, uh, but that, I think it was more just like keeping it from my folks then anybody else, anybody else? I just couldn't care. I could care less about. I just didn't meet anything.[00:51:00]

Yeah. Like I held hands and I didn't, it didn't really bother me .

ANNIE: Have you always been like that? Like since a child where like, oh, you don't care?

FLORENCE: Oh yeah. It was like going on 40 at four spoke my mind. Not always for the good thing, you know, like Chappelle when keeping it real, get you in trouble. So I wanted to tone that down. Um, yeah, basically sometimes it's like, I want to say something really Snyder. I should just smile.

ANNIE: Um, so we know you're in a relationship now. Um, you

FLORENCE: Mary

ANNIE: Mary. was there- Do you, of course, there's a difference between your relationship with Jenna and now

FLORENCE: oh yeah i was a child

ANNIE: what ways have you seen yourself grow since then to be in a relationship?

FLORENCE: Yeah, you know, the thing is you're always going to be growing. Um, and I find that.

[00:52:00] If you, even if you're just relationship with yourself, like every year, I try to make sure I'm doing something that interests me that is new and I'm going to keep it fresh. Um, so whatever that is, uh, you should make sure you

keep doing something that keeps you current and relationship wise. They're also growing too.

So, and if they're not growing, then you're probably going to have a problem, but I guess you could grow apart. But I think in our relationship, it's been important for me to, um, give her a room to figure out more of who she is. Um, I'm her second female person that she's ever been with. And before that she was straight, um, and she identifies as bisexual. Even though she will claim lesbian and I'm like, oh, you're doing bisexual ratios. But sometimes in certain situations she feels like, oh, I should say [00:53:00] lesbian, because she's met some angry lesbians before she's worried about what they think. And I'm like, are they paying your bills? No. Then don't give a fuck about like, so, um, so I think for me, it's been like allowing her to like know that she can grow.

And then for me it's been about how did really do couple of things and like be really domesticated. Um, right. Yeah. Like he realized like, oh, we're going to Lowe's. And like, I like going to Lowe's now, but like that, that is like good hangout time when you're, you know, you have a house together, like a Lowe's hang out is really cool. Um, so yeah, so for me, it's been about like now. It's about maturing and being okay in maturing, you know? Um, so yeah, but yeah, I [00:54:00] feel like he just, you got to keep it moving and you got to, but I know I'm a loyal person, so I feel like once I like liked somebody and I, I feel like I can trust them, then you're going to be at my circle until you've done something where I can't trust you anymore. So

ANNIE: nice. It's definitely a safe way to look at it. Very good. Um, so wow. We have gone through a lot of these questions, like without even like actually even talking about them as awesome. Um, so where does being a dentist fit in your overall life?

FLORENCE: So I love what I do. But I know going into it and knew that this was probably going to be something that was going to just help me live life.

So like, I didn't think of like, well, okay, [00:55:00] so dentistry I've paid back all my loans. Um, and the army helped with that too. So it was really awesome. Like, I don't have any negative feelings about the army, I should say. Like, it's, it was actually some of the people that I ran into, like not the institution itself, even though the institution, it can do what you want to do, depending on who's in charge of it.

It's kind of how I look at it. But, um, so I don't have any bad feelings in fact I got really comfortable with my extractions with the military. So we were deploying Afghanistan at that time. So all the general dentists had to rotate with the oral surgeons to get really comfortable with extractions, like wisdom teeth extractions. We call third mowers too, because we didn't want to refer them off post because we always say. Private dentists, just Rob us blind and they do. Um, so, so I felt really like, and that's something that is, I love extractions is one of my favorite things to do. So as a dent-, what's the question. How [00:56:00] does dentistry fit in my life?

ANNIE: Yeah. So yeah,

FLORENCE: so it, it pays for things and it's fun. Like, I feel like when I am like, actually not talking to people, but just doing my work, it's like, it's like meditation is the most relaxing thing that I do. So I I'm very,

ANNIE: it's your meditation.?

FLORENCE: Yeah. Yeah. It's really small. Over my little scoop loops, a little microscope class. And I'm just like working on a very, they used to be like my pickup line for a little bit. " Im good in small spaces"

A&R: Laughter

FLORENCE: I haven't used it in a long time. so it's helped me do that. And then it also helped me like, think about like, oh, I should like try to like network, but like dentists, dental, people are, both of them are really boring or they're, or they're just so not [00:57:00] me. Like, I feel like a lot of dentists are very the uptight, but there are some like really cool, not uptight dentists, but I feel like a lot of them, I'm just like, I don't want to hang out with you. And that didn't you realize when you were in dental school, you realize these people marry each other. Like, um, there were at least there was at least one wedding. When I was kid or young adults in dental school, they got married while we were in dental. so i know that they're still together.

And I figured I would hear about it through social media. Um, but then I heard, like, that's just the thing, like, but you do spend a lot of time today. Yeah.

ROUKIA: Dentists marry other dentists.?

FLORENCE: Very, very common. And I, I can't imagine, like I never, I hardly ever talk about work at home. Um, so I liked that. I like really having things compartmentalized, but I feel like my dental world it's this, but it's me.

It's me being my healer mode. It's me being my like, oh, I care about you mode. [00:58:00] Um, but yeah, I'm a person who really likes to be comfortable and secure. And I feel like dentistry is a great profession for that. Um, and it also provides like a bar atmosphere in a way that I chat with you for a few minutes and then they don't see you again for like six months or something, you know?

Like, I love that. Like having small talk. Um, so that's been fun and, and sometimes it allows me to travel. Like, um, if I feel like getting some extra money, I'll sign up and go to like Bangor and work a weekend, or during pandemic last year, I went to Massachusetts and worked a weekend there. So, um, you know, it's been fun. Like you can, you can travel with it and, um, you can be yourself. And that's another thing about like, when you're queer, it's easier to be either like an [00:59:00] artsy person or be a science. They don't expect like a smart girl to like dress sexy. So you like being a nun? You're like, oh yeah. Like of course I don't like Dick, like, you know, I'm a nun.

ANNIE: I study science why would I? -laughter- oh, it's literally iconic and so funny .

Um, so I know we had already talked about the involvement in the queer community and the POC community and here and there. But, um, I know there's like, uh, I want to ask about the marriage equality campaign and yeah, I know you wrote a little bit about that in your paper. You wanted to discuss it. What can you tell us about?

FLORENCE: So that started, I actually, the only time I protested, so is dating the person who we ended up, um, living in Kansas together. I was in the army for a little bit, and we met at Howard. She was an undergrad and I [01:00:00] was at the dental school. So, and she was more of an activist.

Like she was a pianist, um, that was her major. And, uh, Just more artsy. And, um, and so when she was kind of like interested in like being a socialist or communist, I don't remember one of those, but I tell you those communists though, when they marched, like they had drums and it was rhythm, I was like, okay, I'll go to your meeting.

I'll check this out. I thought about it. So we marched on Washington and so she was like, oh, I might, I might do this crazy thing. And I was like, well, I'm going to stay in the cut. She was like, uh, she's half white. So she was very light-skinned and I was just like, you know, chances are, I'm just, I'm just not about, I don't want to get arrested.

And, uh, so I can bail you out, whatever you want to do. Um, she never needed bailing out that I'm aware of, [01:01:00] but yeah. So, and then I went to some meetings, um, because of the marriage equality and that's why I learned. A lot of queer people of color, didn't give a shit about marriage equality. Like they had other things to worry about.

And so marriage equality to me was more about white people having it, feeling it, feeling the complication of being othered and being bothered that they were othered. And so they're like, oh, we don't want to be othered anymore. And so that's the only thing they actually cared about. Like it wasn't, and sometimes that's how I feel about trans people, which I've done a lot of work on. Like, I am super cool with people just be non-binary or whatever, whatever label. And, but sometimes I would think back in the day that if you're, especially if you were white, it actually, I feel like if you are willing to give up, uh, your. [01:02:00] Your privilege and be a chick I'm like, okay. All right. But when it's the other way, like I, part of me feels like what's wrong with being Butch or a masculine female. Why can't femininity have the spectrum, like, what's wrong with that part of me. And then back then, I kind of felt like, especially if you were a white lesbian and then you became a male, um, that you really just were trying to get that power trip, and then you were just trying to climb the privileged ladder.

And part of me still kind of feels that way. Um, and I'm still learning how to process it. So it's a more positive thought about, um, but part of me does feel that way. And so, yeah. So I feel like you were climbing the privilege ladder. Um, and I also feel like I don't, you know, like I wouldn't want to be a dude if I didn't have like a functioning penis and balls.

Because I feel [01:03:00] like that would be important at some point. And so I don't know if they've gotten all that together, but I know that, you know, most of the doctors are male and so getting, making a vagina is more exciting to them than it is to make a penis and then get rid of the vag to get to the vagina, to make yeah.

ANNIE: You don't know what they'll do- crazy.

FLORENCE: So, -yeah. Yeah. And so that's when I learned that black people cared more about cared less about marriage equality because they had other things to think about. And for me, you know, I dunno like I, I, I care about it. I like the fact that, you know, if one of us was sick, we wouldn't be. Uh, kicked out of the hospital because we didn't have any validation why the other person is here, especially I'm in a interracial relationship. [01:04:00] So I can't be like, oh, I mean, she's my sister

ANNIE: -laughter- yeah that wont work where does RuPaul Charles fit into your life?

FLORENCE: Oh yeah, RuPaul. So I remember but, uh, so I've followed his career, not like a hard fan, like really not like a hard fan, but like a regular light fan. So I remember seeing him in a music video. I remember the supermodel and being like. That's fucking fantastic.

Um, and then I remember when he had his talk show, uh, on VH1 and I remember staying up late to watch him on VC- i actually fell asleep and didn't catch it. But, um, I was trying as a kid and, but yeah, like that was probably like the first, like really like queer person that I came across [01:05:00] on screen and who kind of looked like me a little bit.

So that was pretty cool. So I always thought woopy would be with kind of Gay , but I think woopy really like dick. So

I thought

ANNIE: so too, but yes, she is very much straight, I believe. Um, so we are coming to about the end. Um, I just want to ask these last two questions, uh, has this interview led on any new insight on your life and you know, thoughts that you hadn't thought that?

FLORENCE: You know, I'm really an introvert. So I will be able to answer that question better tomorrow, but processing wise. No, I don't think so. Um, and I, I feel bad saying that.

ANNIE: No, no,

FLORENCE: you guys want some insight um, no, I didn't remember how I answered the previous questions. So it was funny to be like, hearing about [01:06:00] RuPaul again, like, I guess I did tell you I'm a fan, but no.

Um, no, I think it was nice to just like, think about my life. Kind of like having a, like the, maybe life flash before your eyes before you die. So that was fun. It's fun to think about myself. And as my wife would say that I'm pretty narcissistic in some ways. Um, so yeah, I love like thinking about me. So that was great.

ROUKIA: dont we all?

FLORENCE: Just

ANNIE: a little bit - laughter-

FLORENCE: also gave Rupaul shout out. So

you did, you did really good with that. Is there anything that you would like to discuss that we didn't ask you today that you feel might be important to us to tell your story?

Oh, that's good. Um, so I was going to [01:07:00] circle back to the last question for a second, and it was nice to when you had said that, have I always been that way? I guess I didn't really think of myself as always being that way, but maybe just kind of like the drummer to my own or walking to my own drum beat. Um, but anything that.

Um, um, I guess I, I didn't know if, if you guys were curious about in a really inter racial, um,

ANNIE: Absoutely

FLORENCE: queerness and I guess, I guess I thought there might've been more questions about like the like non-binary movement or, cause I feel like when I was a kid and the part of the reason why I started to excuse me, started to embrace they as an adult and the last years was because I was saying to my [01:08:00] spouse, I was like, you know, I, when I was young, like really young, like, like five, like a first grade, like I had this big crush on my first grade teacher and I always would think about our intimate stuff.

I was a guy on a motorcycle and then she was a girl like, but I never stayed. I was never. And the adult version of myself or a tall version of me, I was always a dude when I fantasized about it. And I was like, I, I just thought that maybe other queer young people did that. But, and then I thought that maybe that was, maybe that was a thing that said that I kind of identified with having a non-binary by or so.

Um, but I'm still like, I guess I could go to therapy about it and talk about it, but I don't know what benefit that like, um, I'm with somebody I love and like, I, I [01:09:00] dunno, I don't feel like my life's in shambles, so I'm like, oh, I don't know what I need therapy for when I'm, but I've had plenty of therapy. Don't get me wrong. I feel like therapy and I don't need to explore it because what does it matter if I consider myself a they? Um, I know it matters to some people, but for me, What does it matter? I don't care what you think about me. Like I really don't and when I do, then there's something wrong with me unless I like love you.

And I can tell you love me, but if you don't love me, then I really don't see why she care what you think about me. So, um, but yeah, so I thought you might ask more along those lines, but

ANNIE: I'm actually really interested in that because as a person who's trying to understand what was my role. And I was like, I love to hear about how people like your journey to come to process that.

Because I think that's where a lot, like the big [01:10:00] issue lies for a lot of people is like the beginning, like this, the first initial thought like that I might be something outside of what I look like. What, what was your journey? Like? What was that for you? Like trying to come to the conclusion that you are not just a she/her.

Was that tough for you? Was that mentally straining for, you know, was it, do you think that the reason why you felt in a way comfortable with it because of the acceptance that you have around you, the community that you have built around you, or is it really because you just don't give a shit about what people think about?

FLORENCE: Um, well I think, I think I don't like taking medication and I don't like surgery unless it's like to save my life. And some people will say that saves their lives. So, um, no, I honestly, because that vocabulary wasn't around

as a kid and I was still able to, I don't [01:11:00] know, have sex and meet people that I didn't really think twice about it.

Um, but I can think about plenty of instances. Where I was asked if I was having top surgery. And I was like, why would anybody ask me that? Like, I was confused. I'm like, I don't know why anybody would ask me that. But if you took a picture of me, when I asked that, like, I like to wear this, there's this one jacket that I got in DC.

I think it was a Kanye west, but anyway, but it like flattened my boobs a lot. And so I, and I had really, I didn't have long hair at the time. And I, I used to call them in little pubic mounds.

ANNIE: -Laughter-

FLORENCE: I like . And, but like, people really like that. And it's hard. It's hard to be non-binary I realized now, if you're not like slender, like, you know, you can't have like prominent boobs or anything.

So this like actually like pressed them down in, uh, and I never, I've never done binding, but I would say [01:12:00] that would be my form of binding. And I mean, yeah, I got questions about a top surgery all the time and I was just like, I don't. And I know now I look back, I'm like, well, I must have been presenting that much more male than female and didn't realize it because it just felt like I was just being me.

Like, this is just who I am. Um, and so I got those questions and then I had like, and gay men would always hit on me until I like opened my mouth and they were like, oh fuck. And like, and like,

ANNIE: Oh my- Laughter

FLORENCE: so, um, that was funny. So I was definitely queer, but I was in a queer bar, you know, so of course. And, and, um, so I guess I just didn't, and I didn't have friends who processed it, like, so it didn't, I don't know.

And I was having fun. So it was, I have to have fun and I felt comfortable. So I didn't, [01:13:00] I didn't really seem like a journey. And now. Um, embracing the, they partly, because clearly people have seen that in me for when I never saw it. But so what

ANNIE: people saw in you before you did

ROUKIA: , it's very interesting that you mentioned that if you had to fit it into the word, like, for example, when he said they, they expect you to be thin and skinny, so that's very much interesting.

ANNIE: Yeah. It's like this box that's been created, but you don't see that box. Like, I don't think you very much conform to that box.

ROUKIA: I think you do see that

FLORENCE: yeah. So a little, I mean, I feel like, um, like, uh, I only work out because I want to make sure I can still like wear the clothes that I have when I don't have to buy new clothes.

Cause I remember when I was, when I got married at like gained like 30 pounds,

ANNIE: happy weight?

FLORENCE: Yeah. Um [01:14:00] more like, I don't want you to leave me. So I'm going to get you fat. That's what happens. Um, cause my partner, I love her, but she's a little more insecure than I am. And I have to acknowledge that because there are certain things where I'd be like, I wouldn't be upset if you did that. But if I do that, then of course she's upset. So I'm like, okay, I want you happy at school. You know, I don't want to be disrespectful. Right. These are your boundaries. So yeah, no, I think, I think you should be, at least I feel like, so like today before I came over, I like ran three and a half miles before I came over here.

Cause like if I don't exercise, I just don't feel good. One and then I don't think I look as good. Um, I know I'm layered up and I'm not a thin person and I'm definitely thick, but I don't want to be thicker. Like there's only so much of me I want hanging over my pants.

ROUKIA: Right.

FLORENCE: I've done lap. That's what they call it. Um, so [01:15:00] no, I feel, and so I've been, I've been working on how I see body image and not projecting that onto people either because it's, I don't know.

Like, I feel like that's like one of the last frontiers, like it's still okay to have fat jokes as a comedian, but you better be careful. You have a gay joke now that has all like been nipped in the bud, but you can still do fat jokes. And so, and I don't want to be a person to make other people feel bad, but I definitely feel like when people are like non-binary or gender fluid, it's easier to be gender fluid when you are a more

ROUKIA: cookie cutter.

FLORENCE: Yeah. Yeah. Cause you know, if you're bigger, you're going to have more boobs. You're going to have a pass and you're going to look more like a woman. You're not going to look non binary and you'll look more sloppy in your clothes. Not so, yeah, I mean, I don't judge people, but I do, I don't want [01:16:00] to be judged. And I also feel like being in a health profession, I should look like I might do something healthy occasionally selling a product.

Yeah.

selling a product I feel like

ANNIE: your image is really important. Like what you are presenting to people, whether, I mean, it doesn't seem, sound like you care what they think, but rather it's important to who you are as a person. And I think that's where I see it. Not completely conforming to this like box that's been set by society because like, you're able to very much understand that.

Like, if you don't look good, like you're not going to feel good, you know, you're just going to be off, but you're not doing it so that other people look at you and see a certain person there. You're doing it because you want to present that certain image because you want to feel that, certain way. Right. And I think that's the difference that I that's very much clear that.

FLORENCE: Yes. And I noticed like, people don't hit on you at all when you're like the older you [01:17:00] get, unless people hit on you. And then when you're like really out of shape, like, yeah. Like I haven't gotten a free drink and

ANNIE: people are very cheap nowadays. Like, can people very cheap. They're not going to buy the nobody drink. Okay. They'll ask, they'll come and us, but they're not buying nobody's drink.

FLORENCE: The staff like, oh yeah.you want to try this Oh yeah.

ANNIE: Just flash a smile. It'll work.

ROUKIA: what smile- Smile with COVID?

ANNIE: hahaha - Um, okay. So. Just to let you know that if there is more of anything that you would like to discuss, we are definitely able to set up like a followup interview with, um, I don't know if we'll be done by us, but Wendy is more than able to set up anything. I think that she would love to. So if you would [01:18:00] like, just let me know, I'll show her your email or I'm sure you already have her email.

Um, also reminding you that I will be sending you and I will send you a copy of this interview. And then once I transcribe it, once we transcribe it down and rewrite down everything, I'll also be sending you a copy of that, just to make sure that everything is okay by you. Okay. Um, and then with that being said, thank you so much for sharing your story with us.

ROUKIA: thank you so much

FLORENCE: its been a privilege and honor. Thank you guys.

ANNIE: It's been amazing. All right, let's stop this real quickly.