Source

2024

EXCERPT FROM INTERVIEW:

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I'm close with coworkers, but they're more so on the side of, like, what family is. I also work with a lot of older women, so it's like, 'Oh, look at you, honey'. They mean well, but still it's making commentary on your physical meat-suit. It's like physical meat-suit compliments instead of person-compliment. So, I think friends that I feel most comfortable with are always commenting on my person and not the meat-suit. That makes me feel more beautiful. More comfy.

Age 29
Assigned Sex Female
Gender Identity Female
Pronouns She/Her
Race White

Okay, so let's talk a little bit more about your gender identity. Can you describe what that means to you?

Gender expression - I feel like, because it's special to everybody, I don't think that there's much of a hardcore definition of it, especially for myself. I've been trying to explore more of how to push boundaries within myself. I feel like I was raised to not follow gender norms. My mom has always been, like, hardcore feminist, so I was never raised where like, the woman has to be cooking and the man does all of the other things. So, I've always been taught to kind of fight that. Obviously, everything is a little bit more pushed nowadays than it was when I was growing up, but I feel like for myself, even though I identify as a woman and go by she/her, I could feel okay with going by they or not fully identifying as what society deems as girlhood or womanhood. I feel like a huge part of being a woman in other people's eyes is, like, wanting children, wanting to have a family - all of that that's never fit me.

Personally, I've never identified strongly with, like, having boobs. I hate my boobs, they are the worst. I am comfortable in the body that I'm in most of the time, it's not like I have any gender dysmorphia or anything like that, but pushing the boundaries of what gender is in society for myself is something that I like to explore in my own way.

So you said your mom has always sort of encouraged you to question things and explore who you are in terms of gender. Do you feel like your dad is or other family members have also been encouraging of that?

I mean, my dad's quiet, so he doesn't say much on many matters. The rest of my family are also very feminist people, so I was super fortunate to be raised with family and extended family that all were of the same mind. So like, Christmases and everything were never really awkward. We all would gather around and be like, 'Everything's so fucked up right now, right?' and that would be what we were talking about. So yeah, there's support that's always been there. I feel like if I would have grown into somebody who was, like, trans or whatever, they would have always been supportive no matter what. That's the kind of people that I grew up around.

So what does femininity mean to you? Or masculinity? How do you relate to those terms or how do those concepts impact the way that you present yourself?

That is a hard question. Um, I don't know. I feel like I'm definitely trying to block the impact. I feel like I have obviously absorbed society's version of what masculine and feminine is, so I'm on a daily journey of trying to unlearn all of that and see it from other people's perspectives of how they see masculine or feminine energies to be. I feel like we all have a little bit of all of them, so I don't know. Also, I feel like whatever my own neurodivergency is, I haven't been able to, like, really pin down what that means. Specifics don't exist in my brain. I feel like there's a spectrum to everything. So everybody has always existed on that spectrum for me and yeah, that's just how I have existed in life.

Do you feel like you take those concepts, whatever those are for you, into account in terms of the way you present yourself?

Not really. It's always been just whatever I like to put on and what feels comfortable for me and my body. Like, the only thing that I've ever really catered to is my own body dysmorphia. Other than that, it's never been gender-specific where like, if I put something on, I'm like, 'Oh, wow, I look like a boy today'. Like, that's not a thought that went through my mind. Or I wanted to look pink and girly. That also was never the thought process. It was just clothing. and I put it on my body and whatever it was, it was just clothes.

Do you mind talking a little bit about the dysmorphia that you mentioned?

Sure. I never have put a name to it other than body dysmorphia. Everybody thinks of, like, weight in that sense, but it was very much not feeling proportionate. And of course, I have my own internalized fatphobia of gaining weight and not looking right. Being heavier. But it was always just body proportions. Like, if something didn't look aesthetically correct to me, I would pick that. So like, my torso wasn't long enough, or my legs weren't shaped correctly, or didn't match the size of my head.

Like, what does my face really look like? I have no idea, because pictures look super different from what it looks like in the mirror. So, I don't know what my body looks like. I don't know what my face looks like. It's all just completely distorted in my personal view. So, I'm always surprised by what other people's perceptions are of me, because it's not what *I* see, at all. It's like, a little gremlin sometimes looking back at me in the mirror. Sometimes I feel cute as hell, but then there's other times where I'm like, 'What happened to my face?' So,

yeah, that's mostly what body dysmorphia is like for me. It's not wanting to be smaller or anything like that, it is just literally not knowing what I look like, ever, and trying to make up for that in the way that I dress and how other people perceive me aesthetically.

Do you feel like the proportional issues you have when looking at yourself are based off of a certain model of an ideal form?

Probably. Yeah, I mean, we all grew up in the age of diets and getting the 'perfect summer body' and it's still like this now, but I feel like it's way more tame than it was as we grew up. So, I definitely have a little bit of that. But, I also have my own body ideal that I would want to have, which is stronger and a little bit less, like, soft, really. I've always wanted muscle mass, which is hard for my body type to show. Like, I can work out and get the muscle, but my body doesn't show it. I don't have an athletic build, so that was always a body type that - I won't say I looked up to - but I wanted. I definitely was like, I wish my legs were more muscular and wish my arms were more muscular. A little bit more intimidating.

It sounds like that's more about being perceived as powerful than being perceived as attractive in a masculine way. Or, maybe powerful in a feminine sense?

Yeah, definitely. I always wanted to be, like, kind of secretly powerful. Like, I would look super chill and whatever, and then I would take off my shirt and be like – '*biceps!*' – you know, like, all of a sudden people pay attention - 'she can beat me up!' But yeah, my body type just doesn't show muscle. Even if it's there, it just doesn't really show much. Maybe it's because I eat a whole bunch of carbs. And I love those.

Have there been particular times in your life where you felt insecure about your body? Or your appearance in general?

I feel like nowadays, I am much more comfy in the body that I exist in. Before that, High School sucked. Middle School sucked. I definitely was wanting to be smaller in Middle School, but I also was in the same mind as now – thinking my proportions weren't correct. So, in Middle School, I wasn't eating. I would worry more about, like, what size my jeans were.. And then going into high school, the aesthetic was 'Tumblr girls', so the 'thigh gap' thing was huge. And that's another thing that my body just doesn't really do. So yeah, I feel like

when I was younger, it was really, really rough. And college was rough, too, but I feel like it all kind of chilled out once I hit my 20s. I just started just being, like, 'I exist and that's enough.'

Do you think there was anything in particular that helped you feel more at peace with your physical appearance?

I started following more people on social media that had different body types, instead of the skinny, kind of curvaceous, 'perfect' body types, or just the people who lift weights that I had been following that had tiny little waists and these perfectly sculpted bodies. I stopped following them and I started following more body-positive and body-neutral people. People that just want to exist happily, that don't really care what they look like on the outside and want to just feel beautiful just cuz they exist as a good person and their body is working. So yeah, I definitely flipped my social media a ton – following a more diverse group of human beings instead of the general 'perfect body'.

So, it sounds like social media definitely has had an impact on your self-perception. Do you feel like commercial media, movies, and more mainstream stuff has as well over the years?

I guess I probably didn't pay attention, but all of the movies that I grew up on were superhero movies, and the superhero women have the tiny little waist and perfectly sculpted bodies, but I was more focused on storylines. I was also a video game girl who would generally try to make my character look as tough as possible. And yeah, tiny little feminine character walking around with huge tits and tiny waist and large hips. Or I would be like, this mystical, magical creature that didn't even really get perceived as a human being, so it was, like, completely 'other.' So yeah, I mean, media influence is always there, but I don't know if I really paid as much attention to that as I did to online social media, Tumblr, Instagram, all of those fun, toxic areas.

Do you feel like the people in your life have had an impact on the way that you perceive yourself or the way that you present yourself? For example, your family and friends? Have they done things to be supportive or pressure you?

Growing up, my mother was dieting constantly. It was a huge part of her life, always trying to lose weight. So she was very much trying to keep me away from that. My grandmother was the same way. It was generational. Like everybody was always dieting and trying to lose weight and be smaller and have this certain body type. But I feel like they all always tried to keep me away from that. So when I did gain some weight during college, nobody – I mean, other than the older people in my family that out of habit comment on my body – said anything.

That was definitely something that I noticed after I had gained weight, my grandparents didn't comment on my weight. Instead of saying, 'Oh, you look good,' they just said nothing. And you notice that absence. Then after I had started losing weight, they all started it up again. It was all coming from a good place, but it ends up being harmful anyway, because you're like, internalizing that: 'oh, it's better for me to not have this weight on.' But I feel like overall, they weren't ever like, 'You need to lose weight, you need to be thin, you need to do this, you need to do that.'

It was more positive reinforcement of being small. I feel like growing up in the Tumblr era and hanging out with all the emo kids, we all wanted to be these tiny little emo nothings. I also noticed when I would go home from college, when I had gained weight, that they weren't as complimentary. They wouldn't say, 'Oh my gosh, you look so pretty', because I wasn't this tiny little stick that I was in high school. So yeah, it was always the *absence* of positive comments that influenced me more than people being like, 'You need to look like this'.

But, it sounds like your mom maybe tried to break that cycle in terms of what she had learned and what she had been through. Has she been supportive of you existing in whatever form?

Yes, definitely. When I had gained weight and I would be like, 'my clothes aren't fitting right blah, blah, whatever.' She was like, 'You just look like a normal human. You're just a human being you put on some weight and that was it. And you went to college, it was super stressful. You took birth control and birth control just destroys our bodies'. And it just made sense that my body put on some extra pounds and she reinforced that a lot. So yeah, they

always tried to not make it about having to be thin and have a perfect body or anything. Especially my mom.

Do you do anything to alter your natural appearance piercings, tattoos, hair dyeing, makeup, etc? And if so, could you talk a little bit about why you do that?

Yeah, I mean, I've got piercings and I have started my tattoo collection. And I've always worked out. Not that I have tons of energy to do it now, but like we talked about before, I always wanted to be more muscular and more intimidating. And with the tattoos, piercings, whatever, it was always an aesthetic choice. I just wanted them because I thought they looked nice or pretty. The art that I'm putting on me is something that I have always found aesthetically pleasing. So yeah, the ones that are going on the back of my thighs right now are aesthetically pleasing to me, but it was definitely a part of [my body] that never felt right when looking in the mirror. So it was like, I want to put something there that I love so I stop looking at it and thinking, like, that doesn't look right. It doesn't look proportionate. I never had the perfect little apple bottom, I have a little bit of a square one. When I have muscle, I want it to look muscular, but it never does. So I was like, I'm just gonna put art there, so I stop staring at it. And I'll stare at it in a good way, instead of a negative way. Other than those two, it's more of just an aesthetic choice.

You talked about tattoos making you feel beautiful in ways that you hadn't prior. What else makes you feel beautiful or makes you feel empowered?

I don't know. I have been disconnected from my body, my sexuality, all of that for, I don't know, probably a little over a year. So I mean, I'll put on makeup and things that will make me feel pretty sometimes. Or it'll make me feel weird, like, 'I'm wearing a mask right now'. I don't know, I'm trying to figure that out for myself, because what used to work, which was wearing clothing that made me feel good, I would go out and talk to people and I felt confident in the way that I was presenting myself to people. But if I was talking to someone easily or able to be in a group comfortably, that's when I felt the most comfortable, beautiful, confident.

When I was growing up, in college, and just outside of college, feeling sexy and like, being sexually free and active in my own ways , but with sexual trauma that doesn't exist right

now. So, that makes me more uncomfortable now than it did before. That doesn't make me feel beautiful anymore. It makes me uncomfy. I don't know. I'm trying to figure that all out.

Are there things that your family and friends and even coworkers or business acquaintances have said or done that have helped you with finding your beauty or your confidence?

I know that when I'm with my friends from college, I feel the most comfy. I mean, just letting me exist without putting their own perceptions on me, I guess is what makes me feel comfortable. Like, I know that I can just exist with [them] without having to put on a mask. And I know that I wouldn't get the comments like, 'Oh, you look so thin. You look good'. It would always be like, 'You're glowing'. I feel most comfortable with the more conscious friends that I have, because they're more so going to be commenting on my art, or my personality, or if I look happy.

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What is your racial identity?

Whiteness. And that is it. Culturally, I have Italian heritage.

Have there been times in your life when your race has influenced how others have treated you?

I mean, white privilege, but not negatively. No, other than just being a white woman and being able to get away with anything that I would want to get away with. I feel like that's it.

Do you feel like your race plays a big role in your identity? Or your family's identity?

No, not race-wise, but heritage wise? Yes. Italian is a huge part of our family and all the traditions that we have. But, like, skin color-wise, no.

My grandmother is full-blooded Italian. None of us are, but because she's full blooded Italian, we are all full-blooded Italian and we follow all of the Italian things, all of the traditions for holidays, and yeah, I was just brought up on all of that.

Have there been times where you felt pressured to change your appearance by close family or friends, aside from what we already talked about?

I don't like wearing bras. That makes some of my family uncomfortable. I'll get commentary about the fact that I do not shave. It was more so in my teenage years where they would ask me to shave or ask me to put on a bra to make them more comfortable, which was irritating. Or, like with my tattoos, I've set boundaries as to like, I don't want to hear that you don't like it, because it's my body, I get to do whatever the fuck I want to do with it. So, yes, they won't outright ask me anymore not to do anything, but they'll ask me why I'm doing it. And it'll be definitely a question [toned] like, 'Why the fuck would you do that?' not so much, 'Oh, why are you getting it?' Yeah, 'What the fuck are you doing? And why are you doing that?'

So you don't feel like they're particularly receptive to your answers to that?

Definitely not. I generally will give a very short answer at this point, where I would just be like, 'Because I like it', and we will move on from that topic of conversation, because it will turn into a whole conversation about why they don't like tattoos, or piercings, or whatever. So, we avoid those conversations sometimes. Like with my grandmother - I love her dearly - she will bring up how she doesn't have to shave anymore because she went through a mastectomy and breast cancer. She doesn't grow [hair] anymore. So she'll bring it up in a positive light, but she still has to talk about it, because it's something that she's not accustomed to seeing. And that's like, every time I see her, she brings it up. Same with not wearing bras or having tattoos. Mom likes the tattoos, but she did question the big ones on the backs of my thighs a little bit. But yeah, I feel like anything that was not socially acceptable in their time is when they'll question what I'm doing.

Have there been times where your coworkers or people that you know casually pressured you to change your appearance in one way or another?

I have only had one boss when I was working at a little paint and sip place. Which, it always confused me because we wore fucking aprons, you can't see my tits, but she had asked me to put on a bra. Which I was like, 'Okay. Sure, I guess'. No one else had ever made a comment. I mean, I wear them at work with the kids, because kids slap and make everything uncomfortable. But yeah, she was the only one that was just like, 'You need to put on a bra. This is not acceptable for here'. Which, again, we wore aprons. It was unnecessary. And I have tiny tits, so I don't need a bra. Why are you looking? But, sure. For your comfort and my paycheck, I will put a bra on for you. That was the only time that anybody really asked me, outside of family, to do something different.

With not shaving and not wearing a bra, is that more of a physical comfort thing?

Yeah, I just don't care to shave. I never have cared to shave. I cared to shave in middle school when I felt like I needed to because you're a middle school student and everybody wants to fit in in middle school, but after that, I just didn't care. And I have super light hair anyway, so who can see it? And if *you* really care that much, that's weird.

And yeah, the bra thing is a comfort thing completely, because I have small boobs. There's no reason for me to have to wear one of these. At this point, I'll wear them just because I'm getting older and things are starting to get a little saggy. Or, I'll wear a compressive sports bra or a bralette just to hold them in place. It's a comfort thing. It's never like I want my boobs to look good, it's just I would rather have no boobs. I'm just trying to be comfortable with them existing.

Is there anything else that you want people to think about while they're looking at the painting of you or just anything you want to add to what we've talked about?

I just need everybody to stop commenting on other people's bodies. Period, always, about anything. Let people be.