

**University of Illinois Student Life and Culture Archives
Queer BIPOC Placemaking Oral History Project**

Interviewee: Nyx Melancon

Interviewer: Alyssa Brown

April 23, 2025

Length: 00:48:51

Alyssa Brown: Hello. This is Alyssa Brown. It is April 23, 2025, and I'm here with—

Nyx Melancon: Nyx Melancon.

AB: —in the Gender and Sexuality Resource Center at the University of Illinois in Champaign, Illinois. This interview is for an oral history project on placemaking among queer people of color at the University. So first, Nyx, I'm wondering if you'd mind telling me how you identify as a member of the queer community and as a person of color.

NM: Um, okay, I am a Black nonbinary transmasculine lesbian.

AB: Okay, thank you. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

NM: I am majoring in English and creative writing at the University and minoring in African American Studies. I'm very passionate about studying Black lesbian identity and Black queer identity overall. And in my free time, I love to write poetry, write short stories, also articles and just talk about my overall experience as a Black lesbian.

AB: Okay, I would love to hear more about that, but first, I'm wondering if you mind telling me where you're from.

NM: Um, I'm from Forest Park, Illinois.

AB: Okay, is that—where is that?

NM: It's a west suburb of Chicago.

AB: Got it, okay. And what was your journey to the University of Illinois? What brought you here?

NM: Well, before I came here, I was studying two years at a community college called Triton College. And then I transferred here, and once I got in, I just decided that this is the school I'm going to because I got Illinois Commitment. So the tuition being free was a big reason of me coming here.

AB: Yeah, that's great. Nice. And what did you expect upon moving here?

NM: Um, I guess upon moving here, my experience being at community college, it wasn't as inclusive. There wasn't as many resources. And so I was expecting, you know, there to be more community for queer people, people to be more open minded and more accepting, and just I could overall flourish as my true authentic self versus commuting and being at home going to community college.

AB: And did you find that to be true?

NM: Partially, but not necessarily. What I found was that it's a bigger institution, but it's still the same problems, just in a larger space.

AB: And what are the problems?

NM: You know, there are people who are, you know, queerphobic, lesbophobic, transphobic, misogynistic, ableist and like those kinds of things, continue to persist, even while having, you know, cultural programs or spaces for students with those identities, there are still going to be people who exhibit, you know, oppressive mentalities.

AB: Mhm. Yeah, have you seen those, like, oppressive mentalities manifest on campus?

NM: Yeah, like in Black spaces. You know, some Black people there are queer, but some are not. Some could be heterosexual. Some could be, you know, dealing with internalized homophobia, queerphobia, and so they may end up saying things that aren't the greatest because they're still trying to figure themselves out. But, you know, being a minority, or being a marginalized person within a marginalized group there, I noticed that some Black people who are heterosexual, they're not trying to educate themselves or learn about the experience that Black queer students go through. So you end up being isolated. Even though we're Black, on the Black part, we're together, but then on the queer aspect, we're isolated. Because when people think about Black issues, they're only thinking about race. They're not thinking about how Black people could be disabled, they could be trans, they could be queer, they could be a lot of different things than just their racial identity.

AB: Yeah, that's a really good point, and something that I have seen too. What do you think should happen?

NM: I think, what I think should happen as far as that, is that Black people should realize that all issues affect all Black people. So whatever a Black person is going through should matter, because Black people can go through anything. You know, Black people are everywhere. Black people are queer. Black people exist in every community that there is. So we should care about every Black person, and

we should care about queer issues, because queer issues are Black issues, because Black people are affected in the queer community way drastically than other queer people because they're Black. So, I feel like recognizing that. And also not caring just because we're Black, but also caring just because of humanity.

And like, if we realize anti-blackness is at the root of everything, then like that means we have to be dismantling all of these systems of oppression, like, you know. And I guess it just starts in the mind, like in thinking—normalizing, like in Black spaces, you know, queerness should not be an afterthought. It should always be included. You know, I mean, people quote James Baldwin all the time, but they never think about the fact that he was a bisexual Black man.

AB: Totally. Yeah. Can we talk more about these spaces? Are you referring to specific spaces, or?

NM: Um, I guess when I talk about spaces, it could be a space created by an institution, or just spaces the students create. Like in general, I've found that Black spaces on campus, you know, where Black people are gathering—um, you know, with my friend groups, or the people that I've become friends with, they are supportive of me, but, outside of that, it is much more difficult. Because when you're in a space where, even though we're all Black, just like they say that not all skin folk are kin folk, just because we're Black doesn't mean we're going to get along.

And I've found that the common struggle is my queerness. Like you know, they're able to see that. And even when I just talk about being queer, when I talk about being a lesbian, you know, there's just a lot of ignorance and a lot of just, I guess, trivializing of those experiences. Because a lot of people tend to be like—or some people that I've encountered, I won't say everybody—has tend to be, you know, self-centered, focused on their own struggles or their own experiences.

AB: Sure, I'm sorry that happens. That's pretty loud, sorry. Um, trying to think of my next question. I wonder, you mentioned, okay, so you mentioned these Black spaces. And you also mentioned having your own friend groups.

NM: Well, not, well, when I say friend groups, I really, I guess, not necessarily a group, because I've never had a group of friends. But I have friends that I talk to, and I say groups because they're separate, you know.

AB: Sure, sure. Well, how do you, how did you make friends here? And like, who do you spend your time with? You don't have to name any names, obviously.

NM: Okay, well, I made friends here off of—partially social media was helpful. Instagram helped a lot. Before I came here, I was following different accounts, and like, you know, GSRC was like, the first thing I saw, I was like, 'We got to see what the gays doing.' So I followed the GSRC account, in there, I

saw, like, BlacQ, the Black Queer Collective, was an org, so I followed that org. And I followed people who was, who were following that account. You know, DMed them, because I was looking for a roommate next year, for next year, just saying, 'Hey, like, you know, I'm a new student here. I was wondering if we could be friends.' And one of the notable, like most, that I could think of, the most, was my friend Mari. We became friends from Instagram. We were like, 'Let's go to this BlacQ meeting together.' And from ever since then, we were friends.

AB: Nice. That's sweet, and cool that you were able to find people through Instagram. Do you—so it seems like you're in this space a lot.

NM: Yes.

AB: Do you work here?

NM: Yes, I do work here. I'm a Campus Engagement Intern.

AB: Okay, nice. And do you come to other events put on by the center?

NM: Yes, I do.

AB: Okay. Can you tell me about some of them?

NM: Um, yes. So one of the events I'm thinking of, we've had a Queer-o-ween. Monday, just now, we had a queer study abroad, where the study abroad department came and talked about, you know, traveling tips and safety for queer students who want to study abroad. Last week, we had another thing—Mondays, when we have our Lunch on Us on Mondays, we call it Quench. We also had a Quench not too long ago about asexuality. An amazing professor came and talked about being Black and being asexual. So yeah, I come to a lot of our events, and those are some of the ones that I've been to recently.

AB: Nice. Those sound like really good events, and none that I've ever experienced in my own, like the tips for studying abroad, sounds really helpful, honestly, and something that when I was an undergrad, way back, that wasn't offered. So that's cool. Hmm, yeah, okay, how—so thinking about you making your friends through Instagram, and also, you know, being in the space, and the experiences you've had with the larger Black community on campus. What does community mean to you? And you've already sort of answered this, but what have your community building experiences been like here?

NM: Um, community means a lot to me. I guess if I would define it, you know, it's a space where you can show up as your true, authentic self, be supportive, and, you know, grow together with other people.

And some of my community building experiences here have been, for example, as a Campus Engagement Intern here at the GSRC, like, I've taken part of community building, because I've been like, creating opportunities for community. We had an event. I've planned two events here so far, being a Campus Engagement Intern. One event—well, three. One event was the Revolutionary Voices Open Mic. We also had a Black queer love poetry workshop. We had the pleasure of having Black queer poet, writer, author, just amazing person overall, Mikey Cody Apollo, come to our campus and host the open mic and also host the workshop, because I saw Mikey Cody Apollo at MBLGTACC. [Brown sneezes.] It was a really great experience. And another example of community building I've taken part in is creating the Black Queer Afropunk Takeover, because I was able to get you know a lot of Black queer students in a space, or even just allies, and just create opportunities for people so Black queer students to be seen by people who support them and just exist.

Because my main goal, like I noticed that here on campus, even though we have a queer community, we have a Black community, there's not a lot of spaces for Black queer students to just organize, even outside of just clubs. So I really wanted to create those events, and the big part was these events, minus the workshop, were both at BNAACC [Bruce D. Nesbitt African American Cultural Center]. And BNAACC are both Black spaces, and I noticed some Black queer students expressed not feeling comfortable or feeling safe at BNAACC. So I wanted Black queer students to know that they belong by hosting events for Black queer students. So you know that, you know, we're Black, we're queer everywhere, and you can especially be Black and queer at BNAACC, even if it doesn't feel that way. Um, so yeah, that was my examples of community building here.

AB: Yeah, those are great. And I was actually going to ask you about BNAACC because I went to the Black Queer Afropunk Takeover, which was great. And—

NM: Thank you.

AB: Yeah! What was it like planning those events? And I guess working with BNAACC to plan the events, if you did that.

NM: So with the Revolutionary Voices Open Mic, we did work collaboratively with BNAACC on that event. Um, I'm thinking right now—Daniel. Daniel was really helpful. Daniel is one of the people who work constantly at BNAACC and doing amazing things. And he actually has a background in spoken word poetry and performed some poems there himself. But yeah, so he kind of just helped us with figuring out the schedule for the open mic. You know what time people should come, music. Um, he helped me with setting up the speaker, making sure that music was being played and, um, because it was my first time having an event there, and just navigating BNAACC as a venue space. BNAACC helped a lot just with assembling the open mic. So like, having tables be arranged in a way where, like, it's a nice, intimate environment. We were also able to put our refreshments, you know, at the BNAACC kitchen. So, this event was a collaborative, like project with BNAACC. You know, it was my idea, but they were

just asking, you know, um, we're working, I'm working with other interns, and just figuring out, okay, how much does this food cost. You know, where are getting the food from.

I also worked with Chris Schlarb, the Assistant Director, on, you know, 'What snacks are we getting? What refreshments? How many refreshments do you think we'll get and would need?' You know, 'Are you emailing Mikey Cody Apollo to see when she'll be able to come and make sure that they're still interested?' So I did—the big thing was, like, emailing, like, even before the event first happened, I emailed Mikey Cody Apollo to see if she was interested. 'How can I get you to come to our campus?' You know, letting them know that they'd be a great asset to our community, and we'd really love to work with them. So, yeah, just with BNAACC, we did Zoom interviews, emailing, because Chris Schlarb did a lot of that part with emailing BNAACC, just because, you know, the Director and Assistant Director, they do work with the other campus organizations. And as an intern, you know, I was really the one coming up with the idea. You know, how did I want things to be working with marketing, because we have a marketing team on creating flyers. So yeah, pretty much that was how it was for the Revolutionary Voices Open Mic, just us coming together and just solidifying everything. But Daniel was always saying, you know, 'This is your thing, like with the music, you get to choose the music you want, but I just want to make sure that I can help you in any way with the project.'

And then for the Black Queer Afropunk Takeover, BNAACC helped with just allowing us to basically take over the entire BNAACC for that time. So we just secured the venue space, but BNAACC didn't help as far as funding or anything like that with the Black Queer Afropunk Takeover event. But they were really great help with just letting us know, like we knew how we wanted to utilize the space, but just showing us how we could utilize the space, you know, letting us know where certain things are and how to put chairs back and tables back. But, yeah, they were really amazing with that. But with the Black Queer Afropunk Takeover, the GSRC pretty much took most of that role with occupying or taking a space in BNAACC, because the goal of that event was to take over BNAACC. Like, have you heard of the term "takeover?"

AB: Mhm, yeah, but do you want to tell me more?

NM: Yes. Just like reclaiming the term takeover, because oftentimes it's used in a negative light. And like, in a sense, Black queer students are taking over, you know, what belongs to them. A Black space. And just inhabiting that and just saying, you know, 'We're queer, we're here, and we're going to exist and we're going to be proud.'

AB: That's great. And I love that idea. You mentioned that you had heard before that some Black queer students didn't feel super comfortable going to BNAACC. And I'm wondering if you have talked to people after those events, and if, you know, they have changed their minds, or if they, you know. What have they been saying?

NM: Well, yes. After those events, um, yeah, they just really expressed gratitude. Like, you know, saying thank you. Like, 'Nyx, I really appreciate you for putting on this event.' Like, for the open mic, one of the responses I got was that this was the best open mic they've had on campus.

AB: Wow.

NM: So I was, like, really surprised, because this person really does a lot of spoken word poetry. And I'm like, 'Wow. Like, this is amazing that you actually really loved this event.' Um, you know, they were just really, like, glad they had a space like that. And like, 'This is the safest I've ever felt here, you know, it just feels really great, really inviting and relatable.' And, yeah, I've got a lot of good responses. People just really feeling welcomed and just feeling more comfortable knowing, you know, I can be in BNAACC and have this event, and some—even the BNAACC interns, who are also queer or allies, came and stopped by to see how it was. We had Black Students for Revolution there. And yeah, everybody who attended really felt supported. And just really was thanking me and just applauding me for the community that I was able to make at this event.

And for the Black Queer Afropunk Takeover I had similar responses. People were just really like, 'We need to do another one.' And because of that, I had a student come to me, like fellow peer, who expressed, you know, 'We need to do another one.' Like, so we're actually creating a club called Afropunk to continue to do these things. And I had another student say, 'You know, keep making events for Black queer students,' you know, and just really applauded me for that. So, yeah, I've had really good responses from those events.

AB: That's great. That's really great to hear. And is the new club gonna start this year or next year?

NM: So, we are thinking of starting it this year. And yeah, so the Afropunk, taking from the actual event that we had here, you know, still including those Afropunk vibes, you know, celebrating, uh, alternative identity, um, Black queerness, and just acknowledging, like, the overall roots of alternative subcultures being Black. Because oftentimes it's overlooked, like, you know, like Rosetta Tharpe—Sister Rosetta Tharpe being like the Godmother of rock and roll. And just all of the Black people who created rock and roll were to exist and being influential in alternative subcultures. And we're also, of course, you know, incorporating queerness into that. Because queer people—Black queer people—have always been involved in those spaces. Um, yeah.

AB: Yeah, cool. This is kind of a delayed question, but for people who may not know, can you explain what Afropunk is?

NM: So Afropunk taking it like from James Spooner, it's a subculture that is—initially was to acknowledge, like Black people in punk. And so Afropunk can also be like a genre of music, like

Black—referring to, like Black punk artists, Like, for example, Tamar-kali, and other examples, like Big Joanie. Another example is, I'm trying to think, hold on. Pleasure Venom. Another example is Honeychild Coleman, so these are, like—or Simi Stone. These are like, different, like, Black punk artists. Bad Brains, Death. So—Fishbone, thinking about those different kinds of artists.

And, yeah, Afropunk is really, like—more so I was thinking about the festival, the Afropunk Festival, and James Spooner is just like the creator of this. It's a festival— they originally started to, like, look at Black people in punk, you know, the punk subculture, the alternative subculture, and then it just expanded to include hip hop, pop, and other genres. And it really, pretty much serves to look at the diversity of Black identity, Black expression, you know, acknowledging we're not a monolith. Black people can be punk, they could be pop, indie, you know, so many different things. And so for that festival, Black people just really show up in so many different unique outfits, and they're able to just be themselves and just be alternative and pretty much just responds to like the erasure of black people in alternative subcultures. Yeah.

AB: That's cool. Nice. Thank you for explaining that and for giving so many good examples. Um. It sounds like you are doing a lot of good community building work, and I'm wondering if you have any ideas for what your next event might be.

NM: Um, that's a really good question. Um, I feel like for my next event, I would really want to do something with like, zine making, and like, button making. At the Black Queer Afropunk Takeover we did—we were supposed to have a button maker—we did have zine making. But I feel like just having an event talking about the Black history of zine making and just how zine making has been like a universal tool to like help, you know, marginalized people. Because I learned that like, zine making was a big thing in the Harlem Renaissance, and a lot of people talk about zine making with, like, punk subcultures, with feminism, but, like, there's so many things, like, way before that where zine making was happening. And I found out about that from this zine maker, this is a person of color. Her name is Bratty Bre. Like, I watch her videos, like, how to make zines. But yeah, we really want to have a big zine making event, or a zine making project event. You know, maybe get some—if we had an event here for the GSRC—get some queer voices that come and we make a huge collaborative zine to, like, preserve our history.

AB: That sounds really awesome. It's something that I would be interested in coming to, because I appreciated that there was a little zine station at the event a couple weeks ago. Sweet. You have talked a lot about community building here, and I'm—I think it's really cool that you have been an active person in building community for queer Black people on campus. You have already talked a little bit about this, but what, I guess, what has your general experience been like navigating the social landscape here at the University with your identity.

NM: Um, well, I have experienced getting misgendered a lot. Um, and you know, I do correct people constantly. Like, you know, my pronouns, he/him, they/them. And that has been something that I've struggled with. Also struggle with people, you know, calling me "girl" or calling me things, just assuming how I want to be called. Even after I say, you know, 'I prefer to be referred to with these terms, and it's how identify, you know, this is who I am.' And people just consistently dismissing that. And, um, that has been a big thing.

Also, just with being Black, you know, a lot of racism. I'm an English major, creative writing major, so there's going to be a lot of racism in the English department. You know, the advisors, awesome. But I have experienced some professors who have been virulently racist, and it has been pretty disturbing. Luckily, this semester it's way better, but it's a lot of times when we end up talking about Black people. Or just in general, like, I'm very knowledgeable. I like to share my knowledge. I'm part—I'm a huge participant in class. So I've had professors be intimidated by my participation, you know, chastise me, put me in private interview rooms and just constantly try to, you know, chastise me for participating. 'You're participating too much.' Then if I don't participate, 'You're not participating enough.' You know, when I talk about what I know, it's like, you know, 'I'm sorry you know, everything in this class.'

You know, it's just a little bit—can be a little bit frustrating navigating the space. You know, as a student who's knowledgeable, who likes to learn, likes to participate. Because I always—being an African American Studies minor, you know, being told in the department, you know, 'Share the analysis you've gathered from these courses in your other classes. This can help other students have a different insight, a different perspective.' And it has. Some professors have been receptive to that, have thanked me for sharing different outlooks, different perspectives. But some professors have also, you know, demonized me and attempted to punish me for sharing these perspectives, sharing my knowledge, and pointing out, 'Hey.'

Especially like a theory class I've taken, um, saying, 'Hey, you know this theorist, you know this sounds—this is racist. You know, this is problematic. While I understand why we're learning this, I am struggling with this, because I don't think that we should approach this writer, um or theorists in a way that they are not problematic. We should acknowledge they're problematic. We should acknowledge how their environment informed their beliefs, and really just taking consideration, because even though theory builds off of each other, people are also building off of this theory to change it, to make it better because of the racist past.'

AB: Yeah, definitely. And I feel like that—you know, your attention to that should be welcomed in class. I don't know, being at—I feel like that's the point of university, is to, you know, for people to question what they're learning and to bring in new perspectives. So I think it's a great thing that you're doing that, but I'm sorry that some professors are pushing back a little bit. Would you mind telling me a little bit more about your studies and like your work that you're doing?

NM: Oh sure. So with English, it's been a long road with English, as I've already told you. But some of my studies, so I'm concentrating in race, indigeneity, gender, and sexuality. So basically, a lot of my classes I've taken in English have been very diverse. So for example, I've taken a queer migrations class, and I've studied, you know, queer people in different locations, regions. You know, whether that's within the US learning about queer identity, like going from rural environments to, you know, city environments, how that can change how queer people make community. You know, queer people who are Latine, and how, you know, being Puerto Rican, for example, can affect your experience as a queer person.

Like we watched this—I watched a documentary called, I believe it's called "Living as a Puerto Rican Lesbian" [*Brincando el Charco (Portrait of a Puerto Rican)*]. And so it was really interesting and informative film. It wasn't a documentary, but it's like a mockumentary. And so the director of that film is actually playing a character in the movie. And so she navigates, you know, being—she navigates and, like, shows different experiences, like some people, being in Philadelphia, being in New York, you know, being in Puerto Rico. And, like, being in these different spaces, being in queer spaces, being in Puerto Rican spaces, and how, like, all those things change, and just. It was so interesting. They also talked about, like, Afro Latine identity, and like, how that can also affect the experience being Puerto Rican, but also being Black because they may not be seen as Black by people who don't realize you could be Black and Latine and all those things, which is so interesting. And I focused on that essay—I mean, I focused on that film for that course, and, like, wrote an essay about it, like what I found from that course.

And I've also done research. Like, I did take a Gender and Women's Studies course, and I did research about, like, Black queer family making, and like the different methods that like, Black queer people go to making family, you know, chosen families. Intrauterine insemination, IVF, in vitro fertilization, adoption. And, like, how those different challenges, those challenges to family making can be difficult, like be complex, based on people being Black and queer at the same time.

AB: Yeah, cool. Honestly, it sounds like they offer some pretty good courses here. Have you—when you're in class, like, do you know the people that you're in class with, or are they like, are there new faces, or are there friends, or?

NM: Sometimes it's new faces, sometimes it's familiar faces. It really depends on what class, but I have noticed that I'll see at least two or three people I've taken another class with in my other classes. So that's really nice, like, to just see familiar faces. I actually even had this semester, had somebody that I'm friends with, that I live in the same dorm with, and so it was like, 'Wow, I didn't know we were gonna have this class together.' So it can be fun.

AB: Yeah, that is fun. Cool. Nice. What would you like to see for Black queer people on campus?

NM: For Black queer people on campus, I want them to have a voice. I want them to be heard. I want them to be seen. And I want them to be able to be their true authentic selves without having to, you know, contort themselves, I guess. Some Black queer students maybe, like, feel that they have to only be Black or only be queer. But I want them to know that they can be both at the same time, and no matter how they identify. You know, I, like, for example, identify as a Black lesbian, so even within the queer community, you may not be fully understood and just knowing that you are gonna—you are who you are, no matter where you are, no matter how people view you, no matter how they see you. And to just have pride in that. And to know that in your mind, regardless how somebody sees you, you know you are the ultimate holder of your existence, and that to seek community where you're seen, not where you're ignored or just tolerated.

AB: Yeah, I think that's really wise and a nice thing that I would also hope for Black queer people everywhere. Is there anything else that you would like to add about your experiences with community on campus?

NM: Um, I guess, I don't know if this would tie into this specific question, but with community on campus, I did want to add—so I'm doing my senior thesis this year. And I'm doing it on Cheryl Clarke, a Black lesbian poet, writer, activist, and through researching her existence. Is it okay if I share more about that?

AB: Please, please.

NM: I'm—so my research question is, "how do Black lesbians express self determination in the face of several types of marginalization?" And I'm doing a narrative analysis of Black lesbian self determination, looking at Cheryl Clarke's biography, you know, through interviews, um, archives, articles written about her, things she's written herself. Um, just really to navigate, like, how do Black lesbians express self-determination? Um, and through reading her, like, in this course I'm taking AFRO 495, being able to do my senior thesis on her has really helped me navigate my own identity and sense of community as a Black lesbian.

And what I really want to say about that is that through Cheryl Clarke's literature—so I'm looking at her narrative and Black—I mean, I'm looking at lesbianism and active resistance. And through her writing, she's—she came out as a lesbian in her, I guess I'll say mid-20s, and so a big part of that was representation. A big part of that was her—like she went to Howard for undergrad. So her lack of, you know, representation, seeing Black lesbians—she didn't know she got identified as a Black lesbian until she went to Rutgers and attended a gay conference where she saw like a classmate who was from Howard and other Black lesbians. And so I guess what I would say is community is a really big thing, especially being a Black lesbian, being able to see Black lesbians be visible, be proud, be seen, to know this could be who you are. This is who I am. You know, somebody—people who understand my experiences. And I think that does inform a lot of Cheryl Clarke's writing. Why she wrote so much about

being a Black lesbian. Why she continues to write so much about being a Black lesbian and just being a lesbian.

And because of that, because of this research I've done, and this interest I have, I think community is really important for so many people, especially for me. Being a Black lesbian, being able to find other Black lesbians in real life, not just online, has been a struggle. But I would say that's important. That's why, in building community, you know, I want to be present, I want to be visible, I want to be proud, and I want to be bold. Because thinking of Cheryl Clarke, what gave her the courage to be a Black lesbian is seeing Black lesbians be proud of themselves and be open about themselves.

And so I strive to do the same thing, and in hopes that by me being who I am, sharing my experiences, sharing this knowledge, this history, with other people, through literature and literature has already been written on that, I can, you know, build more community on campus and beyond campus. And so, I also have a Substack because of that, because I also want to preserve my writing and just help students and Black queer people beyond, just know, like, you know, you can be who you are, and there's a history we have that we continue to build upon.

AB: Yeah, absolutely. Thank you for sharing that and telling me about your research and about how that has impacted you, and you know. I did have a follow up question about—and now I'm forgetting.

NM: No!

AB: Oh, yeah, I would like to hear a little bit more, if you don't mind, about your experiences finding people online. Because you talked about that way earlier, when you were talking about making friends. And I don't want to like gloss over that, because social media can be a very serious tool for people to find community, and I would like to hear more, if you don't mind, about how, how you use it.

NM: Yeah, of course. So Instagram and Twitter, I would say, are the two main forums where I've actually been able to find good community. So Instagram has been helpful a lot. I've been able to find people, like when I come home, you know, in the Chicago area, like being able to find people like they host events or what they're doing, and becoming friends with them and talking to them, that has been helpful. Found a lot of good people on Instagram. And then Twitter was another asset, or another helpful thing. I wrote about this in one of my Substack posts, and it was actually for a class. I took a Black women in popular culture class last semester. Wait, am I telling the truth? Yes. But it feels like it was last—time goes by so fast. But I did do that, and it was looking at—I did a pleasure narrative, after Adrienne Maree Brown's book about pleasure. So I drew up my own pleasure narrative.

And like, I wrote about that, and so in that Substack post, I wrote extensively about like, Twitter being an important asset to me making friends and learning more about my identity as a Black lesbian, and just as a lesbian in general. I was able to meet people, you know, who identified as butch, you know, identified as transmasculine, who were, you know, nonbinary. You know, meeting film lesbians, you know, all Black, and just talking about how they navigate being Black, being a lesbian. Even like the diaspora, like people being Nigerian or Haitian, and how they may complicate, you know, being a Black lesbian, like how that enriches that experience. Because, you know, some people, they're Haitian, you know, they're thinking about Vodou, and how, like, there's Black lesbian, you know, a Black lesbian goddess within that religion. And also, like, with being Nigerian, you know, thinking about, like, the history of queerness in Africa, lesbianism in Africa. Um, and, you know, I was just really able to connect with people and learn from their experiences, hear what they have to say.

Because, you know, before I identified as a lesbian, you know, I called myself queer. I was like, 'I'm queer.' And so, hearing that, I was like, 'You know what, I relate to you more than I relate to other people. Hearing what you say like, that really resonates with my experience.' And everybody on Twitter, you know, they were like, you know, thought I was already a lesbian. Then when I said I was not, they're like, 'You sure about that? You might want to look into the compulsory heterosexuality documents.' Or they call it the comphep doc, you know, if you're familiar with that.

AB: Is it the same as the lesbian master doc?

NM: Lesbian master doc, that's what I meant to say. I didn't mean to say that. But yes, it talks about compulsory heterosexuality, though, within, that's probably why I said that. But yeah, the lesbian master doc, which has become like a thing, you know, to see, you know, are you a lesbian, or just to explore, you know, how heterosexuality is just really a big force. And from that, it led me to learn more. You know, I was finding literature about lesbianism. You know, reading about compulsory heterosexuality, because some people mistakenly call it compulsory heterosexuality, and—I mean compulsive heterosexuality. Some people say that as an accident, but it's compulsory. Like learning how that specifically affects lesbians, and how it is a lesbian term.

Because, you know, everybody expects if you're a person that is a marginalized gender, like they expect you to be interested in, you know, cis men. They expect you to be interested in that, they expect you to be interested in, want to date men, want to have relationships with them. You know, talk about them all the time, blah blah. So hearing about those experiences, how they impact those things. You know, I would be DMing—because the time where I was like, you know, I did identify as a lesbian before identified as queer. But because of lesbophobia, because of compulsory heterosexuality, I was like, 'No, like, I have to be straight.' And I was like, 'No, I'm queer.' You know, I went back and forth with those things because of that. And so, hearing their experiences, reading literature like *Stone Butch Blues*, for example. That book was really helpful, like people sharing free PDFs, like—

AB: That's a really great book.

NM: Yeah, it's really a great book, and it's also very traumatic.

AB: It's extremely traumatic.

NM: Like, people recommend to read it. But, you know, this is like a lot, like, and just to think about how queer people were treated. How lesbians were treated, continue to be treated, you know, if we—and it just makes me think, like if people knew this history, if they knew about, you know, lesbians taking testosterone, you know, and having masculine presentations, knowing about these things, you know, they would know that transphobia is like so anti-lesbian. Because there's so many lesbians that are trans and have been trans throughout history.

So, yeah, just being able to connect with people with these shared identities. You know, after I came out, like, I had a really good friend from Twitter that also was a Black lesbian. We're no longer friends, but through being able to be friends with this person and just being able to learn from them, and we learned from each other, it was a really powerful and amazing experience to bond just from simply saying, 'Hey, what's your favorite, you know, scholarly article, scholarly journal?' You know, we're all meeting Black lesbians at some that were in graduate school, like, you know, like, I want to learn about Black lesbians. I want to contribute to this field and sharing what they find in the, you know, library or. And those things were just really powerful, because I feel like I've learned a lot online, but also from these communities,

AB: Yeah, yeah. That's amazing. And you mentioned you do you have trouble finding people in person. Can you tell me more about that?

NM: Yeah, so all of my friends in person, that I've met in person, I'll say that. All of my friends I met in person, the ones that I'm really close to and interact with often, they are not lesbians. So there is a disconnect, because even though they're receptive to my experiences, hearing what I have to say, you know, they'll never truly understand what it's like to go through my experience. And so it can present challenges because, um, and it's not their fault, and I would say, like, queer phobia is an issue that affects all the community, but we're all affected differently.

And I've been in so many queer spaces where, you know, I'm the only lesbian, or maybe a few, you know. And so because of that, I've experienced, you know people, when we talk about sexuality, some people who do express, you know, sexual desire, attraction, and they are not lesbians, you know, they will be saying, you know, 'I prefer,' showing preference for, you know, men or showing preference for—then we get into these conversations about, you know, how people have sex. You know, some people have sex in ways that are, you know, don't involve men. And so it's like, well, 'I need the specific feature

of a man. I need these specific things.' And it gets real alienating, because sex does not look the same for everybody.

And I wrote a poem about this called "Real Thing," where I like, challenge the ideas of, like, what people consider to be real. Beyond, like, you know, somebody's genitalia, or a sex toy, but just real as in like, the relationship being real based on these requirements and standards like society or they've set for themselves. And, yeah, it's been difficult because, you know, meeting people, some people, even just dating, have assumed, because I'm a lesbian, like you know, that I'm going to be biphobic, you know. And that has been challenging, because maybe they have met lesbians who were biphobic, or assumed that lesbians would be biphobic, because there's different experiences that could be insecurity within their own queerness. And like me, having said, you know, I'm not, not biphobic, you know, I'm knowledgeable about bisexual people's experiences.

But also, lesbian experiences are really important to me, because being able to have lesbian friends, have that community would be really helpful just because, um, I'm not interested in men, you know. People are going to treat me differently because I don't want to date men at all. And like, heterosexual people, they do not discriminate with that queerphobia. You know, like, it's going to show up in different ways, especially with bi people, you know, they're going to be like, 'Why don't you choose—pick a side?' But at the end of the day, it's like, if you're not heterosexual, what's going on? You know, when they—heterosexual people who are homophobic, they're not understanding because they're centering heterosexuality, and so they are really not going to understand anything that doesn't fit their experience.

But I feel like within the queer community, it could be different, because it's like they're already—people already have these assumptions about who I am or how I think, you know. And I'm really interested in learning about all queer people. And so, but really important for me is like, learning about lesbians, because I find these spaces where I'm the only lesbian. Nobody knows about lesbian history. Nobody's trying to learn about lesbian history. People are assuming that lesbians are transphobic. And I'm like, 'Well, I'm trans and I'm a lesbian.' You know, you're not—people are not considering, you know, lesbians are so diverse, you know, and lesbianism is fluid. In fact, since they, like, you know, no, there's no men involved.

But like, lesbians are not just women. Lesbians can be nonbinary. Lesbians can be transmasculine, agender. You know, so many different identities. And so, and some people even the labels they use, like being stud or being femme, they would, some lesbians will see it as a gender identity, some expression of gender. But regardless of that fact, like, that has been challenging, just because I'm coming with knowledge, I'm coming with experiences that some people are not familiar with, that some people don't know.

So my biggest thing is just being—navigating that, navigating that, and trying to bring light to these things, you know, providing them with that knowledge, because maybe they genuinely don't know. But

it can be hard, because I am accused of being against my fellow queer people. But then the same, you know, knowledge, care is not extended to me, and so I feel like that's the biggest divide.

And like, what I would want to fix is just we should learn, learn, not just know about ourselves, but know about each other. And if we knew about lesbian history, like everybody knew about lesbian history, we would just see, like, even just with LGBT being a thing. The L is in the first, you know, first letter, because lesbians playing a big role in, like, helping with the HIV/AIDS, you know, epidemic, and doing blood drives and doing those things. So, yeah.

AB: Yeah, that's great. Hmm. I don't have any other questions, but I'll ask again if you have anything else that you want to share.

NM: Um, I think that I pretty much—what do I want to say? Um, I think that we've covered a lot. I think that, um, I guess the only other thing that I would say is just what I strive to do through my writing—because speaking is an important aspect of sharing your story and experiences—but what I strive to do with my writing is also provide, you know, greater context, or greater, you know, just representation to Black lesbians. And I hope to—I've been published—but I hope to, you know, one day publish like an anthology, or, you know, book of short stories, poetry, and use that to really further, you know, create community and just, you know, have queer people be seen, but especially, have Black lesbians be seen.

AB: Yeah, thank you, and thank you for speaking with me and sharing your story. I'm really grateful. And with that, I will end the recording.