

Alaina Zulli

This is Alaina Zulli interviewing [redacted] goes by [redacted] on May 31 2007, in Bobst library. Okay, so [redacted], let's start with your background. Tell me where you were born. Then about your family.

Anonymous

Excuse me, I was born in New York City, Beth Israel hospital. I am the last born out of four children, two boys, two girls. My mom is a single, single mother. Unfortunately my dad was at the time I was born children. My dad, unfortunately my my father was killed in some kind of confrontation with somebody. So I never really knew my dad. I have a stepfather who raised us who I kind of recognise as my dad because he's the only father figure I've known. And we grew up in Brooklyn, Park Slope, excellent neighbourhood. Should have stayed there. Guess that kind of answers a lot. And I, I mainly grew up with just my sister, just me and my sister. My two brothers were actually raised with my grandmother. I believe my mom probably had them when she was really young. So they grew up with my grandmother. It was cool like, we, we lived in a household where it was just the four of us. Unfortunately, my mom has a my mom has a mental condition. She's diagnosed as being schizophrenic. So that was a little weird sometimes, you know, my mom was kind of always in and out of hospital. I actually when I was born, I was born with what's called CAH, it stands for congenital adrenal hyperplasia. It actually means I'm missing an enzyme in my body, my Adrenaline gland doesn't produce a certain enzyme. And I was actually also born with ambiguous genitalia. Which, as most people know, my sometimes I think about it when I was born, you know, most babies when they're born, they like you have a you have a girl you have a boy, I picture when I was born, it's like you have a Okay. Wait a minute, give us a second, we'll get back to you. So, unfortunately, I I was always in and out of the hospital myself, you know, young kind of went through a series of reconstructive surgeries, which I think also kind of answers a lot in terms of my sexual orientation. You know, being being a lesbian, being

Butch, you know, based on just my overall appearance, you know, I have unfortunately have higher testosterone levels, which gives me a more androgynous look, when people could kind of think that, you know, I'm a female, but I'm not quite sure.

Alaina Zulli

Well, you have facial hair, which to many people is a clear indication.

Anonymous

Yeah, I mean, but nowadays with so many you know, transgender people, like some people not too sure whether it's facial hair due to you know, hormones, right. And, you know, the whole transition over

AZ

So were you raised as a girl or a boy?

Anonymous

I was raised as a girl as a girl, my mom put [compensated?] little dresses on me and, and stuff, but I think what was unique about my mom was that she, I think, because I was born with this condition she didn't really enforce a lot of like, she didn't, when we went out, if it was a family event, she put a dress on me. But really, I played with I played with cars, Star Wars figures, action figures, I never really had dolls, like my sister was more though, the doll and makeup type, you know, I played with cars, trucks, I was very active. You know, I would, I was always jumping around, you know, just like a little boy, I was jumping around. All my friends were boys. I really never had any little girls as friends. So I think my mom kind of, you know, growing up, which was, I guess, good. She never enforced it on me. You know, except for family events. You know? So that was I think that was really good. In terms of, you know, my upbringing, I wasn't a kind of, you know, forced to be this little girl. I just grew up as a regular child, you know, just enjoying the everyday life of just being a child

AZ

Let you find yourself and just be yourself.

Anonymous

Yeah, I it's funny because I look back and I know you know, people I always ask about, you know, when when's the first time you realise you a lesbian. And I think back and I had to be like seven years old, in the second grade, like, I used to have a crush on my second grade teacher. And I used to follow her everywhere, like, you know, when the kids would go to lunch, and I never had to go to lunch with the kids like I would, she would, I would have lunch with her. She would take me rollerskating on the weekends. And I slept over her house one time, but you know, I'm seven years old, and I'm thinking like, yes, sleeping with this older woman. You know, and then, of course, you know, not every now and then her boyfriend would tag along, and I will kind of get mad at him, you know, go rollerskating. And I would kind of knock him down because I didn't want him to be around. And then she got married, she announced to the class that she was getting married. And she invited the whole class to her wedding. And I refused to go. I was so upset. I was devastated. I was like, Oh, my God, I just lost this woman in my life. And, you know, my mom kind of was trying to force me to go and I was like, oh, no, no. So I kind of, I always think back and I was like, wow, like, that was my first like, experience with, you know, like, loving, not well, not loving, but you know, like, being attracted to another woman.

AZ

Sure. Yeah.

Anonymous

And I guess from Park Slope, we move to the Lower East Side, which was pretty bad. It wasn't that bad. You know, we still should've stayed in Park Slope.

AZ

Give me a timeframe for when you moved.

Anonymous

We moved when I was about 11 years old. Okay. So, at 11 we moved because the building that we lived in was being sold. And so my mom just decided, you know, we should move. So we wound up moving to the lower Eastside in Manhattan, and it was good there. It was, I think it was also another confusing time, because there I kind of developed more female friends. You know, like, I even though I still kind of did boyish things. I had, I started having my female friends like my best friend. From that moment on she, you know, we were close. You know, I kind of really didn't look at her in a way that was like, you know, why I'm attracted to girls. But all her other friends I did. And her sister.

AZ

All the other male friends you mean. Wait, you mean all your male friends looked over that way?

Anonymous

No, I looked at her other female friends. Like, you know, like, hey, what's up. And it was just weird because she would always get me because we were best friends. I she would always kind of duped me into like, you know, going out with a guy. Which was, you know, also as confusing because I used to think, well, well, this is what girls are supposed to do. Like dating. Yeah, like dating. Like, she wouldn't be interested in some guy. And of course, his friend would be there. So it's kind of like, you know why I want to be with him. So you got to be with him. And I kind of felt you know, I think I made a lot of sacrifices for my friend kind of like going in and just, you know, dating these these guys. And I guess it wasn't really until I was probably 13. There use there used to be a military Cadet that was ran by the center precinct. And my brothers actually, when they were younger, they used to go there. And I wanted to go so they

finally at one point, they kind of banned girls from being there, I guess because of some altercation, but they started letting them back in. And I went, and it was awesome. Because there I met this young woman. I don't know if I've mentioned her name.

AZ

Well, you can you can choose not to have her name ever. Really?

Anonymous

Well, her name was Selena. And she, you know, she then became my kind of, like, secret gay friend. You know, we both came out to each other, which was cool. You know, like, I was like, you know, I you know, when you're young you kind of feel like you know about you've heard terms, you know, lesbian and gay. But you never really impact impacts you until you actually meet you know, somebody that's just like you just like everybody kind of feel like you're alone until you meet somebody. And we came out to each other then we started discovering that there was other, you know, lesbians and actually bisexuals at the time. And in our cadet, you know, which was cool because I felt like you know, not only was I interested in this kind of military cadet, but you know, it was also surrounded by, you know, my people, my kind of discovering a whole new community. And I remember when we, we got on our bikes one weekend and we kind of went kind of girl hunting. You know, we were like 13, 14 years old. And we we got on our bikes and we went to it was about this time, and we ran into all these gay people, like right around here actually around Washington Square Park, it was we kind of got lost, we didn't know we were going. We just We just heard that, you know, there are, you know, gay people in the village. So we, you know, ventured out into the village to go look for, you know, gay people. And girls. And we had just missed the Pride Parade. Hmm. You know, so when you would, you know, we're riding our bikes, and we see like, you know, drones of like women, you know, and girls and other like, we at first we didn't know what what it was until we actually

saw what gave it away is we saw some butch women so like, oh, yeah, we found, we found our Mecca. And we had, we said, Hold this, this has got to be, you know, there are a bunch girls. So that means there's got to be, you know, you know, girls that we like femme girls around here. So we proceeded to dry it, you know, to ride around on our bikes. And we found these, we found these two girls who were 19 years old, of course, we lied about our age, we said we're like 17 years old. And we, you know, proceeded to like kind of walk with them, you know, hitting on them, and, you know, just kind of asking questions. And after that just became our new, a new hangout spot. And from there, you know, as I started going to cadets so I was going to I started going from my timetable was a little screwed up

AZ

That's ok. When you, if you can clarify. What your age, thereabouts

Anonymous

Um, I would say like about between 15 and 16 is when like I started discovering the village. And you know, we me and my friends then found out about because I didn't realise that she was part of a youth group, which was called Project Reach. And in the youth group, they dealt with social issues that was like kind of my first interaction with a socialisation group where they spoke about not only lesbian and gay issues, but issues around sexism and homophobia, and, you know, classes and as well. So I learned a lot going there just also, once again, just being around, you know, even tighter community where people that are more of my age rather than me trying to perpetrate and, you know, oh, they're lesbian trying to pick up all the women. And from there we we started interacting with our Hetrick Martin Hetrick Martin Institute, which is actually located here on Astor Place. It's probably one of the largest gay and lesbian youth groups. It's also located the Harvey Milk schools there also

AZ

Oh I think I've seen that. Yeah, can you? Well, later, you'll have to write that for me. But Hetrick Martin

Anonymous

At first, they were located by the West Side Highway, but where what people call the pier. Yes. So they were located there. So project reach was actually interacting with other youth groups. So once again, my community and I started seeing that this community is a lot larger. And then we started doing work with the yes group for Richmond services, which is part of the gay and lesbian center. So we started doing going over there and networking. And once I got to the center, I was just, like, amazed, like a whole building just dedicated for us. And we, that became our new hangout spot. You know, so about, like, 17 going into 16 going into 17 that became a new, a new hangout spot, which was actually the corner of 13th Street and Seventh Avenue

AZ

Place. I know

Anonymous

Yeah, yeah. So we used to all kind of that would be the meeting spot. So one person would like 2 people would get there and then you would wait for the rest of us, you know, the rest of the people so probably like about six seven o'clock there was about close to 20 young people there lesbian young people

AZ

And you just stand around on the corner

Anonymous

Yeah, we would all meet up at the corner and then decide what we're gonna do, which always resulted in ending up at the pier. So we would track down,

walk down Seventh Avenue, till we got to the beginning of Christopher Street. And of course, it would take us like two hours just to walk down the block. Because we would stop and see people we know. And stop at stores, you know, and, of course, it was all about fashion, even when I was younger, you know, we used to stop and look at the stores and the clothing. You know, because back then there used to be a lot of, I think it happens now. But unfortunately, I'm kind of out of the loop, there used to be a lot of one was called balls, balls. Yeah, they were basically many fashion shows that there was small communities or houses that were ran by, you know, kind of, they had mothers, which were predominantly like gay men, and by House fathers, which was sometimes, you know, the butcher, lesbians, or sometimes they would just be a gay. Another gay gentleman that was, I guess, a little bit more butcher than the mother. And they would hold these balls, these kind of, kind of mini fashion shows, and people would walk, like literally walk down this catwalk for different categories. So some would run down, some would walk for categories that we would call face, which will cover like you had a girl face. So some of the most feminine gay boys would walk for that category, or they had what was called boy realness. And some of the butch women would actually walk in the whole thing was about passing. It was like, we had our own little kind of fashion Yeah, show, which I don't know if you've ever seen the movie. And you may want to pick it up, it's called Paris is burning.

Paris is burning actually talks about the beginnings of the whole ball thing happened like in the early like, 80s. And, I don't know, if you've also ever seen that show America's Top Model, Tyra Banks, yeah, she actually has a gentleman in there, his name is Willi Ninja. And his house was actually called the House of Ninja. And he was the head mother, and they, he actually teaches these these models how to walk, how to walk down the runway. So, we would go to these different balls whenever we found out and we would go in and we would cheer for different people that will walk different different categories. And, you know, we will go



shopping with some people because, you know, you needed to have the latest and greatest clothes. And I think the probably I used to have the most fun when I used to go with the, with the boys, the Gay Boys, because they went by, you know, they would buy these extravagant, you know, dresses, and they would so funny, they would, they would buy them and keep the tabs on them, you know, because it was so expensive. Yeah. And then they would use it in a ball and then have it dry cleaned, and then return the return the dress

AZ

So would they buy, like down in Soho, they would get designer clothes

Anonymous

They would get either in Soho, depending on how much money they had, you know, like you know, depending on where were they unfortunately, some of them were street workers. So they would get money that way some of them sold drugs, you know. So, a lot of lots of times I would also go to we would go and go to different thrift shops and kind of put together these ensembles of different clothes. Which weren't bad, you know, you could find like really hot clothes in a thrift store and still look still a good like I love thrift stores. And so we would go and go to these different ball scenes and stuff. And it was it was awesome

AZ

That's this is fascinating. Okay, so tell me more about the houses. Was it like those shelters?

Anonymous

No, no, no, they were just like groups

AZ

They were just like social groups

Anonymous

Yeah, they were just social groups. So you were associated like, you know each house was known for different you know, they will have these you will go to these balls. And they will be like, you know, like the top winners. You know, they would kind of make their own houses. So they were like the best and in their in you know, whatever category they were. And it was like, you know, I want to call them almost like gay gangs. Yeah, you know, where you will belong to a specific house right they have the house of ninja they have the house of Pandora's, they have the house extravaganza. And, you know, there was all these people that were part of it. Matter of fact, if you ever seen Madonna's blonde Blonde Ambition tour, where she did the the whole voguing thing there. And there's three gentlemen that she actually has in there that were part of those houses and Madonna herself would actually sometimes appear at these mini balls, you know, which sometimes would be held at, I been to 2 of them one time that were held at the sound factory. Back then the rumor was that Madonna actually owned the part of the sound factory Junior Vasquez which was a famous DJ and still is used to DJ there. And she would come and that's actually where she found some of her dancers from this from this ball scene, and they would go now back then there was this whole voguing kind of scene. You know which people were done in in the houses

AZ

Can you explain voguing?

Anonymous

Voguing is a dance style that originated I think originated out of the ball scene. And it could be anything from like, like hand gestures to the way they move, you know, the way they move their hands and they the way they would pose. Voguing actually came out of there and then people would do these moves these dance moves that were just kind of like voguing is a is a is I think

a cross between dancing and posing. And it's kind of a little hard to explain it where it's easier to see. Unfortunately, I'm butch so I don't know how to vogue vogueing was more vogueing was more you know, kind of like the gay guys then. So I didn't unfortunately, I didn't kind of I'm really bad at it. I tried the one time terrible. But it was it was nice. Like, you know, I really think that that's where my thing of fashion came from. You know, being around the gay young people and everything, everything was about fashion. Everything was about fashion like back then we used to call it used to be called labels. And there was even a category for that you even walked for you walk down this runway for you know, your category that you were walking for was called labels. And it was about who had the best clothes on the most the most expensive clothes or even you know the most of the time it kind of fell in the category of the most expensive clothes or even the somebody would get a Louis Vuitton you know shirt or something or Versace pants you know, I don't I'm not too sure how big bootlegging was back then and they actually really weren't Yeah, these designer these designer clothes but the most of the time they were you know, but it was it was good. You know that actually from there I wanted to actually apply for fashion industries High School. I was the only person in my junior high school actually got accepted to fashion industries. I actually went in for merchandising someone to design in I wanted to design like a Windows like displays. And that that became also because a movie mannequin where he you know, created these extravagant window displays. And I could always remember a few of my friends going and just seeing you know, the Macy's windows, Bloomingdale's, Windows, or even the way that display the way the clothes are put together. Unfortunately, they work too well with me. I got into a lot of fights

AZ

At the school itself?

Anonymous

In fashion industries. Yeah. I think you know, because, because I'm androgynous I used to always get, you know, are you a girl or are you a boy and guys, of course, you know, didn't like, the fact that I think that they didn't know, or, you know, if they figured out I was a (barrow?) it was like, Oh, well, you know, she's a lesbian, she Butch, you know, so that became a problem. So my mom transferred me out of the school and kind of put me in my zone school, which happened to be two blocks away, which was through a part of high school

AZ

And this was in the Lower East Side

Anonymous

Yes, the Lower East Side. It was literally three blocks away from my house, which sucks because I could never cut class without getting caught. And that school was good. I remember being there. And I remember there used to be this one young woman that stood out she kind of stood to herself. And to this day, like I kinda see her but really, I know her because of who she is. You know, in terms of knowing somebody from school, but not really kind of creating a relationship with them. Her name was Lee, and she was like, she made me look femme so much. Like she was like Butch all the way. And I can remember like seeing her, like, get a lot of, you know, like a lot of shit in school. Because, you know, sexuality and just the way she looked like she had her head shaved, which, back then I guess really wasn't acceptable for young women, you know. And she's got a lot of us and I used to feel so bad. And, you know, I used to always want to kind of reach out, but I always felt, the whole safety thing where I kind of didn't want to put myself in that position because I just felt like I got a lot of shit for just looking where I was. And I didn't even have a shaved head. And I didn't really be as butch she was, you know, they kind of just associated with me being Butch because the way I dressed I didn't dress feminine. I dressed in jeans, sneakers, you know t-shirt.

AZ

What was your hair like?

Anonymous

My hair was short, kind of the way it is now. And then I like as fashion started changing, I let my hair grow. I kind of had this Steven Seagal type haircut going on with a, I had a ponytail that kind of grew back. And I think a lot of that happened because my friend started growing her hair that way. And since we were so tight, we kind of brought it the same the same way. And we we just continued going in the village and I remember there was a prom. They had a prom. Unfortunately, when I graduated high school, I couldn't attend my prom. I mean, I could have but there was the whole thing on you know, being stared at what was I going to wear? You know, like, can I go there wearing a tuxedo and have to get shit about it? Or do I have to wear a dress?

AZ

Were there any official rules about it?

Anonymous

There wasn't. I mean, I think that never really is because I don't think they can enforce it

AZ

They do it in some states. But I don't know of any...

Anonymous

In terms of the girls having to dress?

AZ

Like a girl can't go with a girl basically

Anonymous

I don't think I was worried about bringing anybody. If I would have went I probably would have went with my with my friend Josephine, which was my best friend that used to make me date boys, who was kind of devastated after she found out that I started you know, being with girls, and she used to always taunt me with Madonna used to have the song, La Isla Bonita. And in the song she talks about when a girl loves a boy and a boy loves a girl. So my friend used to, you know, every time that part came, like emphasize it. She will look at me and go when a girl loves a boy and a boy loves a girl.

AZ

After you came out to her?

Anonymous

After I came out. But um, she I think she was just doing that because she was just teasing me. You know, like she was really cool I didn't unlike, unlike most people's experiences, and I'd say mine coming out was a little not kind of lucky. But it wasn't that hard. My mom kind of found out because she read my diary, which I actually left my diary in a car. And one of her friends found it and gave it to her. So I was a little awkward

AZ

How old were you?

Anonymous

17 when she found out but I think you know mom's always know. Yeah, you know, so. I don't put dresses. I don't put dresses on there nothing feminine about me. You know, I don't bring guys home. You know, I never talk about boyfriends. So, you know, she just kind of did her own little you know, when she when I came in the house, she kind of just not threw it at me she kind of just

like tossed it. And and I can remember when she tossed it because she she made this comment like she said she said cheers to your night in heaven or something, because unfortunately it was talked about my first sexual experience in in the, in my diary. I was just kind of like frozen when she when she said it and that was kind of the only thing she said after that, like we never she never you know, we didn't sit down and talk about it. You know, it was just kind of like that was a one little comment and life just kind of went on. Which I don't know if it was a good thing, but it seemed to work itself now. Yeah. That's the I think I got a little scattered there, timeline.

AZ

Tell me more about what when you were talking about the balls. You mentioned what the boys wore. The girls I mean, were the girls involved with it

Anonymous

Yes, yes, the girls were and the girls it, I think what was funny is when the kind of femme girls would go against the femme guys for the same category, you know, because they had a girl realness and even femmes would walk for this category, you know, competing against, like these very feminine gay boys. And I think the funniest thing was when the boys used to win. Right? And the same thing with like, see the, I think the whole bunch femme thing is is an attitude, or I think I want to say attitude, you know, or kind of I think it's attitude because I think I kind of, you know, put out this kind of very rough attitudes sometimes, you know, not so much frail or even then ethical being stereotypically feminine, women are frail as well.

AZ

No but feminine does usually imply frailty culturally. So there were say butch women walking in these balls?

Anonymous

Yeah we would walk like I would walk for boy realness. And I would sometimes go against like you know the kind of like butch gay boys. You know and it was almost the same thing like you know like here is a butch woman you know winning this category you know that was kind of like actual like you are a boy and you can't win it like what's up with that. And then after that it kind of faded like you know the the butch boys after that didn't really walk for realness they kind of they kind of excuse me. A new category started coming out so then they had like b boy realness. Or and b boy realness was all about you know a straight boy passing as a I mean a gay boy walking this category trying to act straight. Like he would act thug. You know so he would have the baggy clothes on and you know the Tommy Hilfiger hoody you know the hat and he would walk and try to pass as a straight boy. And it's funny because he's walking for this category that he wins and then you see the gay boy kind of come out and they it was just fun. Like the different then it started after a while it started getting boring because like new categories and things started coming out and then you know there started to be a lot of animosity amongst you know people you know and then it started becoming a thing where people then started fighting like you know you would go to a ball and I can remember like towards the end when I stopped going like I went half the time to kind of watch my friend's back. Because it, a fight always broke out

AZ

Over who won?

Anonymous

Over who won or a disagreement about who won or you know it started coming about you know like things that kinds you know fight about. Like oh well you aint wearing real labels like your labels aint real. You know like your wearing bootleg clothing. Or you know, because it was such a tight community sometimes people would sleep at somebody else's house and so somebody would be accused of stealing articles of clothing from each other.



You know so after that when people starting fighting over things it just didn't become fun anymore. You know it was just kinda like I don't want to go see what fight is gonna break out I want to go to have fun

AZ

So you know how gay men, they have their own style, the pants are tight, they wear tight little shirts, was there ever a lesbian style that you could say was analogous?

Anonymous

I would say it was probably the b boy style. Because it was all about us like passing. In terms of butch like I could only talk about like femme girls wore you know femme clothing they wore you know tight jeans tight shirts you know occasionally they wore baggy clothes but they were still they still wore it in a feminine way. You know they would still have makeup on they would wear even the colours the colours were you know feminine colours pink colours you know pastel powder blues and stuff. Where the butches wore you know we wore the big sweatshirts with baseball caps on. We wore jeans you know sneakers then you know timberlands started becoming a new thing so we graduated to timberlands and for us it was just all about passing

AZ

So your intention was to look like a straight male?

Anonymous

Yeah were kinda like our intention was to to pass as much as possible but still...

AZ

Can you define pass?

Anonymous

Like right now if I wanted to I could get up and walk to the mens room If I wanted to

AZ

Ok so passing

Anonymous

Passing is basically going through the day or going like being able to pass as a male. You know so we would walk into a store and they would be like excuse me sir. So we would be able to pass or being able to you know we would go because women's bathrooms always got lines like we would walk into the mens bathroom and not hear anything about it. Like that's passing like going through life or going through everyday with you know just being thought people just looking at you and assuming that you're you know that you're a male

AZ

Right. And is that something that you want? Have you always wanted that?

Anonymous

I, I just always wanted to always kinda be me. Like I'm a very individual sort of self like I don't I don't really like labels. Like I don't like being categorized you know like I like wearing what I like wearing what I like to wear you know. Right now well my clothes are male kind of orientated you know I work for a urban clothing company so a lot of my clothes is. I wear mens clothes because womens clothes are tighter, I don't like em at all

Alaina

Why?

Anonymous

I mean on me. I think I'm built too much, I'm built too much like a guy to kind of wear feminine clothes, I think if I put on feminine clothes I kind of look like probably a drag queen so

AZ

So you feel uncomfortable in

Anonymous

Yes, even growing up I never liked to wear dresses. Now that I think about it my mom made me wear a dress one time to, for picture day in elementary school, and I cried all day. Because yeah at a young age I had I started developing body hair so I had hairy legs you know I had hair on my arms and I cried all day because she made me go to school in this dress with these little socks on so my legs were exposed. And I was just like, it was never because you know kids are cruel you know kids kids say you know people would look at me and go oh you're ugly look at your legs like you know I'd be called a beast you know. And it was just I hated it it was so bad like they was really, it sucked

AZ

Yeah

Anonymous

It's and then it's crazy now that we're talking like all these memories start coming out and in in the same elementary school I was actually banned from school unless I wore a dress every day to school. Because I was so active, which was another thing and now that I think about it my mom could have actually sued because I went to a public school I didn't go to a private school

AZ

Did they have uniforms?

Anonymous

No, we wore everyday clothes you know whatever like my mom you know I had school clothes and I had play clothes. Obviously my play clothes were probably a little stained and had holes in them and you know my my school clothes were nicer and newer and they forbid me to wear regular clothes I had to wear a dress. They told me they would not allow me back in school unless I wore a dress because I was too active

AZ

Oh so they wanted to keep you from being active...

Anonymous

They thought that if they put me in a dress that it would keep me from running around and jumping because they they thought that you know a little girls they were like I was too active for a little girl. You know I didn't act like the little girls I was I would get into fights I was climbing I was always with the little boys and never with the little girls. And they made me wear a dress everyday which was another thing that I hated. Like I mean I kind of didn't have a choice you know my mom unfortunately I guess you know she didn't know enough to kind of protest it. And it was towards the end of the year so for probably like the last two weeks of school you know I had to deal with it [inaudible] I hated it

AZ

Its a creative answer to solution

Anonymous

Yeah

AZ

So lets fast forward to now you work in the fashion industry. How many lesbians are there? Are there ...

Anonymous

At work because I work for urban clothing company and I'm talking about urban talking about I work for Rocawear which is right up there with [inaudible] and you know everybody knows Jay Z which is you know CEO of Roc-A-Fella records. And unfortunately you, being gay in an urban society you know what I mean is, not to say that it's unheard of but you know you hear even the lyrics you hear about you know people being you know you can't be gay. Basically in in urban society and it's crazy because when I first started working there I remember this woman who worked in [accounts receivable?] department. And you could clearly tell she was a woman it was nothing you know she didn't look like butch or androgynous like can look at her and say is that a woman or is that a man. But she wore pantsuits, not men pantsuits, they have pantsuits for women she wore pantsuits. And I remember that they used to call her a shim which I thought was once again excuse me which I thought was fucked up

AZ

That's like she him?

Anonymous

Yes and I used to always like I would like I would say one of the biggest advantages of being androgynous is people always think you're male. I could put my ID card in front of anybody and as as much as it says female you know you know they don't look at that people you know sex is not a thing that people actually pay attention to on a card on an identification. They're kind of always looking at either your name or your your date of birth. So when I started working at Rocawear they just automatically assumed I was a guy. You know and I needed a job and I actually got the job through a temp

agency. So I kind of really didn't, because it was a temp agency I didn't think I was actually gonna be there long. So I kind of didn't correct anybody or make a big thing about it and then even more after they I used to hear them say this. And I asked I used to ask I said why do you call her a shim like why do you call her that? And they used to be like look at her, look at the way she dresses and I would be like what's wrong with the way she dresses? Like she has a pantsuit on it's not a mens suit its a womans suit. And they used to be like you know but just look at her shes you know shes shes she looks like a man. She doesn't look like a man, she's a woman she's wearing a pantsuit like what's the problem. And I would start getting into arguments but and then kind of backed off to kind of not draw and I think the woman was was oblivious to it because they would call her a shim to her face and should laugh and go yeah I'm a shim. And I don't think she kind of knew what they were saying about her and then she would she would talk about that she had a boyfriend. And of course they would all make fun of her and be like oh your full of shit you know you got a boyfriend, which was like still once again messed up. And so fortunately I didn't realize it but I I then became full time.

At the time I worked when I first started at at Rocawear I worked in the internet department. So I used to basically coordinate what you see on the website. You know getting images together, coordinating photo shoots with the clothes, customer service, basically everything. And they had another des they brought in this new designer and I remember his name was David Ayala he was a gay man and clearly gay flaming as hell. You know cool, you know cool guy and people used to make fun of him. Like like you know they would joke with him but of course always joke with him in like a homophobic way. You know like they would say they would say stupid stuff like you know like how was that dick last night or something like that. Like this is a urban like thing so they didn't give a shit like there was no biting their tongues there was nothing you know like the office is clearly homophobic. Like people say they don't have a problem with it you know but you hear like the responses and the

things that they say the snickering like underneath their breath. And he used to get a lot of crap but I think he just used to joke it off he was probably making a crapload of money for being for being a head designer

AZ

Right, yeah, sure

Anonymous

And then once again the company just grew you know and now I work I I started about three years ago working for the internet department I was working for the IT department. Because the internet they actually started outsourcing to a company called E fashions, which also runs JLo site baby fat. So I was actually going to be let go. And by the grace of God, I was saved by my boss to come and work in the IT department because Rocawear then started getting big started blowing up started becoming more popular. So they needed more people. And from there we move to 1411 Broadway, which is the fashion district that's the big building that got the if you've seen it's got the giant button.

AZ

Oh!

Anonymous

That's the building I work in. And so we expanded we actually used to be 463 7 Avenue, and it became bigger and then they moved to to 1411 Broadway and staff started you know, more people production started getting bigger designs got a bit bigger. And there are people that you could kind of I want to say, you know, when you're gay, you have gaydar, you kind of know, you know who's or you suspect. And people just ridicule them like you could. I mean, I always thought I always kept it to myself. And like you know I would say in my head oh, she looks like shes gay and then they started this in so funny. I think

nobody messed with him because he was he was a big guy, there was a woven designer [move insurance?] or like these button up shirts. Yeah. And his name was Lesley. And he was he was out. He was clearly out. He's gay. Everything about him. Right. He talked, you could clearly tell as soon as he talked to you, he was gay. And I think nobody said anything to him because I think they were scared of him. You know.

AZ

Because he was physically.

Anonymous

He was physically big. You know, like, he was very muscular. He was a big, muscular black guy. And he was Canadian. I didn't know that. But it kind of quieted down a little bit, because I think people kind of curbed their tone around him because he would look like he didn't. He was a person that you would say something that he would just sit there and just, you know, what we call read. Like, he would just read you. You know.

AZ

What does that mean?

Anonymous

Read is like a gay term in terms of is a gay word for like, telling you off.

AZ

Okay.

Anonymous

Like he would simply put his hand on his head. He would do the whole finger gesture. And it's even funnier when you got this kind of big muscular guy.



AZ

Yeah.

Anonymous

Like you know, like, scolding you, like, how you probably would see a younger, you know, petite woman like scolding.

AZ

Yeah, yeah.

Anonymous

You know, somebody and I think he just scared the shit out of people. Yeah, I was like, in the corner. But yes. You know, but, you know, it makes me sad sometime that I can't be like, who I am there. You know, like, my biggest fear, I think at work is people finding out. You know, and it's come like real close at times. When people find it out.

AZ

Yeah

Anonymous

Because we have sample sales. Rokawear has these awesome sample sales. I got your number I'll let you know. And I, they open it to the public from like, the first hour. It's it's just employees, and then they open it to the public. And there was this guy who I actually used to go out with his friend when I was younger, when I was kind of going through my you know what am I phase straight or or gay? And he comes to every sample sale.

AZ

Does he recognise you?

Anonymous

I don't let him like I've came real close where I've I've gone in. And I've saw him and I kind of timed real quick, before he didn't even see me. And it was funny one time I went in to talk to Michelle, which is actually J sister, when she works there, she's real cool. And I went in, I was like Michelle, and I said, Michelle, he kind of like I, I saw him like a profile, like view of him and he went to turn. And when I saw him, I did kind of like ran out of room. So Michelle was like [redacted] what. And I'm like, nothing, I'll talk to you later.

AZ

That's amazing that you have to do that.

Anonymous

Like every sample, like one every time we have a sample sale I avoid, like passing like the office is huge so I could kind of get to where I need to go through any kind of like, I could just. Sometimes I have to literally walk around the whole entire office to get to the stairs [inaudible]. Or I'll leave and just take the elevator up one floor, because we have two floors. So I'll take the elevator to the next floor with my office is or cubicle. And just to avoid, just to avoid. It's, it's really crazy.

AZ

That is something else, yeah. To me, it's like New York City this day.

Anonymous

But I mean, once again, I work in, I work in a urban culture where, you know, it's really not acceptable to be to be gay or lesbian. And then all the women in my office are kind of like, you know, there are some attractive women. So of course, if you're don't look like the typical woman, you know, you're that oddity, you know, so it just, you know, sometimes I think, you know, I shouldn't be here,

and all like that that's not fair. To myself. Like, I feel like sometimes I'm not being true to myself, because I kind of lead this double life. You know, but unfortunately, I found a career that I really liked. And I made a lot of contacts, I kind of put it to the side, you know, so I could make more women get that 30% off for wholesalers.

AZ

So how are you doing? Are you getting tired?

Anonymous

No, I am good. You tired? Break or Anything?

AZ

No, I have so many questions. I don't know how much contact you had with the rest of the fashion industry. But do you think that other places in fashion would be as bad?

Anonymous

As long as they're not urban, I don't think they are. I think it's only the urban, like, clothing companies that we you you kind of fall into that. You know, that where its just not acceptable. Like, you could probably like I'm pretty sure in every in I'm pretty sure there are gay people in Rockafella records that are putting their gay people in Sean John, you know, even even in the in the other clothing companies like Echo. Probably [Nietzsche?], you know, there are there people everywhere, but I just think that it's just, I feel bad. I feel like if they could be who they are, and be openly gay at the job like I commend them. Like and, you know, I think it's, I think it's different for men than it is for women. I think the men because you think about fashion, sometimes you think, you know, if a guy's a designer, he's gay. They used to, you know, like, he's a designer, he's gay. So it's kinda like, you know, they already fall in that category. And, you

know, their stereotypes, I say, into that category. So, but I think when it's a woman, it's still like, I think if it's, if she's femme, you know, she kind of just passes, you know, but if you're Butch, then you're hit with that whole oh you want to be a man or you haven't had a guy to give it to correct or, or something like you're just considered like, odder than odd. You know, I mean, like, you're just worse than that gay designer. But we could deal with him. He's gay. We know. He's a designer, you know, but you're there's something wrong with you.

AZ

Yeah.

Anonymous

So but I think they're I think, you know, I think there are gay and lesbian in every single aspect of you know, in fashion. I mean regardless in urban, I think they're everywhere.

AZ

You just don't know who they are.

Anonymous

No, I wish they did. I wish I did. You know, like, if I could go to a company where I know that there were probably other gay and lesbian people that were out like I would in a heartbeat.

AZ

My boss is Lesbian actually. And her partner was the also the business partner. But that's besides the point. And actually, I think you've hit everything. Is there anything else you want to talk about?

Anonymous

Is there anything else you wanna know?

AZ

Let me see. Not really, let's end there. Okay. Thank you very much. This has been an excellent interview.