

## ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH LORAIN HUTCINS

Michelle Mueller: I'm Michelle Mueller, and I'm conducting this oral history interview with Loraine Hutchins. Today is August 7th, 2023. This interview is a part of a series of oral history interviews I'm conducting with LGBTQ Pagan leaders. Our purpose today is to collect and preserve your oral history, Loraine. I'll ask some guiding questions, tentatively organized as early life, life's work, gender and sexual identity, and spirituality. But I want to emphasize that your oral history is your story to tell. There are many attributes and experiences that make a human being. Feel free to shift our conversations so as to focus the oral history wherever you would like to at present. And I want to encourage you to take the time you desire, answering any question or questions, to not feel rushed at any point in the conversation, and to not feel bound in any way to any specific question that I ask. Does that sound like a good plan?

Loraine Hutchins: Thank you very much. Yes.

Michelle Mueller: Do you have any specific requests as we get started?

Loraine Hutchins: No. I'm honored to be a part of this.

Michelle Mueller: I'm so delighted. Okay, I'd love to start with your early life. What are some aspects of your upbringing that set your life's course?

Loraine Hutchins: I'm fourth generation Washingtonian, from Washington DC. And I was brought up—as I say—I was baptized in the crucible of the social justice, civil rights Methodist church! Meaning that I was brought up a Methodist in a liberal way, during the civil rights movement in Washington, DC. And really civil rights and the Black church coming into what had been formerly my white church was the most transformative spiritual experience of my life.

Michelle Mueller: So, Loraine, when you were a child, what did you want to be? And did you become it?

Loraine Hutchins: I don't know what I wanted to be when I was a child. I didn't understand that I could *be*. I really I mean when I was in high school, I wanted to be a journalist, except that it seemed like all of them were white men who were drunks and smoked cigarettes. And so I felt discouraged by that and did not become a journalist.

Loraine Hutchins: I think I'm a priestess without a congregation. That's a whole other story. But I didn't think about ministry as a child, and I was surrounded by a family that did enact pastoral care and ministry in their own ways.

Michelle Mueller: So let's talk about "priestess without a congregation." What does that mean? What does that mean to you?

Loraine Hutchins: Um it means that I've often experienced being the Cassandra in the room, the Cassandra in the community. Somebody who's kind of way out there ahead, thinking through the strategic action points that my community hasn't gotten to yet, and getting a lot of resistance and

hostile responses from people who are frightened by dissent and conflict and not ready for the changes we have to make to survive.

Loraine Hutchins: So I mean, you know, I occasionally have a sense of community. I've been in covens. I've enacted rituals with people. I feel a part of a community of loving people, but I don't feel like we have the shape or the purpose that we need. So that's why I feel "without."

Michelle Mueller: Thank you. I'd love to talk about your career and your life's work, which sounds like where we're going. So let's just do that. You've published extensively—and I say that as someone who knows that by reading your work—so what I'm curious is, you know, since you have done that extensive publishing, what would you...what would you like to add to the public record? I'm curious, you know, what and who were the greatest social and intellectual influences on you? And most importantly, you know, what haven't you had the chance to say publicly?

Loraine Hutchins: I don't know, Michelle. That's a great question. I'm speaking now in the voice of an aging person living amongst aging people in an intentional retirement community...well, it's called a CCRC—a continuing care retirement community which encompasses a nursing home and assisted living as well as independent livers, which I am supposedly one. And I think that there's stories from that period in my life which I'm living right now that haven't come forward yet. And that I *might* publish. But I might not publish. Because there's just a lot of ethical considerations that I have to respond to in terms of writing about a specific community that is a nonprofit, that is faith-based, that is vulnerable in this larger world of senior, elderly housing situations that are all at risk in neoliberal, neo-colonial, advanced capitalism-fascism. Does that make any sense? I don't know.

Michelle Mueller: Well, I'd love to hear you talk more about that. You know. What are, what do you see as...what are some of the greatest social and/or political problems that you are choosing to focus on today?

Loraine Hutchins: I'm choosing to focus more and more on the intersection of disabilities and aging as relates to gender and orientation. Because that's where I find myself. And that's where I have my voice. And I basically, other than a few women and one or two men allies here, I basically feel very alone, isolated, and not encouraged to speak out. And I goddamn will. [laughter]

Michelle Mueller: So what would you, what would you say to a younger you? You know whether that's you in your twenties, you know...however you want to answer it. But what would you say to a younger you?

Loraine Hutchins: Um. Hang in there, Babe. It's all right. You will make it. It's hard, but it's worth it.

Michelle Mueller: Thank you.

Loraine Hutchins: That's basically what I'd say. I'm also very grateful to be alive and to be alive in this fraught community, because you know, a lot of us don't live this long.

Michelle Mueller: Mm.

Loraine Hutchins: And 75 feels like living long. Even if I'm around women in their nineties who are amazingly much more fit and in shape than me.

Michelle Mueller: Will you...I'd love to hear you talk more about this community, the residential community that you're a part of now. What's day-to-day life?

Loraine Hutchins: Well, I mean, I'll talk about it. We've skipped over 75 years, but...or 70 years—I've been here 5 years. But let me talk a little bit about it. It's called Friends' House. And that comes from the Society of Friends, and... When this faith group was created, I believe it was called "the Society for the Friends of Truth" "...of Truth," and the "Truth" part got dropped off. They are conventionally called Quakers, and Quaker, it's kind of like an n-word...when it was first used in England to denigrate people who quaked. Like the Shakers. And I don't... I've never been to a Quaker religious service where people did what I just did, like move their bodies. In fact, I find Quakers very restrained and shut down on their embodiment, today. But 60 years ago almost, this place was founded by a group of Quakers, of Friends, from Washington, DC, who were involved in the anti-war movement. The peace movement. And it's always been a community that was part Quaker and part inclusive of other people, because it's been interfaith. They didn't talk about themselves as interfaith. "Interfaith" is not a term or a phrase that got used until recently in religious history. Because everything was assumed to be Christian Christian Christian, or Judeo-Christian, which also is a horrible term.

Loraine Hutchins: But if you look at the original founders here, only about a third of them were Quakers, and the rest of them were Jewish, Unitarian, other Protestant, and what some people call the Quakolics, you know, or Quaker-Catholic, or recovering Catholics, not Quaker or whatever. I mean there's Buddhists here...and so it's one of the places that I can live where I don't feel shunned for my Pagan values or my Pagan beliefs. I don't feel particularly understood about them. But I also feel that Quakers are nature lovers, and because they, because...and then I'm saying "they" because I don't really identify as a "we Quaker." But in some ways I do identify as a "we Quaker," because I've been here five years, and the longer I'm here, the more I understand about Quaker approaches and how they can relate to my life. But when I'm saying "they"... I'm sorry I lost the train of that thought. But it's about how we approach life experiences in terms of our values. And...and I know that's hard, because of separation of church and state type of stuff. But the longer I live here, the more I understand that this is important, and also interfaith, religious tolerance is also important.

Loraine Hutchins: I'm a part of the environment committee. Activist here, and that has to do a lot with trying to protect the trees. Stop invasive species. Stop the use of chemical fertilizers. A lot of stuff that's going on on the land here, and the land here is amazing land. I could go off on the land in a Pagan way, but I won't at the moment. But I just read...I read some Quaker little pamphlets that they have that are educational that they publish through their Quaker publishing house, out of Pendle Hill, which is their retreat center near Philadelphia, and there's one called the *Atheist Guide to Quaker*, or something like that, it starts off *The Atheist's Guide*... It's not about atheism at all. And it's not about theism. It's about separating the theology of the still small voice of God within us from the methodology of decision-making within the Quaker meetinghouse. And you know

they not only have meetings for worship; they have meetings for business that they start off with a moment of silence, and they conduct the business of the individual congregation in a spiritual way.

Loraine Hutchins: And they have another book like called *Beyond Consensus: Salvaging the Sense of the Meeting*, which was written by a local Quaker here, who was a, what they call “weighty Quaker,” or somebody who was beloved, was an elder, who died. His name is Barry Morley, and Barry Morley is writing all about how there’s something way way way beyond consensus called “sense of the meeting,” which we can practice if we really get into decision-making that’s nonviolent conflict resolution and nonviolent caring community, and that it’s something that has to do with detaching oneself ego-wise from one’s bias, or judgment, or position on an issue, and trying to feel deeper for the sense of the whole group, and what the community needs to go forward.

Michelle Mueller: Will have to check out both of those resources. They both sound very accessible and useful to people who aren’t identified with the Friends or Quaker tradition.

Loraine Hutchins: It took me five years living here to find them, Michelle. They’re not, I mean, yes, they’re hidden somewhere in our little library, but they’re not promoted. Or, there’s not like a Quaker 101 class here. There is a Sunday morning meeting that I don’t go to. You know why I don’t go to it? I get fidgety. And I don’t know if you’ve ever been to a Quaker meeting, what or if you’ve done Zen sitting, but I mean it’s you...you gotta sit and be quiet and and contemplative. And there’s no music. There’s no movement. In usual Quaker worship. The thing that happened to me as a child, as a little white girl. Okay. I was a little white girl at Brightwood Park Methodist Church at 8th and Jefferson Streets, Northwest in Washington, DC. And our church was entirely white.

Loraine Hutchins: But because of the phenomena of post-World War II housing, integration and Southern Black northward migration, and the availability of government jobs to Black people, the neighborhood around our church started changing from white to Black in the ’50s. And one reason it changed was redlining and racism and white flight, and so white flight made it so that I was the only white kid in my third grade Sunday School class by the time I got to third grade, and so our white church, although we still had a white minister who was a good liberal, kind of became a Black church. And my dad was from the South. My mother was considered a Yankee because she was from DC. Although DC doesn’t feel like Yankee at all to me. But you know I’m sitting there prim and proper, with the rest of my white family and the Black congregation surrounding us is like, worshipping like this. And you know, I started having... I’ve written about this and published about this; I started having fantasies about running to the altar and dancing on the altar. And I mean, I said, “dance naked on the altar” because it felt like a nakedness. But I was told not to do that, and I said to my parents, but why are they moving? And why are they saying, “Yes, Amen! Say it.” And my parents said, “Well, you know they worship differently than us. It’s all right.”

Loraine Hutchins: But the the discontinuity between the white worshipping style and the Black worshipping style never got resolved. It just cohabitated into the rest of my church experience before I left, when I went to college, because by the time I got to college I was no longer going to abide the woman-hatred and the homophobia inside the church, which is persisting 60 years later. Splitting apart the Methodist church. I’m over it, over it, over it, way over it. it’s so humiliating

and embarrassing. And when I was a high school graduate, the Methodist church officially had funded a magazine called *Motive Magazine*. I know that there's probably *Motive Magazine* copies in the RAN Archive, because the last issue of *Motive Magazine* before the church shut it down, was co-edited by lesbians and gay men.

Loraine Hutchins: And one of the lesbians was Sally Gearhart, who became my mentor. You know, a lot of other people. So you know, I saw that happen in the church when I was leaving the church. And I realized now, this many years later, that the church has still not heeded the recommendations and the vision in that *Motive Magazine* that was shut down and defunded, and the gay man, who was the editor of it, was pushed out. His name was B.J. Stiles. S. T. I. L. E. S.

Michelle Mueller: Thank you. this is really excellent history to contribute to the public record. I'm grateful for that. I'd love to talk more about your first 70 years...since you said...we talked about the residential community. And that...I'm I'm really curious about. I'd love to know more about spirituality in the arc of your life, Loraine.

Loraine Hutchins: Yeah.

Michelle Mueller: I'm curious if, as I hear you tell some of these stories with your you know, your your Methodist upbringing. And now your residential period with with the Quakers. I think of the term "religious fluidity," and I'm I'm just curious, you know, if that's something that feels applicable? But I'm really...so I think the questions are—whichever ones you want to answer, of course—but like what...are there spiritual traditions that have nourished you in your lifetime?

Loraine Hutchins: I'm a friend of Ibrahim ["Baba" Farajajé], and world religions have influenced me my whole life. Particularly when I was doing my doctoral research, and he was one of the professors on my committee through Union Institute. And I felt lost a lot because there's not really people practicing my beliefs locally.

Loraine Hutchins: And there have been times in my life when I felt more connected, and times when I felt less connected, and pretty much today I I I feel less connected. But when I left my family's home in DC. And went to the Midwest to college. There was a chaplain at the college who was a big influence for me. He was Episcopal, he was...he wasn't really a spiritual influence. He was a more of a community political influence, because he cared about students and issues that were happening at the college. And he had been a nuclear physicist who quit and went to seminary because he was disgusted with nuclear science. And it's it's it's poisonous. That was an influence for me, even though we weren't sitting down and praying and having communion, you know. But after I left college and became part of the women's movement, I started discovering the women's spirituality movement.

Loraine Hutchins: And in fact, I wrote something about this recently. I'll email you. It's a little short story called...well, it's a, it's a creative nonfiction real story called, "Topple The Man." And it basically involves hitchhiking to California from DC in 1973, when I was in my early twenties and discovering the women's spirituality movement. Out there there were the beginnings of women going back to the...urban women going back to the land and creating women's communities. Covens. Spiritual... You know, we taught each other Tarot reading, divination. We

learned to meditate together and to create rituals that felt spiritually nourishing and grounding and cleansing that had nothing to do with world religions as we knew them, but picked and mixed from those religions into stuff that felt meaningful to us.

Loraine Hutchins: I mean, I could go on, but I'm not sure where to go on with it. I mean, you know, there's there's ways that I felt really connected to you know what I would call Goddess. Although the gender is not so important to me as more of a sense of, you know, Native American Great Spirit, you know, transcending gender. But definitely feeling very female in the affirmation of of female sacredness as well. In other words, I got really allergic to, and and sick of phallic male.

Loraine Hutchins: I just watched, by the way, a film that our women's group brought here to Friends' House, and the film is called *Pink Smoke Over the Vatican*. And you know I watched it with a bunch of women from different religious backgrounds. But you know we watched it together, going, oh, my God! These these women created ordination ceremonies for themselves because they already felt that they were priests. And you know, then I find out that Sinéad O'Connor was ordained in 1999 or something. So you know, there's a lot of our history that's still being uncovered, and that's why I'm such an advocate and a fan of oral history. And I taught oral history a lot when I was doing women's studies at the undergraduate level.

Michelle Mueller: I have some questions about gender and sexual identity. So I'm thinking, maybe we go over to those...but then come back and talk about how how spirituality and gender/sexuality are are connected.

Loraine Hutchins: Sure.

Michelle Mueller: So, of course, questions about gender and sexual identity are by nature intimate. So just please take your time receiving the questions and respond in any way that feels appropriate to you right now. So let's see, here's a question. What do you remember about becoming aware of your sexual identity? Are there terms that you identify with?

Loraine Hutchins: I definitely identify with bisexual. But it can also be pansexual. And I identify as a woman, or as female. That's pretty much it.

Michelle Mueller: Is there anything you want to say about becoming aware of your sexual identity?

Loraine Hutchins: Uhh. Very confusing. I think, without the women's movement I'm not sure what what would have happened to me. Because I was engaged to be married in college, and if there'd been a better match I might have gotten gotten married and become a mom and had kids. But fortunately I broke up my engagement, and became much more fluid in my understanding. I mean the the man that I broke my engagement with, he ended up marrying a woman that was much more butch-acting than me. And I'm like, "Okay, you know, whatever whatever this is your relationship." But...I realized that stuff about gender that I was learning in the women's movement and applying that to how I felt in terms of my own desire and my own needs. It just didn't fit into heterosexism or heterosexual expectations. So spiritually I was looking for something, and emotionally and viscerally, I was looking for something different. And I haven't completely found

that in terms of partnering. I've been... I've had deep, intimate relationships with women and men both in my life. But, as I said before, I was being interviewed by this guy, Mason Funk. I don't know if you're familiar; he's done a lot of oral histories. He's got a group called Outwords, it's on the Web. But you know. Mason asked me what was the most significant relationship in my life, and I ended up saying, "Mason, it was with learning to love me, and I'm still working on it."

Michelle Mueller: Thank you for sharing that again, here. I'm curious about your relationship with gender identity today. You've mentioned the women's spirituality movement. You know has your...what's your relationship with gender identity today? And has it changed?

Loraine Hutchins: Not that much. I feel a lot of pressure. An obligation to be an educator. In fact, as a bisexual, I feel like I've been forced into sex, sexuality, education, because people who don't identify or experience their bisexual possibility. And I'm not saying that everybody is bisexual. But people, but most people don't understand the bisexual spectrum or option. So I feel like I've had to become an educator. And my sense of gender is that we're stuck with it, and we need to get beyond it. But that it's *really* difficult, and it's not going to resolve before I die.

Loraine Hutchins: I've had some fraught relationships with and feelings about the whole TERF thing, because I'm not a TERF, and I condemn the TERFs, but I also understand some of the um...angst...of, for instance, you know I'm listening to liberal news, and I'm listening to people say, "pregnant people, nursing people," and and and and... I I I am very uncomfortable with "woman" being erased from that language. It makes me furious. I feel like we should not be doing that until rape is eliminated from our culture entirely.

Loraine Hutchins: And I know that you know everybody can get raped. But I get really angry when the de-gendering or the the diluting of of of gender labeling gets put in service of a larger social discourse that is much more complex. And the reason I listen to the TERFs is because I think that the medical industrial establishment and the pharmacology, sexual reassignment industries are manipulating people in ways that are immoral. And it's not that I think anyone should be prevented from taking hormones or having sexual reassignment surgery whatsoever. But it is my uncomfortableness with the situation socially.

Michelle Mueller: Mm-hmm. I can understand many of those concerns. I've heard you know at least one person kind of present the possibility of saying, or the approach of saying, "pregnant women and others who are pregnant," as a as a way of being inclusive without erasing.

Loraine Hutchins: I'm fine with that. That I feel better about. But this "pregnant people" stuff it it it pisses me off.

Michelle Mueller: I understand the concerns.

Loraine Hutchins: In fact, I'm sorry, one more thing. In fact, I think it's needlessly polarizing, and adds to the distrust and the hatred amongst us, which we've got to resolve.

Michelle Mueller: Mm-hmm. I agree with you, I agree with you, and I've published on this kind of thing exactly. And so, yeah, I I want to stick to your story. But these are really excellent

important points, and that...there, there is backlash against feminism; and gender and sexual minorities, it breaks my heart, the ways in which the cis white heteropatriarchy is fracturing these movements.

Lorraine Hutchins: Yeah, yeah.

Michelle Mueller: And there are some kind of key ideas that are floating in this conversation already, which are some that I wanted to pick your brain on. You're one of the founders of bisexual studies, and there are a couple of terms and points of discourse in queer identity today that I'm very excited to hear your thoughts on. You've already mentioned one which is pansexuality. What are some of your thoughts about the discourse of bisexuality and pansexuality that are common today?

Lorraine Hutchins: I think I'm kind of, I don't know if you know Robyn Ochs' work, but I'm kind of with her on embracing the largest spectrum of terms. And again not polarizing, because I went through the bi/pan wars. I'm tired of the bi/pan wars. It's not worth it. We need to support and embrace anyone's definition of their sexuality, and to not... I mean the reason I was...I mentioned that little piece I wrote called "Topple The Man," which I'll send to you. It starts off with a quote from a feminist folk song. I can't even remember the name of the folk song, but it says, "We do his job by turning on each other instead of together aiming for The Man." And that's what I see us doing is fighting amongst each other, instead of unifying to do the transformation that is necessary for us to survive in a post-sexist world. I don't know if that answers you.

Michelle Mueller: Yeah, absolutely. I would say, my views are similar. I identify as bisexual. And I...but I often wonder if I came of age and came out today...maybe I would choose a different word. But so to I I I agree.

Lorraine Hutchins: Well, the other word is "queer." And I and I also experience that. I mean, I have anecdotes about that. I don't know. But okay, I mean one of the things. Okay. Sometime in the mid '80...in the mid '90s. In the bi movement which I was a leader of, we were working with what was called at that time the National Lesbian Gay Task Force...no, it was called...Gay...I forget what it was called. They now have finally renamed themselves the National LGBTQ Task Force. But they didn't do it without adding on the Q.

Lorraine Hutchins: And they resisted the Bi Visibility Day celebrations that we asked them to participate in for years because of their own biphobia, and once "pan" and "queer," you know, became a part of the options, then they were willing to embrace bi as a part of a spectrum.

Lorraine Hutchins: And you know, when I first, when I was working on my PhD, which I finished in 2001. I felt kind of awkward and and uncomfortable calling it a queer feminist analysis, because "queer feminist" was not a phrase that I heard other people using, but I did feel that it was both queer-identified, and feminist-identified. So I did use that phrase. And now that phrase is used a lot more than it was in '01 And I'm not taking any credit for that. But I'm just saying that "queer" is another one of those vague words that people find less threatening than "bisexual." Well, why do we find bisexual threatening? What's so threatening about bi?

Michelle Mueller: That is such a good question. What is so threatening about bi?

Loraine Hutchins: And don't give me that shit about how bi is binary. Just don't go there. Because I mean, I've seen Robin and those of us with her fight back on that and say, you know, bisexual means being attracted to someone like myself and someone with an other gender than myself. So it's it's not about male/female. Just stop it. Male/female is where we're limited. So I'm sorry I was saying originally that back in the '90s, in the mid '90s we were working with the Task Force, "we" meaning the bi movement, on producing a *Bi Health Manual*, which I think is still around on the web as a PDF. And when we were producing the *Bi Health Manual*, there was no one out identified bi on their staff in DC. However, they did have on their staff in DC someone who was a lesbian lawyer who was working with the trans movement. And they allowed her to have editorial control over the content in the *Bi Health Manual*. And we had a glossary, and we had a definition of the word "gender," and she changed our definition of the word "gender," and no one told us, and no one asked our permission, and they published it on their website with conflating sex and gender as one thing...and back then...and I would still say even today...I'm like, wait a minute. I I you know I I come from...I mean my degree's in cultural studies. I don't have a masters in public health. But I come from a public health education orientation that really says sexuality is related to chromosomes, biology, anatomy, physiology; and gender is socially constructed. If you're gonna conflate these, we gotta talk about it. And there was no talking about it. It was like you do it our way or forget it. And that's kind of still where that's not still, the trans and the bi movements have improved on their communication since then. And there's a lot of over overlap, because there's a lot of trans people, or bi and vice versa, or pan, or queer. But that's where some of the discourse has gotten bogged down. That has been quite frustrating and probably significant for us to continue to work on.

Michelle Mueller: Yeah, well, thank you for doing that work. There's another label in queer culture that I'd like to ask you about, and the label is "gender non-conforming." And to set it up. I'm going to read a quote from your work that relates to some of my thoughts, and this is a paragraph from the introduction to *Bi Any Other Name*, which is a book that you co-edited with Lani Kaahumanu, and the copyright of this material is 1991. Here's the quote: "Life is both/and; there are male, female, and transsexual people. All these people can appear to be masculine and/or feminine since these fairly rigid traits are created by a polarized sexist reality. Think about it—who says what is masculine or feminine, what is sissy or tomboy, what is butch or femme? Transvestites, for instance, play out a broad range of possibilities within this dichotomy, whatever their sexual orientation." End quote.

Michelle Mueller: So as a bisexual cisgender woman myself, I wrestle with gender non-conforming as a label for myself and others. Am I gender non-conforming? In some ways I'm traditionally femme. There are other ways in which my behavior could be coded as somewhat butch or masculine. And that just reminds me how short-changing the labels gender conforming and gender non-conforming might be. So what are your thoughts? In your vast experience with bisexual advocacy and activism? How do the labels gender conforming and gender nonconforming pan out for bisexuals?

Loraine Hutchins: I still stand by that '91 quote. Even though I don't think we used "gender conforming" and "non-conforming" back in '91. But exactly what you said. You know, in the

'90s, I went on to do my my graduate work or my my PhD research, looking at sexuality and religion in terms of some of these terms, and it was clear to me that when I was looking at what in the United States they call Tantra or Neo-Tantra, adapting some spiritual beliefs from other cultures into this culture...mostly misguidedly, but also, you know, using them a lot in terms of communication for teaching people about relationships and identities.

Loraine Hutchins: You know, we used to have...when we were creating like Tantra teaching workshops. You know, people would talk about “gender-balanced,” which is a whole different term which we haven’t introduced here yet. But gender balance is is a heterosexual heterosexist device to enforce heterosexism. And one thing I noticed in understanding the maleness and the femaleness and the essence of what the West calls Tantra is that maleness and femaleness get reified into these frozen essentialist states of being that are not necessarily real, and not what Asian religious scholars meant at all when they talked about yin yang, or or or or yoni and lingam, or all that stuff.

Loraine Hutchins: All that stuff. All the genital, you know, polarities.

Loraine Hutchins: You know. So so you were originally asking me about gender nonconforming, and that’s it! I mean conforming to what? For who? And what’s the non? ...If we’re adapting and accepting one definition of maleness and one definition of femaleness, we’ve lost already.

Michelle Mueller: Right. Those are exactly kind of the the problems I experience in my own life, and you know terms can be helpful *and* have limitations, and I know that those are terms that you know, are ones that many people do identify with and and find helpful and and beneficial. And I just I felt like that part, the shortcomings, maybe haven’t been talked about as much.

Loraine Hutchins: They haven’t. And and the the horrible place masculinity is in today, and Western culture hasn’t been talked about either. So you know, it’s rough.

Michelle Mueller: Yeah.

Loraine Hutchins: I’m glad I’m not a man.

Michelle Mueller: Why?

Loraine Hutchins: I don’t see men as having strong masculinity role models in our culture. And when I was teaching Sex Ed 101, it was really clear to me that young men, my students, had to constantly reaffirm and reassert their masculinity in the world in a way that women do not. There’s lots of other problems that women have. But we’re not asked to prove that we’re female.

Michelle Mueller: Mmm.

Loraine Hutchins: In the same way.

Michelle Mueller: Mm-hmm. Yeah, different expectations.

Loraine Hutchins: Yeah. And they they relate to our oppressions and our roles. Yeah.

Michelle Mueller: Yeah.

Loraine Hutchins: But that's why I'm glad I'm not a man.

Michelle Mueller: Yeah. Oh, it makes sense. All right. So we said we would come back to kind of spirituality and sexuality, or gender and sexuality. And of course you've written quite a lot about sacred sexuality. And I'd just like, you know, to to ask you in this moment. In your own life, kind of the whole arc of your lifetime, what have been some of the kind of the most prominent and major continuous themes, or changing themes about spirituality and gender or sexual identity being connected?

Loraine Hutchins: Have you read the Taylor & Francis Routledge book that Herukhuti and I co-edited.

Michelle Mueller: I've read parts of it.

Loraine Hutchins: There's a piece that I wrote in there about getting beyond the sacred prostitute, which is my first response to that, is to look at that piece. I can't remember the title of it. But I also have to ask you for a bathroom break.

Michelle Mueller: Yes.

Loraine Hutchins: I don't know if you want to hit pause or not.

Michelle Mueller: I will hit pause. Yes, okay.

Loraine Hutchins: I promise I'll be back.

Michelle Mueller: No problem.

Loraine Hutchins: But you're asking me to think about sacred sexuality, right?

Michelle Mueller: Yes.

Loraine Hutchins: Okay. I'll be right back.

Michelle Mueller: Perfect. See you soon.

[pause in recording]

Michelle Mueller: Okay. So I'm back with Loraine Hutchins, and we're talking about how spirituality and sexuality are connected. And the gist of the question that I previously asked for, Loraine, is along the lines of you know...what are the kind of ongoing, continuous, or even kind of changing themes in Loraine's life experience about spirituality and sexuality as connected?

Loraine Hutchins: Thank you. It's very complex. It's very deep. And in inward inner as well as there in public, and you know, for somebody who's bisexual in an out political way, and who's been a spokesperson for the polyamory movement in an out political way. It's very exposing. And it's very important for me to be able to try to explain and help other people understand the connection between spirituality and sexuality, and when I was working on it as a grad student, I was creating internship possibilities for myself where I was exploring how to feel erotic and spiritual, and not feel them in conflict with each other in my own spiritual contemplative life and my own sensual body awareness of being alive in the world. And one thing I found, you know, looking at world religions is, you know, the the word for chi, or prana, or breath. You know it's all about the life force, and the life force within us, and the life force is sacred and the life forces is how life comes through our bodies into the world. And of course it's blessed. Of course it's sacred. And of course there's all sorts of religious and spiritual beliefs and questioning that have grown up around um, how do we foster and manage, and steward and honor that life force without misusing the power of it? And of course, every world religion has a sense of sacred sexuality. It's just they put a lot of boundaries and regulations on it.

Loraine Hutchins: And if we have a spiritual practice that is totally affirming of women's priesthood and of gay people, queer people's ability to minister to everyone, and to be ministered to by everyone. What does that do to the gender of God, or our understanding of how we practice our spirituality and our sexuality in community and privately? So it's always felt connected for me. But it's also felt fraught with the contradictions and the questions and the dilemmas that our culture and different cultures present. It's not easy. I don't feel like I'm answering the question because there's no easy answer.

Michelle Mueller: That's fine. It's all...it's just a conversation.

Loraine Hutchins: Yeah.

Michelle Mueller: I'm gonna ask you one that might be kind of juicy, which is, you talk about kind of you know different religions and how they set limitations on sacred sexuality. And you've talked about Paganism. How well do you think Paganism has defined those parameters? I guess, just like how how well has Paganism maybe resolved problems in in sacred sexuality, sacred pleasure? I guess I'm curious if there have been any kind of particular problems that you've experienced.

Loraine Hutchins: Good question. Well, that gives me an opportunity to sing the praises of Starhawk, and to say that it's only traditions like the Reclaiming tradition that she helped create that have given me any hope. I mean there's other people like her...including Sally Gearhart you know, who passed away last year who...there's a a film being produced on her. But—and these people are not, I don't even know... Well, Starhawk would identify as Neo... Starhawk calls herself an ecofeminist Jewitch.

Loraine Hutchins: But you know not all feminist spirituality people identify as Pagan. So you know it's it's I...I'm sure you've encountered this, so it's hard to to put a box around Pagan. I do identify as Pagan, because I don't particularly subscribe to any particular European packaged

Wiccan...what are they called? Not legacy. But the you know, the inherited, initiated traditions generally.

Michelle Mueller: Like a lineage-based tradition?

Loraine Hutchins: Yeah, lineage. I don't. I don't. I don't claim myself in anybody's lineage, except maybe, you know, tangential to Reclaiming and Starhawk type of people. And I also understand enough about Reclaiming on lineage to know that, you know it's it's kind of eclectic and ecumenical in some ways. So you're asking whether Paganism has addressed spiritual...has addressed queer feminist spirituality issues?

Michelle Mueller: It's really whatever question you want to answer.

Loraine Hutchins: But okay, I'm frustrated because I don't feel there's enough of a community that I can touch base with or contribute to, and I feel pretty lost and isolated towards this time in my life. You know, I live in a community that is full of heterosexual couples, who are in many cases one caregiver and the other, and I don't feel particularly welcome except in a tokenized way to be out. And even if I find some of the women in those heterosexual couplings as much more attractive than the men to me, they're not accessible to me as partners or possible intimate lovers. So there's just a lot of ways in which the community limits, that any community faces, are kind of microcosm here in this 200 people that live on this land. And there are people here who I wouldn't live with or speak to if they were off this land. But on this land we are part of a community that I care about.

Loraine Hutchins: And when I was talking about the heterosexual couples being in caregiving roles. I've done a lot of thinking and a lot of research and a lot of exploration experientially with with relationships and with communication here about caregiving. And it's really clear to me that it's related to gender. Caregiving is often seen as a female service or feminized service, even if the man is a caregiver to the woman, to the wife.

Loraine Hutchins: And actually Ai-jen Poo, who started the Domestic Caregivers Alliance...that's not the name of it. But you know, she started organizing, working with care workers in the home and she's done a lot of good work, her and Ram Dass, who's now dead, but who wrote one of his last books, he wrote, was called, *How Can I Help?* And he wrote that as a quadriplegic who had been dependent on a caregiver, 24-7 for many years after he had a stroke. And *How Can I Help?* is a book that really merges the roles of caregiver and caregivee into one role and the merge, and it merges, paid, and unpaid caregivers into understanding that the payment is a phenomena of our economy. But it is not in our culture, but it is not a dividing line in how we experience caring.

Loraine Hutchins: And and to me caring is about ministering and ministry in in the large sense of all of us creating the love that we need to thrive on to stay alive. And I've been understanding since I've been living with all people in a retirement community, how much disabilities, including deafness and isolation relate to stress and our ability to live whole lives with diminished physical and mental properties. And you know it's it's heavy duty stuff that actually, I mean, I know this is not Pagan, but I have to you know give a shout out to Ram Dass and Timothy Leary, and everybody who talked about altered states of consciousness. Because I think dementia or intermittent

dementia that's related to UTIs. You know. I mean, I mean a lot of time, urinary tract infections can cause disorientation in an elderly or any-aged person, and it's not even recognized as a UTI. So I want to say that alternate...ways that people's consciousness and their perceptions get altered by physical and mental circumstances relate to the spiritual care and the physical care of those people are people, us.

Loraine Hutchins: And it's it's so complex because in a way gender is the least of it, and in a way, gender is totally related to how people feel shame about our bodies. I mean, how can I ask someone to help me go to the toilet or or or wash myself? How can I? Or how can I help someone go to the toilet or wash themselves without...you know, those are intimate intimate intimate interactions. And they probably have nothing to do with orgasm or with...you know, my therapist talks about arousal. And she came from a...she was a massage therapist before she was a talk therapist, and she came to somatic therapy through a lot of awareness of of kesthesiology in the body. And so let me just say when she says "arousal," she's talking about it somatically as the body's alertness to fight or flight and freeze. And she's not talking about erotic arousal. She's talking about trauma trigger.

Loraine Hutchins: And so if we're talking about trauma and triggers, we're talking about the body being in a state of alertness that is unhealthy.

Loraine Hutchins: And how do we dial that down? How do we slow down the level of stress and trauma in a person's life to to help us even understand anything about how our gender identity or spiritual beliefs relate to growing old and dying? And I'm thinking a lot about that, because people are dying all around me. And you know, how do I want to die? I I did hospice with a partner of mine and it was uncomfortable, and it was, it was rough, and I learned a lot from it, and she died in 2015, and I'm still processing it.

Loraine Hutchins: And she taught me a lot about death and dying in ways I don't want to go out like she had to go out. So. And she was bi and poly and unpartnered in a way. I mean, you know, she and I were partners in some emotional sense, but we were not lovers at that time, and so there's a lot of ways that death and dying are on my mind these days.

Loraine Hutchins: And in some ways gender is not relevant at all, and in some ways it's really related to how we experience our our identity and letting go of our identity as we are transitioning to another state of being that means letting go of our bodies.

Loraine Hutchins: And I watched Ibrahim do that. You know, in his last days he was amazing. Yeah.

Michelle Mueller: I'm really grateful for you talking about, naming your loneliness. And I feel like the version you know of... your story you know, had the bi poly specificities as part of it, and I think it's a really, it's a gift, you know, that you just contributed. Because you, as you know, you are not the last person who will experience loneliness and you know there, there will be others who are experiencing it because of being bi and/or poly or having other kind of shared attributes with you, and there are people who will experience loneliness for completely other reasons. And I think this part of your oral history is, it's it's a gift. Yeah, go ahead.

Loraine Hutchins: I wanted to add something before I went to the bathroom, when I said, if you had read the piece I wrote in Herukhuti's and my long-titled book, which I can never remember the title. But it's something like *Sexuality, Bisexuality...blah blah blah*. The piece in there. It's kind of the reverse of the original sacred prostitute piece I wrote in a *Journal of Bisexuality* article earlier in my publishing history, and the reverse means that it's a difference between being seen as the sacred prostitute to being the client of the sacred prostitute within all the contradictions of that term itself. But it's the reverse. The reversal means...and this is why I'm talking about ministering and caregiving...caregiving as one circle rather than a bifurcated set of gender roles, really. I mean, if I mean, gender is a horrible default. But, is it different to seek the connection with an erotic priestess or priest as a means of spiritual and somatic worship and fulfillment, or release, or communion with with the the spirit? Is that different to be the client versus to be the give or the minister? I don't think there's a difference if you understand the circularity of it. But there's a lot of people that don't understand that, and who continue to approach it in a in a bifurcated way. So. And it's humiliating. I mean. You know the difference between receiving money or compensation for my services as a sex coach versus me seeking an escort session. Because I long for that physical and emotional and spiritual intimacy with another human being who feels to me like we're channeling something together that that feels beyond physical. And that is spiritual.

Loraine Hutchins: It's a switch. And is it a gender switch? No, it's not a gender switch at all. But it's a switch or a role reversal that does relate to our spiritual beliefs and our beliefs about sexuality. That to me, is what I was trying to understand when I was doing my graduate research and which I'm still trying to understand 20 years later. I don't know if that helps, but I'm still trying to understand it. And a lot of it is how how people do therapy and do counseling and do ministering and do sex work. And I'm not saying that sex work is ministering. I am not.

Michelle Mueller: But it can be?

Loraine Hutchins: Yeah, it can be.

Michelle Mueller: Like minds.

Loraine Hutchins: And that's what's so disturbing to right-wing people who don't understand how to, I don't want to say tame, but how to work with the tremendous power of of sexuality and spirituality, and I have to give a shout out to Annie Sprinkle. And her partner Beth Stephens and their friend Barbara Carrellas, and everybody who's working on all this kind of stuff. In ways that are disruptive to the so-called natural order, which is not the natural order at all.

Michelle Mueller: Mm. I feel like we're kind of talking about the nature of relationship. That reciprocity continues.

Loraine Hutchins: Yeah. Yeah.

Michelle Mueller: And so many people age together. And you know the, a person who receives care gives care. We don't all remain in one of those categories.

Loraine Hutchins: No, and you know, as I learned in the feminist disability movement...I just watched *Crip Camp* again. I *really* recommend that film, if you haven't watched it. It's on Netflix right now. But it's it starts off in in the '70s, in a summer camp for young people with disabilities. But you know it. It's all talking about, you know how we take care of each other, regardless of our ability, and it reminds me of you know an old feminist saying, I remember, which is that if we live long enough, all of us are disabled.

Loraine Hutchins: So let's work from the place of being disabled, and how to help each other at any level of ability.

Michelle Mueller: Right. Well, we are wrapping up quite naturally. But I do want to ask you the final question which I typically close with, which is, are there important questions that I haven't asked? Or is there any subject that you'd like to return to before we close?

Loraine Hutchins: Great question. Great. A summing up question. There are many important questions, but I don't know how much you can deal with, and you you gotta like prioritize your own your own research, and we are continuing to ask the questions and answer the questions. I don't have any particular ones right now other than just to say that...I'm both lonely and hopeful. I'm lonely that it's so hard for so many people right now, including myself. And I know that I take that more personally than I should, and that I get more worried about other people as well as having a hard time taking care of myself in a in a healthy way. You know, I mean, I'm a person with some chronic health problems that will probably kill me at some point. So you know, it's hard choosing the the spiritual and the physical path that we have open to ourselves at this point in our lives.

Loraine Hutchins: And there's no question you can ask me where that I can offer an answer to that resolve that, except for me to say that, I used to have this boyfriend, who I'm glad I am free of, who was...his philosophy in life was, "Loraine. People are shit. The world is shit." And he had a lot of reason for bitterness which I won't go into. But my response to him was, "Bob, I know people are mostly shit, but I want to say 'mostly' because I have to believe that it's not only shit because I need hope to go on, and hope makes it more messy, yes, and hope also gives me some power and some spirit to not give up and to not submit." And that's where I'm at.

Michelle Mueller: Right. Thank you, Loraine, for contributing to the public record. You've always been very generous with your intellectual property and and sharing and publishing and making stuff available open access where possible. And I'm very grateful for this opportunity to meet you today. Okay, all right. Well, I'll be in touch.

Loraine Hutchins: Okay, thank you, Michelle.

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