

Trans Wellness Q+A

How have you been practicing self-care recently?

Amayas: It's been a struggle bus couture, but I think just trying to get myself ready, put makeup on, get my gigs together, look the way I want to, grab a boba. ..I feel like that's kind of what it is right now...

Lakshmi I think for me, in regards to self care, it has been such a huge learning curve, especially since I'm in my senior year [of high school]...self care is such a hard thing to do when you have no time for it... You know, I went into the senior year thinking, Okay, I'm gonna take eight courses one semester, and I'm gonna apply early to college, and I'm going to do all these different clubs and be involved as much as I can... then I realized one month in... I can't do all of that... for a while, I was very angry at myself, because I felt like I wasn't doing enough...I had to realize that in order to be successful, I had to make sure that my mental well being was good...If you're not taking care of your mind, your body and your heart. You know, so whether that's sleep, whether that's making sure that you're eating or that you're not so stressed out to the point where like, you don't you can't function. That was a big learning curve for me in the last couple of weeks.

Why is wellness important to you?

Amayas: I mean, if you're not feeling well, then you aren't feeling your best. Right? If I'm not feeling good about my situation, or about the things that I'm doing, or about how I look, or about... my gender expressions...In order to feel my best, and the way that I look and feel and not feel as dysphoric or those types of things, I have to take care of myself, I have to take care of boundaries, I have to make sure that I'm setting myself up to feel the best...

Lakshmi: I totally agree with that... I think, for me, wellness has become such a vital part of my life, because I realized how good it feels to just feel happy, you know, or feel comfortable in your own skin... I grew my hair for a while and I noticed that as my hair grew longer, I just grew more and more depressed... I didn't understand the linkage of it. I was like, "why is this happening? I don't understand why I'm getting sadder" Then when I cut it off, it felt like such an immense weight was lifted off my shoulders, you know, and that's a form of taking care of your own wellness, whether it's sleeping enough, eating food, or dressing the way that you want to dress and express yourself the way you want to doing the things that help you feel good, go such a long way. Because when you do those things, everything around you just somehow becomes better.

What does wellness mean to you as a trans/nonbinary person?

Amayas: I think it's even more important because we're dealing with all the things already...it just adds a whole other thing being trans because it's a constant discovery of yourself. It's a constant moving in the world, not being respected the way that you need to be a lot of the times... you're dealing with dysphoria sometimes you might do something that you feel is about to curb that dysphoria, you're like, "I'm going to get extensions in my hair, and I'm going to not feel dysphoric" and then...boom...even though I did that thing, there's still this whole other aspect of it...I think it's just about making sure that you're aware of your, your privileges, and aware of your safety, and aware of your happiness, and your gender. The way you move in the world...as a trans person is still going to be different. We have similar things, but you know, me walking down the street some days, I'll get 20,000 things said to me, right?...But there might be a trans girly over here, that doesn't get that at all, you know... so it's it's just about making sure that you're taking care of what you're dealing with, and making sure that you are paying attention to those things and being aware of like, how you're going through the world and how you're going through your happiness, and how you're dealing with those types of things.

Lakshmi: Yeah, because I fully agree with being in a school setting, and being trans and non binary is so hard because of the fact that there's so few people there that are just like you. There's a constant struggle of "oh my gosh, are people going to respect my pronouns?" Then there's a fear of if I tell them my pronouns, are they going to make fun of me? I am non binary, and all my friends, are cisgender, I don't know anybody that's non-binary, in my close circle...Unfortunately, high school is very, sectionalized, like, boys hang out with boys or girls hang out with girls...and then you're just kind of like, "Where do I fit into the equation? Where do I feel comfortable? Where I can express myself?" or come one day in like a dress, and then the next in a tie and suit and not have people look at me asking, like, "Did something happen?" But, fortunately, when it comes to wellness, one of the biggest things, for me, at least, is being close to my counselors, because they are some of the most accepting people that I've ever met in my whole life. I know for sure that it helps me feel better about myself knowing that at least they understand.

Amayas: Thank you for sharing that, because, as a non-binary person as well, being the high school...I was lucky that I had a close friend who was also non binary, but they were trans masculine, and I'm trans feminine. So our experiences in school were very different. Because people would look at me and still be like, "Oh, that's just a man" and to them, they just be like, "Oh, you're just masculine person" and those two things are very different. Going through school is crappy, especially when you have people who are misgendering you, who are questioning you a lot of the time...in my experience, it's the admin, like they

could not wrap their head around it... I started my transition in 10th grade, people questioned it, even if they're not saying it verbally, they are questioning it. When you go through the hallways, and someone's talking to you about dress code, or someone calls you, sir... those things add up, and your energy points, are just getting taken away...for me, it was about having to go home, do all the things that I could do, even if I didn't do my homework. I was gonna take a nice shower, I was gonna make myself some tea, and watch a reality TV show. I have to build those energy points up way more than other people do.

What can allies do to support trans wellness in schools?

Lakshmi: My counselors are honestly amazing people, because they're one of a kind, a lot of the staff in our school, unfortunately, [are], not understanding of the whole pronoun thing or... respecting... individuals who, who identify outside of the gender norm, you know, and having them as a backup there has been such a beautiful thing to experience in my four years of high school. In my middle school, a place where it was horrible for me, because I was like, the first openly, gay kid, and I was the first openly kid who was transitioning. Everyone was just so hateful, looking back, I hear stories of kids that are there and it's so widely accepted. They asked kids for their pronouns regularly on the first day of school, they asked for their pronouns, they asked, "Hey, does anybody go by a different name? Or hey, what restroom do you feel comfortable going in?" It's become so different than when I was there... I enjoyed the whole aspect of seeing communities in those schools grow and flourish because of education, being educated about pronouns or what being non binary trans even means...I think that's what we need more of, you know?

Amayas: Yes, all of that, I would say, normalizing the conversations about pronouns, about transness, queerness and about respecting other people....I've noticed if a person isn't trans, and they go by a different name, it's cool everyone is like down. I'm gonna call you DD instead of whatever, but when a trans person is there accepting themselves speaking for themselves stating who they are, that is a threat. When I was in high school, you know, I was the tokenized student, because I was queer, I was trans and I was brown, they would eat that up, anytime that they could, trying to understand and taking my information, taking my stories, for them to get an education...I'm not an educator, I'm just trying to live life as a student. I think like you [Lakshi] was saying, the education part, students should not be educating their teachers, their admin, on what is and what isn't, okay. I already have to do that enough in my real life. The people who are supposed to be there caring for me, loving me, educating me, shouldn't be requiring me as a student to give all of that. I would say, to support the trans students the way that they need, ask for what those trans students need. If there's a GSA go to them be like, "What do you need? Is there anything that you need as students? Is there something that I can do to help?" I think educators

could maybe put into their lesson plans, trans history, trans language and all of those things, because they relate. You could put a trans person in a math equation or something and it makes sense...Talking about trans stories and normalizing those stories, because this is my normal...

Lakshmi: You brought up good point about like making kids who are trans in school the token...That is so frustrating, because in class, it's it's so common to be like, "Oh, yeah, let's discuss whether, you know, gay marriage should be legal or not." Or if trans students should be able to participate in the sport team that they want to and it's like...We don't talk about "Should men and women have the right to marry?"...So when you're sitting there in class, and people are like, "I don't think that a trans girl should be able to play on the girls team because they're not really girls" and you're just sitting there like, "wow, you're discussing what I'm trying to like to fight for." it's such an uncomfortable experience...it feels like being a bug being pinned onto a board and dissected and analyzed as if you were thinking and not like a living breathing human...we don't talk about their rights and wonder if they really deserve those rights to begin with. We don't do that. And yet, with the trans community that is so often done, and I don't think it's just it shouldn't be done. It's such an uncomfortable experience.

How have you been able to find communities?

Amayas: This is hard, because I think it depends on what community you're looking for, For me, I'm lucky that my sister is trans and I got to transition with her... We both got to learn from each other, she got to understand a little bit more about me being a trans feminine person and not being a trans woman and the difference between those things. But I've only had one trans femme friend. And they didn't go to school with me for my last two years. And so we didn't get to transition together, while in school, we transitioned together outside of it...I'm a club kid so when I was able to go to the clubs that's where I found my people, right? Because I do drag and burlesque, so I have sisters and siblings that do drag and, and they're a part of my comunidad. I was able to find some organizations to go to like after school or like on the weekend...I remember when I was younger, I used to go to one of the organizations and it was like every Friday, and we'd have a little Kiki with snacks and stuff. Then when I was in high school, there was another organization that I went to. I found so many people and so much community there... none of us had the same identities or the same experiences, but we all got to have that love because we were all queer or trans in some way...I think finding organizations where you can go like, or if you have a GSA like that was a great space for me to be able to talk about issues in the school or talk about our experiences as queer people in general. I definitely found a community there with a lot of people that you know, I didn't even go to school with because we had two schools, two high

schools and one school so we both intermixed our GSA and I got to see what they were dealing with... [we] got to understand what we were dealing with and, and having that was really important.

Lakshmi: I agree a lot with that. There wasn't a GSA in my middle school when I was there. The reason I started it was because we had a teacher who was lesbian and getting like threats and stuff and...that felt so scary to me. Because I was in eighth grade and I was about to go to high school and I was like, "man, I have no idea what's awaiting me" like if this is an adult, an authority figure getting threats, because she's lesbian, like what awaits me? The community that I found was like my teachers...two specific teachers who had known me for so long that were willing to listen and were willing to learn on their own...having those two teachers there helped me have the courage and build a community... the first GSA meeting we had 75 students, and not all of them were even there, because they were queer, or genderqueer, they were just allies...that made me realize, like, "wow, I spent these three years thinking that I was alone, look at this community of people that came together for something because we all knew what was going on was wrong and now I don't feel as afraid as I did before." Sometimes when you can't find your community, it's so important to create one for yourself, whether that's like, making a movement or speaking up about something or getting people that are like minded, join together and, and start building something together. I think that's so important, because that leaves a legacy, you know, like, now in that middle school, it's the only Middle School in our district that asks for pronouns, or changes your name on the profile thing, or lets you choose which restroom you want to go into, like, I think that's really important to keep in mind.

What are things you do for your own personal wellness?

Amayas: For me, I am moving... I need to be away from home. I need to explore within myself by myself in my own space...find more community and other places. I'm also trying to just do more activism work and more community work. Because for me, that feeds me like, when I see other people doing good, it makes me feel like I can do that too... I'm trying to get an art collective that shifted because of COVID back together... I try to really set boundaries with what I can and cannot do...when I was in high school, I was a people pleaser...once I got out of that situation, it allowed me to be like, "I don't need to please anybody except myself." Yes, I love taking care of others. I love doing that community work, but at the same time, I have to take care of myself. I need to prioritize what makes me feel good...If that's not doing any work after 5pm that's what that's gonna look like, if it's me walking downtown for five hours, which I do sometimes, that's what it's gonna be. If it's just going to be me buying a boba for myself and sitting alone and just looking at my phone, why not....So just making sure I really take the time for myself.

Lakshmi: I think for me, one of the biggest things I've been having to struggle with is realizing that I have limits. I'm definitely the kind of person we're like, oh, I see an opportunity. Let me take it. Let me do this. Let me do that. Let's try to do this....suddenly this obligation of, "I have to create change"...When [it] came to the GSA, no one else is... creating community, I'm going to do it... I have to do it...recently, my struggle was the realization that I took on way too much...and having to step back and think, look, I am very unhappy, and I'm not in a good place mentally...the most important thing to realize is just knowing your limits, knowing what you are okay with and what you aren't okay with. And if you aren't okay with something, making sure that you are outspoken about it, you know, and if there, if you're not outspoken about it, have someone to confide in and have that community that can support you through that situation... because it's so important that all of these factors around you are there...I think realizing your limits, and making sure that you prioritize yourself is so important when it comes to mental wellness.

How can people get started on their wellness journey?

Amayas: One is to recognize and become more self aware of your situation. And I think that's something that they [Lakshi] were touching on. Pay attention to what you are doing and what you aren't doing...really take the time to be like, what is helpful to my wellness? What is not? For me?It was like, how do I make myself feel good about all the things that I'm doing? How do I make sure that I'm taking the time for myself...what fulfills me? What energizes me, what makes me want to keep going, and what doesn't, and the things that don't, I took out of my life, toxic friends, I took out of my life, people that only took my energy and didn't give me any of that. took them out of my life...In Roses council they gave me this book...in the mornings, I write three things that I'm grateful for? The second part is, what can I do to make this day great? Then once you come back from whatever you're doing that day you write, what was the best part of today? Writing that down has shifted a lot of my thought processes. It has allowed me to become more in tune with what I want to do, and what I need to do for myself.

Lakshmi: I've always really struggled with mental health, like throughout my whole life it took me so long to realize the things that I needed to do in order to make myself happy, was just such minimal things, nowadays, I go to bed, and I just reflect about my day. I always tell myself, like, "you know, what, it might have been hard, but I'm glad that I got through with it." I think another thing that it's so important when starting that journey of wellness, is that realizing that you're not a perfect individual, there is no rush to it, there is no perfect process to it, there is no formula to it...start nurturing yourself and becoming your own

best friend...for me, when I take care of my best friends, I am extremely loyal to them. I fight for them, I root for them, I care for them, and I love them. Applying that to yourself being your own best friend is such a beautiful journey to start going through...The outcome of it helps you realize how strong a person that you can really be...

How do you prioritize your wellness in times of high volumes of stress?

Amayas: Honestly, just taking anything that I don't want to do, or that is stressing me out, out of my life, Sometimes that's hard to do, because the things that are stressing you out, or there might be a person that's stressing you out...If I need to ask for help...I can ask for help. The journey is not just by yourself...Your wellness journey should be also your community...because if your friends are not making you feel good, that's not a part of a wellness journey, you've got to talk to them about that say, "hey, you said this that hurt me, you are doing this, that's hurting me." It's making sure that if I do have these stressful things, what can I do to make them less stressful?...Try to only worry about things You can control. I cannot control world hunger, I cannot control trans violence, but what I can control is my happiness. I can control what I do with my time, I can control what I am offering to myself and to others, I can control what I'm putting into my body. So that's what I try to focus on.

Lakshmi: For me recently, I've realized I'm not superhuman. I do not have to do every single thing that people asked me to do, or that I forced myself to do, and do activities that help you unwind. I've taken up ceramics recently, and I was like, "Oh my gosh, that sounds kind of weird to do you know", but it helps me spend hours just not thinking...sometimes that was what you need, something that completely engulfs you, where you don't look at social media, you don't have to talk to people and you let yourself recharge. Especially during these times, I've noticed such a high trend of students going back to school and feeling so drained, just from socializing with people, or talking to individuals... taking a moment to realize that it's also important for you to do activities that...don't require deadlines don't require obligations don't require this immense amount of responsibility or stress for rather creativity...time to yourself... definitely make sure it's something that is worth stressing out over or is worth being tired for, and that the outcome will make you so happy.

Any last things

Amayas: For me, do everything in your power to make yourself happy. I know not every situation, you can right?. But if you have the control to do so, then do it. If you want to dance in the rain, and have your makeup, all nasty in your hair, all wet, do it, you know,,

when I'm downtown, I'll dance in the streets, I'm commentating in the streets, because it makes me happy. And it and for me to see other queer people happy to see other trans people happy. That makes me want to keep going makes me want to just keep living and keep caring about all those things. One of my biggest things in life, I was that little kid walking down the street, looking at people always trying to find someone like me. And if I did, if I saw someone like me, I probably would have figured myself out a lot sooner. I want to be the person that a little kid or even an older person can look at and see and be like, I can be happy like that one day.

Lakshmi: It's so good to hear those words. Because you don't hear them every day from people, it's so not common to have someone that is encouraging or charismatic...it's so much better to hear them come from someone else...I think that kind of ties into overall what this is just realizing that you're not alone on this, as much as you may think that you may be you're not alone in this. Time heals a lot of wounds, you know, you're not a bad person for realizing that the most important person in your life is yourself. Prioritizing the simple things such as just your physical well being is, you know, like the first step [in] developing such a nurturing love towards yourself can be such a beautiful journey to go on. You know, coming to a point where you can say you know what, I love myself, being self reaffirming and self assuring and loving towards yourself is the best thing you can possibly ever do in your life. Find people who are willing to support you not criticize you but more so have an understanding, encouraging and supporting voice that can help guide you through those times when you don't know what to do. So, yeah.

Amayas: I want people to be proud and be okay, about the little steps towards your wellness and growth. Because for me, you know, sometimes it's hard to go shower, sometimes it's hard to brush my hair or whatever it is. If you wanted to paint a full canvas and you only got halfway through, be proud of at least getting halfway through these you still did it. You might have not hit the milestone that you were reaching for but you still did something towards that goal.

End of Conversation. Interview was edited for clarity.