

Pigeonhole Episode 08

[bright ambient music]

Introduction

CHORUS OF VOICES: Pigeonholed, pigeonhole, pigeonhole, pigeonhole, pigeonhole, pigeonhole, pigeonhole, pigeonhole.

LAVAUN: My name is Lavaun Heaster. [upbeat music] I'm an artist. I'm legally blind and have a couple of other disabilities.

CHERYL: Lavaun posts a lot of pictures of her art on Facebook, but she doesn't show herself much. Recently, I found a picture on her wall: Her gorgeous, vibrant paper craft on the living room wall and in front of the art, Lavaun, looking directly at the camera. She was watching you watch her art. I was totally enjoying the picture until I looked at the comments below. Don't look at the comments.

Being told to smile on Facebook

LAVAUN: I broke up with someone many months ago, and I started thinking I'm kinda getting ready to think about dating again. And so, I've been trying to take pictures. I need to take pictures of myself as an artist also. So, I post this picture up on Facebook, and I'm not smiling.

[typing on a computer keyboard] "Thinking that eventually I want to try dating again. So, working on getting an honest pic for dating website. For me smiling is pretty not what I do. Not ready to get live yet, but I am working on getting there." And everybody had a comment, it felt like. It just, it felt so invasive to me. It started out with, "I vote for smiling." I'm like, "You don't get a vote! This is my life. You do not get a vote."

[pensive piano music]

Yeah, I don't know that person. I felt like someone from the outside is coming in and telling me what I should do, to have him voting on this is, it's just an insult to have someone from the outside thinking that their opinion counts without even introducing themselves.

I'm this pretty intense person who...is not always happy, who is very thoughtful, is very caring, is very curious, is very generous. I'm 54 years old, almost, and I'm at a point where it's about me portraying who I really am.

My heritage is that I am half Ladina and Navajo and Ute, and so I grew up around a lot of the Latina community. And part of being in many non-dominant culture American communities is that you have to establish a relationship first before you insult someone, as far as I'm concerned! For me, I don't feel that I have the privilege to speak like that. When you have grown up with privilege, sometimes you feel like it's just like you get to. You just get to. I definitely don't come from that place.

[upbeat music]

I have a lot of experience of being told how to be because of having had Type I Diabetes from the time I was nine years old. When you have a chronic condition, everyone tells you what you should do, how you should do it. If you would do what they said, you wouldn't have the

problems you have. I would get articles in the mail all the time: Oh! This wonder drug worked great for this person, and you should be eating garlic, drinking kombucha. It was just constant.

And when it comes to dating, I've been through the dating scene before, and I have these friends who do the, "Well, if you just do this. If you would just do that."

[atmospheric music]

When a woman or a man tells me, as a woman, what to do, I take it very seriously, and I feel like I have to try it even if I think it's something that I think won't work for me. I feel guilty about the fact that I'm not doing what I'm being told to do, which I think is really sad because if I felt that I had the right to just be who I was, I wouldn't have to have the back and forth. It's always confusing, you know. Quite honestly, I don't remember how I wrapped it up. [laughing] I just ignored it in the end!

CHERYL: Oh, you wrapped it up by saying, basically never mind. I'll do this later. I'm putting the whole picture thing on hold. I'm not ready for this pressure.

LAVAUN: Oh, that's how I wrapped it up!

CHERYL: Oh, well, then you also wrote, "As women we are often told to smile, often by strangers on the street, and everyone else invested in our lives." People probably thought that by pressure, you meant the pressure of dating, not the pressure of dealing with all these comments about how you look.

LAVAUN: What I was really saying was this is really scary for me because I'm afraid of being judged. And that's why I'm trying to find the most honest picture available. I'm trying to show a picture that shows that yes, I do carry extra weight, that I have short hair—which I think is quite attractive; I love my short hair—you know, that my face is beginning to look older, I'm beginning to get a little jowly. I'm just trying to be really honest about who I am and where I am 'cause I'm terrified of going out there and misrepresenting myself and disappointing someone.

CHERYL: I went back to Lavaun's wall after recording her story and looked again. There were people telling her she looks harsh or angry or dark. There were comments to relax or to dance before taking the picture. Lavaun doesn't dance.

I get it. People are trying to feel helpful. But [what is so wrong about a woman not smiling?](#) She's got some new pictures online now, and she's smiling in some of them. I like Lavaun's pictures and all the truth that she carries in her face, smiling or not.

[upbeat theme music]

Wrap-up

Every episode is transcribed. Links, guest info, and transcripts are all at www.whoamitostopit.com, my disability arts blog. I'm Cheryl, and...

TWO VOICES: this is Pigeonhole.

CHERYL: Pigeonhole: Don't sit where society puts you.

[bright ambient music]

Music in this episode:

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