

The Hum - Episode 8 Transcript

{Theme music begins}

{Zahra's voice comes in over music}

Zahra: I mean there's so many things that happen there all the time - all the time! Inhumane things. And I think that coddling something doesn't necessarily help it grow. Instead, I feel like criticizing something will, and that's what I tried to do.

{Music increases in volume}

Male voice: You're listening to The Hum.

{Music fades off}

Amar: So today Gilad and I are joined by Zahra Haider, who recently started a bit of a shit storm in Pakistan by writing a very candid article for vice. Zahra is currently based in Toronto. And in the article you openly discuss your sex life in Pakistan before you actually came to Canada at the age of 19. And, uh, there seems to be this gathering of, um, weirdos on the internet who feel the need to talk about this article. And we'll get to that, but first, I think both Gilad and I wanted to know, you know, we went to high school in Canada, you went to high school in Pakistan - how did you still get so much more ass than we did? Going to school here, those are pretty good numbers, those are like all-star numbers. I'm very curious as to how that happened {Gilad laughing lightly under breath in background}. And I'm kind of a little bit upset at myself frankly.

Zahra: Well I think it has something to do with the fact that (A) we don't really know about sex, uh, we don't have sex education, we don't have the sex talk with our parents. So I feel like because it's this taboo topic in our culture, in our society, it makes it more exciting in a way and we really want to experience it because it just seems like something we shouldn't. And I think that element adds a lot more excitement to it, because you know it's shunned to engage in it. For example, the elitist class, which I mentioned that I was a part of growing up there, we were very influenced by Western values and and Western culture, and I feel like sex is a part of that. And because, you know in our families they'd allow us to drink at gatherings here and there - you know they, they're very open in that sense, but when it came to sex, or like having a boyfriend, it would be quite hypocritical because they'd you know allow us to dress you know a little more openly than the rest of Pakistan, the rest of Pakistani society. But when it came to things like sex and hanging out with boys it was like, "no."

Gilad: A huge nono.

Zahra: Exactly, so. I feel like that just made it more exciting, in a way.

Amar: Yeah, well your article says that, you know, this is like a mind-blowing stat to me, but like Pakistan is the highest porn watching country in the world according to some sources.

Zahra: Right.

Amar: And so you think that's because of what you were talking about in that, this sort of like, because it's like taboo, because it's such a repression there, that people are kind of taking to the internet to kind of find release, so to speak?

Zahra: I think so, yes, um, I believe so, because I mean obviously sex is a natural human thing to do. It's something that two human beings engage in and we need that, you know, release, we need that connection. And I feel like when we can't obtain it, we have to sort of find other ways to achieve the same feeling and I supposed masturbating and watching porn is one of those ways. And I have received a lot of backlash for that statistic. Apparently I didn't do my research correctly and, according to PornHub, Pakistan isn't even listed in the top 40 countries of highest porn watching rates via Pornhub. But there is, there is something that people should also acknowledge in Pakistan is that, regardless of that, perhaps I was wrong about that, but we have YouTube banned, YouTube is banned in Pakistan. You need to access it using a proxy server or a VPN, and I feel like a lot of people would do that with porn too and that's not traced, obviously. And the other thing is that, you know, it's a known fact that we have these infamous DVD's that people also use to watch. And because of load shedding and all these things we don't really have access to the internet as much as we would to just a DVD that we could pop into the DVD player and sort of just watch it.

Gilad: I'm so proud of ourselves. It's taken us a number of episodes, almost a full season, to use Porn Hub as a source for some of the stuff that we're talking about here. So, you write this article for Vice...

Zahra: {over Gilad} Mhmm.

Gilad: A fucking shitstorm hits everywhere - I read somewhere that this is one of the most talked about things in Pakistan. My question: before you write that article and you put it out, do you hesitate at all? Are you able to predict that any of this is about to happen and does it scare you?

Zahra: To be honest, when I wrote the article and you know, when I was submitting it to Vice, I obviously had an idea of the consequences, I knew that people would be upset, I knew that people would be extremely supportive because, you know, I've given them a voice that they've been unable to use for a very long time during, you know, the course of their young adolescence in Pakistan. And of course I knew that, you know, there would be controversy, there would be more religious figures being upset over this, but I did not know that it would cause this much of a shit storm to be completely honest.

Gilad: What's, what's maybe the most surprising thing you've heard?

Zahra: There have been a few things, I suppose, a few accusations, you know, conspiracy theories that I'm an Indian spy.

{All laughing}

Zahra: Yeah, that was really funny. Contrary to popular belief I'm actually -

Gilad: {Over Zahra} Hold on, hold on for one sec. An Indian spy doing what? {laughing}

Zahra: I don't know, an Indian spy just trying to shame Pakistan just to destroy -

Amar: {Over Zahra} Trying to sex up the Pakistani kids man {humourously}

Gilad: Through vice? {laughing}

Amar: Yeah {laughing}

Gilad: I love this

Zahra: Yeah. That's uh, that's one of the ridiculous things I've heard. Other things include I was a classmate of Maryam Nawaz, who is the Prime Minister of Pakistan's daughter, which I frankly speaking don't recall at all. Yeah..

Gilad: Mmm.

Zahra: Yeah, yeah. So I'm not sure where that came from. But they've made like a little image of it and everything with my photo and her photo and in Urdu they've written "oh, she's something," it's a political, political conspiracy theory basically.

Gilad: {laughing} So it must be real? I'm looking at my Indian co-host Amar here, looking for any validity to any of this.

Amar: No I'm, to me it's, this whole thing is, it's, to kind of gauge just how big this got I'm looking at your twitter feed right now, and, uh, can I ask how many twitter followers you had before the Vice article hit?

Zahra: I had 60.

Amar: Okay, I'm looking at yours right now, I'm going to scroll up. You currently have 8404 followers.

Gilad: Which is about 8400 more than Amar's got.

Amar: Yes. But I mean that's a very low bar if we're going by me. But you went from 60 to 8400 in the span of, of what, how long did that take?

Zahra: Um, about five days?

Amar: Jeez. And like, is this, is this something you're worried about, like this new found attention you're receiving? Are you worried that like, you know, you're, you're a writer, like this new scrutiny you're under, most of it's coming from a negative place, but is there personal kind of feelings attached to all of these people now paying attention to everything you're doing and writing?

Zahra: Yes and no. I mean if my article has proved anything, I, you know, I'm going to be as honest as possible as a writer. I, I can't help that people will be upset or that people will praise

me for what I've written. I think the most important thing as a writer is to be relatable, and, you know that's what I tried to achieve. And I did, you know, I received a lot of support from a lot of people. And, of course, I also received a lot of backlash. But I feel like when you receive, like, negative comments and when you receive hateful comments, I feel like you've done something right, in a way. You've made an impression. And, regardless of how many people are going to be scrutinizing me, I'm still going to be as honest as I possibly can in whatever way.

Gilad: That's, that's amazing. And some of that acceptance comes from Avina Shah On, what was the name of that website?

Zahra: On Dawn. It was on Dawn.

Gilad: Right, so, and, and, and tons of awful backlash. Do you have anything you want to - a response to any of that, or...

Zahra: Regarding the Abina Shah article, it has been removed now. She mentioned it was because of copyright issues. Um, it was being posted without her permission on other websites. I feel like what she said is, I mean, she said it from a very diplomatic point of view, but she also gave me kudos for being honest and for writing something she wouldn't have been able to say. There was also an article by Moni Mohsin on Times of India that, again, you know, she's also a Pakistani writer, and she also, she applauded my bravery. And, I mean of course everyone's going to be diplomatic about it in terms of writing about it, and that's totally fine, I completely appreciate that, and I appreciate that they have applauded my bravery too.

Gilad: You brought up Times of India as one. So, when we were doing some, some research, we saw that a lot of South Asian media has picked up this story, including the backlash and the support. But it doesn't seem to be getting the same attention here from the Western media. What are your thoughts on that?

Zahra: I feel like the article itself in the Western media, I mean I did have a few people. Like non-Pakistani's, non-South Asians, um, you know they appreciated the article because it gave them some sort of insight on, uh, how, things work back there, and how it affects people who move to the West. Like South Asians that move to the west, it helps them understand them a bit more. I received messages that said things along those lines. But I feel like, in a way, it's not as shocking over here, because culturally it's not a taboo topic.

Gilad: It's not a story here.

Zahra: It's not a story here. Exactly. It is a story, however, back home of course. But here, I feel like, it's viewed as something that's normal.

{Radio clip begins}

Woman's voice: This is -

Man's voice: Nee hao -

Woman's voice: On BBC Asian network.

Second man's voice: Let's get into this story, the unmarried Pakistani woman who wrote about her sex life. As you can imagine, people have had a lot to say about this on social media. Zahra Haida's story has been shared thousands of times across the internet. Sparked a debate about

Asian women talking openly about their sex lives. [Unintelligible] Preet, what would you like to ask Zahra?

Second woman's voice: After reading your article, I feel like you've written it just to kind of make a point that the men are doing it, why can't the women? **{the hum theme music comes in softly in the background}** I don't really understand. It's not about culture. I don't think it's about your culture in any way. I think you've basically made it about, you know, women can't do it, men can, it's unfair. You know because men have a patriarchal role in our society it's unfair.

Zahra's voice {muffled as if over the phone}: Yes, that is what I was attempting to do. It is unfair.

{theme music gets louder and then ends}

Amar: So, can we talk a little bit about what's in the article? Can you tell us a little about your experience as a young person in Pakistan and what it's like to kind of deal with, with sexuality as you get older, and what it's like for some of the other kids that are currently living there now based on your experience?

Zahra: Well, I feel like, I mean, it is exciting of course, you know, the sneaking around, and the, you know, having to park in a deserted alleyway and hook up with someone - it is exciting, for sure. And I feel like, well, most of the schools that I went to were all girls schools and, for me, I found that when I went to a co-educational school there was less sexual tension in a way. And I feel like in an all girls school we were excited to kind of, you know, see boys from the boys branch, and stuff like that. So it kind of made us want to hang out with boys out of school more, in a way, because we wanted to experience what it was like and that obviously led to, you

know, getting more intimate, and kind of having to, you know, sneak around because we couldn't have a boy over, you know, unless your parents were more open minded. Which there are, you know there are parents that are okay with their daughters hanging out with boys and stuff. But, for the majority of us it's not really, especially during like puberty, pubescent years. It's not really acceptable I suppose. And hence we'd have to sneak around. It was really like an adrenaline rush, I suppose, like having to get home before curfew. But, you know, you're in the car with like your boyfriend or whatever and you know your parents can't see you and you, your security guard can't see you and your domestic staff can't see you {laughing}. So -

Gilad: {over Zahra} You had to sneak past security to do this?

Zahra: Oh yeah! {laughing} Cause like most of us have security, like security guards outside of our houses.

Gilad: Right.

Zahra: So, your partner would have to like drop you outside of your street and -

Gilad: {over Zahra} In camouflage gear

Zahra: {over Gilad} Right! It was, yeah, it was very exciting to be honest. So like yeah, a few other things that I did mention were the hotel rooms. I'm also receiving backlash for that apparently because not everyone can afford \$150 hotel room and, of course, there are like guest houses over there, but again I was speaking from my personal experience, who, you

know, did date guys who were in my sort of social circle. And, yes, they could afford \$150 hotel rooms per night. And that's just something that we had to do if we didn't really, you know, have a choice. We didn't have a choice.

Gilad: You mention in the article too that there was a, an office that had a bedroom connected to it. How the hell do I get one of those?!

Zahra: So, in Pakistan, I mean if you come from a family that has more money I guess, you either, like, it's it's common to have like a farmhouse or a second house that no one really lives in - a guest house, I suppose. Or, you know, I did hook up with a guy whose father's office had a bedroom inside of it - I don't know why, I don't know if he was using it for, you know, other purposes. I have no idea why it was there, but there was a bedroom, there was a living room, and yeah, it was pretty convenient to say the least.

Gilad: You say it's exciting and all that and I can imagine it would be, but I, I also imagine that eventually it would just start to get annoying that you have to jump through all these hurdles and sneak away through all these people to engage in something that we all agree is very human.

Zahra: Yeah, no, I mean, it is, I can completely relate to what you're saying. However, after a while it's just, it's just a norm. I grew up with my half aunt - you know she's like eight years older than me - and when I was a kid I used to, I was her accomplice in helping her sneak out to meet her boyfriends. I was an ally and sort, of, you know, like I would help her do that and I would see her friends sneaking out, etc., and then when it came to my friends and I when we were around that age, we started doing the same things too because it's just, it's just how it is. And we're

conditioned to think that this is just how it's going to be, so we just continue doing it, and we don't really know that it should be okay for us to be able to sit on a couch and hang out with, you know, our boyfriend if we're like sixteen or something. It's just, it's just not like that.

Gilad: Mmm.

Amar: So we're talking about, about the sneaking around and stuff and the exciting parts of it. But, there are real consequences for particularly the young women when they get caught, right. Can you talk a little about what some of the consequences are for young couples that actually do get caught having sex?

Zahra: So I did mention in my article an example of my grandfather beating my aunt's boyfriend with a golf club, and I do feel like that does happen to other people as well where their either catch them sneaking in and they kind of just get very physical, very aggressive, and, um, they cause a shit storm in that situation. Other things would include, I mean, people have been stopped over by the police and, again, I'm not talking about the entire police force in Pakistan. However, it is very common to be able to bribe policemen in that case. So if they do catch you engaging in, you know, premarital sex in, you know, a car or publicly, they, you know they will threaten to take you to jail, etc. But, if you are from an influential family and you throw your name or you offer to pay them, I don't know, 5000 rupees or roughly around there, which is about, it's not a lot in dollars - I can't convert right now, but it's not a lot. You know, they'll let you go, and it's happened many times - to me, personally, it's happened when we've had like alcohol in the car, when we've had hash in the car, it's happened. And it's so easy to get - I've been sitting on a guy's lap in the car and we basically just paid the cop off and they let us go.

Amar: Why did you feel the need to qualify that the way that you did? Were people actually trying to deny that there's corruption within the police force in Islamabad? Are you fucking kidding me?

Zahra: {over Amar} Yeah, they were! Actually, they were!

Amar: Really? {laughing}

Zahra: {laughing} Yeah, so hence I feel the need to state that you're wrong and we all know that it's a heavily corrupted country in many ways.

Amar: There's, there's - I moved to Canada from India when I was eleven years old and, you know, obviously I have a lot of memories but I have several distinct memories of my family members bribing police officers. Anyone wants to talk about South Asians and corruption within police forces and say that there isn't any - just shut the fuck up.

Zahra: {laughing} Honestly, it's true.

Amar: So, what is your status in Canada now? Are you here on a student visa? Are you planning on sticking around in Toronto for a little while? I guess, what I'm getting to is are you going back to Pakistan any time soon?

Zahra: I'm actually a Canadian citizen - that's something else I wanted to clarify cause a lot of people have been accusing me of trying to seek asylum - {interrupted by Amar and Gilad laughing} since the article -

Gilad: I thought you were an Indian spy?

Amar: {over Gilad} I gotta, I gotta, I got this planned out. So the plan is: you move here, you write an article for Vice about your sexual history -

Gilad: {over Amar} As an Indian spy.

Amar: And then you use that as a way to get Canadian citizenship.

Gilad: And twitter followers.

Amar: And twitter followers.

Zahra: Basically, that's what people are accusing me of.

Amar: You are a master criminal, I must say.

Zahra: {over Amar} Yep. That's what I am {laughing}. Apparently. No, I'm a Canadian citizen - my mother was actually born and raised here. Hence, I'm Canadian. I've actually never been here until I moved here when I was 19. I do plan on staying in Toronto, but, uh, I don't plan on

going back to Pakistan anytime soon. I was actually just there. Um, I went to visit in, um, the end of December, but I don't plan on going back any time soon. Even though I'm not afraid of what people have been saying to me - it doesn't really make me feel like I don't belong in the country that I'm originally from. I don't think that that's fair. But I definitely don't plan on moving back there, I do plan on staying in Toronto. I also grew up in Dubai for a bit, and I do have my mom who lives in Dubai, so...

Gilad: How has your family reacted to this?

Zahra: So, my mom is very supportive. She's more open minded I suppose, so she's very supportive, she thinks that I created a much needed dialogue and that I was brutally honest and that's something that, you know, we need sometimes, especially in a culture, in a society that doesn't really condone honesty in that sense. And my paternal uncle has also been very supportive, he's also slightly more open-minded than the rest of my family and he's kind of been talking to my twitter trolls - you know tweeting my twitter trolls, kind of telling them to back off. However, the rest of my family has not been supportive, so {laughing}...

Gilad: Mmm.

Zahra: Yeah.

Amar: Was there a concern on your part at all that the way Western audiences would kind of read your piece - and, and, sort of, it would sort of add to the negative stereotypes about

Pakistan and Pakistani culture that already kind of exist there. Was something that kind of was on your mind when you wrote the article at all?

Zahra: Yes and no. I mean, I obviously knew that I was shedding a negative light on it, but in my opinion it does require a lot of improvement in many ways. I mean, if people are going to have a negative opinion based on what I wrote, I don't speak on the behalf of the entire Pakistani population. That's insane, I can't do that. But, I mean, I can't help it, I am being honest about this specific thing and of course there are great things about my culture too. However, this is something that is a bit more negative in that sense, and I can't help but be honest.

Amar: So, tell us about some of the positive feedback you've gotten from young people, particularly those in Pakistan. It's very easy to see some of the negativity that comes out on twitter and all of the twitter eggs sort of start to troll you a little bit. But, what have been some of the positive sort of messages that you've received?

Zahra: So I've received a lot of thank-you's, a lot of, you know, you've nailed it, you're so relatable, your story is so relatable to a lot of us. And, you know, it's so refreshing to see somebody talking about something that has never been talked about, that's kind of just rejected as a thought. And all of my friends from Pakistan completely support me. And I guess that's because in a way that they know me and they know my intentions, whereas all these random people on twitter don't. And, you know, that's completely fair. But I have received a lot of emails from people, you know, long emails, saying thank you and I can't thank you enough for this.

Gilad: From anything you've seen has it inspired other women who are currently living in Pakistan to open up about their own experiences that relate to this?

Zahra: I feel like perhaps not yet. I, I still don't think - because I am the first Pakistani woman to do this, I feel like I've, I have motivated people in a way because I have people publicly tweet me and say, you know, I support you fully. And I feel like that's a big step in itself, because if, you know, someone is to support someone in that sense, in such a - in something that's receiving so much backlash from Pakistani media, I feel like letting their friends and family know that they're actually supporting me is a big step in a way. I even had someone message me on facebook and they were like "oh I shared your article on my wall, and it was amazing, and thank you so much for writing this, and initially I was thinking of you know limiting my profile so the judgemental aunties wouldn't judge me, but then I was like fuck it, I don't give a shit. So then I posted it anyways because you know it's just so great."

Gilad: Mhmm. Is most of the backlash coming from the male population? Out of curiosity.

Zahra: I think so. I believe so - yes. I do think that I'm receiving a lot of backlash because I have made Pakistani Men look bad.

Gilad: It's so ridiculous though because men were involved in this as well and, and we're putting all the blame here on you, which is so, so silly, and...

Zahra: Well it's because I'm a woman. And I mean, I can't deny that Pakistan, it is a misogynistic society, you know, our laws itself are misogynistic. They drop the Hudood Ordinance , which is where if a woman gets raped she needs four male witnesses, but they still practice that in lots of Muslim, Middle Eastern countries.

Gilad: You need four male witnesses?

{Theme music begins in background}

Zahra: You need four male witnesses. They, they actually do this in the UAE and, uh, Gulf countries. If a woman gets raped and she goes to the police, she either needs the rapist to come forward, the guy who raped her, or she needs four male witnesses who witnessed the rape to come forward.

Gilad: So in the, in the history, how many of these cases actually end up getting - it seems like an impossible situation.

Zahra: From what I know, in Dubai itself there were two ex-pat women who went through this and, um, they of course, you know, it just didn't happen, so they were put into jail for fornication outside of marriage.

{theme music gets louder, then stops}

{clip begins}

Male voice: Sex before marriage. We all know that sex is something that is pleasurable. It feels good.

Woman's voice: Sex before marriage? I would agree with it.

Second woman's voice: We think, uh, you should wait till the marriage.

Second man's voice: Something special.

Third woman's voice: I think it's okay because, you know, some people don't want to get married.

Third man's voice: Well, if grandma was watching, I'd say no {laughing in background}.

Fourth man's voice: I think it's actually a good idea to determine sexual compatibility with a partner.

Fifth man's voice: You can't go into a basketball game before you warm up, so how do you go into a marriage before warming up?

Sixth man's voice: If you take the appropriate countermeasures to prevent STI's and things, then I think go for it, why not.

{Clip ends}

Gilad: Living here in Toronto, have you found, has any part of our sexual culture here surprised you? Because even though we are a lot more liberal, there still is quite a lot of slut shaming that goes on and stigma around that. Can you elaborate on any of the surprises that you had here in Toronto, maybe with the Canadian culture at large, but also within the Pakistani-Canadian community as well?

Zahra: Initially when I came here I did face a bit of culture shock. You know, when I was on Yonge Street and I saw that there was a sex shop next to a Mosque. That kind of you know creeped me out a little bit, in a way, cause I wasn't used to that, I wasn't used to seeing that growing up in Islamabad and Dubai. So I was a bit confused about that, also because I was just generally confused about my sexuality and because I had experienced sex, but I had experienced it in a sort of like shameful kind of manner. I know back home you know I was slut shamed for smoking a cigarette or for drinking alcohol. But, no, I haven't really, I haven't really faced any sort of slut shaming by non-Pakistanis. However, I've found that Pakistanis who were raised here - I'm not sure why, I feel like there are some who haven't really assimilated into the sort of open, general culture that is here in Canada. And I feel like I also received somewhat harsh judgments from them in a way for being a certain way.

Amar: Are you hoping that this article you've written - I think it's pretty clear that it started a conversation in, in Pakistan. But I guess it remains to be seen where this conversation goes. But, are you hoping that Canadian-Pakistanis will also start to talk about this?

Zahra: Um, yes, I am hoping - and I have, I have received backlash from Pakistanis in Canada. The Toronto taxicab twitter tweeted me basically like something not very nice {laughing}. And, uh...

Amar: Sorry, say that, say that again?

Zahra: Toronto taxi cab, I think that's what it's called, they tweeted me, and I feel like it's run by, uh, Pakistanis, I'm not sure.

Gilad: What does this have to do with cabs?

Amar: {over Gilad} Is that an organization or like a specific Toronto taxi driver?

Zahra: It's called Toronto Taxicab on twitter {laughing}.

Amar: Okay, we gotta look this up.

{Zahra laughing}

Amar: Cause it's like they've got a big enough fight with Uber... let's leave Zahra alone

Gilad and Zahra: {over Amar} Right {laughing}.

Gilad: I just love that this all of the sudden has something to do with taxis now.

{Zahra laughing}

Amar: Right, yeah we had a conversation about uh, Pakistanis in Toronto and it had to end with cab drivers, just perfect.

Zahra: {laughing, over Amar} Oh my...

Amar: Just way to go Zahra, you had to take it there.

Gilad: I didn't even go there.

{Zahra laughing}

Zahra: Um, yes, so, I do hope so, so it's completely different over here - it's not viewed the same. Sex is definitely not viewed the same over here that it is over there and, I mean, I have nothing against people who don't want to assimilate into the general culture of a country, for example. But, I feel like Canadian Pakistanis have some sort of an identity crisis at some point - not all of them of course, but I definitely did. And, you know, I didn't even grow up here, so I can't imagine what it would be like to, you know, have your immigrant parents influence you in a way, but then you're around all of these different, I guess western values. And you, you grow up kind of confused in a way. Because I have spoken to Canadian-Pakistani friends about this and they've tried to, you know, hold onto religion, they've tried to practice certain things, they've tried not to drink, etcetera. And some have successfully done that, and some have you know,

maintained those religious values, and hats off to them for doing that. But then I also have Canadian-Pakistani friends who've, you know, found it very difficult and had sort of very different perspectives on things, and tried to be religious for the sake of their parents, but then eventually couldn't be religious. Or they were gay and then they couldn't tell their parents and they feel ashamed and they're just stuck in the closet and forever and for eternity basically because they just can't tell their parents. because they would disown them or they would never speak to them or they would just be so upset that they're, you know, daughter for example, won't marry a man and have children with him. And, you know, it's just, just very limiting to somebody's growth in that sense. And it happens in Pakistan too. I have gay friends in Pakistan and they're just so afraid of coming out because they would just be shamed so badly for it and it's just so, so saddening to me.

Gilad: It's sort of interesting this double life a lot of immigrant children have to face when they live here. I can totally relate to that as well. My family moved here from Israel and they wanted all of these things for me as well - dating a Jewish girl. My mom still has a hard time with me at some points eating pork or putting cheese on meat. And I mean it's like I have to have this one life at home, but then I have the culture that I'm living in. But in some ways it's like, what did you expect when you moved here? We're in a new place with a new culture. Amar, have you ever experienced anything like that yourself?

Amar: Yeah, I mean sure, I moved here when I was eleven, which is kind of a tricky time for a young person because i was - I mean I wasn't young enough to just feel Canadian right away, but I wasn't so sort of, my Indian side wasn't so deeply rooted in me that I wasn't capable of losing some of it. So things like my accent went away right away and those kinds of things. And

when you're young you just want to fit in, right? And being different kind of sucks and you just to assimilate as quickly as possible and so you do things that you kind of regret down the road. Like I wish I'd spoken my language for longer. And Hindi, it's kind of stuck around within me somewhere, and I'm still hoping I'll kind of relearn it one day. But stuff like that, I, yeah, it definitely happens, because you're kind of caught between two cultures in that way. I think that's something that a lot of people in this city in particular can relate to.

Zahra: In Pakistan it's actually the same thing, which people don't seem to understand, because when immigrants come here and people make fun of their accents and etcetera, whatever, whatever way they can sort of make them feel like an anomaly in an awful way, the same thing happens over there. I grew up in Dubai for my first, like, I don't know, until I was eight years old, and then I moved back to Pakistan and I went to an English school, so I had a very heavy British accent. And everyone - and I didn't speak Urdu at all back then - so everyone made fun of me, everyone called me a burger.

Gilad: A burger?

Zahra: {laughing} Yeah, that's basically what you call like a brown kid who acts like a white kid.

Gilad: Mmmm.

Zahra: Yeah, and they called me a burger, they used to bully me for speaking in a different way, for having an English accent as a brown kid and, you know, they'd, they'd speak in Urdu around me, they'd talk badly about me, and they'd bitch about me in Urdu. And I'd kind of just feel so

alienated in the country that I'm from. And it's just insane whenever you're an outsider in any kind of community, even it's your own, they'll still make you feel excluded. And to me that's just insane, and I feel like sex is relevant in that sense over there especially, because it's just, it's a basic thing that human beings do and I don't think that, you know, shunning it is acceptable in any way.

Amar: The sex thing is a real thing, right? I mean like I remember my parents were also very liberal and my mom would let me have a swig of beer once in awhile when I was young and like they were totally cool with my friends. And as soon as we'd be like watching TV or a movie and a, kind of a sex scene came on it'd be like whoa, like, my mom's hands would go right over my eyes, as though like I couldn't figure out what was coming next, or like I didn't know, I didn't know what was about to happen on screen. So it was like sex has always been this separate kind of thing for South Asians I think that, no matter how liberal you get, sex is still the one thing that South Asian parents seem to not want their kids to talk about, and it leads to all these problems. Which is why I think you're seeing the shit storm that you're seeing now {laughing}. It's like you've just, a whole shit load of South Asian people and their parents are just like what the fuck?

Gilad: This happens? {laughing}

Amar: So, I guess I'm just curious if you wanna, if you could, if you could speak to the people who are criticizing you in Pakistan now, but also the young people who are secretly reading your article and going "Yes! Thank you!" What do you want to say about what you wrote and, um,

some of the backlash you've been receiving, if you could speak to those people directly right now, what do you feel like saying?

Zahra: Well, to the people who, you know, can resonate with what I've written who are supporting me, you know I'm very grateful, I'm very appreciative that I could resonated with them, that I could connect with them on that level where they don't feel alienated in that sense. And you know I'm very happy that I've managed to, you know, be a voice in a way for those people. And as far as the people who are hating me are concerned: everyone's entitled to their own opinions and I can't condemn them for having their own opinions against my piece. But they should know that this is my personal experience, but also the personal experience of many other people, and I think that it's shameful that all they're focusing on is that I had sex with almost a dozen men {laughing} and other things like, oh, uh, nobody went down on me, when I'm trying to, you know, I used my personal experience as an example, but I'm trying to get to a larger point, which is that we do need more awareness around the subject because people do do it. Because I have had friends who've had to self-abort in secrecy and I have had friends, I know people who've overdosed on emergency contraceptive and I know people who've had to rush people to the hospital - you know their female friends for having to self abort, for using tangible objects to do so and they were sick for days, for weeks. And, you know what, it's just something that we need to address I think.

{Theme music starts to come in under Zahra's voice}

Zahra: And if you're going to be hateful about it, that's okay but eventually I hope that you realize that it is something that needs to be talked about. It is something that we need to be

educated on, whether it's premarital or postmarital, it doesn't matter. It's something that we need to know.

{Theme music gets louder and then drops off}