

## Still Buffering 324: "Not Okay" (2022)

Published August 16, 2022

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[theme music plays]

**Raleigh:** Hello, and welcome to *Still Buffering*: a cross-generational guide to the culture that made us. I am Raleigh Smirl.

**Sydnee:** I'm Sydnee McElroy.

**Taylor:** And I'm Taylor Smirl.

**Sydnee:** Um, so big changes on the horizon around here. I don't really have something to talk about. I'm just sort of just going—

**Taylor:** Just diving in.

**Sydnee:** I'm just diving in.

**Raleigh:** Let's dive in.

**Taylor:** Whooh!

**Sydnee:** This is not, like, an announcement. That sounds like what you say when you're about to announce— like, you're— like, Raleigh is moving.

**Raleigh:** I'm moving.

**Taylor:** Oh, okay. I thought I was about to be fired or something.

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Raleigh:** I think actually I'm the one that might be fired. I think Charlie's gunning for my place.

**Sydnee:** She tries.

**Taylor:** I didn't sign off on that, if that's the case.

**Sydnee:** It's not— it's not just you, though. Don't take it personally. Charlie keeps coming to me with new ideas for Sawbones now since she did the one episode with me. And, like, saying, "And we won't need Daddy for that one, either." [laughs quietly] So...

**Rileigh:** Justin and I both are about to be out of a job.

**Sydnee:** She just wants to podcast, she can't help it!

**Rileigh:** She just wants to podcast.

**Sydnee:** It's in her genes! [laughs]

**Taylor:** [laughs] Those podcasting genes!

**Sydnee:** She's gotta podcast! She was— she was performing today for me, by the way. So— so, uh, their cousins Bebe and Dot were here visiting. And, um, Charlie and Bebe put on a performance where Bebe was playing various instruments and playing music, and Charlie was dancing. And her dancing... was choreography... not from the show she was in, from *Descendants* that she watched so many times this past summer during summer theater. So she was performing choreography for us. And I thought, "I have the most musical theater—" she's gonna go to parties and do this. She's that kid. She's the musical theater kid who's gonna go to a party and a song's gonna come on, and she is gonna be like, "Step ball change, step ball change, jazz square, jazz square." [laughs]

**Rileigh:** I mean, I did that when I was her age.

**Sydnee:** "Up with this arm! Big arm up with this one! Big finish!" Anyway.

[pause]

**Rileigh:** It's in her genes!

**Sydnee:** [laughs] It's in her genes!

**Taylor:** "I gotta podcast, and I gotta dance!"

**Sydnee:** It was— it was very cute. And then Cooper came out in the red dress that Lydia wears in *Beetlejuice* in the movie, when she almost marries Beetlejuice. She came out in that dress and did a very dramatic performance with lots of, like, falling down and looking longingly and then, like, a sort of pseudo-death scene at the end, so.

**Rileigh:** That sounds about right.

**Sydnee:** [laughs quietly]

**Rileigh:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** So... anyway.

**Rileigh:** It's in her genes!

**Sydnee:** [laughs] That— that too, probably!

**Rileigh:** That's a weird combination of some genes in there from you and Justin that made that.

**Taylor:** Cooper got the creepy recessive gene that lurks somewhere in your bloodline. [laughs]

**Sydnee:** It was a great milieu, 'cause the whole time Dot was just singing one line from the theme song from *Vampirina* over and over again, so. [laughs]

**Rileigh:** Was it "[singing] Whoa-oh-oh, Vampirina!"

**Sydnee:** Yep. [laughs]

**Rileigh:** Is that it? Yeah. I knew it. [laughs]

**Sydnee:** That was happening. It was a happening, I would say. It was a happening.

**Taylor:** I think I've paid, like, 35 bucks to see this performance at a warehouse in Bushwick.

**Sydnee:** [laughs] I could've sold tickets.

**Rileigh:** It was a happening.

**Sydnee:** Instead, it was happening very early this morning. So I was sitting there on my couch drinking coffee thinking "Why is this— why is this happening happening?" [laughs]

**Taylor:** You just needed to— don't question it. You just need to be there. That's how you just take in the art, Syd.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm. I took it in. And then I had to rank everybody. Then Charlie, of course— that's Charlie—

**Rileigh:** Oh, God.

**Sydnee:** —handed me a sheet and was like, "You've gotta score everybody now, so a winner."

**Taylor:** Okay, well, that's not how art works.

**Rileigh:** And she got that from you.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Rileigh:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** I know this trick. 10/10 for all of 'em. 10/10, four-way tie. Best— everyone was best.

**Rileigh:** But then she'll say, "But there's— there has to be a winner."

**Sydnee:** [laughs] I refuse. Nope! 10/10, everybody.

**Taylor:** You should've spun it like, "I— I give you... blue points. You get... "

**Rileigh:** "A gold star."

**Taylor:** Yes. [laughs] "And you get three... fish. Ha!"

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Rileigh:** There you go.

**Sydnee:** Figure *that* out!

**Rileigh:** Do that conversion.

**Taylor:** Don't compare yourselves to each other, please.

**Sydnee:** I know. I kept saying— she kept saying "The next competitor," and I kept changing it to "Participant." [laughs] Like, we're not competitors. We're participants! We're *participating* in this event. That's it. [laughs]

**Rileigh:** The best part is that Charlie is at least three years older than all of them. It's like Angelica orchestrating like, "Okay, babies!" [laughs]

**Taylor:** "Mom, please. Let me beat these babies. I need to beat these babies. These babies? I need to defeat them. Can you help me?"

**Sydnee:** "It's really important to me right now."

**Rileigh:** She's about to be eight.

**Sydnee:** I know.

**Rileigh:** This episode goes up, it'll be her eighth birthday.

**Sydnee:** Yeah, that's true! This airs on her eighth birthday.

**Rileigh:** Crazy.

**Sydnee:** I don't know how it's possible. Today she plays *Roblox* with her friends on her iPad, and they talk. Like, I guess you can, like, talk while you're— I don't know. I'm so old.

**Rileigh:** Ohh, you sound so old! But I also don't know. I don't do *Roblox*.

**Taylor:** That's—

**Sydnee:** It may just— huh?

**Taylor:** No, I was gonna say, any time you tell me about *Roblox*, I thought they were playing... blocks? I thought they were blocks that had, like, a robot component. So the fact that this is the internet, I— I'm... I'm younger, and yet I'm older.

**Sydnee:** I still— I play *Roblox* with her sometimes, and I don't know how to, like— sometimes you'll pick something up, and I don't know how to put it down, and she gets so mad at me. I'm like, "Charlie, I don't know how to put this ice cream cone down. I'm still holding the ice cream cone. Is there a way to make my character eat it, or can I put it down? No, I just have it now."

**Raleigh:** She and Cooper both yelled at me for not being good at *Roblox*. Like, I'm sorry! [laughs]

**Sydnee:** But she— I think she's just chatting, like, on FaceTime with her friends while she's playing. Anyway, the point is, one of them called and Justin answered.

**Raleigh:** [gasps]

**Sydnee:** And it was, like, a full teenager freakout. "Dad?! What are you doing?! Gimme that! Dad! [gasps loudly] No!"

And, like—

**Raleigh:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** She was like, "I'll call you back." And then hung up and went, "Why would you do that to me?!"

And he was like, "Did I embarrass you?"

"Yes!"

It's like, "Why?" [laughs]

**Taylor:** Did that— did that child not realize he was talking to the famous podcaster, media talent Justin McElroy?

**Sydnee:** [laughs] I don't think he cared. He was pretty chill about it. He was like, "[deep voice] Hey. What's up?"

**Raleigh:** I mean, his voice didn't sound like that.

**Taylor:** [laughs] That's a seven-year-old you're talking about. "[deeper voice] Hey, what's up? Is Charlie home?"

**Raleigh:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** [laughs] It was a child voice. More like, "Hey, what's up?"

**Raleigh:** That's just your voice, Syd!

[all laugh]

**Sydnee:** I don't know! What do— what do children— I have two of them! What do they sound like?

**Taylor:** "What do children sound like?"

**Raleigh:** Not like, "[deep voice] Hey." [laughs] You're like Dad! Dad with his boy voice and his girl voice.

**Sydnee:** I know.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Yeah, I don't know.

**Raleigh:** Dad's a boy, and his boy voice is still just like that one you just did.

**Sydnee:** "[deep voice] Hey."

**Raleigh:** "[deep voice] Hey."

**Sydnee:** [laughs] I like the voice we've all made up for Cooper.

**Raleigh:** It's like a gremlin.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm. It has an edge to it that isn't human.

**Raleigh:** And it's not what she sounds like.

**Taylor:** I mean, it— it is, in a way.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Raleigh:** It's the essence of her voice.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Raleigh:** "Hey."

**Sydnee:** "Hey. Can I— today, can I have another crewer? Another crewer? I wike the donuts that are crewers." They're crullers. "Dese are da best donuts." Anyway.

**Raleigh:** Anyways.

**Sydnee:** Speaking of youth...

**Raleigh:** Yeah, let's talk about... youths. In... a film. And youth culture. Let's talk about *Not Okay*. I'm not okay right now, I'm sorry. Um—

**Taylor:** But that's okay.

**Raleigh:** It's okay to not be okay.

**Sydnee:** That's what we learned.

**Raleigh:** It's what we learned. *Not Okay* is a Hulu original film that just came out at the end of July of this year, so it's been out for, like, two weeks now. Um, about a girl who works for I guess an online magazine. I guess, right?

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Raleigh:** Like a BuzzFeed-type place.



**Sydnee:** That's what I was gonna say. Doesn't it feel like it's supposed to be sort of BuzzFeed-esque? Like, not exactly that, but like...

**Raleigh:** Like online content creation and news and stuff.

**Sydnee:** And it's— what is it called again? Uh, I wanted to say Disgusting, but it's—

**Raleigh:** Depravity. Right?

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Depravity, that's what it is. Depravity.

**Raleigh:** Um, but she works at—

**Taylor:** A little too on the nose there, but alright. [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Yeah, yeah.

**Raleigh:** Yeah, yeah. I mean, basically. Um, she works there as a photo editor and wants to be a writer, and to impress this influencer guy that also works there, I guess as an influencer? Is that what his job is, Dylan O'Brien?

**Sydnee:** That was my guess. He was an influencer, and vaping. Vaping is his other job.

**Raleigh:** He vapes a lot, yeah. Um, wants to impress him, so she says she's going to a writing retreat in Paris, and fakes a trip to Paris and takes off work for a week and hides in her apartment, posting edited pictures of her in Paris. And then it happens to be the same week of a terrorist attack in Paris. And so then she goes along with it and says she was there, and she survived, and... hijinks ensue, because she's lying, of course.

**Sydnee:** You know, and in the beginning, like, the idea of pretending you went to Paris for a week is so benign, I almost felt bad for her at first. Like, "Aw, she's just trying to impress some people."

**Raleigh:** And she started out with what, like, 60 followers or something? She wasn't famous.

**Sydnee:** No, she was not getting famous by having gone to Paris.

**Rileigh:** No.

**Sydnee:** And that's very realistic. At first that's what I worried was about to happen. I was gonna say, like, "Are we supposed to believe this girl got famous just by going on a vacation to Paris? Because... a lot of people do that." But no, that— and so I felt kind of bad for her at first. Like, "Aw." Who hasn't embellished a little about their lives to try to impress somebody? We've all been there.

**Rileigh:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** I mean, obviously there is a tipping point with her story. There is a point where it's not just lying about going to Paris, which we'll get into. But I also think that this— and the movie does good at setting up the fact that she has— she comes from money. She has the means that if she wanted to go to Paris, she could. So it's not like, "I can't get there and I just lied and said I went there."

I would have sympathy for that. [stammers] They do well to build a, you know— "You don't have to feel bad for this character. Don't worry about it." [laughs]

**Sydnee:** That's true.

**Rileigh:** And, I mean, it's really her guinea pig's fault that this all happened.

**Taylor:** That's true, that's true! It is the— it is the guinea pig and some drugs to blame.

**Rileigh:** Yeah. She smoked a little marijuana with vape boy. Uh, and her guinea pig, which is named Guinea Weasley, um, which was pretty good, uh, walks onto her laptop and opens up this picture she had been editing for the magazine of a girl in Paris, I guess.

**Sydnee:** Or something, yeah.

**Rileigh:** That the background, yeah, was like the Eiffel Tower or something, and she got the idea that she could edit herself. All because of the guinea pig.

**Sydnee:** All because of the guinea pig.

**Raleigh:** I did appreciation that representation in a film.

**Taylor:** [laughs]

**Raleigh:** I felt like for at least the first few minutes before she lied about having been there for a tragic event, that I could see myself in a character, finally, of this girl living alone in an apartment with her pet guinea pig constantly sitting next to her. [laughs]

**Taylor:** Well— well, that— I wanna ask, Raleigh, 'cause you brought this to the table. Um, obviously outside of the guinea pig— because this movie's obviously about the desire for—

**Raleigh:** [through laughter] Outside the guinea pig.

**Taylor:** Outside the guinea— it's about the desire for internet fame. And, I mean, Syd and I grew up without that being a thing. It just kind of— it became a thing, and then I think a lot of older people that happened into it were like, "Oh no. This is— this is— this is what this is."

But you grew up with that as a thing. Can you— can you relate to that character in that sense at all?

**Raleigh:** Yeah. I mean, I think that like a lot of movies that want to have something to say about society, it's obviously exaggerated to an extent. Like, I'm not saying this has never happened. Maybe there's someone out there that has lied about a similar thing. There probably is. But every— I won't say everyone. 90% of people my age on the internet are probably... I don't know, taking pictures when they're somewhere, they're not even having that good of a time, and posting about how much fun they're having. Or they're editing pictures to make them look better, or posting about being on a trip or something that they might not really be on to make their lives look better than they might actually be. So I think in that extent, yes. I mean, it feels like everyone does that these days, to the point where you look at something it's like, "Well, that's edited, or that's not real. But we're all doing it, so it's fine." [laughs quietly]

**Sydney:** Really?

**Rileigh:** Yeah. I'm not— not to the extent where I've known anyone who has edited themselves, like, in a foreign country they haven't been in.

**Taylor:** [laughs]

**Rileigh:** Or something like that. But, I mean, for sure people that, you know, go on a trip with their family and aren't having a good time, but they take a picture of them on the beach or, I don't know, while camping or something, and talk about how much fun it is, and how great it is, and look how great I look, and the whole time they're actually miserable while they're there. But look how much fun they're having, 'cause they're having a great time.

**Sydnee:** I think it's interesting. You introduced the idea that maybe, though, sometimes they lie about other parts— other than just, like, how much fun they're having. Because that's, outside of the internet, that's something we've all done in our lives is we didn't want to admit that our life was maybe not as exciting or interesting as someone else, so we've played up some aspect of it. And not lied about the details, just about how it made us feel. Like, "We had such a great time doing this thing!"

When really it was something that was kind of boring. Whatever. Like, we do that outside the internet. But the idea of, like, actually looking at somebody's picture and going, "I don't know if I believe you are actually there," or "I don't know if I believe you actually did that thing," wouldn't occur to me. And would that be conceivable, that you would see a picture and think, "Hmm, I'm not sure you were on that boat." You know what I mean?

**Rileigh:** Yeah. I don't... hmm. That's interesting. I don't know if I would guess that someone edited it, but maybe... [sighs] I don't know. Like, I could imagine a scenario where someone is on a trip and happens upon a, uh... a red carpet event or something, or a concert or something, I don't know. And can put themselves in a background that would look like they were invited to be somewhere, or were somewhere very important, or something like that, when really they weren't at all.

**Sydnee:** So you see the boat, you take a picture of yourself in front of the boat, people assume you were gonna get on that boat.

**Rileigh:** And you make a caption that might hint at you being on it, or you going to a party or something, and you might think like, "Well, that's not true."

**Sydnee:** Not quite so bold as just flat out inventing a scenario. Okay.

**Raleigh:** Yeah. Well, people are really good at picking out when pictures are edited now, too. Like, you'd have to be a really good— and I mean, I think that's why we're supposed to think it's believable that she made these pictures that people are buying into, because she does edit pictures professionally for a living for that magazine. Um, but I feel like it's— it's easy when using phone editing apps to notice when someone has done some hardcore editing. Maybe not just some touchups, but if someone were to edit themselves in front of the Eiffel Tower using, like, Facetune, I feel like you'd be able to catch on to that pretty quickly.

**Taylor:** Well, and I think what you're getting at, Raleigh, is a lot— it's a little bit more messed up, but I think it's absolutely more prevalent. It's the editing of the actual feelings behind the picture, or the actual reality. Like, I know this from working in a restaurant where we've had an influencer come in and, like, order things, and pose with, like, beautiful cappuccinos that have rosettas in them, and then they leave it all there, because they don't actually eat food, because they're on some horribly restrictive diet. It's like, "Oh. The pictures will show that you enjoyed all of this. The reality is, this was part of your brand," and that's a little— I think that's very much a thing. Where we can take— the pictures can be real. The captions we typed ourselves. But we're creating a false reality.

**Raleigh:** Yeah. I think that there's a scene in the movie that actually highlights that really well, which is when she goes to that influencer party after she first becomes, like, internet famous, and vape boy Dylan O'Brien invites her to go with him. And you don't really see anyone partying. It's just a lot of free stuff, and people taking pictures with said free stuff. Like, that's what influencer parties are. When brands have parties or release events, or there are premiers or launches or whatever, nine times out of ten, from what I've, you know, seen influencers share, I have a couple friends that have been to events like that, um, it's just a lot of opportunities to take really nice looking pictures for you to promote their stuff. It's not a lot of actual hanging out or meeting people or partying or anything. It's "Here's all this free stuff, but only so you can take pictures with it and post it on your social media and make it look like you're having a great time."

**Sydnee:** That sounds so boring.

**Taylor:** [laughs]

**Raleigh:** It looks dystopian in the movie. Like, to see this underground party where it looks like it's a big deal, but then you walk in and it's just everyone's taking pictures with, like, teeth whitening... devices. But that's, like... realistic.

**Taylor:** Yeah. Oh, absolutely. Well, and I do think that's— I think that's what's smart about this movie. I mean, it represents it as this— I mean, obviously the main character is reprehensible for her lies. But when you kind of think about it alongside how much fabrication we do to gain followings and to gain relevance in social media, it is interesting. It's different to completely fabricate a false reality, a false background. But how much of that do we do in ways that we can't be caught, you know?

**Raleigh:** Yeah.

**Sydney:** And, I mean, I think the central question that gets posed there when all of a sudden this thing that seemed sort of benign— she pretended to take a trip to Paris— which if you found out somebody pretended to take a trip to Paris, you may think less of them as, like... "Oh, that's... that's not... " You know? Like, I don't know.

**Raleigh:** That just seems silly to me. Like, why would you do that?

**Sydney:** Yeah, and why would you lie about that? And, like— but you wouldn't feel, like, hurt necessarily. I mean, I don't know.

**Raleigh:** I don't think I'd think they're a bad person.

**Sydney:** Yeah. You might— I would probably feel sorry for them that they did that. Like, I wouldn't— I would not feel like it would affect me. You know what I mean? But then when— the turning point, when now there has been a terrorist attack in Paris, and so she either has to come clean and say, "Okay, never mind, sorry. I wasn't actually there."

Or... roll with it. It is an interesting moment to think about if that sort of online life is so important, especially to the younger generation, you know? That, like, keeping that online persona, "This is who I am, this is what my life looks like, this is what I look like. These are the things— all the fabulous things I've done and places I've been." If that's so important— and once you crack that veneer and say, "Okay, actually I lied about something," you shatter it all. Like, you're gonna lose all of that.

**Rileigh:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Um... it's an interesting question. Like, how far would you go? How low would you sink? How much of your morality would you toss to the side to keep that, you know, facade up?"

**Rileigh:** Yeah. Well, it also is just, social media is based in instant gratification. So when she immediately decides to go with it, "Yes, I was there," and shows up at the airport when a flight is getting back into New York from Paris and pretends like she's getting off the plane so she can be photographed by the news, and her parents are there holding her and crying and everything, like, all that I imagine is going through her head at that moment is, "This'll be great for likes and followers and stuff." There's no moment you see her think, like, "Well, this could go horribly wrong." But it's good for right now. 'Cause that's what social media is. It's not "What if in a month someone sees this post and realizes I was lying?"

It's "Think about how great this is gonna be for my social media right now."

**Sydnee:** Hmm.

**Rileigh:** Which I think is—

**Sydnee:** It's a real dissociation from, like, your online you and your you-you. 'Cause at that moment she's just only concerned with online you and how that's gonna look, and the actual her is not a consideration.

**Rileigh:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** I feel like that's the... I think that's a very distinct shift. And, you know, we talk so much about obviously generational shifts on this podcast but, like, when we were growing up, the internet and your presence on it I feel like was more about, like, that's a place you could be your real self. You could talk to people that related to you, that understood you, and you could be your real self on the internet. And then, you know, in your real life you had to go about and, like, follow the rules and be normal and hide the parts of yourself that weren't okay. And, like, that complete upside down of now your internet self is a fabricated self, it's— it is— it's your brand, it's the thing that you sell. It's so interesting to me. I do think that's a very distinct difference between our generation and yours, Rileigh.

**Raleigh:** Yeah. And, you know, at first we watched it, I thought— 'cause I think the main character is supposed to be mid to late-ish 20's, I guess? 25, 26.

**Sydnee:** I would assume.

**Raleigh:** I would guess something like that. Um, the first when we were watching it I thought, "She needs to be younger for me to believe this. She needs to be, like, distinctly Gen Z." Because, like, the way she was dressing and her makeup and the social media and all that stuff felt very relatable to me. But then I think— at least what I hope the movie was maybe trying to get at in a more positive way was when they introduce the character of Rowan, who is a school shooting survivor who's supposed to be only, like, 17, 18. Um, and they showed the difference between how she— because she becomes actually famous in the real world for the advocacy she does. And, you know, the talks she gives and all that. Um, but she doesn't use— she wasn't doing obviously any of that to reach that point. She was doing all of these public appearances to try to enact change, but doesn't continue to then use that fame she gets to do anything for her own personal gain. And the main— what is the main character's name? Why can I not remember her name?

[pause]

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Raleigh:** Um—

**Taylor:** Oh.

**Raleigh:** I f—[laughs quietly]

**Taylor:** Danni.

**Raleigh:** Danni?

**Sydnee:** Danni.

**Raleigh:** Danni. But when Danni realizes she's so famous, she's like, "Why is this girl not acting like, you know, an influencer? She's not going to these events, she's not doing all these things."



My hope is that the reason they make Danni this, like, I think very stereotypical quote, unquote, "millennial" that, like, you know, is— is— has this money at home but acts like she is having a rough time in the city and, you know, fakes these trips, and does these bad things with social media, is because then Rowan is like this Gen Z kind of new way of using social media. My generation that watched people like Danni on the internet faking their lives and using our views for money and popularity. And then us trying to use it for something better. 'Cause I do think there was a brief period of people that are probably just a couple of years older than me that— of— of influencers using the internet for just personal gain, and you didn't see a lot of young people using it for, you know, advocacy or social issues or anything like that.

**Sydnee:** Well, and I mean, I think that's still... you know. It's all about what you can market, ultimately. Like, everything sort of gets swept up by capitalism sometimes, and the internet is just that. Like, everybody's selling, everybody's marketing, everybody's faking it. It's okay, that's the deal. You don't have to pretend like you're true or authentic, because we don't need you to be. It's the internet.

**Raleigh:** We want you to be what sells, yeah.

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** Well, and to that end it just becomes an extension of self, and that's the— the same question that anybody that puts anything— creates or produces anything, or uses your voice in any way. Do you wanna use it to help, or do you wanna use it to advance yourself?

**Raleigh:** Yeah. Yeah, it, uh— I kept saying it reminded me of *Dear Evan Hansen*.

**Taylor:** Yeah! [laughs]

**Raleigh:** Like, set ten years later. Because instead of, like, an anti-bullying campaign that blows up from a speech at school that's posted on YouTube it's, like, talking about, you know, advocating for survivors and safety and all this stuff through social media. But both are characters that are, you know, not likable, that lie about something that in the end furthers their own personal gain.

**Sydnee:** And I think, you know, it is— it is important. Like, the things she comes up with, "I am not okay," that becomes the hashtag that makes her so incredibly popular. One, she stole it. [laughs quietly]

**Rileigh:** From Rowan.

**Sydnee:** From Rowan. So that sentiment, that it's okay to not be okay, came from a place of truth and authenticity, you know? Like, this was a survivor who was saying this. So it resonated with people so much because it's true. Because it came from honesty. But it was being sold through and packaged in a false way, you know? So— and I think that there's so much stuff that that's exactly what marketing does. Like, really effective advertising. It's going to grab onto something that is true and authentic and real and human, but it's gonna package it in something false. But you're gonna still be caught by it because you'll feel that, you know? It knows— they're smart enough to know how to do that. Which is exactly what she is in that moment. She's just one more brand being marketed.

**Rileigh:** And I think we're supposed to see that maybe her saying that is her authentically believing that, and a lot of the things she shares in the survivor support group she goes to are things she actually feels, because she has depression. So in a way it's like almost supposed to feel like, "Oh, but she actually is struggling, and she is not okay, and she's trying to work on herself because she struggles with mental illness." But also I guess you can acknowledge that you have mental illness, or life is hard, or things don't feel good, even if you haven't been through some awful tragedy. Like, it would be okay if she acknowledged "I'm not okay, and my life is pretty good." Like, you can say that. And I think that it was a— a... I don't know. It was kind of awkward for me watching to try to reconcile, yeah, she's obviously going through something. Hmm. But this is not the way to be... going about dealing with that, I guess.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. I mean, 'cause she's still, like, the villain of the story, yeah.

**Rileigh:** Yeah. You don't wanna have sympathy for her. And then there are those brief moments where it's like "Yeah, she actually obviously is struggling with something. But man, she's also being a really bad person right now."

**Taylor:** Well—

**Sydnee:** And I—

**Taylor:** Oh, go ahead.

**Sydnee:** [simultaneously] Oh, go ahead.

**Taylor:** No, I mean, I think that part of it is that when sympathy becomes, like, a social currency, when it becomes something that you can get value from on the internet, you really make a perverse thing of something that should just be offered up. Like, I do think— I do have sympathy for her character. I do think she was struggling, clearly. I think you'd have to be in a pretty bad place to do what she did from the beginning.

**Raleigh:** Yes.

**Taylor:** And that— I think, like, to put herself on the— I mean, to adopt the identity of somebody who survived something heinous, she became the villain, absolutely. But I don't think that the movie is about "Look at this horrible disillusioned privileged lady who did something terrible, and then here's real victims."

I think it's more about, like, how we prof— like, how— if we can profit off our victimhood, then victimhood becomes a way of getting capital and power, and that's bad. Because then we get in the— it's just like anything else that's marketable. Where really we just need to, like... like, we need to take all of that marketing power away from these things. This is just ourselves. Like, we should be able to be honest about ourselves and what we're dealing with.

**Raleigh:** Yeah. And we shouldn't have to, like, advertise and try to openly and publicly discuss what we're struggling with or what our issues are for public attention in order to feel, like, our struggles are valid. It's like she feels like she needs to extrapolate it to this large scale and put it out there for people to say, "Yes, you're right. It's okay for you to not feel good." Even though she should just, you know, be able to do that in her own life as is.

**Sydnee:** Well, that is a good lesson, because there are a lot of aspects of her life that, like, I mean... that— that organization where she works, Depravity...

[all laugh]

**Sydnee:** ... seemed like sort of an unhealthy kind of [laughs quietly] situation. Its existence, the things that it prioritized and prized and perpetuated and...

**Rileigh:** Well, it prioritized her as an employee when she had this tragic story to share.

**Taylor:** Right.

**Sydnee:** And so, you know, sometimes the problem is that you're in a dysfunctional system, and it's good to be able to recognize that that's the problem. It's not— and you don't need an excuse to feel bad about that, or to have trouble functioning within that dysfunctional system. The system is dysfunctional. That's not a problem with you. You know, you don't have to justify it by saying, "Well, I just can't because of this, this, or—" no. The system is dysfunctional. You can just recognize that.

**Rileigh:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Um, I do think that that has to be— I would think, I don't know— part of the decision to not make her too young, too. Because in terms of having sympathy, if the stuff she did was done by a teenager... there would be a big part of me that would think, "That teenager is about to learn a very hard lesson." You know?

**Taylor:** Right.

**Sydnee:** 'Cause not, like, everybody would. But it's a lot more believable to see somebody, you know, whose— whose frontal lobe is not fully formed [laughs quietly] making a really bad choice to do something really reckless and dangerous and harmful. Um, and know that, like, they could still grow into a good, decent person. They've just made a giant mistake. It's— I think that making her older helps to remove that too, so that— you know. I mean, she knows what she's doing.

**Rileigh:** Oh yeah.

**Sydnee:** I think that there's a lot of privilege in the character that is, she does not recognize or understand. There's not a lot of introspection there, and I think that that informs— like, she knows what she's doing. I do not think she has taken the time to reckon with the harm she could cause with something like that until the very, very end of the movie.

**Rileigh:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** Yeah. Well, and I think the end is— I'm really happy that there was no redemption arc. Like, I think that is correct. The fact that she just sort of... disappears at the end of the movie I think is appropriate. Because I think that would've kind of— that would've left a sour taste in my mouth if she had been given a "Oh, now I get to, like, hug the person who had very real trauma that I capitalized off of and, like, be forgiven and get a musical number."

**Rileigh:** Yeah. Yeah, she, uh— spoiler alert for the ending. She goes to— she's been forced off of all social media, everyone finds her out, and she's the most hated woman on the internet.

**Sydnee:** She's fired. She moves back in with her parents.

**Rileigh:** And even her parents are, you know, not... doing— you know, not happy with her. But she gets off all social media and tries to go to Rowan's performance of her end-of-the-year showcase type thing, where she's gonna do spoken word poetry. And has this whole thing written out on her phone to say to her afterwards to try to apologize. And Rowan ends up doing a piece about Danni, and how hurt she was by her, and all the awful things she did, and how she doesn't even realize some of the hurt she caused. And instead of going up to her after, Danni just lets her have that moment and walks away. That's it. Which I do think is a good— I agree. It was a very good ending that she doesn't get a redemption arc, but you do see her, in the smallest way, start to realize, like, sometimes the way to make things better is to not make them about me and to not force myself on someone who obviously is not ready to hear from me, is not ready to hear this long thing I've written in my Notes app. So I'm just gonna, you know, walk away.

**Sydnee:** Yeah, she finally stops centering herself.

**Rileigh:** Yeah.

[pause]

**Sydnee:** And I have to imagine that that was also intentional that our main character who does that, who is privileged, who has a habit of centering herself, is white. And the character that she harms the most— she harms a lot of people,

but the character that she harms the most with that is not. I have to imagine that that— I mean, 'cause that, you know, it's appropriate and it's true.

**Raleigh:** Yeah. I mean, there were a lot of moments where Danni would say things to Rowan, like, joking about... I don't know, things they had talked about that were traumatic, or, like, constantly smiling and happy and Rowan was not able to understand that. And I kind of cringed watching them. Like, Rowan lost her older sister in the shooting they were both in. And Danni starts, like, trying to fill that role almost, and plays the music in the car that she used to listen to with her older sister.

**Taylor:** Oh, yeah.

**Raleigh:** And it's so uncomfortable to watch, because you're thinking, like, "Obviously that is not what this girl needs to hear right now." But you see Rowan constantly just, like, swallowing it and dealing with it, and not letting herself get upset by it, and just playing along like it's okay. And that does feel very much like, yeah, this is a white girl who thinks all these things are okay that she's doing, and, um, people of color don't always feel comfortable saying "Hey, this is hurtful to me. This makes me uncomfortable." And white people don't always think about those things.

**Sydney:** 'Cause you can't— it doesn't happen, but you can easily imagine a scenario where Rowan would've called her out, and she would have immediately started crying.

**Raleigh:** Yes.

**Sydney:** And saying she wasn't racist, and that obviously not, 'cause she has Black friends. Like, you know?

**Raleigh:** Yes.

**Sydney:** You know that that's this character. You know that, like, if she got called out, white tears would fall, and they make that very clear.

**Raleigh:** Yeah. It, uh— I mean, I think it's— all around it's a very, very good representation of both some of the best parts of my generation, and some of the absolute worst. Like, yes there are people that are my age that are using their presence for good, and talking about change and reform and all that stuff. But

also people that are probably lying about trauma they've been through, or something, for personal gain and money and fame.

**Sydnee:** Clicks.

**Raleigh:** Clicks, likes, subscribes. All that stuff.

**Sydnee:** I do— I didn't know how to feel about— the only thing that I would say I was trying to figure out, grappling with my feelings about, were when she is found out to be a fraud— and obviously the people around her are upset. Her boss is upset, Rowan's upset, her parents are upset. People are personally harmed by her, and there is a lot of hate directed at her as a result. That backlash goes to where all backlashes go on the internet, to people, like, telling her to harm herself and things like that. You know, saying, like, horrible, horrible things to her that to me seem out of proportion to any— I mean, to lying about being somewhere. You know what I mean? She— I don't know. That was the only part I was trying to grapple with. Like... the movie doesn't suggest she deserves that. But it doesn't suggest she... doesn't deserve that? You know what I mean? So I don't know. That was the only part I was trying to, like, reckon with.

**Taylor:** I—

**Raleigh:** I—

**Taylor:** Go ahead.

**Raleigh:** I was just gonna say, I feel like it's probably an accurate representation of what happens when someone becomes, like, the internet's newest target.

**Sydnee:** Main character.

**Raleigh:** Yeah, main character. Um, there are prob— there are definitely, not probably, people that take it to that extreme. And I hope the reason for including that was not just to be, like, realistic, but also kind of point out the hypocrisy of telling someone who harmed other people to harm themselves.

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** Yeah. Well, and that's— yeah. That's... that element, like, was very... I mean, that is where the internet goes, no matter what your supposed sins are. I

think hers were pretty heinous, but that is just the inevitable end of any discourse, is "You should... not be alive anymore, and we're gonna tell you 100 times why that's true."

And I don't know what action deserves that, but I don't think... faking some pictures— 'cause the other thing is— and it's pretty pathetic of her character, but the reason is, I don't think it really was for fame as much as it was so she could get a boy, which is kind of sad. We can all agree on that. But, like, sad in a way that lots of people are sad. Lots of people do things that are kind of desperate because they want love and attention from people that they don't get it from.

**Rileigh:** Right.

**Sydnee:** But, I mean, it really is. It's a cautionary tale about if you decide you want to become the internet's main character... that goes one of two ways, and often it will end up going both ways. Whichever way it goes at first, it will go the other way next.

**Rileigh:** Yeah. Which I think they do a good job of highlighting, because even you see Rowan getting hate, and people saying she's faking it, and criticizing her for how she responds to someone setting off firecrackers at a speech she's giving that causes her to have a full, you know, panic attack.

**Sydnee:** Yeah, somebody who's completely authentic and real, and not trying to harm anyone, yeah.

**Rileigh:** And they highlight that even people criticize her. So, you know, yeah. Usually if you're going to put yourself on any sort of platform nowadays on the internet, you're gonna get both. It just depends on the current moment which one you're getting more of, I think.

[pause]

**Sydnee:** Well, it was—

**Rileigh:** So. [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Still— despite [laughs quietly] all of this intense dialog, it was still— I mean, I— it was interesting. I enjoyed watching it. It's hard. Like, I was cringing a lot, like "[uncomfortable] Ugh— oh, why are you doing this?"



**Rileigh:** It's hard to watch a movie that has an unlikable main character.

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** Well, and it's not just a straight through line of, like, a moral story where "Here's the bad guy. Here's the good guy. Here's how you're supposed to feel."

There's a lot of complex layers about, like, the people that were crucifying her are also people that probably behave a lot like she does on social media. It's kind of the same— so it's like really, you could look at it as a takedown of being inauthentic, which I think is good. I mean, I think that's always good. I think that, you know, any profit you get from being false or lying is... maybe not something you should feel good about. And that's maybe, like, what you were saying earlier, Rileigh, about how, you know, you think younger generations use it in a more, uh, useful way. Not to be fake, but to be authentic, perhaps in the way that in the early days of the internet we thought that was the point. [laughs] Like, I can say what I mean here! No one can put hands on me if I do.

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Rileigh:** It's definitely—

**Sydnee:** I can share it all with Livejournal.

**Taylor:** Yes. Oh no, yes. [laughs]

**Rileigh:** It makes me look at it like a very, like, bell curve sort of why. Like, where it started as maybe getting now— now it's getting closer to where it started, if that makes sense. Um, obviously not everyone. Obviously there are still many, many people who are doing inauthentic things on the internet to make money.

**Sydnee:** But we're getting better at spotting them.

**Rileigh:** Yeah. I think there was a brief period where I was watching YouTube when I was 12, 13, and everyone that was popular on there was these perfect, usually white, people, that had these very wealthy lives and perfect houses and partners and clothes, and marketing all of it to my young, impressionable brain. Um, I don't think that's all of them anymore.

**Sydnee:** No. No, my children watch YouTube videos sometimes, and that's not what it is.

**Raleigh:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** There's a lot of crushing various kinds of objects that have a color inside and trying to guess what color's inside.

**Raleigh:** [laughs quietly] See, that evolution of the internet I still don't understand. Your kids watch a lot of videos which are people playing with dolls, and making them have conversations with each other.

**Sydnee:** Yes.

**Raleigh:** That sometimes are like... just regular, everyday conversations. It's not like some intense story.

**Sydnee:** No, they're going to school, or it's they're going to the beach or they're having a birthday party.

**Raleigh:** Like, it's like watching just, like, cartoons or something, but with people using dolls instead on YouTube. I don't understand it, but they all have, like, 50 million views whenever they click on them, so obviously there are people that do understand it.

**Sydnee:** That, and now ASMR makeup tutorials are really big.

**Raleigh:** Right. Yeah, I don't know. Internet's— internet's going places that I don't always understand. And that's why we changed our show. 'Cause I don't get it anymore. [laughs] And that's why Charlie's gunning for my place. But thank you all for watching this with me. Uh, I felt like it was a good thing for us to talk about. Not even just because of the actual movie itself, but really just for what it brings to the table about modern culture and internet and stuff.

**Sydnee:** Yeah, I'm glad we all got to watch it together.

**Raleigh:** Um, what's next?

**Sydnee:** Uh, I would like you all to watch *A League of Their Own*, please.

**Taylor:** [laughs quietly] Okay.

**Raleigh:** I've never seen it.

**Sydnee:** Oh, it's a great movie! It makes me cry every time—

**Raleigh:** Oh, good. [laughs quietly]

**Sydnee:** —and there's, um, as— Taylor, when is the show coming out?

**Taylor:** Oh, right! You picked the movie and I didn't realize, there's a new television series. I think it was... it's coming out on the 12th, I believe.

**Sydnee:** So the day that— so today, as in that's the day this episode will air.

**Raleigh:** Yes, today.

**Sydnee:** So today, it comes out.

**Taylor:** Yeah. And it's got Abbi Jacobson in it. Airs on— I think it might be an Amazon show? I'm not sure. It's a streaming show. It's one of those.

**Sydnee:** I don't know if it'll be good or not, but I loved the movie, so.

**Raleigh:** You're gonna check it out.

**Sydnee:** I like the odds.

**Taylor:** Alright.

**Sydnee:** Alright. Well, thank you both. Uh, I'm not— *Not Okay* is on...

**Raleigh:** Hulu.

**Sydnee:** Hulu, if you'd like to watch it. And thank you to Maximum Fun. You should go to [Maximumfun.org](http://Maximumfun.org) and listen to all the great podcasts there. You can tweet at us @stillbuff. You can email us at [stillbuffering@maximumfun.org](mailto:stillbuffering@maximumfun.org). And thank you to The Nouvellas for our theme song, "Baby You Change Your Mind."

**Rileigh:** This has been your cross-generational guide to the culture that made us. I am Rileigh Smirl.

**Sydnee:** I'm Sydnee McElroy.

**Taylor:** And I'm Taylor Smirl.

**Rileigh:** I am still buffering...

**Sydnee and Taylor:** And I... am... too.

[theme music plays]

**Rileigh:** I just really feel like we didn't talk about the guinea pig enough.

**Sydnee:** [laughs quietly]

**Taylor:** It's all the guinea pig's fault.

**Rileigh:** Like, she started it.

**Sydnee:** You just related 'cause of the cleevy— clever guinea pig pun name.

**Rileigh:** Yes. I'm not alone.

[music plays]

**Jo:** Well, Manolo, we have a show to promote. It's called *Dr. Gameshow*.

**Manolo:** It's a family friendly podcast where listeners submit games and we play them with callers from around the world.

**Jo:** Oh, sounds good. New episodes, uh, happen every other Wednesday on Maximumfun.org.

**Manolo:** It's a, it's a fast and loose oasis of absurd innocence and naivete and—

**Jo:** Are you writing a poem?

**Manolo:** No. I'm just saying things from my memory. And, uh, it's a nice break from reality [laughs]. Is that, are we allowed to say that?

**Jo:** I don't know, it sounds bad.

**Manolo:** It comes with a 100% happiness guarantee.

**Jo:** It does not.

**Manolo:** [laughs]

**Jo:** Come for the games and stay for the cats.

[music and ad end]

[chord]

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