

“FRIENDS WHO ARE GUYS”

FOR LESSON

*Growing Up
and Fitting In***NARRATOR** **Shahana Hanif**RUN TIME **2:03**

HANIF We got caught several times because we were hanging out with boys. So — but I, like, contest a lot of these things. Like, what is getting caught? And, like, why was it such a problem to have a friend who’s a guy? And it really — like, I have a problem with the fact that all of my and my sister’s interactions with boys and men were always sexualized. Like, it was never seen in the sort of like, they’re just friends. They’re just hanging out, and there’s nothing happening that is intimate in a romantic way.

So, that was a problem for me. And really seeing my parents in this very, like — they didn’t seem like good people. Like, they just seemed like — is this protection, or is this manipulation? Like, why are they treating us like this? Because on the other spectrum we were seeing those same boys that we were hanging out with live their best life. They were joining a cricket team. They were hanging out after school. They had, like, rich dating lives and just opportunities that they were able to take advantage of. Whether or not they did, that’s not an issue.

But the fact that there was choice, there was agency over decisions, there was a lack of questioning of where are you and what were you doing with X, you know, XYZ person? None of that was a part of their childhood. Regardless of the fact that they, too, are Muslim, they, too, are Bangladeshi, were in nearby schools in Brooklyn, how could it be that we’re growing up in the same place, same time, and their lives are so much more drastically freer?

BIO Shahana Hanif was born in 1991 in Brooklyn and raised in Kensington’s Bangladeshi community. After a health crisis as a teenager led to a diagnosis of lupus, she went on to earn a bachelor’s degree in women’s and gender studies from Brooklyn College. While there, she became involved in intersectional activism and community organizing, especially with the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence and Naree Shongothok: Bangladeshi Women Organizing for Social Change. Hanif has worked as director of organizing and community engagement for New York City Council Member Brad Lander.

CITATION Hanif, Shahana, Excerpt from oral history interview conducted by Liz H. Strong, April 17, 2018, Muslims in Brooklyn oral histories, 2018.006.15; Brooklyn Historical Society.