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[Music plays]

Lily Cornell Silver: I'm Lily Cornell Silver and welcome to *Mind Wide Open*, my mental health focus interview series. Today I am talking to the front woman of Bully, Alicia Bognanno, who is a singer, songwriter, and guitarist. She just released her most recent album, called Sugar Egg, in which she talks a lot about her experiences having Bipolar 2 Disorder, so she's going to talk about that today, what that experience looks like for her, and how it relates to her music. Thank you so much for watching and I hope you enjoy.

Hi, Alicia.

Alicia Bognanno: Hi.

Lily Cornell Silver: Thank you so much for being here.

Alicia Bognanno: Yeah. Thanks for having me.

Lily Cornell Silver: So you just released your newest album, Sugar Egg, under Bully, but a solo project and it features a lot of references to your recent diagnosis of Bipolar 2 Disorder.

Alicia Bognanno: Mm-hmm.

Lily Cornell Silver: What inspired you to be so open about being Bipolar, even while you're still kind of navigating like what that looks like for you?

Alicia Bognanno: I mean I was hesitant to talk about it, but you get pushed so much for like bio stuff and in the past – well, I try and be as best I can be about only talking about things that I'm comfortable talking about and I won't have to second guess later, but it was such a big part of my life I didn't know how I was going to get around talking about it.

Lily Cornell Silver: Wow. Okay.

Alicia Bognanno: Because it just totally consumed me for the past, you know, four years and everything kind of revolved around that.

Lily Cornell Silver: Totally.

Alicia Bognanno: I hate to say that, because you know, I'm not my diagnosis. I don't want to let it have ownership over me, but it just felt like it was unavoidable to talk about if I was going to talk about the music.

Lily Cornell Silver: Sure.

Alicia Bognanno: I was kind of like, "Well, I don't really – I've kept it like a secret for no reason," and I just felt okay with it. I think I felt like I had more of a grasp on it and not like I wanted to like joke about it or anything, but I wasn't as paranoid about being judged or having a stigma around it. Honestly, if someone wants to then I don't really care. I don't really need them in my life anyway.

Lily Cornell Silver: Right. Absolutely.

Alicia Bognanno: Yeah. It just kind of got to the point where I was like, "Okay. I need to talk about this, because there's just no point of hiding it."

Lily Cornell Silver: Yeah.

Alicia Bognanno: I don't want to like, you know, have this record be the next three years of my life and not be able to talk about the main part.

Lily Cornell Silver: Right. Okay.

Alicia Bognanno: Yeah.

Lily Cornell Silver: When did you get diagnosed?

Alicia Bognanno: About four years ago.

Lily Cornell Silver: Okay. Okay. So was there like a turning point, where you were like, "Oh, this is something that needs to be diagnosed?" What did that look like for you?

Alicia Bognanno: Yeah. I just got to the point where it was really debilitating. I couldn't – it was particularly for work, because I just – the social media aspect of it made me sick. I couldn't post anything without

feeling like I was going to throw up. I would be like up at night worrying about it. I was so paranoid. I was starting to like turn down shows because I had this fear that I was going to be like booed off stage or something, which has never happened. I was really convinced that a lot of the people around me who loved me were trying to help me had like ulterior motives. It was just like in the back of my head. I was like, "Oh, well, why do they want me to do that? Because of this? Because of this?" It's like, "No, because I care about you and I want what's best for your career."

Lily Cornell Silver: Right. Right.

Alicia Bognanno: I just was – I had to go in, because I was just so paranoid. I couldn't – I didn't – I couldn't really exist.

Lily Cornell Silver: Wow. Okay. That's super interesting. I have a friend who has pretty severe Bipolar and that's like one of the main things that he struggles with is like feeling like his parents are like plotting against him, or like out to get him in some way, and that's an aspect of the experience that he talks about a lot.

In that vein, like, I know – I have several friends and family members who have Bipolar and it looks so completely different for all of them.

Alicia Bognanno: Yeah.

Lily Cornell Silver: Like it's such a broad spectrum and I think that's something about Bipolar that people really don't understand. Like, there's kind of one like media idea of what Bipolar is, but like it's – you know, it's so, so, so diverse and can look so different. So what does it look like for you on like a day-to-day thing? What is your experience?

Alicia Bognanno: Two parts of it that still are frustrating to me is even though I've spent so much time understanding and familiarizing myself with the cycles I still sometimes don't know until it's like a little too late. Or I'll have had a week where I'm just like, "Oh, I just feel so good. I'm just so happy. I'm so – like I'm going to rearrange my house. I just want to be super active. I'll do whatever on social media." Then like three days after that I'll start to get really heavy and it gets kind of discouraging to think back and be like how did I not know this was coming, like how could I not tell?

Another thing is just – I mean besides obviously I take medications every day for it –

Lily Cornell Silver: Yeah.

Alicia Bognanno: But is I have to do so much to just keep my head on straight, like to just stay level. I have to very actively exercise. If I don't exercise I just feel like a ball, like I can just feel irritation coming off of me and I just need to put everything down and be like – the other day it was like I hadn't for a few days and I just felt awful and so upset. I just stopped working. I was like, "I need to just go on a run. There's nothing else I can do right now except a run." So it's keeping up with that and meditation, which I don't do as much as I should. I should do daily. Honestly, you hear about it all of the time, but when you actually do it and practice it, it is life changing.

Lily Cornell Silver: It's one of those things that everyone I talk to about meditation goes, "I should do it more than I do."

Alicia Bognanno: Yes. Every time I make myself do it I get done and I'm like, "This is the best I've felt all week."

Lily Cornell Silver: Wow. Yeah.

Alicia Bognanno: It's just like so important to kind of keep in mind that the world is so much bigger than you think and it's easy to manifest on very small things that essentially don't matter and that is pretty much how I keep I would say – or try and keep myself in check whenever I'm stressing out about like, "Oh, someone said this," or, "Someone said that," I'm like, "Well, I'm going to die one day and I should enjoy my life."

Lily Cornell Silver: Right. Yeah. No. Meditation definitely has that kind of grounding and like zoom out effect for me, like not, you know, not sweating the small stuff and being able to be more in the present moment.

Alicia Bognanno: Totally. Do you meditate daily?

Lily Cornell Silver: I should meditate more than I do. I have – like you know there's apps, like Head Space and things like that that I use, but something that I've been reading a lot about is like different forms of meditation, like so many different things can be forms of

meditation, like, writing and playing music can be a form of meditation, like painting, walking outside, swimming, like those can all be forms of meditation.

Alicia Bognanno: Yeah. I mean playing music is the most therapeutic thing in the world, like by far. Playing a show is like 45 minutes where you just forgot about anything that was bothering you.

Lily Cornell Silver: Right.

Alicia Bognanno: Or you figured out a way to funnel it into the show and it's just like unlike any other feeling in the world.

Lily Cornell Silver: With struggling with Bipolar, did that aid your music process or did it make it harder to like motivate and harder to write, because I know when I'm struggling with my mental health, like sometimes it can be a good creative motivator, and other times it can just be like I can't, like I can't do this right now.

Alicia Bognanno: Yeah. I would say it definitely aids it. I hate to say that in a way, because I don't like how mental illnesses can be romanticized, especially in rock music. I think that's very – treading very dangerous waters and I wish that wasn't a thing, but I tend to write when something is bothering me or upsetting me and that is not to say I can't write a good song when I'm happy, but when I'm there it helps me get through it. And absolutely, playing live is like if something happens to me that day, or week, or month, or year and I can play live it's like the best way for me to just let go and let all of my energy out. That's actually something I really struggled with during quarantine, because I didn't –

Lily Cornell Silver: I was going to say – yeah –

Alicia Bognanno: Yeah, because you don't have that outlet anymore, so it's like –

Lily Cornell Silver: Yeah.

Alicia Bognanno: You know, figuring out what else you can do, but you really learn to appreciate that when it's taken away.

Lily Cornell Silver: Definitely. Just for my own knowledge and for people who might not know that much about like what Bipolar looks like, what's the difference between Bipolar 1 and Bipolar 2?

- Alicia Bognanno:* The main thing is Bipolar 1 you have had an episode where your mania gets so high you're like hospitalized and it can shift to a higher place. Bipolar 2 is usually the depressive – the depressive place is longer. It's like switching places of awful moods pretty much.
- Lily Cornell Silver:* How was it like suddenly being very vulnerable about it? Like, was the response good or was it tough?
- Alicia Bognanno:* It felt so good.
- Lily Cornell Silver:* Oh, good.
- Alicia Bognanno:* I mean that was like the first time a lot of my cousins, and family, and anybody, like friends heard about it and it just felt like good to have it out there. It was just like I don't need to hold onto this anymore. This doesn't need to be like a dark secret that I'm afraid I'm going to be judged by. I was just like, "This is out," and it was, I think, the best way to kind of share that information, because I didn't have to have those one-on-ones.
- Lily Cornell Silver:* Right.
- Alicia Bognanno:* When I think about talking about it to people, first of all, I don't want any sympathy.
- Lily Cornell Silver:* Right.
- Alicia Bognanno:* Like I just – I like don't ever want to be like, "Woe is me," which isn't – I just think when you get to tell someone about it it's just a weird thing, because you don't really have the right words to describe how you feel or what's going on in your brain. It's just like a very lonely place to be and you just kind of think, "Well, even if I tell them they're not going to feel how I'm feeling, you know? What are they going to do with that information?" If it's someone you love and care about you, hopefully they'll read about it and research it and try and help you with it. But if somebody is just, you know, not that interested and you tell them and then nothing is changed really, so it's a very strange one-on-one conversation to have with somebody you know, because more than often they're not going to know how to respond to it.

Lily Cornell Silver: Right.

Alicia Bognanno: It's kind of hard to sit with that.

Lily Cornell Silver: Definitely. And that's something, you know, with the series and in my own like day-to-day life, wanting to spread as many resources as possible and like kind of create a different situation where people have more vocabulary to talk about things like that and more information so that the conversations can be had and that it's not kind of this weird – you know, in my case, like talking about losing loved ones to suicide, or like struggling with PTSD, and anxiety, and depression. Like, you try to just have a conversation, the same thing, like I'm not looking for sympathy. I'm just wanting to have a conversation about my day-to-day life and people just have no idea how to respond.

Alicia Bognanno: Yeah. Yeah.

Lily Cornell Silver: So that really is very super important.

Alicia Bognanno: Yeah. And I also think that like it's okay to like deal with your shit and feel your feelings and want help getting through that. There is nothing wrong with that.

Lily Cornell Silver: When you have had conversations about it with other people that have been helpful, like, what do those look like to you, like what does a helpful conversation look like, or a positive conversation?

Alicia Bognanno: A really cool conversation I had – well, with my therapist. Maybe that doesn't count, but –

Lily Cornell Silver: That definitely counts.

Alicia Bognanno: Okay. Well, she's usually the most helpful conversations. She has pointed out so many times I'll be like, "Oh, my God. The medication saved me. I'm so happy for the medication." She'll point out – she'll be like, "Yeah, it helped, but also, you've done a lot of that work and you need to like take credit for that." You know what I'm saying?

Lily Cornell Silver: Right. Totally.

Alicia Bognanno: I don't know. That was just cool to hear, but I actually like to talk to people about it, like with other people who have it, because I just don't get to have that conversation very much. Like, I was listening to a podcast the other day – I forget what it's called. It's like Stuff You Should Know or something, and they had an episode on it, and hearing them discuss it I was like, "Yep. Yep. Yep." It just it likes – it's nice – it's like –

Lily Cornell Silver: Super validating.

Alicia Bognanno: It's super validating. Like oddly, it's really validating, because you're like this isn't in my head. I'm not alone.

Lily Cornell Silver: Right.

Alicia Bognanno: It's just – you know, I don't know, that connection. That's hard to find.

Lily Cornell Silver: And speaks to the importance of talking about things openly, you know, in like whatever format, like that podcast, or this series, or just amongst friends, like, speaks to the importance of creating that validation for other people by just having destigmatized, normal conversations about it as you would physical health.

Alicia Bognanno: Totally. For sure. It's just – yeah, it's important to be talked about and I think – like you and I discussed this on the phone the other day, like so many people deal with anxiety and depression and in so many different ways, on so many different levels, so lots of times you'll hear about it or know someone is dealing with it, but there's not like that particular connection. I think whenever anybody can find that in any sort of mental illness it's comforting, you know?

Lily Cornell Silver: Totally. Your new record, Sugar Egg, which I love –

Alicia Bognanno: Thanks.

Lily Cornell Silver: It's so good. It's so good. What songs – were there particular songs you can point to that were written specifically like about your struggles with mental health?

Alicia Bognanno: Yeah. Come Down, and Like Fire, and Prism.

Lily Cornell Silver: Yeah.

Alicia Bognanno: Yeah. I would say those three are like the most – I mean when I wrote Come Down and Like Fire I was just was in a horrible place and it was absolutely a way to be like let's just get through this.

Lily Cornell Silver: Sure.

Alicia Bognanno: Like Fire is just about like the drastic changes, and like ups and downs, and like how it feels when I'm there. It's funny, because people have asked about my faith or like asked if I was religious because God is mentioned and it's totally – nothing against anyone who is religious. I'm not religious personally. It's more of an idea of somebody always being there and everything is going to turn out okay, and everything happens for a reason. Then you get to that place mentally and you feel so alone and you're like, "No one is here right now. Why is this happening? This cannot be – nobody should be in this place. This is not meant to be. I don't wish this on anybody."

Lily Cornell Silver: Yeah.

Alicia Bognanno: But it's really about just like – I mean that song is very literal to like states of mind that I have been in 100 percent. It's weird. It's weird writing about it in songs, because you write about it and you're like, "No one is going to know what I'm talking about, like, peel my skin off. What is this?" Then you're like, "Whatever. I'm going to write it for me. Who cares?"

Lily Cornell Silver: Totally. Totally. Which is like, in my opinion, wholeheartedly what music should be is doing it for yourself and if other people can relate to it or find, you know, whatever meaning in it, that's awesome, but –

Alicia Bognanno: Yeah.

Lily Cornell Silver: Not necessarily the goal all of the time.

Alicia Bognanno: Yeah. Yeah.

Lily Cornell Silver: I wanted to talk to you a little bit too about your experience with audio engineering as a woman in like a male dominated field and I read in your *New York Times* article, like struggling with mental

health in high school, or like just growing up and how audio engineering felt like, you know, kind of a reprieve from that.

Alicia Bognanno: Yeah. It just – well, I mean in college it was pretty uncomfortable just because I was a lot of times the only woman in all of my classes and I just felt a lot of pressure.

Lily Cornell Silver: Right.

Alicia Bognanno: Like I can't f**** this up because then I'm going to give women a bad rap, which is so dumb. My last year in it I just opted to do my studio projects alone, because I was like, "I'm not going to be in a position with some dude, who's going to try and take the reins," and I'm a very physical learner, like nothing makes sense to me unless I am doing it. You can tell me all day, but until I'm actually doing it I just – my brain is like in a million different ways. So I just was like, "I'm going to do this alone," because I'm never going to learn if I'm going to be, you know, treated like I'm going to be put on the back burner, naturally.

Lily Cornell Silver: Right.

Alicia Bognanno: Growing up I was still trying. I wanted to be – I felt like I was my grades, like that was like how I felt growing up. You're validated. It was like you're smart or if you don't get good grades when you're dumb and you have no future. Our public school could take electives from the arts school, and you could drive over there and they had an audio engineering class, but I mean it was super rudimentary. It was like the bare basics. I mean you were like, "Oh, that's a microphone. Oh, I talk into it." It wasn't like how does this compressor work?

Lily Cornell Silver: Right.

Alicia Bognanno: I did that class, all As and kind of – I think I maybe like applied to a college or two and didn't get in and didn't really have a lot of plans forward because my grades were so bad and MTSU, which has a Bachelor's of Science in Audio Engineering, like, pretty much anyone can get it. It has like a 47 percent graduation rate. It's like not a good school, but the program is really cool, and so I was like, "Okay. I can get in. It's not like 'Belmont school prices or anything. It's like commuter college school.'" I started studying and

started playing music with people and was surrounded by people who wanted to like be in bands and stuff.

Lily Cornell Silver: Yeah.

Alicia Bognanno: That's how it all ended up was like that teacher. I think about that teacher all of the time, because I'm just like I don't know what I would have done.

Lily Cornell Silver: Right.

Alicia Bognanno: Yeah. I mean teachers are so amazing.

Lily Cornell Silver: Do you think taking that class at the time helped with your mental health?

Alicia Bognanno: A little bit. I think I didn't really have much of a grasp of what was going on. I remember I would be like buttering a bagel in my kitchen and just start crying and just be like, "What? I don't what's happening," but I don't know like when my Bipolar came on. I mean I always remember having anxiety and like depression growing up.

Lily Cornell Silver: Right.

Alicia Bognanno: It would take me like three hours to fall asleep and I just thought that's what it was. I thought that was normal until I got to college and was like maybe because I was drinking, or maybe because I was so tired that I fell asleep for like the first time very quickly and I was like, "Oh, it doesn't take people three hours to fall asleep." I'm pretty sure I had anxiety then and I didn't know what it was.

Lily Cornell Silver: Right. Right. Right. Completely. No. That seems to be a pretty universal experience. One of the recent episodes I did was like a panel of my friends and like peers talking about mental health and their journeys from like childhood to now, and almost all of them said, like, "Yeah, I definitely had very severe anxiety or depression as a kid and had no idea. I didn't know that's what it was," either thought that it was normal or like thought that they were crazy because there were no conversations being had around what was –

Alicia Bognanno: Yeah. And I think it's like easily written off, like, "Oh, you're just an unruly teenager."

Lily Cornell Silver: Right. Right.

Alicia Bognanno: “That’s what teenagers do,” and there’s already that like gap in communication between you and your parents at that time anyway probably because teenagers are such a pain in the ass.

Lily Cornell Silver: Right.

Alicia Bognanno: But mental health is wild.

Lily Cornell Silver: It is. And it’s a constant thing. Like it’s something I have to be, for me, like I’m having to check in on myself constantly throughout the day.

Alicia Bognanno: You really do.

Lily Cornell Silver: Yeah, just to like make sure everything stays –

Alicia Bognanno: Yeah. Yeah. Am I here?

Lily Cornell Silver: Exactly. Does your self-care routine change depending on like kind of what stage of like the Bipolar cycle that you’re in?

Alicia Bognanno: Yeah. Definitely, because when I get like – well, I mean when I get really down I still don’t really get out of it very well. It’s just hard to find any motivation. It’s hard to do anything really. It’s like everything is a chore, but I will try to get up and like run, but I would say I’m more likely to make myself do that when I’m more in an irritable state or like a frustrated state, so I’m like going, but I’m just very irritated. Then when I feel good I’m like where’s the pizza? Give me the ice-cream. I don’t care. I’m not going to think about myself or have paranoia about my body. Whatever. Sort of like garbage you find yourself thinking about.

Lily Cornell Silver: Right.

Alicia Bognanno: And then I’ll like work out too on top of that, but it’s not like as much of like this is all I can do, but I mean when I’m down I try and do that, but it’s more of a lot – you know, dharma talk, meditation time.

Lily Cornell Silver: Yeah. Right.

Alicia Bognanno: And then sometimes you just have to lay in bed for a day.

Lily Cornell Silver: Right.

Alicia Bognanno: It's just like the irritated, frustrated points I have to work out. Even aside from just being Bipolar, if you're working a lot, you're communicating a lot, you're e-mailing a lot, whatever, whatever you just got to like get outside. I've found that getting outside is so important. Like, especially if you work from home, which everyone is doing right now. I've only realized in like the past few months, like, don't work over the weekend. Like, because it's so easy to do. I've been like trying to find weird stuff, or like is there a cave I can go visit, or there's like this park in Louisville that has these massive troll statues that I can go drive to, or a hike, and it's just so important to when the weekend comes, or whenever your weekend is, or whatever you decide your day off is, to like get outside and just see something else and think about something else, and learn about something else. That has been huge for me during quarantine.

Also, with everything that's been going on, this is going to sound so corny, but for a month and a half it was like I forgot that there was any beauty in the world, because I was just consuming the news.

Lily Cornell Silver: Right. No. It's so true. Yeah.

Alicia Bognanno: It's arguing. It's anger. It's COVID. It's just everything is just like horrible things going on, just horrible police shootings that have always happened. Do you know what I'm saying?

Lily Cornell Silver: Yeah.

Alicia Bognanno: And just like the COVID updates every day that I was reading. I don't know. I just like – there was a while where I just – it was all that I knew and I got to a point where I was like, “Okay.” Before I was like, “All right. I'm sick of checking.” When I pick up my phone, I'm waiting in line or something, opening up Instagram. I'm not going to do that anymore. I'm going to do – I got the New York Times out and started doing that. I was like, “All right. I can't do that with the news anymore.”

Lily Cornell Silver: Right.

Alicia Bognanno: So I just like sat down one day and was like Googling positive news websites to like keep on my head, like My Modern Met or something where I would go to and just see cool, creative shit that like people are still building in this awful, dark time, you know, that you don't think about.

Lily Cornell Silver: Right. Totally.

Alicia Bognanno: Just remember that there are things out there that we haven't ruined yet.

Lily Cornell Silver: Right. Right. Right. Right.

Alicia Bognanno: And I think being able to get out of my house and go, you know, going and seeing other things or other forms of art, or just like nature, is very reassuring and just like gives you a little bit of motivation back and makes you feel less discouraged for sure.

Lily Cornell Silver: I have a question that's like more for me.

Alicia Bognanno: Yeah.

Lily Cornell Silver: I'm just curious like –

Alicia Bognanno: I mean you can ask a lot about you. Give me a break.

Lily Cornell Silver: I was just curious, like curious to hear from you in my experience with like struggling with mental health issues, like in being in relationship, like especially like a romantic relationship with somebody, what I've found is there can be a lot of frustration from like a partner wanting to fix you and not – like there's frustration when they can't make that happen. There's like a lot of misconception around like mental health issues aren't things that need to be eradicated or like erased. Like you're not healed once it's erased –

Alicia Bognanno: Yeah.

Lily Cornell Silver: Like it's something that you accumulate tools to learn how to integrate them into your day-to-day life.

Alicia Bognanno: Yeah.

Lily Cornell Silver: So I'm just curious if you've had struggles with that, like in romantic relationships trying to, you know, heal and help yourself and then also like be with somebody else?

Alicia Bognanno: Yeah. I think about that a lot, because I just have a hard time in romantic relationships always. I feel like I shouldn't say this about myself and it's not true, but I often feel like I am just like hell to date. Like, I just feel like a weight. I just feel like –

Lily Cornell Silver: Like a burden feeling. Yeah.

Alicia Bognanno: A burden. Yeah. I feel like a burden and I literally talked – said this to my partner the other night. I was like, “I just feel like such a burden,” because a lot of times to it's just like I'm so impulsive I can't sit with – I need to talk – like if something is going on that I thought was like a weird look or something it's like, “Are you okay with this?” I need to talk about it. I feel like it consumes my body thinking that maybe something is wrong, or like you're upset. It's just like every little – I can't put anything aside and it's so – it's one of my worst qualities. But yeah, I feel like that my mental health ruins, but I mean it doesn't ruin, but it makes it very hard for me to be in relationships, because when you just know you feel like shit you don't want to put that – not put it, and this isn't the case, because they want to be there for you, but you just feel like you don't want to be a toxic, a constantly toxic person in their life.

Lily Cornell Silver: Right. Yeah.

Alicia Bognanno: It's just like yeah, you just feel like a burden and I have a really hard time with that. Like, right now I'm in the middle of that. It's just the worst feeling in the world and then it just makes you mad at yourself, like, you're just like, “Why? Why am I doing this? Why do I have to be this way? Just like be chill, you know? Just be cool. Just be cool for like one day. Could you just not for a day? Like just don't.” I cannot believe the patience that my partner and anyone that I've ever dated has had. I can't believe it. It's just – and I think that's their form of helping me deal with it, you know? Like maybe they identify it and they know that, so they make a note to be patient about it, and to not react in a way that would only fuel the fire.

Lily Cornell Silver: Right.

Alicia Bognanno: But no, that is a huge thing. As far as fixing it goes, I haven't had that happen. I haven't had anyone try and fix me. I think I might be like, "Yeah, please fix me." But no, you're right, it's like I've also never dated anybody who hasn't – who is like, "I don't know. What's mental health, you know?" It's like everybody that I've dated I feel like is either dealing with their own shit or pretty aware of it and so I think that they're sensitive to that, but how – how do you think about that?

Lily Cornell Silver: I feel like more – like I've had a lot of experiences with people who are like – you know, that don't really understand. Like, I had someone ask me one time, like, a boyfriend was like, "What's anxiety?" I was like - pffft!

Alicia Bognanno: Yeah. You're like – your brain is just like –

Lily Cornell Silver: Like can we please switch lives?

Alicia Bognanno: I know.

Lily Cornell Silver: I know, but it's been interesting and it's been kind of a hard road to walk in terms of like when – because I struggle with PTSD, and then anxiety, and depression, and like knowing that it's an explanation, but not an excuse, you know?

Alicia Bognanno: Yeah.

Lily Cornell Silver: Like I need to vocalize like, "I'm really, really anxious right now," or, "I'm struggling with this," but it's not an excuse to be really shitty, you know, and take it out on your partner.

Alicia Bognanno: Totally. Learning to vocalize it is a process. It is a thing that you need to do, because instead, I used to just – I would just kind of disappear for a few days. I would just be like, "I cannot be around anybody and not be a burden, and I'm not comfortable telling you what is going on in my brain, so I'm just going to like act like I want to do my thing or whatever."

Lily Cornell Silver: Right.

Alicia Bognanno: But you're totally right. It's like you can explain it, but you – yeah, to not use it as an excuse, and it's a slippery slope, because sometimes you want to just use it as an excuse. You're just like, "Oh, I'm sorry I'm an asshole, but" –

Lily Cornell Silver: Right. Right.

Alicia Bognanno: "I don't feel good."

Lily Cornell Silver: Right. Definitely.

Alicia Bognanno: I feel like my cycling of moods, I'm not usually an asshole. It's more so just like paranoia and whatever, just overthinking everything. It's just exhausting.

Lily Cornell Silver: Right.

Alicia Bognanno: You know, when you're a kid, like when I used to go out to eat when I was really young, or even if like a Jewell song played on the radio I'd be like crying in the back of the car as like a seven-year-old. But whenever I would go out to like say I was like seven in an Applebee's if I saw an older person eating alone I would just start crying and like that person probably wants to be alone for all I know, but like in my head I make all of these situations. This is so literal, but I'm not even joking. This is a real thing. I ordered a food from like whatever, Post Mates or some food ordering delivery thing, and this woman dropped it off and she was like maybe, I don't know, 65 or 70, and she handed me my food and my brain was instantly just like – and for all I know she could want to work, like that's what she wants to do with her free time, that's probably what I'll do, but I was just like in my brain, I was just like, it's so unfair, like you should not have to just like work forever. You know what I'm saying? Like you can't get a break.

Lily Cornell Silver: Right.

Alicia Bognanno: I just wanted like her to feel good and I don't know, so I like tipped her a bunch of money and then I shut the door and I was just like bawling and I'm like, "Why am I even crying? She could be really happy right now."

Lily Cornell Silver: Right.

Alicia Bognanno: But just like the idea of somebody feeling insecure or like embarrassed when they shouldn't be is just – hold on- the idea of anybody feeling shame makes me really sad, because I think that just – I've felt so much shame and it's just the worst feeling and so many times it just like shouldn't be there. It's like it came from something that you don't even know. I hate seeing people who look like they're feeling shame. It absolutely breaks me. It's just like I can't handle it.

Lily Cornell Silver: Empath vibes. I definitely will have a similar –

Alicia Bognanno: Yes.

Lily Cornell Silver: I have similar stuff as this.

Alicia Bognanno: Yes. Like empathetic to a fault.

Lily Cornell Silver: Right. Completely. Completely. Where like suddenly I'll be feeling someone else's emotions and like start crying or something and they'll be looking at me like –

Alicia Bognanno: Yeah.

Lily Cornell Silver: They're like, "I'm good. Are you good?"

Alicia Bognanno: Yeah. Yeah.

Lily Cornell Silver: Why are you crying on my behalf?

Alicia Bognanno: Being really sensitive is like a blessing and a curse.

Lily Cornell Silver: Definitely. Definitely. What is something that's giving you hope right now?

Alicia Bognanno: Going outside, for sure. And kind of like what I touched on before, just –

Lily Cornell Silver: Right.

Alicia Bognanno: Looking for things, people who are making cool art that like has nothing to do with what's going on right now, or that does, but can give you a break.

Lily Cornell Silver: Sure.

Alicia Bognanno: Every kind of animal and watching any sort of animal documentary. Documentaries, I love. They give me a lot of hope. There was this one I watched the other week when I was like – I like Googled inspiring documentaries to try and get in a better mood and there was this one about this 16-year-old girl who sails the world by herself for two years.

Lily Cornell Silver: Wow.

Alicia Bognanno: It's so cool, and little things like that that you have to kind of sort out and you watch and you're like, "Wow. This is so amazing." Then you're like, "I'm a failure," but it's like very cool, but little things like that give me hope. There's probably a better, easier answer that I could have said, but I can't think of it.

Lily Cornell Silver: No. That's perfect. That's perfect. No. That's, yeah, authentic and amazing.

Well, thank you so much for being here, Alicia.

Alicia Bognanno: Yeah. Thank you so much.

Lily Cornell Silver: If it wasn't for your openness and, you know, infusing mental health into art and music is something that's like one of my number one passions, so...

Alicia Bognanno: It's so cool you're doing this. I love this. We need people like you in the world for sure.

Lily Cornell Silver: Thanks.

[Music Plays]

[End of Audio]