

Who Are You Wearing – Sara Pascoe

[Upbeat electronic music]

KIRI PRITCHARD-MCLEAN: Hello and welcome to the Who Are You Wearing podcast with me, Kiri Pritchard-McLean. This week I'm chatting to stand-up comedian, writer, actor, and author Sara Pascoe. This was such a long chat. She was so generous with her time. I'm amazed that we've managed to get it down to a manageable level, um, because me and the producer, Jo, have decided that it is rude to send out a podcast that lasts somewhere between two and three weeks.

Now I love Sara's style. She's one of the first people I thought to ask to do this podcast, actually, because she's so, um, what's the right word for – she's basically just so playful with it. And whenever I see her, I – she's like a beautiful Hieronymus Bosch painting. Because I just notice new things I like about her outfit or what she's wearing every single time I look at her. That was meant as a compliment but here we are, it's not sounding like one.

This interview was recorded in April 2021. Sara was at home with her lovely dog, Mouse, and I was in my cupboard that I grandly call a walk-in wardrobe. There's some absolutely amazing stories that come off the back of our chat about clothes. It goes in all different directions. So please settle down and enjoy this podcast as we ask Sara Pascoe, 'who are you wearing?'

SARA PASCOE: But I went on a holiday with my mum and my mum's twin and my granddad and my sister. So we went to Cornwall. And I decided, I think based on a Timotei advert or something that had a big effect – that I wanted to be a fashion

model. And so on this holiday, so the thing that's really ridiculous is I was like washing my hair in streams. Like in Cornwall, outside in the freezing cold, insisting that I had to do it in the meadow. And everyone was making fun of me.

And – but also what I was doing was tie-dyeing my own clothes with bleach. So this was not special stuff and they were not clothes that were supposed to – so I like – I had a Batman t-shirt that I'd cut the sleeves off. So this is what I mean, I was definitely fashion-aware, is I knew that you could adapt things or – and I loved this Batman t-shirt. It was my favourite. But I cut the sleeves off so I – and then I just put it in the bath with loads of bleach and then my mum hated it because it just looked awful. It was just orangey and – because it was a black t-shirt.

And then my mum, what she used to do is I – I didn't know until I moved out of home when I was 18, was that washing machines don't eat clothes. Because my mum, if you ever said, 'where's my thing?' You'd put it out for washing and then she'd go, 'oh, the washing machine ate it again.'

And because like the other thing I used to do is cut holes in jeans. Cut holes in clothes. I really wanted to layer clothes. Oh, here's a thing at that time as well. I was wearing leggings with, um, cycling shorts over the top with then a skirt over the top. Again, so I didn't have any sense of sophistication, but I did have a sense of trying to create something new or being original. And – and definitely it was – it was performative as in I thought, 'everyone will look at me.'

And people commented so much. So at primary school a teacher always used to say to me – because we didn't have school uniform. 'Oh, Sara's got dressed in the dark again.' And I know

that sounds like an insult. Like they were making fun of me that it looked like I got dressed in the dark. But I was just like, 'uh huh, that's right.' Everyone commented on my outfit. So – so I really – I liked that people talked to me about it and I think I definitely had – that's what I think happens in teenage years. And I've seen it happen with other young people, is that you have all of this confidence as a young person, which being a teenager just absolutely zaps from you as you go into, 'I just want to be invisible. No one look at me. No one comment. I'm going to wear exactly what other people wear.'

Um, but I was never very good at that. And I – I'm glad for it now, but at the time I just hated it. Like when I started my new school, so I would've been 12 at this point, I started a new secondary school, and this is awful – I stole £30 from my mum and, um, bought some boots that I'd seen in the shop. In the – in the front of a shop. This isn't a shoe shop, by the way. It's a, uh, maybe it was like right near Romford market. Anyway, they were big – they were black boots but they had massive gold buckles on and I thought they were absolutely amazing. And so I stole them and then I hid them in my house, and then I – when I got to sent to my second secondary school, I changed outside the school gates.

Like everyone at this school – because I left my first school because of bullying, which I know – which is – and also like not horrible bullying, I was just incredibly unpopular. So I went to this second school and I was like, 'there's going to be no bullying here because these guys are going to think I'm –' whoever I thought was amazing at the time – Gary Barlow. 'These guys are going to think I'm Gary Barlow.' And I put on these boots that my mum didn't know I had. And then just waltzed into this school and then by the end of the week I wasn't wearing them anymore because people would've made such fun of them. Um, but I did – they

looked like Jack and the Beanstalk or something. Like I did have – like they were proper like giant’s boots from fairy tales.

KIRI: [laughs] Oh, love you. Um, also –

SARA: So I was really aware of it but not good at it.

KIRI: Yeah, so you knew it was a form of expression or it gave you status or you knew what it meant but not how to necessarily speak the language.

SARA: Yes. I think I didn’t have – I think we – there wasn’t enough conventionality around me for me to pick up on, uh, conventional things. So I’d picked up a little bit and then it was very much child brain adapting it and going, ‘oh, I guess those boots in the front of the news agents, that’s what fashion is.’

And my – my sister Cheryl and I, so Cheryl has it a bit – so we – we really loved football. So non-uniform day at this secondary school, we both used to wear full Manchester United football kit. And I look back on that now and it’s so, so sweet. These two girls that only had each other to play with on – at like – and we obviously played football, um, but we didn’t play with the boys because they didn’t want us to – so boys played football and on the same football pitch it was me and my sister with a separate ball and our full Manchester United football kits.

And then I think I remember when I was in fifth year, she was third year. She was like, ‘can I – can we not do that anymore?’ Because she wasn’t having as bad a time. Like she was pretty – people liked Cheryl. Um, but I – I think of stuff like that. And also, so here’s the other thing. Like at discos at school, they might have like a disco at the end of the year, we used to wear my mum’s

clothes because we thought my mum was amazing. And so the clothes we used to borrow, it was a gold suit. I don't know why I was so obsessed with gold. It was a full-on gold blazer with gold trousers.

And again I walked in there and that for me, I felt like Cinderella. I felt like it was going to be like at the end of a movie where everyone like got out of the way and went to the side and just clapped me while I danced on my own doing, I don't know, what's – whatever we were dancing to at the time. Let loose. And, um, and I really thought it was – this was going to be the moment they realised I was beautiful. I was brilliant. I was wearing a full gold suit from Next owned by my mother.

And just couldn't believe that people would make fun of these things. And then even after my experience, Cheryl borrowed the same suit for her disco the next year like absolutely just – it just must've been Sara's dancing or something. I won't need to be picked up early.

KIRI: I really wish there was – is there a picture of you in that gold suit? Because I bet it was great.

SARA: No. It is great. I actually did look on Depop to see if I could get another one. I thought, 'this would be so funny with my family if I just rock up in the gold suit from the olden days.'

KIRI: So it sounds like you had a really strong sense of style as a kid. And I hope – I hope this doesn't come across – I – I mean this as a compliment, but when I think of your style, I think of it as being – there's an element of childlikeness to it.

SARA: Yeah. Yeah.

KIRI: Because what I think with you is, it's like when you're a kid and you – when I see kids and I think they look amazing, it's because they've put their favourite things on at once. And every piece is a statement piece and that's what I think about your style, is it's the kind of thing that people would be like – something very plain but then a very exciting shoe, you have an exciting shoe, an exciting dress, exciting everything. So is that – did that start as a – I hope that isn't offensive. I mean it as the greatest compliment.

SARA: Oh, no, it's – oh, of course it's not offensive. Um, I – when people ever like in interviews ask me to describe my style, I do say like 'nine year old with a debit card.' Because that's how I feel. Because the excitement now – and I do buy clothes and I buy a lot of clothes, um, and it's – the really exciting part of my job, actually, is I really enjoy getting to buy clothes for work because I buy the stuff that makes me feel so happy because it's tapping into what – exactly the same thing would've made me happy when I was a child.

I – but there was a big gap in between. It wasn't continuous. My first stand-up jobs on TV, I don't know how you felt about it. What I felt so awful about it was that there were discussions about my outfit and discussions about my shoes and very much at the beginning I would describe it – like at school I was wearing stuff that I didn't like but that I thought made me look like a comic or like a girl version of a boy.

Or I started, um, at Stand-Up For The Week and I replaced or was the next one after Andi Osho, who's incredibly glamorous, very, very naturally. Like Katherine Ryan, who started slightly after her, there were these women all of a sudden who were looking

amazing and, you know, fashionable in that couture fashion kind of sense onstage.

And so I was doing like a – a River Island version of that. So like – and I will have a blazer or I will have a top, and none of it came from oh, what makes me so excited. And I think hopefully now for women starting there's such a range. Because there's so many more women on TV all looking like – all expressing themselves, hopefully now they'll know, 'oh, like Angela Barnes wears flat shoes.' Um, like there are people who just go, 'oh, I have my thing.'

Whereas at that point I really was walking on in shoes where I couldn't bend my knees, so I looked like a little giraffe coming on with my River Island blazer looking – my boyfriend at the time said, 'can you stop them dressing you like a cruise ship entertainer?' And I was like, 'I don't think I can. I think – I think women's job in stand-up is to look like a pretty flower. And I don't – I think that's what you're there for.' Whereas – whereas now it doesn't happen as much.

KIRI: Yeah. Yeah, well I'm really lucky in that I – because I have only been doing television for a couple of years and I feel like you and Katherine especially being so present and eclectic has made a big difference, even in just terms of – this is such a boring thing, I don't know if anyone will care to listen, but lighting.

There's only one show I can think of where it's still a problem, but it, you know, when you have to show – you have to bring options when you do a TV show, and there's loads of like, 'no mesh, no sequins,' or there's a load of things that usually – typically only women wear. And some programmes are so zero tolerance and you think, 'oh, it's because you only know how to light a shirt and

a tie. And you don't actually care about making space for people to feel comfortable in who they are on stage.'

SARA: Yeah, I wish – I wish they could show you why they don't do those things. It's so odd. It's not because of light, it's because of cameras. So it's not that they could change the lighting, it's that it doesn't pick up. Like how you can't wear completely white and then you – and if you ever see someone testing – I've – I quite often watch in make-up them holding the stuff up that they say no to and then seeing like, 'oh, it actually is reflective or it would strobe if you moved to quickly because the background's too busy.'

Also what I hadn't realised, sometimes it's sound. Like taffeta or anything rustley. It's not what it looks like, um, yeah, and being see-through, I once really pushed back on like a – on something on 'Eight Out Of Ten Cats' and they showed me, 'that's what your skin looks like underneath it.' You can't see it with the naked eye but on, um, the camera it looked like I had like blotches of oil like – and it – it so was odd. And you go, 'yeah, that would be so distracting the whole programme.' Like, 'oh, is she oily? Is that woman oily?'

Um, but you are – but you are right. I – but I – I do think, um, pushing back on those things, they do get better. There are so many elements of television where it – because they've been expecting, uh, white men that they – they're having to – they're having to get better. But because people have to complain and go, 'hey, I –' they're – they're not the norm anymore. That's not the default, that's what I should say. Yeah.

KIRI: Yeah. So as a kid, who – who dressed you? So you – you thought your mum was the coolest and you and your sister seemed to have something going on, but did – was it all from you?

SARA: Yeah. Well there's – the – the urban lore in my family is that from 18 months old I would not take feedback and I got dressed myself. My mum said, 'I had you as a baby and then at 18 months old, you were like, "that's enough, mother. I'll do this."' Um, and then – and she said, 'it wasn't worth the row.' So this point that I can tell you about, like with Cornwall or with the layering of clothes and the get dressed in the dark, my mum found it quite embarrassing. Because she was a single parent, she thought it looked like neglect, like she hadn't been there. But it just wasn't worth the row.

So her thing was, especially when it was just her by herself, you go out into the world – that's why she hated the tie-dye and the cut stuff and the me trying to look – because it – she – to her it looked like someone whose clothes were falling apart and so – and she didn't want people looking and going, 'oh, yeah, they're the Pascoe's girls. Look at them Raggedy Annes.' Like and my mum had bought me nice clothes and I'd bleached them in the bath.

So, um, so, so, uh, so no, it was – definitely came from – I was very, very influenced by friends. I don't know if you had this where I did have friends as a teenager who had more money, so Hailey, who I mentioned earlier, her dad used to give her 20 quid on a Saturday. We'd walk to – he worked at a car dealership. We'd walk down, she'd get 20 quid. And at Romford market, I'm sorry, you could buy like eight things for – for 20 quid. Um, you could buy wedges for £3. You could buy shoes for under a fiver at Romford market at that point in the – in the 90s.

Um, so I was – I was always very influenced and borrowed a lot of clothes from whoever my best friend at the time was. Um, so it's not like I've never been really influenced by people. And I still am now. I'm – with Instagram, I've been off it for about five months and I've come back on it recently and I've realised, 'oh, that's why I like it.' Because I literally go, 'that's a nice top. Where you can get that top?' As in I click on it, I don't ask people. Because I find it so annoying, personally. 'Where did they get that top?' Oh great, I'm going to buy that top.' Like and – like – and because at school did you have the thing where, um, if your friend had it you weren't allowed to buy it? And you would fall out with someone if they got the same thing in Topshop?

KIRI: Yes, copying.

SARA: Or they copied you. Copy cat, yeah. That was such a no-no that I love now that it's the complete opposite way where people are all the time like, 'where did you get your shoes? Where did you get your cloak? Where did you get your – where did you get your dog? Where did you get that book from? Where did you get that bag?'

And also, so weird, I did a documentary and in Georgia there was like these singers, like pre-Soviet, this tradition is – and then people said to me, 'where'd those singers get those velvet outfits from?' And it's like, 'well, they get them from Georgia hundreds of years ago because it's a tradition.' Like ask – and, um, the other day, someone had made me a dog – dog costume on 'Eight Out Of Ten Cats', and I had a man trying to buy it for his wife. And it was like, 'they don't exist. It looks like my dog.' But he was like, 'my wife fell in love with that dog outfit. Where can you get them?'

KIRI: That – that I don't believe that. That's like the people who are like, 'show us your feet.' Do you know what I mean? There's something else going – he – he specifically wants the costume that you wore as a dog. That's what's going on there.

SARA: Oh, really?

KIRI: I reckon.

SARA: Oh, he seemed very disappointed when he said that he couldn't buy one in a shop so I – I kind of believe it. Um, oh god, those people who are just like – do you get the ones who want you to tickle yourself? Or tell them when you've been the naughtiest girl? And it's like, 'this is so blatant. Like this not in any way feels like a genuine concern of someone who's interested in my work.'

KIRI: They've read Animal and they've – and gone, 'do you know what? I think she really needs to cheer herself up with some tickles.'

SARA: Yeah. Yes, yeah.

[Upbeat electronic music]

KIRI: So what an interesting situation for your mum to be in. To be like having this independent, expressive kid who you know because of how conventional that people are, they're not going to see that. They're going to see, 'there's a negligent mother.' So did she ever put you in stuff that you hated? Was there an item of clothing that you hated wearing?

SARA: I think my mum didn't have any input at all. Um, it was just that she didn't want us to ruin things or to be actually – when I was at – when I was doing art at school, so I would've been like 14, I thought the coolest thing was to have like bits of acrylic paints on your blazer, because it just looked like – and I did sometimes – I went through a phase of staying in the art room at lunchtime. And the people who were really good at art always had just little bits of paint where they'd leant on it or put their blazer back on at the end.

And that's the kind of thing that drove my mum crazy. Um, because she was like, 'those blazers are so expensive and they're supposed to last you three years because you don't grow out of them.' And it was the looking uncared for rather than like the items of clothing themselves.

KIRI: Okay.

SARA: Because I don't remember her being that involved. I think we got to choose everything ourselves. Oh, off-brand school uniform or something that made me very sad. But the problem is with school uniforms is that there's a certain place that sells – we had like a green blazer and skirt. And you can go to a supermarket and get those things cheaper and then you have a slightly different colour to everyone else, or it feels like everyone else at your school. So we were those kids. Unless we were playing for Manchester United.

KIRI: Yeah, I – I went to, um, obviously extreme privilege, but I got sent to a private school where the supplies are even more expensive. And I remember Mum made me a summer dress.

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: And all the other summer dresses had pointed collars and this had a round collar. And I remember being like politely interrogated by children in the playground who'd go, 'why is your –' and you know exactly why, because your mum can't afford to buy the dress.

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: But you just have to be like – I remember it being like, 'it's a special one and they said that only I get to wear –' you know, like trying to rebrand it.

SARA: Yes.

KIRI: Because I was so ashamed. I knew like this is a visible sign I don't have the money that these people have.

SARA: It feels very visible. And actually that's what – I – I really don't think I'd care in the same way now, but at the time it feels so important to just – to not – branded trainers was a thing. Because my school had a uniform and they always said, 'it's so that you can't see the difference in – the disparity in wealth.' Because, um, this part of Essex actually has some very, very wealthy people and it's a really good school, alongside some other people who weren't.

And they- and that's why they always argued about the uniform, but trainers made you see, 'oh, that's –' so that's where people looked, is they looked at shoes. And anyone who had, you know, Matchsticks or supermarket plimsoles. But the trainers were so expensive. I mean, you know, nearly £100 or about £60 or £70, so it was – and I used to – also, by the way, private school isn't

extreme privilege. Prince William has extreme privilege. I think you're being too hard on yourself. I think it's just privilege. I think it's okay.

KIRI: Um, I was just trying to make it like a – then as close to a sport that I could say I did.

SARA: Oh, I see, yeah. Extreme privileging. Yeah.

KIRI: Extreme privileging, yeah.

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: Um, when our school as well, the bag – the plastic bag that you used to take your PE kit in, that was a status thing.

SARA: Oh.

KIRI: Whether it was a Lidl bag or an Aldi bag or a Tesco bag. Yeah. So you'd turn it inside out.

SARA: Um, people had shoe bags – this is how big trainers were as a currency – people had shoe bags from the shoe shop they'd bought their trainers in. So they're like – they were like rucksacks with string. Did you not have these? So that's what people had as their PE bag.

KIRI: Oh, yeah yeah yeah. Yeah.

SARA: And then – and then it was either, if you did have, you know, a Reebok one or a Nike one, or if it was JD Sports, they were all acceptable. At my school, uh, a carrier bag wouldn't have been acceptable. Although people would've had them. And it

would've been the blue and white news agents bags. They are the ones. Yeah.

KIRI: Oh, the one that you get four cans in? Yeah.

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: Um, so did you have a favourite item of clothing or an outfit that you just never wanted to take off?

SARA: I'd say the Manchester United kit was up there. And just for feeling brilliant in something and thinking I looked brilliant in it. And at that time I loved Manchester United so much. That was maybe – that was when I was 15 or 16. And that's when they did the – the treble. So it was just such a big year to be into a football team, um, with the certain players.

Um, I'm trying to think if there was anything else. I think everything was very short-lived. Oh, when I went clubbing, so I had an outfit that was completely Romford market. So I had a bra that was actually a bikini top that was padded. So it was so – but it was so, so padded that I thought if a man squeezed your boobs, it felt like boob. And do you know what? No one ever complained. And I would say to my friend Hailey, if they tip me up, actually they haven't because they're just feeling my bikini.

So I had this bikini top and I would wear a purple vest from Bay Trading over the top. And then on the bottom I had, um, a skirt that was like fake python. So it's brown but it's reflective. And – and the reason I liked this skirt, and this is how – this is dark. Um, I used to sweat a lot inside so I thought I was losing weight while I was in the club. And, um, and – and some brown wedges. So I

mean now doesn't that sound grotesque? But I went out and felt brilliant.

And, um, when I was 16 I got spotted in a club – this is, um, something I remembered the other day. My friend Hailey was a dancer unlike me, but this woman who must've been really drunk came over and said that she was releasing a song and she needed a dancer. So, um, and she paid me £100. And what happened is I went round her house. She did have a disco song coming out, and the – and the – so the gig I did, I went – I did, uh, a gig in, um, for the Pink Festival in Soho.

We drove to London from Romford. I didn't know the dance moves, we wore fake fur, I signed autographs, um, we then did this gig and then the second one was at the Limelight, uh, um, with the Drag Spice Girls. That's who we shared a dressing room with. So it was all incredible, right? And then this woman was supposed to then go on, um, the National Lottery live show and then release her song, which was going to be like a clubbing song in discos, and then – and also my – my job was done. I was only there for that day.

But then Princess Diana died and Elton John got her slot. And so – so her – so it never came to anything, that song. And I remembered this the other day, that I cannot believe – this is how feral I was, that no one like said, 'oh, you can't go to London with this stranger.' But also Hailey was so upset because she was an actual dancer. But I was wearing that outfit when she came over and I think that was part of it, is that I just looked and – I looked and felt – I felt so good so I looked good and she thought, 'okay. She can dance behind me.'

KIRI: Yeah, like, 'she looks sweaty enough to go on tour with me to Soho.'

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: Um, what an amazing story. Oh my god, it's so – that's incredible.

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: Um, so have – is there any trend that happened when you were younger that is just not for you? Have you ever tried to pull it off since as well? Like whatever happens I'll never be able to wear a halter neck. It just is not –

SARA: Um, oh, a halter – well you've got boobs. So I can halter, like I can't belly top. My belly button, they're – and I admire it so much in women of all ages, and actually – and all shapes as well. But it's something about me that it makes me feel like I haven't finished getting dressed rather than I've – that's what I'm doing today. Um, belly tops. I'm not very good with heels. I mean I love them and I love how being taller and how legs look with heels on, but I walk in them so terribly. Yeah, I think mainly belly tops.

KIRI: Yeah, it's, um, oh god, yeah. I – I – this is the weird thing. I'm like, 'god, I could never wear a belly top.' But I've definitely seen women bigger than me and I've – in a belly top and I've thought they've looked absolutely amazing.

SARA: Exactly. Yeah.

KIRI: So it's just the – the prison in here, isn't it?

SARA: Yeah, I think – I think we've told ourselves stuff so many times, or it has been said to us by our parents or family members, all of those kind of things, that by the time you get to a point where you're choosing what to wear, there's stuff that feels, um, so second nature you can't hear it as external criticism because it's – it's already in there so deep. Yeah.

KIRI: When you were a teenager, what were the big trends? Did you indulge in any of them?

SARA: I don't know if I even noticed them. That's the thing is it wouldn't have occurred to me. I wouldn't have ever read a fashion magazine and if someone had said – like so the idea of something being on trend or this season, I only even know that's a thing now because I've got more money.

And because of things like Instagram and then people will go like, 'oh, last season's', and you go like, 'what do you mean, last season's?' And because they do it at the wrong times. So it's like 'last season was autumn – or no, last season was winter.' Is that what you mean? It's like they don't mean winter, they mean spring. I've – oh, anyway, whatever – whatever they mean. Um, I think tartan was a thing. So I would normally have like a Bay Trading version or a Romford market version of things that probably were in fashion but without knowing that's what it was. Yeah.

KIRI: Yeah, same. Llangefni Market was where I went, so my sort of fashion was, you know, those big baggy parachute pants with bits hanging off of them. You know, like strips of material.

SARA: Oh, did they? Okay, so I don't know those. We used to – I have remembered one trend. Silk shirts. So you – you would be

too young to remember this. This was like a going down the fair outfit. Black leggings and that – no matter what colour it was, like a silky shirt. Collared button up.

KIRI: Oh, is it a bright coloured satin one?

SARA: Oh. Yes. Yes. Yes. Sorry I said silk. It's obviously not silk, is it? Yeah, satin. Like a – like a lime green kind of thing, or orange. And then that same year there was a black fabric that had like big orange sunflowers on it. And people would have all different shapes of outfits in that. So that would've been – yeah, around that time.

KIRI: Yes. 'Live and Kicking' presenters I think had a – those in their wheelhouse. I think I remember seeing presenters wear them.

SARA: Oh, did they? Yeah.

KIRI: Yeah. Um, it's mad, isn't it? Because that stuff was just everywhere. That's going to come back in again, the whole satin shirt thing. That's definitely –

SARA: I think – I think it already is. I think the minute, um, Carrie – when the – when the choker – when those little plastic chokers came back, she was like, 'oh, okay, we're actually going to dump – we're not going to take the good bits. They're actually going to – they're going to scrape the barrel just like we did then.'

Um, the shape of jeans. I think those shirts can still be bought. I think that they are back again. Just haven't taken up – and leggings with lace at the bottom. That – for me, that is so

evocative of that time. Black leggings with lace at the bottom. Everyone had at least one pair.

KIRI: Did you, um, did you have a rebellious phase as a teenager and did it show in – in what you wore?

SARA: Um, I don't know if I had a rebellious phase and I don't – yeah, so I would look at people like, um, oh, goths and punks and things. Because obviously at about 13 or 14 some people diverged and split. And my dad, who's very judgey, he was like, 'if you're going to rebel, don't conform to a different thing.' That's not actually how he talks at all. Um, but that was the tone of what he meant.

And so he thought that being a goth or – he – he thought adapting to another – adapting to a subculture visibly was a sign of not being original. So I would – I would have been far too scared to go like, 'oh, by the way, I've got black hair now, Dad.' And – and a nose ring. Because that – that to him was a hiding behind something rather than expressing something.

KIRI: Wow.

SARA: Um, but I – I always thought people who did that were very brave. I was always very impressed with people who did it.

KIRI: That's so interesting, that it feels like your – that – that spirit, um, it is something – that's a really bold, cool thing to say to a young person.

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: About like, 'don't be part of any of it. Just build your own thing.' And it sounds like you were doing it.

SARA: Well unfortunately my dad's a jazz dad. So my dad's a jazz musician, so his opinion is completely jazz. Like, 'we don't need an outfit, just play the music, guys.'

[Both laugh]

[Upbeat electronic music]

SARA: Noel Fielding – so I didn't watch The Mighty Boosh until I'd left university. And I'd been recommended it a few times and, um, when I watched it, Noel's fashion to me was very original. Because I don't know his reference points for his fashion, which obviously are kind of from music and 70s culture and things. And then he once said – I think it was in an episode, but he talked about soft – so – and bright colours and soft fabrics. And I thought, 'oh my god, there is a whole world out there of enjoying clothes which isn't following fashion.'

And it was really big for me to go, 'oh, I – you can just like nice colours and things that feel good. And that's nothing to do with looking at skinny women wearing clothes.' Which I'd always associated as like, 'oh, it's either you had to be fashionable and skinny and that was the only option, or you were – or you would say, 'I don't care about what I wear. Don't look at me.' And then I realised there's this other place of happiness.

KIRI: It's so interesting, isn't it? It's so – I just –

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: You're so right. That's exactly how I feel about it, but I've been I think late to the party in – because we're not brought up to think that we – we're taught like fashion is something that you either suit the fashion or you hide your body away and you don't – your body – you don't let your body have the conversation that it's failed at being, you know, a fashionable person or a woman or whatever.

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: Um, yeah, and then it's – isn't it so interesting? Because also watching 'Ru Paul' really helped me in that – I do think sometimes men are better at teaching women how to be women and take up space.

SARA: Well – well absolutely. I think not just you, I think so many people. Because what it showed was that femininity is a construct. So if you've always felt that it wasn't right for you, that's because it's an unnatural artifice. So having people doing that artifice brilliantly, it doesn't matter what their identified gender is or if they have one at all. What matters is it's a thing you can put on if you enjoy putting things on. And if you don't you don't have to put it on. It's so – and that – and that is so groundbreaking. It took people taking it to the extreme to make you realise, 'oh, I see. I do scruffy realness.' Yeah.

[Both laugh]

KIRI: Um, so thinking about your like current style now, what age do you think your style is – started showing? Or did it disappear at times and then come back?

SARA: In terms of now, and obviously like with everyone it still mutates and – and kind of goes round and round. But I think – I think at some point in the last sort of nine or ten years after I started stand-up, what fused together is the kind of things I loved when I was a child. Things that – to go back to that Noel Fielding quote, ‘that were bright colours or felt nice.’ And so that there was a joy or happiness or pleasure – pleasure in clothes that way.

And then also knowing that I’m – I’ve got, um, I’m not now – for a long, long time like lots of people I was renting. I was always moving in bin bags in taxis, so it wasn’t good to have a lot of clothes, whereas now I’ve got wardrobes and I know I’ll keep these things forever. Um, so I treat myself to nice things that are probably much more expensive than if you’d asked me five or ten years ago, like, ‘oh, do you ever spend £200 on a dress?’ I’d have gone, ‘absolutely not, and people who do should go to prison.’ Would’ve been my hard opinion then. Yeah.

KIRI: Yeah. It’s interesting, isn’t it? Because that’s like, um, I think it was – you used the phrase ‘newly wealthy’ to me and I – that – that resonated so much in terms of having disposable income for the first time that I can remember since I first got a job and was like, ‘I’ve got 15 quid, I’m rich.’

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: Um, and it does change things, doesn’t it? Once you get past the initial – at first it was all about acquisition for me, so like lots of stuff from Asos. And then I was like, ‘oh, that doesn’t feel great.’ And then it’s obviously not good for the world. And now it’s like I try and think more about the stuff that I’m buying.

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: And I'm like, do I want to show my kid this and go, 'you can have this in 30 years,' and know it'll still be great?

SARA: Yeah. I worry that because of the – I think what I have is, because of the – the fact that there are really ethical ways of buying clothes, and what I would say is, you know, organic fabrics that aren't poisonous and toxic and, uh, small businesses. Uh, independent businesses that are in the main, you know, owned by women or black-owned businesses.

The trouble is when I see them I'm like, 'yeah, I can buy as much as I want from there.' And there's loads of them now, which is amazing, but I actually know I'm buying far more clothes than I can wear. So I do still think I'm in an unhealthy place where the excitement, the – especially this year, that what I should've had is, 'no one is going to see me wearing anything. I can take a year off shopping.' Rather than, 'it's my only thing waiting for the postman.' Like it's Christmas, going, 'when will it come?' And when it comes going, 'now I can buy something else.'

Um, because I think – yeah, I'll be telling my grandchildren like, 'you can have all of this when I die.' And they'll be like, 'what, your thousands and thousands of things you've never worn?'

KIRI: Yeah, it is, um, I – I did – over the pandemic bought lots more since I've been buying less – lots more than I normally would.

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: But I think it's because there was like – I do feel, like it's really shallow, but like clothes do give me a – a real sense of joy.

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: And the first time you get to wear it, whether it's to do like a Zoom gig or whatever, like I feel lovely and I'll make my boyfriend take a picture of me in it so I can look at it another time. Um, so it just was one of the few ways to break the monotony and also give me some joy. Do you feel joy from clothes?

SARA: Yes. Yeah, I – I get a real – a dopamine rush of arrival and acquisition. And I – so I think it – I get three. I get the hit of buying it online, because I don't ever shop in shops, and so buying it online, then it arriving, and then maybe a third time where I – the wear – have – just owning it, it feels like a library or something where you get to look at your things, um, I guess I just – I feel mixed emotions about that I have it.

But in a forgiving way, and I'll say this to anyone listening as well who's similar, is like there were so few places to be able to be in control of pleasure, and if spending was one of them, then it's okay. It is – it is okay. Like with anything, like we just had to – we just had to self-soothe when we could.

KIRI: Yeah, yeah totally. When you, um, you know when you said you're used to shopping you don't – you only do it online, obviously the pandemic has forced your hand slightly.

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: But prior to that, what's your relationship to shopping? Do you enjoy it? Do you only do it online, or?

SARA: No. No, because I – I was never – I didn't ever enjoy the going around the shops thing. One of the worst auditions I ever had, when I first signed with my agent, was for, um, and I now see what I did, but it was with – for Armstrong and Miller, to be in their sketch group. And, um, I would've just signed with Dawn. And so it was so like exciting to have a TV audition.

And I went in and it's Armstrong and Miller, who are these very successful men, and they said, 'okay, let's, um, do the first sketch.' And I'd memorised all the sketches. And they went, 'this first one. Character notes. You know how women love to shop?' And, um, unfortunately my little hackles, I mean, I've got so much better now at slagging people off afterwards rather than thinking, 'well, viva la revolucion, baby.' So, um, they said, 'you know how women – you know how women like to shop?' And I said, 'some women. Some women like to shop.'

And then they didn't know what I'd just done back. And they were like, 'sorry, excuse me.' And I was like, 'you just said all women like to shop. I'm a woman, I don't like to shop. Should we do the sketch?' Like I was – I was so – and I – and then – and then the – just the mood in the room went awful and it was an awful audition where they clearly weren't going to work with me, but we had to go through all of the sketches and I told them off. And then thought, 'oh, no, they're – they don't like me now, but they were the ones who were horribly sexist.'

But I – I thought I was helping them out because why would you assume that shopping's fun? It's like going, 'you know how women love to golf?' Or, 'you know how women have to –' and you think, 'I don't. I don't like it at all. Why would you say something so ridiculous?' Um, I never found it pleasurable but I thought that's because of the looking at yourself. I think, uh, the

changing room thing is so horrible and the – I find walking around the shop depressing. Like ugh.

I don't think, 'oh my god, look at all these possibilities for me.' I go, 'ugh, all of these things that I can't or shouldn't or –' and when I say 'can't', again that's absorbed rather than – they do come in my size. Um, and then again fashions and trends that wouldn't suit me or I would think would accentuate, you know, negative parts of myself. So I think that's what I always thought shopping was until the internet, where you only see it in your – you – I know you watch – look at it on a model, and again things are getting much better at having models of all different shapes and sizes.

But I'd – I prefer it not having to try it on. Kind of knowing. You can check measurements. You know that it's this. And then it's just yours and it's yours in your house. And by the time it arrives you're not trying something on going, 'oh, what does this make me look like?' You go, 'this is my jumper. This – these are my trousers.'

KIRI: Yeah, oh, it's – yeah, I – I do think online shopping has changed. Obviously there's the bigger conversation about the high street and things like that, but it has alleviated a lot of anxiety that automatically goes with shopping for so many people for so many reasons. I think of it as well in terms of, um, you know, like it's normal to shop online now whereas maybe 15 years ago, if you're shopping online it was because it was specialist.

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: So it was because you were a 'transvestite' and you needed a size 14 high heel.

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: Or, you know, or you were plus size and you know you could – or – or, you know, like people who were very tall and they could only get stuff from America. Um, whereas now it's – it's been democratised so hopefully there's less stigma and – and it means more choice and people are able to find stuff that makes them feel like them as well.

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: Um, I don't know why I just gave that speech. I'm sorry. Um –

SARA: Um, I think – and I know it's important to remember those things, isn't it? Because you're absolutely right. There were people who felt like they weren't served. And when you say the high street, like I think big shops, especially when people now know how the clothes are made and the staff are treated, places like Topshop and everything, it's not sad to lose those. Um, I guess, yeah. Independent shops and all of those things, but maybe they will always afford a shop front so people can go and try on – there seems to be a model of that. Of having one or two shops that people could go into and then you do – and then you do all your selling online as well. Um –

KIRI: Do you – when you're getting ready, do you think of like – do you think of makeup and hair as part of your outfit?

SARA: I don't wear – I'm trying to think. If I was going out, no, I wouldn't think of them as part of my outfit, but I obviously would put some makeup on and do something with my hair. But that would be – that's my, uh, my cherry on the top rather than part of the cake, I would say.

KIRI: That's interesting.

SARA: So yeah, when you said that thing about eye colour, like I don't think I have any eyeshadows. I'm so basic with my own makeup. And it's because I'm not good at it. So if I do – also I – actually this is where it's interesting with drag. So I look so much like my dad that when I started to wear makeup I looked like my dad in drag. And, um, and it – and then that's why I never – I never went over the top. Because the more I put on the more I look like my dad had put on, oddly. And, um, and so I always stayed very – I was never good at it. And I'm always – and if I do put stuff on it'll just smudge so quickly. That you know that thing where you've gone out and you feel like a million dollars and then you go to the toilets after you've had two glasses of wine and you see this girl who looks like she's been crying for hours and – and yeah. And then you think, 'why did no one tell me? I was having such a nice time. Lipstick on my teeth and globules of eyeliner hanging out. Yeah.'

KIRI: Yeah, when they go like – when it goes under there and I – yeah, so many times –

SARA: In the creases, yeah.

KIRI: Yeah. To my partner I was like, 'why did you let me – we took a photo ten minutes ago. Why didn't you say anything?' And he's like, 'oh, I didn't notice.' And I'm like, 'you didn't notice this? Like

what – what are you on about?’ Um, what’s your oldest item of clothing that you’ve had a really long time and that you still love? Is there anything in your life you’ve held onto like that?

SARA: No. I – it’s – I give lots of stuff to the charity shop. And, um, I think before the – the phrase ‘spark joy,’ I think I always had that attitude to things of – I think I – maybe there was, um, so one of my aunties actually, one of my dad’s sisters is a – a stylist and dresser, but – not a stylist. What would she be? It’s more like a coach. So she’s a coach where she does people’s colours and you go shopping with her and you would do your seasons. You would change winter to summer, put stuff away. And, um, so she’s the kind of person who would say if you haven’t worn it in two years, like give it to the charity shop. Someone’s going to love it. But, you know, so I actually think a lot of the time I spend looking for things going, ‘did I give that away? Did I give that away?’ And it’s like I always – I must’ve done unless someone’s stealing just lots of – yeah, I don’t think I’ve got anything old at all.

KIRI: Wow, because I know you –

SARA: I’m not – I’m not loyal.

KIRI: That’s really interesting because, yeah, I thought you would be maybe like a hoarder that holds onto bits.

SARA: No.

KIRI: But it’s –

SARA: No. Unless I think I’m going to wear it in the future, I don’t – I do have some stuff in a bag in the loft which I’ve worn on TV that I probably won’t wear again but I don’t want to throw away,

so I wore a dress on ‘Nevermind the Buzzcocks’, the first time I did ‘Nevermind the Buzzcocks’ and I really, really, really wanted to do that programme. And also of course with Noel Fielding, who is the team captain. And I felt so brilliant in it. And it was – it was – I think it had cost 90 or £100. It was Henry Holland. And so it was the first time I’d spent that amount on clothing ever and it was in – I must’ve seen it on Urban Outfitters on the stairs. And I just – I couldn’t believe how brilliant this dress was.

And then the feedback afterwards from the internet – because that’s actually something we should touch on, is, um, people who are mean. But, um, uh, a bit like bullying at school, people were like, ‘is Sara Pascoe wearing a scuba diving outfit? Why is she in a wetsuit?’ And I – it just hadn’t occurred to me that it – because it was – and because they could only see the top. But yeah, it was just – it was long-sleeved and tight and maybe a lycra, but it – I hadn’t realised, ‘oh yeah, it looks like a wetsuit.’ I just loved it so much. But I – I kept it because I thought, ‘I can’t give that to the charity shop because that feels very important.’ But yeah, most stuff just goes to the charity shop, yeah.

KIRI: Yeah. You – I think you donate to a place I do as well, Salvaged Project.

SARA: Oh yeah. Yes, yeah.

KIRI: Which is brilliant. It’s a – it’s a girl, uh, basically in her back bedroom who, um, sells clothes. It’s like an online charity shop on Instagram. And yes, sells clothes, um, and Aisling sends her stuff there and you send your stuff there and I – and I send stuff.

SARA: Yes, yeah.

KIRI: Um, and because I used to buy vintage clothes from charity shops and sell them. That's what like – but as a result I have bags and bags and boxes of stuff I'll never do anything with. So I'm getting – sending all my vintage stuff to her and, um, she – she's so great because it is just one girl in a bedroom. There's no overheads.

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: So she just gets a big lump of money and then also she's great at being across – in particular for refugees.

SARA: Yeah, really small charities. Yeah.

KIRI: She's like – small charities that like they are in immediate need of something because there's been this cold weather front and they are giving – they're buying stuff for babies that need it. So she's – so she's great. I recommend everyone checks her out.

SARA: I – the other thing I really love about her is that – especially like selling TV stuff, I was like, 'ooh, what's she going to sell stuff for?' And actually she sold it for so much cheaper. Stuff that I'd paid a lot of, you know, £100, let's say, she was selling for £30. And what I loved about that was it was just luck. If someone happens to be the same size and wanted it, they didn't have to be rich. Someone could afford that and it had only been worn once or twice and, um, and I really love that about her as well. Because other people would've – even like put stuff on Ebay and tried to get the most that they could. It is all going to charity. It's going to charity, but also she's re-homing clothes to a happy, affordable place as well that they're going to get worn. So all round it's brilliant.

KIRI: Yeah, absolutely. Do you – is that something you're – when you're picking stuff for telly, do you just pick what you want? Like what makes you happiest? Or other than how things look on camera, are there other things, you know, like – like something I've become more aware of is like, right – because normally I have loads of cleavage out, just always.

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: But I've noticed I get comments that I don't necessarily want. So I've started to wear stuff that's higher or doesn't show that, because I just don't want – it means that some people think I'm consenting to have a sexual conversation that I haven't consented to.

SARA: Yes. Yeah. Um, I – I think what happened is I got more confident with things that – what I realised was that people were going to write horrible thing whatever, and so me trying to please them, what I then realised eventually was I – I didn't like – I didn't like what I'd worn either or if they said a mean thing I would go, 'ooh, I really thought I was just trying to have something that was non-commentable.'

Whereas now I wear things where I really like them and I don't look at comments. But if I did, I would then go, 'well I really liked it.' As in, 'you don't have the same taste as me. I probably don't like your trousers. Um, do I, Alan?' Um, what else do I think of? I think of – a lot now, it is TV stuff. I do know what necks you can't wear to be mic'd up with. Great thing about documentaries is because the mic's under the clothes you can wear stuff that you bought for TV and then couldn't wear. So that's quite useful sometimes. It's going, 'oh, oh great. I can just save that for something else.'

Um, I still sometimes will get stuff wrong, thinking it won't strobe or it won't be see-through and it is. So you do make mistakes with it. But do I think about – I – I don't have – I don't have big boobs, so one it wouldn't occur to me to be cleavagey, and then yeah. I – and I also wouldn't think, 'oh, that's too low-cut.' But actually – maybe it was already in there, I wouldn't wear something that was low-cut anyway.

KIRI: When you're doing different jobs, so like when you're doing 'Guessable', you're like – or the – the lectures, like you are – you are the boss. It's your show. So would you dress differently for that than you would to pop up on something like 'QI' or – or to do 'Live at the Apollo' where you're moving around a stage. Does – do you think about those things?

SARA: Oh, I would – I would say – yes, absolutely there's a difference between if you're going to do stand-up in it, can you walk around in it? Different angles. I don't think – the boss thing, with both 'Guessable' and 'Comedians Giving Lectures' there's more discussion, as in you bring in more options and people choose out of your options everyday. So you don't get to choose. But some of my favourite stuff I didn't get to wear, uh, um, sometimes I – I do – it's more like planning for a party. Like if you were going to go to your friend's birthdays at a Wetherspoons on a Monday, you would – you wouldn't wear the same stuff that you would wear if you were going like clubbing somewhere on a Friday night.

And that's what I would say the difference between, um, like 'QI', which I think – that's a polite dinner party. I mean of course you're going to love it, your polite dinner party, but it would be weird if you turned up in a bikini, say. Or, um, something like that.

And stand-up, especially if you're buying a new thing for a stand-up show, the worst thing you could be is in your head going, 'oh god, I feel terrible.'

Um, Katherine Ryan's Apollo, which is one of the most, um, watched and the most brilliant, it's the routine – her first one where she did, um, the routine about Beyoncé, she couldn't wear the outfit she turned up with and then someone had to go to Westfield to buy her that dress and those – and those shoes. Um, I'm telling someone else's story so I'm just – I'm probably misremembering and she would obviously correct me on this. But that wasn't what she was planning to wear. So her thing before was like, 'oh god, I've got to wear this.' And then – and you can see, if you see the routine, she's being absolutely amazing, but you've never seen her wear anything like that before or since.

KIRI: Yeah, because I wouldn't have put her in dark colours ever.

SARA: No.

KIRI: And – and they're – they're – because I know the one, it's – it's like a navy and it kicks out. It's like an almost skater cut and then there's boots as well.

SARA: It's – it's grey. It's like a – it's a pinafore dress.

KIRI: Yeah, that's it.

SARA: With flat black shoes. Which she would just – she just wouldn't wear, yeah.

KIRI: Yeah. That's so interesting. Because, uh, Rachel Parris had it, didn't she? For Apollo, that she turned up and they were like, 'no.'

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: And I was thinking, because I kept pushing and pushing and pushing my agent to get them to confirm what I wanted to wear.

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: Because I was like, 'I'm not Rachel Parris, you can't just go to Topshop and pick something out and know I'm going to fit in it.'

SARA: Yeah. Yeah.

KIRI: I will – and I will be beside myself. I won't be able to think. I'll be – because I could – you control what you can and controlling how I look, whether people like it or not, it's how I want myself to be seen. Um, yeah. Oh, god. Ugh, ugh. And –

SARA: I know. And that's it. And – and the politeness. Because especially when, um, work things – and this would happen in all – all, uh, lines of work, not just stand-up. But with work things, when they feel very important, what you're wearing is also – can't be distracting to you or to other people, or you're inside your head thinking, 'oh, everyone's looking at that or thinking that.' It just makes you worse – worse at your job. So it is – it's very interconnected.

And also the boys do have to fight as well. I have to say, like so people like Rhod Gilbert who want to wear – wanted to wear jeans were told, 'you can't. You wear a suit on "Live at the Apollo."' Because this is the point where it was – it was suits. And he was like, 'but I – I don't ever wear a suit. I can't just suddenly wear a suit for my first –' he said, 'it doesn't fit with my material.

It isn't – it's not who I am.' I remember he had to really fight to look like a normal person, because that's how he looked onstage.

And then by the time you get to people like Russell Howard, wearing white t-shirts and jeans is like – that was the thing, is that you could – you could be a stadium comic and not look like a stadium comic had always been expected to in that, you know, Steve Martin or, um, Michael MacIntyre. That outfit wasn't just all comics.

Which I think is why maybe with women and more women expressing themselves onstage, maybe that is why it's been – it's been tentative. Because there wasn't just a, 'okay, this is how female comedians dress.'

KIRI: Yeah, totally. Is there – is there an era in time that you would love to be in just for the clothes alone? Is there like, 'oh yes, I love the fashion from this time'?

SARA: I don't care about bodices. I'll tell you what I do like, actually. It's because I've got a big bum myself, is I do like the bustles. The whole putting on an extra bum over your bum. And if I'm being like so attractive, um, I'd – I do quite like that. Um, I – I think all of the ones that people get romantic about that are very old, like the fact that people didn't wear pants so they could just squat and have a piss and those big skirts. Like I am intrigued by it, but I also do think it's really gross. Just – and your skirt dragging around in Elizabethan London with all the disgusting stuff on the floor.

What did they wear in ancient Egypt? I feel like Cleopatra, we have – wouldn't really have sat around in gold bikinis, would she? No.

KIRI: No, I think that's a slight –

SARA: That's a modern idea.

KIRI: Yeah, I think that's a bastardised version of – of how – how she would've dressed. Well what about things like 50s, so full skirts, or like 60s sort of like the big eyeliner and the –

SARA: Oh, I like flappers, actually. I do like the flappers. The kind of – the very flirty, naughty element of showing that through the length of your skirt and the – that you were going to dance and drink champagne and like probably do a bit of cocaine. And inspire some poetry. I think once – once, um, yeah. Oh, sorry, my dog's – poor dog's coughing. Hello, are you okay? Um, that once those outfits were kind of just – I knew what they were expressing, I was very into that as a fashion choice.

KIRI: Well because that's the weird thing, is that I just thought – you know when you think of like 1950s and it's, you know, little waists and a big skirt? But that was the Dior New Deal and the history is that basically after the war they were like, 'we're not Russians anymore, let's make everything big and really feminine because you've all been in the land army.' And it's so – you just see a – a dress that is a certain shape but that – the historical moments that led to there are the same as – the social, historical choices.

SARA: Yes. Yeah. That's it, what it's rebelling against. That at each point it's rebelling against the thing that's come before. It's going, 'let's not conform. Let's do this instead. Or let's celebrate this instead.' Um, yeah. It's really great. I do – I really, really love women in suits. I really love, um, like masculinised – you know

how I say like Janelle Monáe epitomises it. I just think that's the most beautiful a woman can look, actually. Like much more beautiful than dresses is a woman who can look amazing in a tux with brogues.

KIRI: Yeah. Oh, god. Janelle Monáe is so good at that.

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: And your – it's on the cover of your book as well, your, um, I'll get the word for it the other way round.

SARA: I've done it – I've done it a couple of times and I've realised, 'oh, that's what it is.' Is partly because actually that's what I associate with boss, is a feminine version of – basically you take it and you go, 'oh, I'm very much a lady but I'm wearing what used to be considered masculine or male uniform.' Maybe that's what I read in those women. Maybe that's why I've connected it to the rebellion. Um, I'm – sometimes people will do it at award ceremonies. Oh, I'll tell you who else did it really, really well. Um, have you seen the film – oh, I can't remember this actress's name. She was in 'Gossip Girl' and then she was in a film with Anna Kendrick. Blaire – no, she's got blonde hair. Do you know who I mean?

KIRI: I'm afraid I don't, sorry.

SARA: Oh man, I've just described her so badly. So it's a – it's a comedy film but it's got like a murder in it. There's a twist. Do you know this one? It was really good. It's, um, Blake Lively. It's 'A Simple Favor.' Blake Lively in this film has the most – like Janelle Monáe but it's, um, have a look. Have a look at some of the outfits.

KIRI: Oh, what, is it white – is it a white – oh my god. Oh my god, that's amazing.

SARA: Yes, yeah. Yeah. It's – it's breathtaking.

KIRI: Wow.

SARA: She is breathtaking in these outfits. Um, because she's sort of – she's working so it's all kind of – she goes to work in these things and comes home and makes herself incredibly strong martinis and it's so aspirational.

KIRI: Do you – have you seen Diane – obviously we have to talk about Woody Allen briefly, but –

SARA: Yes, yeah.

KIRI: Diane Keaton had that look absolutely nailed as well.

SARA: Yes. That's – you're right. That's – that's a very – that's a – and that's the thing with – when people love his work, not to dismiss all of the other things about it, but that's just something that I think people really do latch onto, is women dressing in that way and what it said about them and – and how exciting it was. And again, actually, at award ceremonies as well, just what a brilliant dresser she was.

KIRI: Yeah. Have you seen Amber Ruffin is her name? Amber Ruffin? She presents like a late night talk show in America, like a satirical thing.

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: And she's a Black woman and she wears the most brilliant, really feminine twist on suits and tuxes.

SARA: Amazing.

KIRI: To present in. It's brilliant. She looks stunning. And I – do you know what? I – I'm getting a suit made at the moment because I have always wanted to wear a suit but because I've got like – because I'm short with a big bum and big boobs, like I just look like – if I wear a suit I look like I work the door in a regional nightclub.

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: And I'm the most like hard line bouncer there is. You know when female bouncers are more hard line?

SARA: I – to tell you what it would look like, you know in America when they have those people on the plane that are supposed to be blending in but really they've got the gun and they take over if there's terrorism, that's what you'd look like. Like a policeman dressing down. And just straight away you'd go, 'there, that's the person with a gun.'

KIRI: I'd just look so like hench and authoritative, um, and I want to always look like feminine and glamorous. So I'm getting a suit made. The – the girl who makes some costumes for me –

SARA: Amazing.

KIRI: That – but I'm looking at all those like really feminine shapes of like – I guess the 70s. So big flares and you know, like cinched

waists and like – but it's because I just don't trust that there'll be one out there in the world. And if I have a suit that's made for me –

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: I hope I'll feel nice in it. Or if I don't it's a fucking waste of money.

SARA: Well, but also that's the thing about looking at people who look amazing in clothes. So I'd say, actually, that – that Blake Lively in that film, she did – they didn't just buy clothes for her and then put them on her. The thing that you realise is that there's constant adjustments. So, you know, sleeves get taken up, waists get taken in or out, hems go up and down so that the clothes end up fitting and looking brilliant on you.

And I think that's why the actual, real life experience can sometimes be so disappointing. Even realising the fiddly things they do – they – on model shoots when they take hems up and down or they pinch things in or they have all those like butterfly clips at the back holding your jacket in. So you think, 'oh, that jacket's so fitted and tapered.' And you get it and you go, 'oh, no, it's not. It's awful. It's just – there's flaps – flappy jacket.' Um, that's what I think people also have to remember, being kind to ourselves, is it's – it's three people's jobs to kind of hone clothes to a person and if you're not a seamstress it's very difficult to do that for yourself.

KIRI: Yeah. Totally. Totally. And also that that like – I don't want to sound like someone who's like insane and massively out of touch, but that's the thing that like – my partner and I love going to charity shops and he'll find a suit jacket that he loves and now it's

like the case of £9 to take it somewhere to make sure it fits like he wants it to fit.

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: And not like an old man. So there is a world in which you can make this stuff work.

SARA: Yes.

KIRI: But again, he's quite thin, so there's some thin privilege that comes with that. In that – um, yeah.

SARA: Yeah. Yeah, charity shops are a real treasure trove for people – I don't know what the equivalent for men is, but like under a size 10.

KIRI: Yeah.

SARA: That they really can go in and find stuff. Um, yeah. And that – and there isn't – there isn't as much – anything bigger than that. Especially not plus size.

KIRI: Um – no. The – the brilliant, um, comic, Barbara Nice, I don't know whether you've ever seen Barbara Nice, she's brilliant.

SARA: Yeah, I love her.

KIRI: She's got a great, uh, she talks about what she's wearing on the stage and she goes, 'ain't it lovely when somebody just your size dies?' And she's –

[Both laugh]

KIRI: And I think about that every time I'm in a charity shop and I find a load of stuff I like.

SARA: Yeah.

[Upbeat electronic music]

KIRI: Is there an item of clothing, whether it's like a – an item or a thing that you have specifically that you put on and you instantly feel great? So is it like jogging bottoms or is it like this shirt specifically?

SARA: Oh, um, I bought a cardigan the other day and it's so amazing, but I don't think I'm ever not going to feel really special. And I wore it round to my friend Dolly's house, it's the first time I wore it, and then – and I wasn't making a big deal out of it. I just walked into her house and she was like, 'oh, where did you get that from?' And I was like, 'yeah, this is going to happen every time I wear it.' Um, do you want to see it?

KIRI: I'd love to.

SARA: I know this is a podcast, so I'm just showing it to you.

KIRI: No no no.

SARA: Yeah, hang on.

KIRI: Because we might get you a, um, we might get you to send a picture that we can use when it goes out so we can –

SARA: Yes, that's what we'll do. I'll send you a picture.

KIRI: Oh, wow.

SARA: So the – the reason I love it, before I bring it out properly, is because it's the epitome of everything I like. It's a big old secondhand Depop woolly cardigan, it's got animals on it. I'll show you. Um, so can you see this? This – look, there's deer, there's fish in the river.

KIRI: Yeah.

SARA: And it's the same – and it's – and it's so nice. That's the back. And it's got trees and then that's the front. So you – it buttons up so you can wear that layered if it's cold or under a jacket or just with a white t-shirt. It's so beautiful. And I looked at it and I thought, 'that's the best think I ever saw.' And what I do is I put things in my basket. And if I'm still looking back at the basket then I get it a week later. And it's little foxes and little deer.

KIRI: It's really nice.

SARA: In the countryside. And it is that kind of –

KIRI: And then, um – yeah.

SARA: Grown-up childlike stuff that I kind of associate with you, yeah.

KIRI: Exactly. Yeah, that's exactly my aesthetic, isn't it? And then the other day I saw a six year old, actually, who had the best jumper I've seen for a long time apart from that one. And her dog was playing with my dog but there were adults and I really wanted to say like, 'oh, where's that jumper from that that child is

wearing?’ Because that’s pretty much what I’m looking for in life. But I didn’t because I thought it looked – it looked – people are so funny about you kind of complimenting their children. Like, ‘hey, your kid looks sexy. Where can I get an outfit like that?’

[Both laugh]

KIRI: I, uh, I’m thinking about – when did I – there’s a couple of – I think it was for ‘Guessable’, and you were wearing this incredible – it was really sparkly with lots of layers dress with a sparkly cardigan over the top of it. And some amazing shoes. And I was just – I couldn’t take my eyes off you because I was like, ‘it’s every – every item is fun and every item is saying something and it like – I guess from like conventionality, you wouldn’t put them all together, but because you’d think it’d be a cacophony. But actually it makes a choir when they’re all together. They’re all singing the same thing and it’s so fun and – and yeah, I just – I – obviously I just love what you wear and I just, again, I just – I think there’s such a sense of fun.

Um, and – and also I guess do you feel like it helps your persona? Because your persona is a – is like – is a – it’s super smart and the things you talk about are – are I think heavy and smart but with such a lightness and a deftness and a playfulness that it’s really palatable. Does it – do you think about the relationship between what you wear and what you talk about?

SARA: I do. I think – but I – not because of what I’m talking about. I think it’s because of – so there was something Milton Jones said that really stuck with me when I was still at a phase where I was trying to work out what to wear to gigs, especially weekend gigs that really scared me. So going to a place like the Glee that might

have 300 people in there who hadn't heard of you and you're just the middle act or you're just the opening act.

Um, I really struggled like what to wear because it was nighttime. They were dressed up. And I'd read Steve Martin's book, which says that you should always – even if you're talking onstage about your life being terrible, the audience – you should always look like your life is going really well, which is why he wore that incredible suit. Um, like don't come onstage looking like a down and out even if you're going to talk about being like a down and out. So I'd really absorbed that but didn't know what that version was for me.

And then Milton Jones, obviously, and if your listeners don't know, they – he wears very bright Hawaiian shirts and he makes his big quiff. And like – and Harry Hill would be another example of this. You exaggerate something because you're not trying to look like them. So actually when Milton Jones's outfit says clown – and it's his clown. It doesn't look like clowns. He's not, um, like a circus clown, but it does say, 'I'm not like you.'

And that's what I realised about being dressed in brighter things. That thing that you just said then, that's quite interesting about like wearing stuff together. For me, all it says is fearless. I'm not trying to – I'm not trying to be in a business meeting. I'm not trying to be a door to door salesman. I am supposed to look like a slightly bigger version than what I would wear if I was going to the pub. That's what I think it is.

And doing it, not necessarily confident, but it does make me say, 'oh, I've – I've shown that I don't care. Or I've shown that I'm brave here.' So I think there is an element where it just makes me feel slightly more confident at work. And then that's what's

interesting, is like with new material gigs and things, I would be very, very dressed down to really go, 'oh, I'm not in my drag. This is – this is me just – you can just listen to what I'm saying. I'm not – I'm not thinking about performance yet. We're just doing the – the words.'

KIRI: Interesting. Oh, that's so interesting. Yeah, I hadn't thought about that but that's such a good tip for new material. To – to visually go, 'this ain't the proper thing. Like we're not all bells and whistles.'

SARA: Yeah, you're not seeing a set – you're not seeing a show. This isn't a show. This is – this is the – this is the first day of rehearsal. Everyone's got their scripts in their hands. And then you can have a conversation about it afterwards. Yeah.

KIRI: That's great. You were saying you buy stuff on Depop, which you've recommended to me and I just can't – I can't –

SARA: You couldn't get into it, yeah.

KIRI: I can't – I can't get into it. I'm quite good at Etsy now. I find some good stuff on there.

SARA: Oh, yes.

KIRI: And I live for Ebay. So I think you –

SARA: Well – well no, but that's it. It's all the same stuff. You've just found it different – on different websites. The people who advertise will always be on all three.

KIRI: Oh, great. Okay. Thank god.

SARA: Yes. Yeah.

KIRI: Um, so you buy lots of secondhand stuff anyway, but do you – what is your relationship with charity shops? Do you ever go for a dig through those?

SARA: Yeah, I do. I do. And I think what I really always live for is, um – I mean just – you can – that's why I always compare it to Depop, is that you wouldn't ever stop going in because what keeps you going, is the times where it's just incredible. It's just such kismets when it's something that you've always wanted. But you didn't know until you saw it now. Or you have always been looking for. And there it's there. And you're thinking, 'it won't be in my size. It won't be in my size.' And then it is. And it's not – it's not like other shopping where you can go, 'oh, can you see if you've got any size eights out the back? Or have you got these one up?' Like it's – it just has – it works or it doesn't. And so they're the – really fun to root around in.

And then, um, when you find something that you either wear all the time or love so much it's really – it's really, really brilliant. Um, my husband had never been in, um, charity shops until a couple of years ago, we went to Brighton and we went to Oxfam because we were both too cold. So we had to like get a jumper and a coat and he bought a Gucci wool coat in grey for about sort of 50 quid and it – he just couldn't believe that England did this. Like, 'oh my god.' And it – and he looked so handsome in it and it's just so fantastic. I mean it's just such a fantastic – and fits him so perfectly. And I was like, 'that's the – that's the joy. That's the joy of charity shops.'

KIRI: I was going to ask you what the best thing you've ever bought from one is, but it sounds like it's being stood next to someone buying a Gucci coat that fits them for 50 quid.

SARA: I – and I got – I got real bad jealousy, because it's years ago. I've – I've – but that day I was really like, 'ugh. Stealing that Gucci coat. Get a – get a room, guys.'

KIRI: I would've seemed – especially because he didn't know what they were. Like you brought him to that experience. It's quite rude for him to sort of like hit the ground running with it, yeah. I think I would've carried that with me all day.

SARA: Yes, yeah. Yeah.

KIRI: Um, any charity shop favourites, though? For you?

SARA: I've got a cardigan that's not that dissimilar to the one I just showed you, but it's a – a kind of, um, it's in acrylic but it's, um, argyle pattern that I wear all the time. And actually that goes with everything. It goes with absolutely everything. And the buttons fell off and so I replaced them with bright green buttons, and it now looks even better. It's got different colour greens. Oh, it's so good. I really, really love that as a charity shop – I've got some really good charity shop cardigans.

KIRI: I, um, I love a – a replacing a button does – is such a great botox for stuff you've had for ages that you can put into circulation.

SARA: Okay, well we've had lots of conversations so I'll tell you my true secret. I get buttons in shapes of things. Do you have any of these? So for instance, um, I've got a whole Jesus nativity scene

on one shirt that starts off with lambs on the cuffs. It's got the baby Jesus, a shepherd with a stalk, and then some stars. Oh, here's one – here's one of the shepherds. Look. That's a shepherd with a crook. That's a button.

KIRI: Oh my god.

SARA: Yeah, so, um, and – and – but my best ones, these are my best ones, which I've not put anywhere yet. Um, oh, that – oh, that – that one's holding a lamb. Um, I'm going to find it for you. Um, oh, look at that little shepherd holding a lamb.

KIRI: That's really cute.

SARA: You see? It's so sweet. Um, these ones are all stationary school things. So my favourite thing apart from buttons is stationary. Look at this. Exercise book button.

KIRI: Oh my gosh.

SARA: That is – that is a pencil. That's a – these are on Etsy. And this – and also this is a sharpener. So if you go on Etsy, I would say to people not only get into changing buttons or like replacing when they come off, but you can then have like different ones on your cuffs. They're just for you. That's some maths on a button.

KIRI: That's so lovely.

SARA: That – that's all the subjects you'll be doing at school on your buttons. Um, so – so that's my top tip, actually, for – and then even if other people don't notice, it'll just make something so plain really special to you.

KIRI: Yeah. I, um, I bought – I had like from a charity shop a navy blue button-up dress from H&M and I took the buttons off and I replaced them with big white – oh, look at the calculator.

SARA: Isn't it good?

KIRI: Um, I replaced them with giant pairs of white scissors. And then everyone was like, 'where's that dress from? Where's that dress from?'

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: And they didn't mean the dress, they meant the buttons.

SARA: Buttons.

KIRI: Um, yeah, but you can make something I think really – and that is – like I – I don't want to sound like, you know, Trinny and Susannah or, you know, someone giving lame advice. But changing the buttons is a really easy job and it can make something look like it's not from, you know, just old anywhere.

SARA: Yeah, and it's such – it's such basic craft ware, but to me when that's actually the only sewing I can really do, that's the thing that makes me feel like, 'ooh, I'm just tilling the land. Just seeing what –' like it makes me feel so rooted and like just, um, like I – fending for myself. Like I – it's so weird. It's just changing buttons, but to me it's like, 'ooh, don't interrupt me. I'm doing my darning.'

[Both laugh]

SARA: Oh, that – this is the other thing I like, is iron – iron-on, um, iron-on fellas. Like, um, these are little dogs that I’m showing you.

KIRI: They’re cute.

SARA: But these are so easy. And that’s such a good thing you can do on a cardigan or – or old skirts or on things that have got stains. Like I had stains on a jumper and then I got loads of little tiny bees and now it’s just got like a flock of bees on it. On all of the – on all of the coffee stains.

KIRI: Oh, great. Again, great dirty girl tip.

SARA: Great dirty girl tip. And also, things on Etsy that you can buy for £5 or £4 when you can’t really shop at the moment. I think that’s sometimes a way of tricking your brain to go, ‘I don’t need to spend lots of money. I just need to have something coming in the post that I’m excited about.’

KIRI: Yeah. I have – I’ve gone through a stage now of getting – is there any next to me? Um, not right now. Where’s the – oh god, where’s that gone? But, um, so I – I bought from – when I was shopping at Asos, um, I got a – a leotard. A black leotard of just a vest, but it’s got really long black fringing that hangs from it, so it’s really flattering and it’s fun. It’s – so because I wear loads of black plain stuff on – with exciting stuff over the top. So immediately you’ve got fun on your plain black stuff. So then I went mad and bought loads of gold and black fringing and was like, ‘I’m going to sew it on everything. I’m going to put –’ and then obviously never have.

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: Um, but my dream is to – to put some fringing on stuff. And also you can buy big sequinned patches for not much money, and that feels slightly more ethical than, you know, like – and then you can whack them on a plain t-shirt.

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: And suddenly you've got a very jazzy t-shirt. Um, but it's –

SARA: Yeah, that's good.

KIRI: It's all in a big pile that I doubt I'll ever get to. One day I'll have a crafty day. Um –

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: But what – what happens is I just sew, um, buttons back on my partner's shirts and then forget to do my stuff. Anyway, um –

SARA: Hey, I think I – I think I can hear a prank coming. Next time his button falls off, just do some fringing. And so he's like – he doesn't know. Just put it back in the wardrobe. Don't even mention it until he gets it out to wear and he's like – in like a summer festival swinging his arms around.

KIRI: He would love that. He's got –

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: One of his favourite t-shirts I – I bought him is from – it's a kid's brand called Zilla Kids, but they make adult stuff and it's –

SARA: Oh, I know Zilla Kids, yeah.

KIRI: Yeah, they've got – it's like a big pink heart and around the edging is pink fringing, and he absolutely loves it. He loves a fringe, that lad.

[Upbeat electronic music]

KIRI: Do you see your style changing as you get older? Do you think that you'll lose the – the colours or the textures? Do you think it'll be – or do you think you'll get even like more flamboyant?

SARA: I – I hope I would become more colourful and flamboyant. I think, um, I – all of the things that people feel pressure about dressing I don't actually have, but there is a thing with women where they think that there's a certain point where they're supposed to show less skin or dress I guess less, uh, more austere or something like that, whereas I don't think that would ever be my style, I don't think.

I think – so I – I hope it – I hope I just, you know, if I have kids I really hope they're embarrassed at the school gates every day. Like I really want that to – um, yeah. And in terms of being older, I think I – I don't want to be invisible ever. And also hopefully I'll always be doing my job, so I'll always get to wear fun stuff for work. So I hope that it doesn't change.

KIRI: One of the things I loved about, well many things I loved about your sitcom, but you and – and Katherine's as well, is I was excited to see what you were wearing every episode. Is that something you were conscious of when you were making it?

SARA: Well actually more than even making it, when I knew we were commissioned, I started buying clothes for the show. So some of the stuff I bought I knew was too big for me in real life, especially because – so we had this Alice in Wonderland theme, and then, um, we had the fact that she's a child, she dresses like a child, and I wanted to – the palettes to be very bright.

So, uh, so in advance I started buying things that I couldn't justify buying for myself, but I would buy because I knew it was going to be on screen in the show. So it was in my head for the, you know, the 11 months in advance I had this suitcase full of things which is – that's what – that's what actor – pretend Sara's going to wear.

KIRI: And it just happens that you get to keep them afterwards as well.

SARA: I do happen to keep them, yeah. I did – I did something where actually I instantly regretted where, and you know, you must get this, like this mum contacted me and said she'd looked everywhere for this cardigan, it's from the first episode. Now it's Lazy Oaf. I bought it at three times the price on Depop because I loved it so much. It's Snoopy and it's got – and she basically said, 'I've looked for it everywhere but the only ones on sale are really, really expensive. Where did you get yours?' And, um, and she said, 'oh, my daughter's a teenager. Having a terrible time.'

And I thought, 'I can't reply to you going, 'well I paid £300 for it like every – like the ones on Depop.' Like I can't tell you that's what I did. So I just said, 'oh, I'll send it to you.' And she was like, 'are you sure? I'll give you money.' I was like, 'I don't want your money. I've worn it in my programme, I'll just send it to you.' Anyway, I did. The daughter was so embarrassed. My mum – she was like, 'why did my mum tell you to send me a cardigan?'

KIRI: Oh my god.

SARA: Because I think then I – I then looked weird. Like what kind of person just sends their clothes? But actually a time like that, especially when I know she can't get it, when someone says, 'where did you get it?' And I know you're not going to ever find this for a reasonable price, like they didn't make enough of them and it's one of those things, it's just easier. Especially if I'm not – if I don't need it anymore, just to send it. And yeah, and the 16 year old girl's like, 'I've been told to write you a thank you letter. I don't know why you sent me your clothes.'

KIRI: That's so funny.

SARA: As in – because – isn't it?

KIRI: And that's obviously like that's – it's so funny that the mum went, 'oh, send a thank you letter.' And she's like, 'yeah, I will.' And then she's like, 'and I'm going to make it clear to this woman when you're not watching that was fucking weird.'

SARA: Yes. Yeah. I wanted – yeah. Because she probably isn't the kind of person that would want anything secondhand or anything like that. She'd just be like, 'ugh,' like, 'okay, great.' Yeah.

KIRI: I love as well there's a bit, um, I think it is maybe the first or second episode, but you, um, and your screen Mum, screen sister are all in those burnt sole leotards.

SARA: Oh, yes. Yeah.

KIRI: And that is so joyous as well, of seeing like a – this is – might sound patronising, but how amazing your screen Mum looked in a leotard.

SARA: Yes. Yeah.

KIRI: Because you don't see women of that age wearing really fun like leotards. It was just great to see.

SARA: Yeah. She's got a kicking bod. That's the thing about Juliette Stevenson. She – she's absolutely got it going on in every way. So it also wasn't a thing of me saying to an actress who wasn't going to feel comfortable because they looked super, super brilliant. Because also I – the reason I love those burnt sole cat suits is they are so flattering on every single body shape. And actually that's what I love about people wearing them at festivals or Instagram and everything, is that, um, I think they make – they make the best of everyone. Where they come in, the bits that they show, um, they're really fantastic.

And that's another thing, actually. Writing the first episode, I knew – I knew what I – I'd already bought it drunk. I had that burnt sole thing in my house. I think I bought it to wear at Latitude and just didn't – didn't have the confidence. So I wrote it in and then, yeah, then my costume lady, I was like, 'they'll – they'll probably lend you another couple. Just ask burnt sole. Tell them. Like get another couple of those.'

KIRI: Because you're right, because they've got these chevrons which –

SARA: They have, yeah.

KIRI: Which so it – it brings – it – and it's all around the waist, so – because what everyone's going for is a – is a smaller waist.

SARA: Yes.

KIRI: It does all that work for you no matter what size.

SARA: That's it.

KIRI: Because Rachel Fairburn wears them as well.

SARA: I've seen. She's got the tiger print one, hasn't she? With the black and the black mesh. It looks stunning. I swear it's because the thing about, um, the – the waist is it's relative. So it's not about having a waist smaller than everyone in the world, it's about having a – a waist that's smaller than your hips. And that's why those suits just make everyone go in and out.

KIRI: Very clever. Very clever.

SARA: Yeah, isn't it?

KIRI: Um, is there an item of clothing that you can always see yourself wearing?

SARA: I think – I hope lots of my clothes that I have now. I mean I think the – the cardigan with the – the fish and the deer on it, I think I'm going to have for absolutely forever. I think with dressed up clothes, I think the trouble is you wear something a few times, especially if you wear it on TV once or twice, and then it kind of – what I hope is that they'll come out of rotation again in a few years. And if I haven't worn them on something – because they repeat TV shows so much it's hard to wear the same thing on like

– the Dave TV channel, I could end up wearing the same top in three shows in a row because they could do like a ‘QI Extra Large’ after a ‘Mock the Week’ after a ‘Comedians Giving Lectures’ or something.

So it can – because I don’t like the idea that you can’t wear something more than once. But you definitely aren’t allowed to wear it on everything. I want – I want, actually, that would be an interesting experiment to see, when would someone intervene if I wore the same dress on everything? At what point would they go, ‘um, can you tell her not to wear the same dress again?’ I’ll be like, ‘it doesn’t strobe. It has no logo on it. What’s your problem with the dress?’

KIRI: Are – are there any trends that you’re hoping – well this is the thing, you don’t really do trends.

SARA: No.

KIRI: But are there any you’re hoping just for the world don’t come back?

SARA: Oh, don’t come back. I was going to say the one that I really liked is that when, um, I think it was Victoria Beckham who put cats on shirts, and then that mutated and lots and lots of people did animal patterns. And I was so into that. I don’t know if Victoria Beckham did it first, but that was the first time I saw it. And then I – then I’ve got lots and lots of different animal shirts and, um, that was really exciting. Animals on stuff.

Um, don’t come back? No, because actually if they make someone happy I don’t – I don’t care. I think, um, the very, very heroine chic thing that was going on – and I know that there’s never a

good thing, but I think that was so unhealthy. The celebration of people who were so skinny they were sick. Or that there was any idea you could do that in a healthy way that wasn't self-destructive.

Um, what's interesting about the Khloe Kardashian thing that's going on, a lot of the discussion at the moment is even people who like the Kardashians are very unhappy about things that depict them in a certain way because that can be, um, it's not a reflection of being thin or not being big or, you know, having spots or, you know, being – it's – it's an irrational thing we all contain inside us. That here's a good version of us we're getting away with it, and here's a bad version of us, um, that we're trying to hide from people.

And um, that – that – the very, very, very skinny thing that was going on when I was in my late teens made people who were my size think they were obese. And it – and it was so damaging. And then what happens is those people then call themselves fat all the time, and then which then gives other people – which basically tells the entire world around them, 'if I'm fat then you're all fat. We're all fat.' Like, um, and I think that's what happened. So I really hope that doesn't happen. I – I really hope that people get used to and start really enjoying looking at different – different shapes and sizes bodies in clothes.

KIRI: Yeah, because also when people are using that, the – you know, the – the term 'fat' then, it was – it was so – and as it still is, uh, intrinsically linked to unhealthy and lazy and undesirable and all that.

SARA: Yeah. Yeah.

KIRI: Kind of stuff that we're only just starting to potentially look at unpicking as well. So yeah, it was a really, really unhealthy time. Well – well doing this, your book, 'Animal', it was so – I remember I – I read it in the – in the first lockdown. I know that's way too late. I should've read it earlier.

Um, but one of the things that struck me, because the way – and in this conversation you talk about your body, was so like dumbfounding to me because I'm like, 'but you're – you're in the case that everybody wants.' And then I was – and then that's when I have to remind myself, I'm like, 'but there will be people who look at me and – and everything I put my body through and everything I say I don't like about it and get cross at, and I'm someone's target weight.' That's what you have to remember. Everybody is someone else's target weight.

SARA: Yes, yeah. Yeah.

KIRI: And that's – that's when you realise. And there was this great thing the other day that I saw that was like you know when you look at pictures of yourself when you're a teenager and you were obsessed with how fat you were, and it was something like that shows it was nothing to do with your body and it was all to do with your mind. So – but it's – that conversation never stops happening, I don't think.

SARA: Oh, it's nice that you ended it that way, because my thing was always, 'oh, because you've carried on getting fatter and older.'

[Both laugh]

KIRI: Well, there is that as well.

SARA: So you're back as – the trouble is you're always looking back at someone who's thinner than you are now. And it's like, 'oh my god. I thought – I thought that was fat.' Um, and no, these – even using these words and joking about it, I know for some people it's so – so difficult to listen to because it sends them into a spiral, so I'm so conscious of it.

I got a message the other day that I really liked that was from a woman who's bigger than me, um, she – it's what she was describing. I will – that's not a judgment on her photos. But, um, so she said that she hadn't realised that women that are my size go through the same stuff as her. So she was saying, 'oh, it was a really nice thing to go, "oh, you freak about those things," and I hadn't realised.' I think she had thought people were just happy or easy or didn't have that element of their life.

But I've also – and I've – and actually I've only learnt this recently after doing my sitcom, is that there's still privilege within it. So in my sitcom I got, um, I – I wore padded suits in the second episode. And it wasn't a fat suit, because I do know – the stupid thing is I do know that fat suits are incredibly upsetting and offensive to – to people. And, um, this wasn't. It was like, um, different bits of padding that got taken off and it was all about dysmorphia. That's what I thought I was showing. Is, 'oh, well this is dysmorphic. And this is how bad we feel about ourselves. And we feel bad. We think we look a certain way.'

And then, um, I upset some people who wouldn't have expected someone like me to be so thoughtless about them. And, um, and then what I realised was, because I was explaining to this woman like, 'it wasn't a fat suit. And it was this and it was that.' And eventually she said, 'you put on a – padding to have a body that

looked like mine.’ Like – and I was like, ‘oh’. I – it took me so long to hear what she was saying and then realise, ‘oh my gosh, like, um, like, uh, it isn’t about the – whether the suit’s made or whether there’s a punch line in it or you’re being flippant.’

The idea of someone small putting themselves into someone bigger’s suit and then going, ‘oh, this is how I feel when I’m on a bad day,’ is really – it was really insensitive even though I thought at the time I was expressing something more universal, if that makes sense. So I – I’m really aware within it. And I hate it. I mean I really, really don’t do it with stand-up, but this thing to women slag themselves off, you do have to internalise it because you shouldn’t do it in front of other people. And you shouldn’t – especially in front of children, which is what the 80s was. Women calling themselves pigs if they had some prawn – prawns. Um, we just heard women all the time going, ‘oh, I shouldn’t. Not allowed. Oh, I’ve been naughty. Had an avocado.’

KIRI: Oh, yeah.

SARA: Yeah, all of that. And – and unfortunately – unfortunately we just absorbed all of it and now it’s a battle not to spread more poison to other people.

KIRI: Yeah, it happens. Yeah, you’re right. It – battle is the right word because you – it’s so normalised culturally that it – it’s a second language that you’re fluent in and you didn’t even realise, so it’s so hard to suddenly like change gear and – and to – to –

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: Outwardly and inwardly as well, like sometimes I just have to have the conversation with my partner where he is just listening

and I'm like beating myself up about my weight and I'm like, 'but – but I always put on weight in winter and I always lose it in summer naturally because I move more and I – and I, you know, I eat salads and stuff like that. And then he's – he's just sort of really quiet. And I'm like, 'I do this every year, don't I?' And he's like, 'yeah, but if you just need to say it out loud, that's – that's fine.'

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: But yes.

SARA: Yeah, it's hard reassuring yourself. Um, I get, um, really jealous, actually, of people who are or – or seem to express absolute being fine. As in – so it's not about what size they are, because it's not like I look at beautiful people and go, 'oh, well of course you're fine. You're beautiful.' Or beautiful to a certain standards.

It doesn't – what I'm trying to say is, but – so the body positivity movement are obviously people who have – have experienced societal oppression based on what they look like. And their love for themselves and their acceptance, I look – the reason I get angry with myself about it is like, 'why can I not care? Why can't I just get over it? If other people are managing to get to a point where it really is love and acceptance, what am I clinging onto? What do I think will happen if I just do that as well?'

I think, um, Lena Dunham's doing some stuff with a fashion label and she's writing really lovely, long posts about her body changing and acceptance and things. And I literally read it going, 'oh my god, you lucky cow.' Like if you've just reached that epiphany with it. Like because all of the headspace that's wasted and all of that,

like you say, even if it's just once a year that you have a season, you're like, 'oh, this back again,' uh, about the attitude, like I – I don't know what kind of growth you have to do – one has to do to get to somewhere you go like, 'oh, now I don't care.' Now I'm like, 'I can't fit in those trousers. I'll put some bigger ones on. Oh, the bigger ones are too baggy. I'll put on some little ones.' Without that all having emotions attached to it.

KIRI: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Well I'm still – I wish I was but I'm – I'm definitely not there with it yet. I still have like I feel like I'm at war with my body as opposed to just existing in it. But I'm – I – yeah, fucking – it's exhausting.

SARA: Yeah. It is. Because I think a war is an interesting thing, because I feel like a prisoner. Because I feel like a disembodied voice – this is so rude about my body as well, which is like the – literally the thing that gives me all of my pleasures and carries me around the world, but, um, I feel like I'm a – a disembodied voice that's been stolen. That's like, 'we'll cast you into this meat and there you are imprisoned.' And that – because – because that's what dysmorphia or disassociation does, it makes you think – it's other something's. You go, it's a physical thing I'm stuck inside, rather than, 'oh, no it's actually you.' Like that's the journey, of looking at is as yourself. Um, which I find so odd.

KIRI: It's so, it – yeah, it's so – it's so interesting. And I feel like for women in particular and, you know, uh, and people who've been raised as a woman, it feels like a universal thing. I've – I've yet to meet anyone my age who was socialised female or is a female – or a woman, um, who doesn't have this conversation at all or had to unlearn something at least.

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: So – but I fucking hope the next generation doesn't have it.

SARA: Yeah, I hope. I mean it was – it was interesting because of photographs and them being online now, it'll be interesting to see how that – what that becomes. If it's worse or better. Because I think the attitudes have really improved, but the physical thing of taking the pictures of yourself constantly, which is what people now do on a daily basis, does that make you more self-accepting or does – does it make you even – even less – even less connected to reality of it? If you think that the picture with a filter and a good light is you, what you're supposed to look like, then the rest of your life with disappoint you.

Every time you look in the mirror or see an unedited photo, which is what the Khloe Kardashian thing is, you'll go, 'well that's not me. I can only be on my best day.' And that's where I think people find aging really hard. Because, you know, it's a reality and it happens. Yeah. And – and, um, yeah.

KIRI: Yeah. My – yeah. Totally. My mum, um, there were no – there's no mirrors in the house. She had them like taken down in the bathroom because she said, 'I can't deal with looking back – looking in the mirror and seeing an old woman looking back.' And it's like, oh. [laughs]

SARA: Yeah. But have you thought that maybe your mum's house is haunted? Wouldn't it be funny if actually it actually was a ghost? Like reaching out a hand. And she's like, 'I just don't want to see the old woman in the bathroom. It's so scary.'

KIRI: It's haunting her saying, 'you shouldn't have called Kiri fat so much when she was growing up.'

SARA: Yeah, it literally – it's literally going, 'and now it's your turn.'

[Upbeat electronic music]

KIRI: Um, well this brings us on nicely to the final question, which is, um, what would you like to be buried in or cremated in?

SARA: Oh, that's very fun, isn't it? That's a very fun idea. Um, I've bought this dress from – from, um, do you know Lirika Matoshi?

KIRI: No, I don't.

SARA: And I – I might not be pronouncing that right. It's the dress that you will have seen in Instagram, because, um, everyone wanted it and then Amazon did a copy that you can get for very, very cheap, which obviously is not –

KIRI: The strawberry one?

SARA: Yeah, well no because it's the strawberry one but it's the hearts one. So I've got the – the original. The strawberry one is the copy dress. And I can't fit into it, actually. But I think if I was dead and lying down they could do the zip up and then I could get buried in it. I – I think it's – for me, for me I legitimised it because I thought, 'oh, it's a chat show dress. Like I will get to do something like Graham Norton or Jonathan Ross again in the future at some point and then I'll wear that dress.'

KIRI: It's –

SARA: But if I was dead, even better.

[Both laugh]

SARA: Yeah, I just think just relaxed. I'd be so flat and relaxed that I think, yeah, it'll fit me great.

KIRI: That's, um, that dress is spectacular. So spectacular.

SARA: It's really – do you know what? Again it's that very childish – it looks like a – a little girl's dress but it's for a big girl. That's what I like about it.

KIRI: For a big dirty girl.

SARA: It's very, very much like a kids' – big – big dirty girl. Um, yeah, it's very much a kids' party dress. That's what it is.

KIRI: It is, yeah. Lots of like flounce and – and also I've seen someone and the – the rip off of it, but I've seen someone who is plus size in it, and it does look good on everyone.

SARA: Honey – Honey Kinney has it. I don't know if that's who you're talking about.

KIRI: That's – that's who I'm talking about, yeah.

SARA: Um, she looks – I mean she's obviously a very, very attractive, brilliant woman in lots of ways. Um, but um, her getting it and looking so brilliant in it, she was one of the things where I was just like, 'oh my god, this dress. This dress.' It was very inspirational for me wanting to get it and seeing Honey Kinney in it. Um, and yeah, she looks brilliant in lots of things.

Do you know that the 'Daily Mail', like she's always on the sidebar at the 'Daily Mail' now? They just put her Instagram. So they don't even have a comment, they just – basically it's because she wears revealing clothes, they'll just be like, 'Jonathan Ross's daughter in a thong.' And that's it. They're not – like they're not – like they don't seem to be leading judgment, which is obviously what their comments are for. And I don't – obviously I don't have a gun in it, but I just thought, 'oh, that's interesting that because – because she's wearing revealing clothes – sorry, that's my dog gagging. Um, I – I know, it's disgusting, the culture at the 'Daily Mail.' Are you okay? But yeah, so she kind of does their work for them. Because what they like is – is half dressed women.

KIRI: Wow.

SARA: So it's really great as well. Yeah. Plus size representation.

KIRI: Because she's stunning and like –

SARA: Yeah, absolutely stunning.

KIRI: Yeah, her, um, her like – the stuff she posts on Insta – Instagram, she's so like, uh, body positive. And I don't mean that in that weird way that people say –

SARA: No.

KIRI: 'Well you're body positive because you're a plus size person who exists.' I mean that she's in underwear and like – or just like got it all out and she always looks stunning. So I guess, yeah, it's the perfect storm for them, isn't it? It's like naked woman, plus size so there's some – that'll rile up the comments, and Jonathan Ross. It's like all the things coming together.

SARA: Yes. Yeah, I think – I think she’s really, really cool. Like that’s what I think about everything that she thinks. Like so when she’ll write a post that will have very wise, informative, positive message, you’ll be like, ‘well of course, because you’re so cool. So you just thought that already, or that you’ve already –’ she’s so young and she’s already done all of this work and just knows it already. Yeah.

KIRI: Yeah. Yeah. I think, um, well I don’t – I think her mum is incredible and that must be part of it, right?

SARA: Yeah.

KIRI: Having like a mum who seems like she is 20 years ahead in terms of thinking to – to most mums. Um, that’s what all – every – our generation’s kids will be like, hopefully. If we manage to get rid of the bullshit baggage we were brought up with.

SARA: Yeah, yeah.

KIRI: Um, thank you so much, Sara.

SARA: Oh, no it’s been lovely. It was so lovely to talk to you. I’m sorry if I went off on tangents and things, but – and showed you buttons. I’m just excited about my buttons.

KIRI: I loved it.

[Upbeat electronic music]

KIRI: So that was Sara Pascoe. Buttons. Who knew? All you crafters are screaming at your phones now. ‘Me, I knew. That’s

why I've been changing buttons on everything for ages. Do you know what? Sara has sent me some exquisite pictures of the buttons that she has customised things with. So if you head over to our Instagram, you can have a little nose at those this week. I'll be whacking them up. Uh, we are @whoyouwearingpod on Instagram. Also we absolutely love chatting to you guys on there, and so do say hello.

We have had some lovely messages this week. Um, thanks to Heather who emailed us, uh, – now, there's going to be a content warning here because I'm about to read compliments about myself out loud, so if that gives you the ick, please bail now. Fast forward about 30 seconds to a minute.

So Heather says, 'Kiri Kiri Kiri.' I always love it if someone starts an email with my first name three times. She says, 'you are just magnificent. I am living for this podcast. Thank you so much for sharing such amazing, wonderful stories through fashion and beyond. Absolutely loved Seye's episode and I cannot tell you how much his relationship with fashion and mental health resonates with me. I've since interrogated some of my own behaviours with fashion and clothes, so Seye said, "some of these things are more powerful than just feeling nice." I'm telling everyone who will listen to go and check the podcast out because it's utterly brilliant. I've taken so much comfort from it and I can't wait to hear more. Big love always, you legend. Heather.'

That is such a nice message and we got Heather's permission to read that out loud in case you're like, 'guys, you're reading out Heather's diary entry there.' Um, so thank you so much for that message. Do you know what? We've had loads of messages about, um, Seye's episode.

Actually every episode seems to really resonate with people in different ways, which is what I wanted from it and is why I'm so excited about some of the episodes we've got coming up, um, with people who are activists, non-binary people, um, plus-size people. And you know, just really interesting conversations about how everything someone is intersects with fashion and clothes and style in ways that you – some ways you'd expect but some ways that are completely unexpected. So guys, keep listening. We've got some good stuff to come.

Now something I love doing with this podcast, is scouting out small business to sing about. And some of them work perfectly with the guests that we have on, so this not so much of a small business as it is a small charity because we already mentioned it in the episode anyway.

It is Salvaged Project. Now Lauren runs it all from her house. She's an absolute superwoman. She takes your secondhand good quality clothes and then she sells them on her Instagram page and raises money for specific small charities dedicated to supporting refugees. She's so empathetic and politically aware. I'm just absolutely in awe of her. And her expert knowledge around the refugee crisis allows her to sort of pinpoint the best places to send the money she's raising at the best times.

So all the clothes on there are secondhand as well, so it is close to guilt-free shopping as you can get. And as Sara mentioned, she and Aisling send their telly clothes there once they're done too, so you can get some real bargains. Plus whatever sequinned fever dream that I no longer fit into. That's also where I send those. Go and follow Salvaged Project on Instagram and keep an eye on her stories. I have got some belting bits from her over the years.

Thank you so much for listening, for chatting to us on Instagram, and for being lovely in your reviews of the show. This podcast is growing and growing, um, and it's just a really small team behind it and we really love it and it's just so nice that you guys are getting behind it as well. Next week I'm going to be chatting to another brilliant comedian. It is the ludicrously well turned-out Darren Harriott. So see you then.

[Upbeat electronic music]

Who Are You Wearing is produced by Jo Southerd, the artwork is by Mary Phillips, and the music is by Ani Glass. This has been a Little Wander production.