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—LESLEY ARFIN, WRITER FOR GIRLS





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The writer on HBO's cultural phenomenon is one of the real-life *Girls*.

Anyone who has watched *Girls* won't be surprised that Lesley Arfin is as funny, self-deprecating, and brutally honest as the show she helps write. Now beginning its second season, *Girls*, led by star and head writer Lena Dunham, follows four 20-something women in Brooklyn as they navigate the awkwardness of early adulthood.

Arfin has her own early career to use as inspiration. She got her start as an "awful" intern at *Vice* magazine, where she brought back a defunct column called "Dear Diary," which, after five years, she turned into a book of the same name in 2007. "Then nothing happened," says Arfin. "I was freelancing for magazines, copywriting, collecting unemployment. I went to India, I worked for a while at a magazine called *Missbehave* that folded. And then I saw [Lena Dunham's film] *Tiny Furniture*."

Arfin and Dunham began a Twitter friendship, and when Arfin got word that Dunham was writing *Girls* for HBO, she submitted a hastily written pilot—"a darker, punk rock *Hannah Montana* kind of thing." Hired, she gravitates toward writing for the *Girls* wild-child character, Jessa, and Dunham's character, Hannah.

"Jessa has a do-whatever-you-want-and-deal-with-the-consequences-later kind of attitude," says Arfin. "If I'm not like that, maybe I used to be like that—or I wish I was more like that. It's fun to write someone who will try anything once. And it's easy for me to identify with Hannah. I really relate to her overinflated ego and her anxiety over guys."

Arfin's affinity for Hannah extends to the show's sex scenes, which are talked about both for their awkwardness and their showcasing of Dunham's imperfect naked body. "If it's controversial, it's only because people can't deal with their own realities about their own sex life," says Arfin. "I think it's

really important to finally show real girls with real bodies having sex. I always found that, for me, sex could be really good but really awkward at the same time, and I thought my sexual experiences were wrong based on what I saw in TV and movies. It's refreshing to watch these girls and think, Oh my God, this is gross but I also like it."

Hannah's sex scenes have also made Dunham's plentiful tattoos a prominent presence on the show, and body adornment is something Arfin shares. Eclectic is a mild way to describe her work, done mostly by Michelle Tarantelli at Saved, in Brooklyn. The story of her ink is best told in her own words: "I have a baby riding a swan and crying. I don't know why she's crying. She just doesn't like riding the swan. And I have a baby in a banana. I have a Germ circle, which is really stupid. The Germs are this band and it's just a blue circle on my arm that looks like a doughnut and makes my arm look fat and I hate it. I have my old cat's name tattooed on me. I have Long Island, New York City. I have hearts on my fingers. I have a blank banner, and I let people write stuff into it at parties. And I have my father's name tattooed on me—which is Duke, but everyone thinks it says 'Dyke,' which doesn't bother me."

It's hard to hear about Arfin's love-hate relationship with her tattoos and not notice the parallel to the life experiences depicted in *Girls*. "It's kind of like the best part of getting a tattoo is hating it," Arfin says. "I got all of these tattoos at different points in my life and it's really unrealistic for me to think I'm going to go through every day of my entire life not regretting at least one of them. They're a part of me, and I've made this decision—and I can regret it, and I can live with that regret." —*Suzanne Weinstock Klein*