

EXCLUSIVE

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Olivia Munn speaks candidly about being in the spotlight, her career, and holiday plans

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There is an ethereal fragility about Olivia Munn that stands out to me as she shakes my hand. The word delicate immediately comes to mind as it describes her beautiful features and reserved manner. (The latter actually takes me by surprise. I guess I had expected that free-spirited, insta-friend vibe seen in her social media posts and past interviews.) The unquestionably gorgeous actress is dressed in a sky blue and black Versace ensemble with black over-the-knee boots – a wardrobe change from this morning's *Good Morning America* appearance where she donned a white dress. Her dark tresses are swept up into a ponytail and her makeup is subtle and fresh. We are seated in the lounge at The Greenwich Hotel in Tribeca, which is enveloped in the season's festive glow. Standing in the center of the room is a tree trimmed in white lights and gold ornaments. Above it is a faux cobalt sky dotted with tiny stars. The toasty space is a welcome refuge on this cold, dreary December afternoon.

Last night, Olivia attended the New York City screening of her movie, *Office Christmas Party* (in theaters December 9th). From directors Will Speck and Josh Gordon (*The Switch*), the comedy features an ensemble cast that includes Jason Bateman and Jennifer Aniston. I caught an early screening of the film a few days ago, and it was hilarious. In the film, Olivia plays Tracey Hughes, a genius engineer whose company Zenotek needs to land a big client to save them from being shut down by CEO Carol Vanstone (played by Jennifer). "It's an R-rated comedy, which means the directors were given the go-ahead to do whatever they wanted. We have to throw an epic Christmas party to make him want to work with us. And of course, things go crazy." The quirky characters' escapades have you laughing throughout the movie – and cringing at times. There's romance, comedy, adventure, thrills – all wrapped up with a big holiday-themed bow. You will leave wishing your company threw ragers like this one. I mean, can we at least get an egg nog ice luge over here, please?

Cast full of brilliant, comedic actors, including *Saturday Night Live*'s Kate McKinnon and Vanessa Bayer, Olivia brings beauty, brains, and humor to her character Tracey. If a superlatives list were created for this cast, what would you be voted Most Likely to...? "Most Likely to feel awkward when people are taking your picture," she says. Really? I give her a skeptical look since I follow her on social media. Um, she looks flawless in all her photos and her witty,

self-deprecating captions are amazing. This thought was prompted by her run-in with the paparazzi earlier today, she tells me. "I don't know how people do it: the ability to take a picture and have people in your face and not always look awkward. It's amazing," she muses. "Most likely to look awkward and feel awkward." She may feel awkward – but look awkward? Sorry, Olivia, but we're going to have to agree to disagree with you on that one. As the cover girl for magazines like *Allure*, *SELF*, *SHAPE* – she has done a masterful job at creating the illusion of being the super-cool and confident actress we'd trade places with in a heartbeat, if she does in fact feel awkward in front of the camera. (And to set the record straight, she surprisingly was never a model as her Wikipedia bio incorrectly states.) "When I'm doing photo shoots, I'm not being a character, I'm being myself... So it just adds another layer of feeling awkward in front of the camera. It's easier to fall into a character than it is to be yourself sometimes," she explains. The camera loves her, as seen on these pages, on TV, and in the films she has held her own in alongside Hollywood heavyweights like Johnny Depp (*Mortdecai*), Robert Downey Jr., and Gwyneth Paltrow (*Iron Man 2*).

From the list of impressive actors you've worked with, who is your: *Ohmygod, this is insane to be working with...?* "It's Jennifer Aniston... Watching people, you get swept up. *I love this actor...* and then you meet people and there is a disappointment. That's why people say, never meet your heroes. And you start to get a guard up 'cause you realize there's more of an act. What you really want is for people to be real... Jennifer Aniston is one of the best people I have ever met." Olivia openly praises Jennifer's authenticity and protectiveness in a couple of brief anecdotes. "She'll talk about her experiences and not in a way that's like, *Oh, everything is great...* She'll tell you about the things that are crappy... 'cause everybody has to have things that suck and she has no problem talking about that... She is really nice and she can still be a boss and be really cool... It's like she really hasn't lost herself. It's inspiring just to see somebody that has gotten to this point and you genuinely like," she says about the down-to-earth actress.

In explaining why she is so taken with Jennifer, it reminds me of the adage, "The sweet is never as sweet without the sour," –especially when she offers her musings on those who occupy the opposite end of the spectrum. "I find that a lot of people kinda live in their own bubble and don't

know how to really communicate with people or even see people standing in front of them. No matter how rich or famous or successful or powerful somebody is, I exist just as much as you exist. Treat people like people.”

We could all benefit from taking a page from these women’s books, especially Olivia’s. As beautiful on the inside as she is on the outside, the generous actress has been known to gift much more than is expected: she helped her sister through law school, bought her mom a house, and has purchased a couple of other big-ticket gifts for loved ones in the past. “I try to get really good gifts for people,” she replies when I mention what an excellent gift-giver she is. What’s the most extravagant gift someone has given you? “My boyfriend [Aaron Rodgers, Green Bay Packers quarterback] gives me the most amazing gifts and really amazing jewelry. He’ll find vintage pieces and he knows I love one-of-a-kind pieces or something that you can’t really find. The very, very first real gift he got me is still one of my favorites. He got me this emerald ring from Fred Leighton years ago,” she says wistfully.

As for their holiday traditions, those are being developed. “I don’t have traditions.” She pauses to think about it. “I guess we’re starting to make them. Just be at home with my boyfriend and our dogs.” (Olivia lives in Los Angeles, California and Green Bay, Wisconsin.) Olivia recently shot a cute Xfinity ad, where she tackles the holidays—cooking the turkey, watching movies—with her dogs, Frankie and Chance Rodgers. Life does imitate art here, she does cook and loves baking, particularly cakes and breads. And this season, she is set on mastering cookies. “I actually realized I’ve never baked cookies. Cookies are a completely different breed.” She found this out when she randomly decided to whip up some holiday cookies. “The physics of a cookie was very difficult for me. I tried two sugars, gingerbread, an eggnog cookie, and a peanut butter cookie. They all—I bombed,” she says of the ambitious two-day attempt. “They weren’t good, so I went to holiday cupcakes. But I’m going to master the cookie.”

The waitress comes over and Olivia orders a Coke, essentially to wake herself up. Once the waitress disappears, she contemplates ordering French fries. “I always want French fries, but then I’m thinking about this dress I have to wear and there’s a part of me that’s like, ahhh,” she sighs. Do you really have to watch what you eat? “I yo-yo a lot. I can lose weight

quickly, but I can put it on quickly. I’m not very tall. I’m 5’4 ½. When people are really tall, there are more places for the weight to go on their body... Last year, I lost a lot of weight when I was doing *X-Men* and I didn’t realize, and I was just eating healthy.” She attributes the 12-pound weight loss to the martial arts and sword training she did for her role as Psylocke. “It’s such a difference when you’re doing the best things for your body and eating the best things. But I just think French fries are good for your soul.” She laughs. An avid researcher, Olivia is constantly searching for ways to keep her body healthy and youthful. “French fries are not on that list,” she says with a smile. However, they are at the top of her list when it comes to late night cravings, along with Rocky Road ice cream and chips. “My boyfriend has a sweet tooth. I have a salty. Sweets you can only go so far with it. You can fix it with a cookie. But with salty, it’s usually like pasta or French fries — it’s never just one thing.”

As we chat, I notice that she is uncharacteristically (considering what I’ve seen of her in the past) reserved and maybe a little careful with how she answers. Past interviews show you a little more... uncensored. “Yeah.” Has that changed a little bit? “Yes,” She laughs. “It’s funny, I was thinking about that the other day. It’s changed in a way that even then I had realized. Like, oh, when you say something—something comes off different in print, like sarcasm comes off different.” She found that some journalists were furnishing her with opinions that weren’t her own or they were taking her answers out of context in order to use them as attention-grabbing headlines. Because of her past experiences with the press she’s more cognizant of who she sits down with for interviews. “People are allowed to ask what they want, but I’m also allowed to not do certain interviews, so then I just don’t... But I’ve pulled back in a way that I’ll think a little bit more about if I’m going to say something crass or inappropriate,” says Olivia, who shares that she used to curse all the time. Her perspective changed after she watched an interview of herself on the red carpet where “every other word was f-this and f-ing this and f-ing that.” On *The Daily Show* at the time, she asked Jon Stewart whether it came off badly. “He was like, ‘You know what? For some people, it could distract, then they only really hear that.’ I’m learning as I go, like what things are distracting from what I’m really trying to say. My intention is never to put people off.” Now, before she tells a joke, she quickly decides if it’s one that can be said in public or should be reserved for friends.

What do you think fans would be surprised to find out about you?

“People always seem surprised when I say how uncomfortable I do feel being in this business or having my picture taken. That I do still feel like I picked up a lottery ticket on the ground and kinda snuck in. I feel like I’m still watching as a fan and seeing how things work. I still can’t believe I’m doing this. Every day, I just can’t believe it.”





What would you say
is your best quality?

“If you would ask anybody who knows me or any one of my friends, everybody would say I’m fiercely loyal. That’s something that I’m very proud of and something that I value in other friends as well.”

Have you had any regrets with anything that has come out or that you've said? "Yeah, for sure. I can't think of them, but I just know." She thinks about it for a moment. "I regret not being smarter about knowing that somebody will twist my words, even if it's unintentional... I try to be smarter about those things." When she's explaining this to me she adds that she has no idea how I'll write this or what the pull quotes will be. And then it finally clicks. Perhaps *this* is why I felt that intangible fragile, guarded vibe from her off the bat. In sitting down with me for this interview, she is entrusting me with her story. She has no idea how I intend to spin it, especially when you take into account her past experiences with the press, and can only hope that what I write is an accurate depiction of her. Like she mentioned earlier about Jennifer Aniston, it's refreshing to hear about the not-so-perfect experiences as it essentially make stars seem more human, more relatable and this makes Olivia even more alluring.

There was a time when Olivia was a journalist, before she became an actress. While attending the University of Oklahoma, she majored in journalism and wrote for the sports department at her college newspaper and for a local sports magazine. There weren't any women covering sports then, so this was her in, even though she knew nothing about sports. "You just figure it out and you learn it, like everything else." This led to an internship at FOX Sports in California, where she did some courtside reporting on women's college basketball. "After that I got a commercial and I was able to keep doing that." This life experience would give her something to pull from when she stepped into the role of reporter Sloan Sabbith on HBO's Emmy Award-winning series *The Newsroom*. "Working with Aaron Sorkin and being able to have the opportunity to play a character like that" are why this is her favorite role to-date. "I have such a love and respect for journalism that I was able to bring that love to the role." If you could pick anyone's brain as a journalist now, who would you choose? "I'd love to interview Edward Snowden. I just find it fascinating, everything he knows, and what he plans to do with his life now. Is he going to live in limbo for the rest of his life? I think there's so much more to know and understand."

The conversation turns to being in the spotlight. She talks about how different makeup artists can make her look drastically different from one week

to the next and then shows me a split photo on her phone as an example. We agree that the look on the right is more appealing and fresher. She pauses to ask me what I am. Like her, I'm half white and half Asian. "I feel like people really don't get it, 'cause I'm Asian and white so I have Asian bone structure and more white features at times," she remarks. This segues into her thoughts on being on the red carpet in instances when the dress may be tighter since the last fitting because your weight fluctuates and when you took a chance with the vision of a new hairstylist. "You're standing there and you're like, 'Oh, well, hold on,'" she says the last part in a soft voice that indicates that she's uncomfortable. "They throw out these women to get dressed up and then stand underneath the horrible lighting and now let the world judge you. And that is just, that portion of being in the public eye that I think is—that people are not really understanding, at least how it is for me. And I wonder, I think so many people have it so much easier, 'cause I've asked. I think it's because being multi-ethnic is really difficult and there aren't a lot of Asian women in Hollywood right now."

Do you think that's helped you in getting roles because you look exotic? "No, I don't think that. If you look like a minority then there will be times that they cast a minority. But when they want a white person, per se, they'll go with a white person. *But*, if you're a white person, they'll give you a minority role as well... I feel that there are opportunities that people get in the beginning based on different things, but at a certain point talent and opportunity kick in... I'm at a place where I really can't complain... I don't think that me being Asian stops me from getting roles at this place. I know in the beginning it does. I'm lucky I've moved passed that but I'm still in a place where I still have to bust my ass and fight for roles and I'm happy to do that and keep going.... I was very excited about all the diversity in this movie (*Office Christmas Party*) and that people weren't cast because of their ethnicity.... There's just a collection of amazing actors. And I think that's what helps push the envelope, when there are people of different ethnicities and they're not playing their ethnicity." **ML**

Don't miss Office Christmas Party in theaters now and keep up with Olivia on Instagram: @OliviaMunn and Twitter: @OliviaMunn.