

Selena Meza  
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins  
Interviewer

The Transgender Oral History Project  
Tretter Collection in GLBT Studies  
University of Minnesota

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The Transgender Oral History Project of the Upper Midwest will empower individuals to tell their story, while providing students, historians, and the public with a more rich foundation of primary source material about the transgender community. The project is part of the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota. The archive provides a record of GLBT thought, knowledge and culture for current and future generations and is available to students, researchers and members of the public.

The Transgender Oral History Project will collect up to 400 hours of oral histories involving 200 to 300 individuals over the next three years. Major efforts will be the recruitment of individuals of all ages and experiences, and documenting the work of The Program in Human Sexuality. This project will be led by

Andrea Jenkins, poet, writer, and trans-activist. Andrea brings years of experience working in government, non-profits and LGBT organizations. If you are interested in being involved in this exciting project, please contact Andrea.

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1     Andrea Jenkins             -AJ  
2     Selena Meza             -SM  
3

4     AJ:     So, hello. My name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian for the Transgender Oral  
5             History Project at the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota Libraries. Today is  
6             November 19, 2017. We are in Minneapolis on a Sunday afternoon and I am here today with  
7             Selena Meza.

8     SM:     Meza.

9     AJ:     Meza – all righty. So, that we have no misunderstandings, Selena, can you state your name,  
10            spell your name, state your gender as you claim it today and your gender assigned at birth and  
11            your pronouns.

12    SM:     OK. So, I am Selena Meza and you spell my name S-e-l-e-n-a and then my last name is M-e-z-a. I  
13            identify as trans femme as well and my pronouns are her/she and they/them. Yeah.

14    AJ:     Yeah.

15    SM:     Did I miss something?

16    AJ:     No, I think you covered it all, so thank you very much. So, Selena, just to kind of get your  
17            memory bank flowing, tell me about the first thing you remember in life. What's the first thing  
18            you remember? Maybe it's about your trans identity, but it does not have to be. If it is, it's cool;  
19            if it's not, it's cool.

20    SM:     I feel like I have a memory, I don't know if it's a dream or a memory, but I remember when I was  
21            a two-year-old, being on a bed and there's a picture . . . because there's a picture of me being  
22            on the blanket, a pink floral blanket, with my brother, and I just remember that moment. I don't  
23            know how I remember that still, but that picture just triggered that memory and I remember it.  
24            I don't know if it's a dream or a memory because sometimes you can't really . . . I don't know if  
25            it's possible to remember that long.

26    AJ:     I don't know, some people say it's possible; others say it's not. Memory is an unpredictable kind  
27            of thing, right? We don't really fully understand it. Where did you grow up?

28    SM:     So, I'm from Chicago originally and I moved to Wisconsin when I was around five years old, so  
29            pretty much grew up most of my life and my adulthood in Wisconsin.

30    AJ:     Is that right?

31    SM:     Central Wisconsin, very not diverse.

32    AJ:     In rural?

33    SM:     Yeah, the country.

34    AJ:     Were your parents farm workers?

- 1 SM: They migrated from Mexico and they found better jobs in Wisconsin because we have so many  
2 siblings, so they needed an area where they can also provide for all of their kids and have the  
3 land to live off of. So, they're farmers pretty much and they worked cranberry marshes, like  
4 doing the marshes over there, and dairy farms. There's just a lot of agriculture in the country  
5 that a lot of migrant workers come. Usually they move on to the next one, but my parents  
6 ended up staying in Wisconsin. They found their own little community. It's really random, but  
7 there's a Latin community there, with the migrant workers, and it's just really low key in the  
8 middle of nowhere.
- 9 AJ: Really?
- 10 SM: Yeah, there was even a Mexican restaurant . . . or, market, in someone's garage because there  
11 was . . . to get groceries that are from the Mexican market.
- 12 AJ: Culturally specific.
- 13 SM: It would be like an hour – yeah.
- 14 AJ: Wow. So, what was the name of the town?
- 15 SM: Nekoosa, Wisconsin.
- 16 AJ: Nekoosa. How do you spell that?
- 17 SM: N-e-k-o-o-s-a. And it's a really interesting town because it's actually . . . in Native American it  
18 means, "swift water," and it's a tribe that's Ho-Chunk Nation that has their reservation there.
- 19 AJ: Yeah.
- 20 SM: So, I grew a lot learning about the Native American culture, or the Ho-Chunk culture, and their  
21 struggle as well. And, how they have their own economy and how they started their own things  
22 as well, which is really cool, because it's in the middle of nowhere and their kind of culture is  
23 there still as well. If you find it, you'll find it.
- 24 AJ: Really? Wow. Yeah, they have casinos, right?
- 25 SM: Yeah, they have five different casinos – like Wisconsin Dells, Madison, and Nekoosa, Black River  
26 Falls . . . yeah, that's how they kind of started their economy through Indian gaming.
- 27 AJ: Sure. You identify as Mexican-American?
- 28 SM: Yes, Mexican-American.
- 29 AJ: How many siblings?
- 30 SM: I have five brothers and six sisters.
- 31 AJ: Oh, boy – yeah, that's a pretty big family.
- 32 SM: Yeah, very traditional . . . I grew up very traditional Mexican-American family. Catholic, my  
33 parents were. Yeah, just having a lot of siblings. Usually . . . my parents never said it, but when I  
34 was reading through Mexican-American culture, a lot of them did have a lot of kids because they

- 1 can help with the land and that's pretty much what my parents have been doing. They raised us  
2 to help them garden and harvest and live off our land.
- 3 AJ: Yeah. So, do you still have a lot of brothers and sisters . . . is your family still there in Nekoosa?
- 4 SM: No, my family . . . some of them are in Chicago, Madison, and my parents are the ones that are  
5 in Nekoosa, and another sibling. So, most of them are in Chicago and Madison.
- 6 AJ: Wow. So, what was it like growing up in the middle of Wisconsin as a Mexican-American? I  
7 mean, were you bullied in school? Was your gender identity a challenge for you at that time?
- 8 SM: Yeah, I think growing up in a small town you don't really have many resources. My school didn't  
9 really educate you on other cultures.
- 10 AJ: Right.
- 11 SM: It was mostly based on the regular white American history that we learn. We didn't have any  
12 LGBTQ clubs. I didn't know what LGBTQ meant until I came to college and I learned about it.  
13 But yeah, a lot of the kids would be kind of . . . they would single you out because you were the  
14 only other brown kid in school. Back in the day, I was kind of afraid to identify as anything else,  
15 so I would try to blend in . . . just blending in is kind of what helped me get out of there. So, I  
16 blended in until I could leave the town and then once I came to college is when I started taking  
17 Women and Gender Studies class and started learning more about sexuality and gender identity.  
18 That's when I . . . I knew I was trans, but I didn't confirm it until I knew more about the history of  
19 trans.
- 20 AJ: So, in school and everything, you really tried to conform and . . .?
- 21 SM: Yeah, I think that's what kind of . . . kind of made my days go by easier.
- 22 AJ: Yeah, it was safety, take care of yourself.
- 23 SM: Yeah, I was just conforming and just quiet, kind of, until I could reach when I wanted to leave.
- 24 AJ: Where did you go to college?
- 25 SM: So, I went to college at the University of Wisconsin-Stout, which is an hour and a half from  
26 Minneapolis. It's close to Eau Claire. They had a really awesome art program there that I was  
27 accepted to.
- 28 AJ: You're an artist?
- 29 SM: I was originally an artist and then I switched majors during that time in college. So, I went to  
30 school for industrial design, which is more designing products like a water bottle. I originally  
31 wanted to design cars.
- 32 AJ: Wow.
- 33 SM: I just always liked sketching cars and that's all I would sketch, so that's what I was hoping I could  
34 do. During college, I just ended up taking a pair of classes to learn how to sew and I really ended  
35 up liking how to develop a pattern and then cutting the fabric and making everything on your

- 1 own. Industrial design was kind of concept work, it wasn't really doing it – you were just  
2 sketching and hopefully . . .
- 3 AJ: Someday it may materialize but there's no full pathway to it.
- 4 SM: Yeah, and with fashion you can definitely design it, cut it, sew it and then fit it right and that's  
5 what I liked about it is that I can have a product made entirely by myself.
- 6 AJ: Wow. And have it.
- 7 SM: Yeah, and have it and have it be functional as well.
- 8 AJ: Wow, that's pretty incredible. Is that the work you do now?
- 9 SM: Yeah, right now I'm doing more of the illustrations for the company, so I do fashion illustrations  
10 that get sent to China for vendors when they're making . . . like a basic t-shirt, they need  
11 illustrated with details with the stitching and the hem that it's going to have and all of that. And  
12 it's more technical design, so it's working with the vendors and having good communication  
13 with them and fitting clothes too.
- 14 AJ: So, are you out as trans at your work?
- 15 SM: Yeah, at work . . . yeah, it's a small company and I started working there as a temp in August.  
16 That was pretty much when I decided to change my name because I was still . . . I was still on the  
17 edge of, "Do I really want to change my name?" It's just something . . . for me, I grew up  
18 knowing this name, I talked to my mom about it and she just thought it was very important.  
19 But, for me, it was just something that was still kind of . . . it wasn't for me. So, I had to change  
20 my name and I'm still trying to work with my work to see if we can . . . I'm just a freelance  
21 designer there so I'm not on their team, so I just would like when they hire me on their team, I  
22 can talk to them about my current name. So, I'm out. I dress exactly how I'm dressed now at  
23 work and they accept it. They haven't questioned it at all, it's been really good.
- 24 AJ: Do they refer to you as she or . . .?
- 25 SM: Yeah, they refer to me as she. I work with all girls too. It's a really young group too, it's like 10  
26 other girls that I work with. It's a small company.
- 27 AJ: So, they're all accepting.
- 28 SM: Yeah, accepting . . . liberal, I think. It seems like it.
- 29 AJ: So, you just came out?
- 30 SM: Yeah, I guess it would be just coming out, but I've been kind of femme throughout my entire life  
31 but just having a new name is kind of what confirms my femininity.
- 32 AJ: So, what was it like in college? You said you got to college and you started to take Women and  
33 Gender Studies courses and explore gender identity a little bit more. Were people supportive,  
34 accepting? I mean, Stout is a pretty small Midwestern school.

- 1 SM: Yeah, that's very true. Stout is a very small school, but it's kind of a weird school because many  
2 students are from Minneapolis, Minnesota area so it's kind of a clash with country folks with city  
3 folks.
- 4 AJ: Is that right? OK.
- 5 SM: Yeah, so it's fairly interesting the kids that go there, but it's not as diverse as you would think it  
6 would be. It's not a diverse school at all. So, it was still pretty hard going there and just seeing  
7 people that you can't really relate to . . . yeah, you can't really relate to them so it was just . . .  
8 for me, what I was focusing on was the school. Every day of the week I would just focus on  
9 schoolwork and not go out, like not have that college experience. So, I was still kind of isolated  
10 from actually exploring more of trans identity. During school, like the fashion industry at our  
11 school they kind of prepared us really hard for that, so a lot of the assignments that we had we  
12 would do all-nighters trying to sew and design at the same time and have our portfolio ready for  
13 your professors.
- 14 AJ: So, it sounds like Project Runway, but every day.
- 15 SM: Yeah, that's how they made . . . the school, they kind of did too much work on their students,  
16 because now that I have a job it's not like that at all. It's not . . .
- 17 AJ: Design on demand and . . .
- 18 SM: They could have let us enjoy more of our time instead of having these really critical deadlines for  
19 projects to be due. But yeah, I started doing Women and Gender Studies class when I was  
20 changing my major, which was my sophomore year in college. I was just exploring different  
21 majors and seeing what I liked. I ended up taking Women and Gender Studies classes and  
22 Lifespan to Sexuality because that's just what interested me and I had credits that I had to fulfill.  
23 I think that's what really changed me was being open to the idea of just that you can evolve  
24 throughout your time and just reading bell hooks also was really awesome.
- 25 AJ: Yeah, how so?
- 26 SM: I didn't ever hear about bell hooks until I went to college and *Ain't I a Woman* was one of her  
27 books that was just like a lot of really awesome things that . . .
- 28 AJ: *Ain't I a Woman?*
- 29 SM: Yeah, that one is a really good one. And after that I just started obsessing over bell hooks.
- 30 AJ: Oh, wow - yeah, she's pretty obsessive worthy.
- 31 SM: Yeah, she's really radical and I love how she's really a critical thinker as well. So, I think those  
32 were kind of my escapes during college as well – just looking at talks that she would have at  
33 colleges.
- 34 AJ: So, you became a feminist.
- 35 SM: Yeah, I guess.

- 1 AJ: I mean bell hooks is pretty much a Black feminist as it comes. Yeah. So, when is the first time  
2 you ever met a trans person?
- 3 SM: The first time I ever met a trans person . . . the first time I actually ever seen a trans person was  
4 probably when I was like 10 years old and I was . . . my brother would do a paper route, so he  
5 would do a newspaper route. I remember there was a trans person that was also doing the  
6 paper route. He would kind of make fun of her, because back in the day that was just something  
7 that you never saw.
- 8 AJ: Right.
- 9 SM: It was bizarre and something that you would pick at and that's what my brother was doing. I  
10 just remember . . . I remember that person because they would be there all the time and dress  
11 fabulous just doing the paper route.
- 12 AJ: Oh, wow. That's awesome.
- 13 SM: Yeah.
- 14 AJ: Did you ever meet them?
- 15 SM: No, I didn't get to meet them, I just observed. But, actually meeting a trans person was  
16 probably in college.
- 17 AJ: Really?
- 18 SM: Yeah, and not very many trans people at my college either. But, it was so funny because my  
19 freshman year, me and my roommate, we were both identifying, at the time, as just queer and I  
20 really didn't know exactly what LGBTQ meant until my roommate was kind of telling me about  
21 it.
- 22 AJ: Right.
- 23 SM: That's when I started joining the LGBTQ groups.
- 24 AJ: OK, so you did get involved in those groups.
- 25 SM: Yeah, they have a really good program there, the Qube, is where you can just go and connect  
26 with other LGBTQ students. That's when I kind of started exploring more about sexual identity  
27 as well.
- 28 AJ: And you called it the Cube, C-u-b-e.
- 29 SM: It's the Qube, Q-u-b-e.
- 30 AJ: Q-u-b-e. OK.
- 31 SM: Yes, the Qube.
- 32 AJ: I'm glad I asked. Wow. So, how do you identify around your sexual orientation?



- 1 SM: I see myself as just open-minded. Sometimes I find females, or a feminine person, very  
2 attractive and I'm open to that. I think that's another thing, just being open-minded towards  
3 everything.
- 4 AJ: So, you date guys as well then?
- 5 SM: Yes, I date guys as well.
- 6 AJ: Or, male-identified people.
- 7 SM: Yes. Anyone that interests me I would date, I think.
- 8 AJ: Sure. So, to the extent that you feel comfortable, Selena, have you undergone any medical  
9 interventions in your gender journey? Or, do you plan to?
- 10 SM: Right now, I'm still in process. I haven't actually sought any medical or treatments. I've been  
11 trying to, kind of – after college I wanted to but just with health care, it's kind of hard to even try  
12 to think you could afford to do that kind of work. So, because right now as a freelance designer,  
13 I don't get the benefits like a health care provider, work doesn't provide that for me.
- 14 AJ: Right.
- 15 SM: So, now what I do is just I drink a lot of soy milk.
- 16 AJ: Hey, yeah.
- 17 SM: I was thinking about this too because I'm not sure in the future what I want to do with my body.  
18 I think it's something that changes as you grow as well.
- 19 AJ: Yeah, I would agree.
- 20 SM: I think right now I'm content with what I have and I'm happy. I do think about breasts because  
21 this is something that is just . . . in society, women have breasts and that's what society pictures  
22 a woman to be. That's another thing that I struggle with is like the image of womanhood and  
23 what does it mean and do you have to conform to that image.
- 24 AJ: Right. What do you think?
- 25 SM: I don't think you do. I think that a person that is going to find you attractive is going to find you  
26 attractive and they should be open to what you have to provide for them.
- 27 AJ: Yeah, the woman that you are, not the perception of what a woman is.
- 28 SM: Yes, definitely. Yes, so we all are different.
- 29 AJ: Wow. Well, thank you for your honesty. There are clinics that are sliding scale to free that help  
30 people in their transition too. So, those are some options.
- 31 SM: I've been looking at Planned Parenthood. It still says that it's a cost there, but I'm not sure of  
32 their expense, how expensive it is. I just have to actually get in there and do an appointment.
- 33 AJ: Well, I know that they're starting up a brand new trans-specific program and so there might be  
34 some opportunities.

- 1 SM: Yeah.
- 2 AJ: So, have you found that since you've been sort of presenting and identifying more feminine,  
3 femme, have you experienced any challenges like finding employment, accessing various  
4 institutions like the medical industry or police interactions and that kind of stuff?
- 5 SM: Definitely identifying more as femme, you do get more issues than otherwise like trying to find  
6 employment. When I first moved to Minneapolis, I didn't have employment so I was staying  
7 with one of my roommates at the time and she kind of convinced me to move here. As I was  
8 doing interviews, I would dress more kind of unisex – pull my hair back, no make-up, and just  
9 trying to get a job. And that kind of still didn't work. I had this job that I totally was qualified for  
10 and I really wanted it as well, and I had connections in the company, but they ended up picking  
11 someone over me because of experience. And then I looked at LinkedIn at the person that they  
12 hired and they did not have any experience, but that's what they told me over the phone. I  
13 think that was another thing, that people are not really comfortable, still, with being . . . a  
14 femme-spirit being in their presence in the Midwest. I don't know, I still . . . when I walk into a  
15 white room, I still feel like everyone is looking at me and they're trying to figure out . . .
- 16 AJ: It's because you're beautiful.
- 17 SM: I think, also, because they're trying to figure out what my anatomy is as well. Yeah, it's  
18 something that's interesting and that I notice more too. Also, when I put make-up on and stuff,  
19 I do get more attention from guys and it's not attention that I want from them. When I end up  
20 talking with them and telling them that I'm trans, they just . . . they do not know how to react.
- 21 AJ: Really.
- 22 SM: Sometimes, it's kind of rude as well, the interactions with them. When I'm out and they want to  
23 take me home with them and I'm like, "I'm not sure if you're going to be interested in this or  
24 not." That's how I ended up talking to one guy and he kind of came out with a backhanded  
25 comment and was like, "Oh, I wish I could have a baby with you." And I was just like, "That's  
26 really insensitive to say to a trans person – we can't have kids like that."
- 27 AJ: Right, wow. This was after you guys . . . had you guys been dating?
- 28 SM: We had just met that one night. No, I think because I'm trans, I think that he totally thought  
29 that respect . . . like he didn't have to respect what he was saying to me or think about what he  
30 was saying. Because after that, after I told him I was trans, he changed . . . his respect kind of  
31 changed.
- 32 AJ: Went down?
- 33 SM: Yeah, it went down. Because, when they're trying to get your attention they're like . . .
- 34 AJ: Right, like being all extra nice and gentlemanly.
- 35 SM: And then when you tell them your honesty, then that's not what they want to hear, I guess.
- 36 AJ: Yeah. So, how do you approach that when you're meeting someone? Are you open right  
37 upfront?

- 1 SM: Yeah, usually . . . unless I'm trying to hook-up, then yes, I'm open about it. But if I'm not trying  
2 to hook-up, I don't have to tell you anything.
- 3 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 4 SM: I'm a person.
- 5 AJ: Yeah.
- 6 SM: So, yeah, recently I just started dating this guy that's kind of really been respectful and really  
7 open to me being trans.
- 8 AJ: Sure.
- 9 SM: And, just started to talk about it with him and kind of teaching him about what trans means  
10 instead of what they think it means or what they learn from the porn industry what trans  
11 means.
- 12 AJ: Yeah, which is problematic.
- 13 SM: Yeah, it's super problematic.
- 14 AJ: Yeah.
- 15 SM: The terms that they use as well is not . . .
- 16 AJ: Like what kind of terms?
- 17 SM: They use shemale or tranny. "I've never been with a tranny before." "OK, that's not how I  
18 identify."
- 19 AJ: "And, you won't be with one now because I'm not a tranny." Oh, man.
- 20 SM: I think it's just those type of things that they just learn from . . . vulgar words like that from the  
21 internet, I guess, and not being educated in school about different gender identities, I guess.
- 22 AJ: Yeah, well, it's still new information for a lot of people.
- 23 SM: Yeah, it's very new information still.
- 24 AJ: Even though trans people have been on the planet in every culture, including Mexican culture.
- 25 SM: Yeah, I've learned about that too.
- 26 AJ: For thousands and thousands of years, since the beginning of humanity. So, you were involved  
27 in queer organizations in college?
- 28 SM: At Stout, yes.
- 29 AJ: When did you graduate?
- 30 SM: So, I graduated in December 2016.
- 31 AJ: OK, so less than a year.

- 1 SM: Yeah, it's less than a year.
- 2 AJ: And you're working in your industry, that's pretty cool.
- 3 SM: Yeah, I'm really happy. I just had a really good connection to that company and that's how I . . . I  
4 was fortunate enough to have that connection, otherwise I think you can't get a job if you don't  
5 have a connection.
- 6 AJ: It's . . . I mean, the best way to get a job is to know somebody – yeah. You can get jobs other  
7 ways, but it's tough – it takes time. Even when you know somebody it takes time. Because still,  
8 at this point, like you said, you're like a consultant.
- 9 SM: Yeah, I do freelance . . .
- 10 AJ: Contract.
- 11 SM: Contract, yeah. They're kind of telling me that I'm going to be on full-time and stuff, but I think  
12 it's on their terms so I'm still looking for a different position where I have a company that wants  
13 me there and puts me on their full-time on their terms right away. I've been there since August  
14 and they've been telling me that, "Oh, yeah, we're going to put you on full-time." And I'm like,  
15 "Yeah, when is that going to happen?"
- 16 AJ: It seems like if you're doing design work for Target, they might be interested. They are probably  
17 one of the best employers for trans people, at least in this area anyway.
- 18 SM: Yeah, I did see that. They have really awesome positions for design work, but most of the  
19 positions you need experience.
- 20 AJ: Five years of experience.
- 21 SM: Yeah, that's like their minimum, which is crazy. But, I think that starting out now will help me in  
22 the future too.
- 23 AJ: I think sometimes those requirements are just to kind of keep people from applying, but if they  
24 find somebody talented with one year of experience, they're going to go for it if it's going to be  
25 a good fit.
- 26 SM: Yeah, I definitely would like to work at Target.
- 27 AJ: I would encourage you to apply.
- 28 SM: Thank you. I was also thinking about my future here in Minneapolis, now that I have time during  
29 the nights and weekends, I want to use it just better myself. I was thinking about the U of M  
30 and how they have programs, as well. I would like to learn more . . . I still want to learn more. I  
31 think I would like to apply for a masters at the U of M. I'm not sure exactly what program I want  
32 – like if I want to go into the fashion industry or if I want to learn more about gender identity  
33 and Chicano Studies. I think they have a Chicano Studies there as well.
- 34 AJ: Yeah, they do. I know they do.

- 1 SM: So, I just have . . . I'm still trying to figure out when to apply for that because I know it's a  
2 process to apply for that.
- 3 AJ: So, Selena, if you don't mind me asking, how old are you?
- 4 SM: I'm 25.
- 5 AJ: You're 25. Wow, so young . . . just got out of college, you're just coming out. What is life feeling  
6 like for you right now?
- 7 SM: It's actually really good right now – just coming to a new city, being a new girl. I think that's  
8 what has been really helping me – just being free. I feel really free.
- 9 AJ: Really?
- 10 SM: Yeah.
- 11 AJ: Are you out to your parents?
- 12 SM: Yes, I am. My dad doesn't really care, we don't really have a relationship. But my mom and me  
13 have a really good relationship. I think that's the only reason that I'm able to be out is because  
14 my mom . . . she's just so caring and loving.
- 15 AJ: Really? Are your parents still together?
- 16 SM: Yes, they are.
- 17 AJ: What about your siblings?
- 18 SM: Yes, they all know.
- 19 AJ: They all know.
- 20 SM: Yeah, they're all really cool too.
- 21 AJ: Really? No one has disowned you?
- 22 SM: No, I haven't . . . I've been just so fortunate.
- 23 AJ: And, I don't want that to happen, I'm just asking because you said you were from a traditional  
24 Mexican family, Catholic, 12 kids. There's a lot of machismo in Mexican culture and a lot of  
25 expectations on boys in the family to be these macho men. So, you know, I'm bordering on  
26 stereotyping a little bit, but I think it's somewhat of a reality.
- 27 SM: That's true. That's exactly how my dad is, he's kind of a machista and I think that's what . . . it's  
28 just really hard for him to understand anything with trans identity or even . . . when I first came  
29 out as gay, it was super hard for everybody, and now the second time I came out, it's easier for  
30 my siblings . . . they knew, they already knew because I was already femme.
- 31 AJ: Right.
- 32 SM: I think that my family didn't disown me because they've been through crazier things than this.  
33 Living in Chicago was just way crazier than just having a kid that's identifying as trans. I think my

- 1 brothers are all really cool too because they're just . . . they don't follow the book either, they  
2 do whatever they want.
- 3 AJ: Really, OK.
- 4 SM: I think just having a family that also just cares for each other really helped, we all just really  
5 cared for each other since we were kids. We've all been really connected and learned how to  
6 share with each other. I think that's being part of a big family, just learning how to share and  
7 care for each other.
- 8 AJ: Wow. So, all the brothers, all the sisters, are just super cool. Do you have a lot of nieces and  
9 nephews already?
- 10 SM: Yeah, it's awesome. I have 16 nieces and nephews already.
- 11 AJ: Is that right? Because you're 25, so I would suspect you're pretty low in the family.
- 12 SM: Yeah, I'm the third youngest. I have two younger sisters. I think education helped me help my  
13 family kind of learn . . . or teach them about gender identity and sexuality and how it's not the  
14 same. My brothers thought it was the same thing and . . .
- 15 AJ: You're just gay and gay people like to wear dresses or whatever.
- 16 SM: That's exactly what they thought. I was like, "It's a little bit more complex than that." But, I  
17 think that they're all really . . . they all pretty much knew since I was a kid because they would  
18 catch me dressing up sometimes.
- 19 AJ: Oh, wow – OK. Did they bully you at all?
- 20 SM: Yeah, the first time it was a really traumatic time when I got caught dressing up.
- 21 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 22 SM: I think I was like nine. It was me and my cousin actually and I was dressing him up too. We were  
23 doing each other's make-up. It's so funny because now he's this really masculine boy.
- 24 AJ: Oh, really? He's not trans, right?
- 25 SM: He's not trans. It was just us being kids too.
- 26 AJ: Yeah, it's just a kid thing but then, you know, some people, like you or I, it's real. It is a thing.
- 27 SM: Yeah, and I think that that is part of my . . . another thought, that was my expressing myself at  
28 that time, as a child, being feminine when my parents and everybody was gone.
- 29 AJ: Right.
- 30 SM: And, I had the chance to put my sister's make-up and clothes on. They came back and I was so  
31 surprised, and then they kind of . . . I don't know, I just remember them taking pictures of me  
32 because . . . to like shame me almost. It was my older sister that did that and I remember it was  
33 just more like a shameful thing to do. But, now that I think about it, it was funny for me

- 1           because, at the time, it was just like, “Oh, my God – I was wearing a dress and putting on make-  
2           up and I was nine.”
- 3   AJ:     Yikes – and they caught you. Did they try to beat you up?
- 4   SM:     No, it wasn’t like beating up. It was . . .
- 5   AJ:     Calling you names, picking on you?
- 6   SM:     It was like that. It was still . . . it was still a type of verbal harassment, I guess.
- 7   AJ:     But in school, when you were in grade school, nobody could really . . .?
- 8   SM:     No, I was just trying to blend in with all the kids.
- 9   AJ:     Wow. But they knew you were a Mexican, though, right?
- 10   SM:    Yes, definitely, they knew I was Mexican. Yeah, we would always get into fights and stuff. On  
11           the bus, it was the most dramatic bus rides ever. It was in the middle of the country, so our bus  
12           rides would be like 45 minutes long sometimes.
- 13   AJ:     Right, so you’ve got a long time to be sitting on a bus with these kids.
- 14   SM:    The things that would happen on the bus would be like our bus driver would tell us that we can’t  
15           speak Spanish to all the Mexican kids that would be on the bus and from that . . . it kind of built  
16           to separation between the white kids and the Mexican kids that were there. There would  
17           always be fights on the bus because of it. A lot of the Mexican kids would sit in the back  
18           because we would speak Spanish and the bus driver wouldn’t be able to tell us anything.
- 19   AJ:     Couldn’t hear it, yeah.
- 20   SM:    And that’s why we would be in the back and then just . . . I remember always having spitball  
21           fights and stuff like that, and then just actually having . . . my sister actually got into a physical  
22           fight with this other person that was on the bus, and it was just not good at all. It was always  
23           the Mexicans getting in trouble and never the white kids.
- 24   AJ:     Wow.
- 25   SM:    Yeah, it was never the Mexican kids . . . sometimes Mexicans started it, but it was always us  
26           getting punished for it.
- 27   AJ:     Wow. So, what do you think is the relationship between the gay, the lesbian, the bisexual  
28           community and the trans community?
- 29   SM:    I think that our relationship is just also like being an other, being referred to as an other type of  
30           person. I think that also you can stem from being gay or intersect, I guess, they intersect as well.  
31           If you’re trans and you identify gay, that you’re the same type of feminine person, then you can  
32           be lesbian, I guess. Yeah, I think that they intersect as well. Also, for me, when I first identified  
33           as gay, I still have that history behind me, so I was identified as gay throughout this year and  
34           that’s part of my history. I’m not embarrassed to say that I was gay.
- 35   AJ:     No, I wrote down as your identities: gay, trans, femme, queer.

- 1 SM: Yeah, I think that it intersects for me a lot just because of my history and also education. I didn't  
2 realize I was trans because I always thought I was gay.
- 3 AJ: Right, but it was more than just being gay. Wow. So, you think they should be together?
- 4 SM: I think they can be together, but also . . . they can be together, but they don't have to be. I think  
5 that trans people also face things that gay people don't face. I don't think they would be able to  
6 understand it because they can't experience the trans issues that happen to trans people.
- 7 AJ: Right.
- 8 SM: But, I still think that they're still a family.
- 9 AJ: That's a good way to put it. Yeah. Have you ever worked with or for or volunteered for any  
10 LGBT or trans organizations?
- 11 SM: No, I haven't. I would love to start volunteering my time to be something for the trans  
12 community, or get involved in the trans community. I just never had another trans friend or  
13 anything. The first trans friend I had was Liv when I moved here.
- 14 AJ: Is that right? Liv Mickla . . . ?
- 15 SM: It's with an H . . . Hickley or something like that.
- 16 AJ: OK, Liv – we're sorry we're butchering your name, dear. We love you.
- 17 SM: But she was introduced to me by my roommate and then that's when I was just like, "Oh, my  
18 gosh, finally, another trans person that I can talk to."
- 19 AJ: So, your roommates are all cis?
- 20 SM: Yes, they're all cis. We all went to college together.
- 21 AJ: Are they queer? Straight identified?
- 22 SM: I think they're queer. Yeah, one of them identifies as queer and then the other ones are just  
23 straight.
- 24 AJ: But, they're cool with you?
- 25 SM: They're super cool – yeah, they're really cool. We all went to college together and they've seen  
26 me transition throughout the years.
- 27 AJ: I'm just going to go out on a limb and say they're probably all white.
- 28 SM: No, actually . . . most of them are white . . . I have this one roommate, she's so cool. She's from  
29 China and she was an international student at Stout and then we just kept the relationship  
30 together for the longest time. She went back to China for a bit because her visa was expired and  
31 she just renewed it. But, I'm happy that I have one that's not white at least. Sometimes we do  
32 talk about how it is to live with . . . they're pretty much privileged white girls that I live with. It's  
33 kind of crazy to see how privileged it is for them – or how sometimes they don't have to struggle



- 1 at all about money or anything else. They complain and I'm like, "Why are you complaining?  
2 Why don't you appreciate what you have?"
- 3 AJ: Right. You know, people . . . when you have things, then you want more. So, it's kind of a  
4 human condition but . . .
- 5 SM: But yeah, sometimes living with the white girls, like I do have to correct them sometimes when  
6 it comes to feminism and they think about feminist . . . for example, one of them is a diehard  
7 Hillary Clinton fan and then I was talking to them about why I find that problematic, for me, to  
8 be a diehard Hillary Clinton fan because of what she did in the past of . . . just the super predator  
9 things, calling Black people super predators, and also just trying to be cool with the cool people  
10 to get the votes.
- 11 AJ: Yeah.
- 12 SM: And saying that she carries hot sauce in her bag.
- 13 AJ: I knew you were going to say that.
- 14 SM: It's just like . . . I just could see the fakeness from Hillary that my roommates couldn't.
- 15 AJ: Right.
- 16 SM: And then having to explain to them why I found that problematic for me. I think that's another  
17 thing – they're still white feminists and when I listen to podcasts, I listen to Janet Mock or bell  
18 hooks, and then that helps me teach them, also, about what they're not seeing.
- 19 AJ: Sure. Wow. So, what do you think the future of gender is, in your mind, Selena?
- 20 SM: I think the future of gender . . . I feel like right now it's starting to be more accepting and I think  
21 in the future kids are really not going to care about gender identity, putting labels to it I guess. I  
22 think that's what the future is starting to be, less labels and more expression.
- 23 AJ: Yeah.
- 24 SM: Kids now are really cool. My nephews and nieces, when they talk to me about being trans, they  
25 just are really open-minded to it already and I like that about the youth right now, that they  
26 really seem to be open-minded to it.
- 27 AJ: Sure.
- 28 SM: I think that they're not going to have as hard of a time when it comes to the future of gender  
29 identity and hopefully that's right, where they can just be themselves and not have to put a  
30 label to it. There's where I kind of struggle with labels is in the trans community where we have  
31 to label a lot of things. That's also kind of conforming to cis normatives and that's something  
32 that I struggle with because I don't want to conform to them, to be cis normatives, the  
33 construct, because being trans you're not going to be accepted in the society that was made for  
34 cis people – white cis people. So, I think that's something that I was struggling with at first – just  
35 like, I don't want to conform to just being this female, what you think a female is.
- 36 AJ: Wow, no – that's kind of the future of gender, I think.

- 1 SM: I think so too.
- 2 AJ: Personal question.
- 3 SM: Yes.
- 4 AJ: Which restroom do you use?
- 5 SM: Which restroom?
- 6 AJ: Yeah.
- 7 SM: I use the female restroom.
- 8 AJ: The woman's restroom.
- 9 SM: Yeah.
- 10 AJ: Have you ever had any problems at all?
- 11 SM: No, I haven't had any problems in the female restroom, but I do notice, like at work, when I go  
12 to the restroom, the girls wait for me to leave the restroom and then they go use the restroom.
- 13 AJ: Oh, really.
- 14 SM: I notice that, but they don't think I do. I don't know why they would be afraid to go in the  
15 restroom with me, but that's what I've noticed. Yeah, I use the female restroom. When I was  
16 identifying as just gay but a lot of people thought I was a girl still, I went to the boy's because  
17 that's what I used to do, and then I got corrected one time. They were like, "The woman's  
18 restroom is that way." And then I was like - oh, wow, I really didn't realize that I was being  
19 perceived as female at that time.
- 20 AJ: Wow.
- 21 SM: So, that's kind of when I stopped using the boy's restroom. If people were seeing me as more  
22 feminine then I probably should be . . . I don't know, I just didn't want to have those  
23 interactions.
- 24 AJ: Yeah, in the men's bathroom.
- 25 SM: Now that I know what happens to trans people in the men's restroom, I try to avoid men's  
26 restrooms.
- 27 AJ: Yeah, absolutely.
- 28 SM: Wow.
- 29 AJ: Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you want to be sure you talk about? You  
30 mentioned that you're in a relationship and that's going good.
- 31 SM: Not in a relationship, just dating a guy.
- 32 AJ: I'm sorry.

- 1 SM: It's OK. It's going good though.
- 2 AJ: And that's been since you've moved here.
- 3 SM: Yeah, since I moved here.
- 4 AJ: So, you moved here in September.
- 5 SM: It was in July.
- 6 AJ: July. But, you found a job, you got a place to stay, you're dating. That's pretty cool.
- 7 SM: Yeah, it's really interesting because dating and being trans, you do have to kind of think about  
8 the guy that you're going to date and how open they may be and . . . I don't know, it's just  
9 something I didn't . . . during college I never dated or during high school I never dated until now,  
10 as being an adult.
- 11 AJ: So, you never dated guys or girls?
- 12 SM: No. I guess I was just more . . .
- 13 AJ: Very studious, very . . .
- 14 SM: Yeah, I tried to be more into that so I wouldn't have to date or . . . I don't know, I just didn't have  
15 the eagerness to date at all until now. I think it's fun now and I like it.
- 16 AJ: Yeah, that's awesome.
- 17 SM: I hadn't done it before, so yeah.
- 18 AJ: Yeah, dating is kind of fun – having done a little dating myself. Wow, have you had sex? You  
19 said you haven't dated . . .
- 20 SM: The guy that I'm dating with, we haven't had sex yet. We've been fooling around, but we  
21 haven't had intercourse yet and it was just . . . waiting for the right moment, I think, for me. I  
22 don't know, I just like making out and stuff.
- 23 AJ: Yeah, yeah – no. Our bodies are a big thing for us and so, you know, I think who we are willing  
24 to share that with is a big thing and it takes time.
- 25 SM: I definitely want the person I'm dating to respect me still, to get more respect. I know people  
26 will have sex and then they end up not talking to them afterwards. It was just an experience for  
27 them.
- 28 AJ: Right.
- 29 SM: So, I've been trying to just not have sex.
- 30 AJ: That's a smart move. This is November 19<sup>th</sup>, so tomorrow is Transgender Day of Remembrance.
- 31 SM: Nice.
- 32 AJ: What do you think about that day?

- 1 SM: Transgender Day of Remembrance?
- 2 AJ: Yeah.
- 3 SM: I think it's important because it's kind of . . . I guess, like putting mainstream people onto the  
4 trans people that have been dead or getting murdered. I think it's something that a lot of cis  
5 people don't even think about or even care about. I think that that day, hopefully some people  
6 would get to know the people that died before – or at least some transgender historical figures,  
7 just learning about trans people.
- 8 AJ: Right.
- 9 SM: I think that's important. So, I think at least having a day is good.
- 10 AJ: Yeah. Are you going to do anything to mark the day? There's a lot of celebrations . . . not  
11 celebrations, but observances, I should say, and events around town.
- 12 SM: Yeah, I haven't heard about anything going on, but I would love to go to something.
- 13 AJ: Maybe I can pass on some information to you.
- 14 SM: Yeah, that would be awesome.
- 15 AJ: So, again, is there anything that I didn't ask that you feel really compelled to share?
- 16 SM: I don't think so. I think you've asked really good questions.
- 17 AJ: Yeah. Wow, well it's been my pleasure to meet you and talk with you. We've met before, but  
18 to really get an opportunity to get to know each other.
- 19 SM: Yeah, definitely.
- 20 AJ: I certainly have learned more about you than you have about me, so thank you for sharing your  
21 story, thank you for being a part of this project – and until we meet again, my friend.
- 22 SM: Yes, thank you.
- 23 AJ: All right. Bye-bye.
- 24 SM: Bye.