

Neno Miller  
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins  
Interviewer

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

November 29, 2016



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     Neno Miller             -NM  
3  
4  
5     AJ:     So, hello. My name is Andrea Jenkins. I am the oral historian for the Transgender Oral History  
6             Project at the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota. Today is November 29, 2016,  
7             and I'm on campus at the University of Minnesota in the Anderson Library. I'm here today with  
8             Neno Miller. Hey Neno, how are you?

9     NM:     I'm good, how are you?

10    AJ:     I'm doing really, really well. Can you start us off by stating your name, your gender identity  
11             today and how you define yourself, your gender assigned at birth and the pronouns that you like  
12             to use?

13    NM:     Yeah, so I'm Neno Miller. I identify . . .

14    AJ:     Can you just spell your name, I'm sorry?

15    NM:     Yeah, so it's N-e-n-o and then Miller is M-i-l-l-e-r.

16    AJ:     Got it.

17    NM:     Yeah, so I identify as . . . I kind of use a lot of terms sometimes, but gender queer, non-binary,  
18             trans masculine, and . . . is it OK if I swear?

19    AJ:     Ahhh, yeah.

20    NM:     I don't know, I've really come to like the term gender fuck as well.

21    AJ:     Yeah. What does that mean to you?

22    NM:     I just kind of think of it as queer in gender, like maybe being non-normative in that and kind of  
23             like breaking some rules. Yeah. And then what was . . . ?

24    AJ:     Whatever pronouns that you prefer.

25    NM:     I use they and them but I've been experimenting with ze and zir as well.

26    AJ:     Those have been tough to really make their way into the lexicon.

27    NM:     Yeah.

28    AJ:     We can talk a little bit more about that. What gender were you assigned at birth?

29    NM:     I was assigned female at birth.

30    AJ:     Neno, what's your earliest memory? What's the first thing you remember in life?

31    NM:     First thing not about . . . ?

32    AJ:     It doesn't have to be about your trans identity at all, though if it is about your trans identity,  
33             that's absolutely fine too – or your gender queer identity.

- 1 NM: I don't know. I think the first earliest memory I had was I was getting my photo taken, I was like  
2 2 and I was in this photo studio. I like had this toy ball, like this . . . play catch ball, and  
3 apparently it was the photographers but I thought it was really cool and it had like sparkles and  
4 points on it and I really wanted to take it home, but I wasn't allowed to and I guess I got kind of  
5 upset.
- 6 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 7 NM: Apparently not for very long.
- 8 AJ: Wow – so mine, mine, mine. Wow, that's a pretty powerful memory, you still remember it.
- 9 NM: Yeah.
- 10 AJ: Where did you grow up?
- 11 NM: I grew up in Medford, Wisconsin. Medford is a town of about 4,000 people and that's where I  
12 went to school all throughout kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.
- 13 AJ: Wow, same school.
- 14 NM: Same school, yup. I actually . . . so I live in Goodrich/Athens, Wisconsin area and that's about 30  
15 minutes away from Medford, 30 miles. It's unincorporated, a really rural area.
- 16 AJ: So you grew up in a really . . .
- 17 NM: Isolated – yeah.
- 18 AJ: Isolated, rural environment. What was school like?
- 19 NM: I don't know. I guess the day I graduated high school, I could confidently tell you that I knew  
20 everyone in my class and that I'd had an interaction with one of them at some point in time, and  
21 probably most of the kids in the entire school. I don't know, growing up it was really hard. I was  
22 bullied a lot in school and that was always kind of a place where I never wanted to go but I also  
23 found comfort in it because I really liked learning. I loved reading as a kid.
- 24 AJ: What was the bullying around? Do you have an idea?
- 25 NM: Yeah, I think it was around a couple of things. I grew up as a bigger kid and it was certainly a lot  
26 of body shaming bullying. And also, even as a young kid, I didn't really prescribe to kind of  
27 gender norms. I wanted to wear boy's clothes, I wanted to wear boxers.
- 28 AJ: OK.
- 29 NM: Yeah, I didn't prescribe to girl at all and some of the teasing was kind of centered around that  
30 too.
- 31 AJ: Wow, in this really rural community, huh?
- 32 NM: Yeah.
- 33 AJ: Wow. Was that all through school or did it have a certain start point? Did it ever ease up at  
34 some point in time?

- 1 NM: So the bullying around body size really kind of . . . I felt like it always stuck throughout . . . like  
2 the first day of preschool all the way up until last day of high school. It changed in different  
3 forms – it was less overt as I got to high school but still felt like really shamed. The bullying  
4 around gender kind of went away . . . so when I was a junior in high school, I started to kind of  
5 ascribe to a more feminine presentation and stuff. That only last for two and a half years, but  
6 yeah – so kind of my last two years in high school, I started to kind of perform femininity, yeah.
- 7 AJ: I love that – perform femininity. What was your home environment like? Two parents?  
8 Siblings?
- 9 NM: Yeah, so my parents were both married, they still are. I don't have any siblings, I'm an only  
10 child.
- 11 AJ: Your parents are both married to each other?
- 12 NM: Yes, yes. Yeah, but my dad is a construction worker and so he worked on the road a lot growing  
13 up, so I would only see him two to four times a month.
- 14 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 15 NM: And my mom was working in the window factory in my home town and she worked 12-14 hour  
16 days. So even as a little kid, I was really kind of shuffled to my grandparents . . . they were the  
17 ones who put me on the bus in the morning and whose house I got off the bus at. That was  
18 where I ate dinner, probably up until . . . I would say maybe 6-8 years old.
- 19 AJ: And then you were able to kind of be on your own or . . . ?
- 20 NM: My mom's hours kind of got a little . . .
- 21 AJ: More manageable.
- 22 NM: Yeah, it was less 12 hour days.
- 23 AJ: Is that Andersen Windows?
- 24 NM: Weather Shield.
- 25 AJ: OK. All right. I don't think I'm familiar with that company.
- 26 NM: They're . . .
- 27 AJ: Pretty big?
- 28 NM: I feel like they might even have a connection to Andersen but I don't know.
- 29 AJ: Well, so pretty middle income family, would you say?
- 30 NM: Yeah, I would say middle class.
- 31 AJ: But your folks just chose to live in a rural community.

- 1 NM: Yeah, so the Goodrich/Athens area was where my mom was from and that's where her parents  
2 still live, all of her aunts and uncles still live there, all of her brothers and sisters still live there,  
3 most of my cousins live there. That area is . . . the entire town is almost family.
- 4 AJ: Oh wow, OK.
- 5 NM: But yeah, that's, I think, kind of why they stayed there. My dad is also from Medford as well.
- 6 AJ: Wow, OK. When did you just kind of begin to realize that your gender was something different  
7 from what you were assigned at birth?
- 8 NM: Yeah. I remember when I was a younger kid, I always kind of presented more masculine – in a  
9 more masculine way. My family all described me as a tomboy and I remember when I was a  
10 little kid, I was really queer as a kid.
- 11 AJ: What's a queer kid?
- 12 NM: I ran around saying, "I'm going to marry girls."
- 13 AJ: Oh really, wow. In Medford?
- 14 NM: Yeah, I was kind of "corrected" right away and told like, "No, you can't do that." And so I kind of  
15 silenced that. And then I remember, there's this one memory when I was like eight years old  
16 and I decided that I really wanted boxers, I really wanted Batman boxers. They're like shorts  
17 and they have Batman on them and I thought that was really cool. I remember we were going  
18 school shopping and I begged my mom for a pair of Batman boxers and she was like, "No, you're  
19 a girl, you're not a boy, you can't have these."
- 20 AJ: Even though girls wear boxers all the time now.
- 21 NM: Right. But yeah, I just remember I kept pushing it – I wanted them so bad. I begged and I cried, I  
22 just wanted a pair of Boxers, that's all I wanted. And finally, she was just like, "No, you're not  
23 getting them, this is not who you are, this is not who you're going to be." And that was a really  
24 kind of a powerful moment where I think I started to realize I was a little bit more different in  
25 terms of gender. From that point on, I kind of kept it more silent. I was more androgynous in  
26 presentation, I guess. I just wore t-shirts and pants all the time. Those aren't really ascribed to  
27 anyone – yeah. I kind of kept wearing that same style of stuff up until my junior year of high  
28 school. I didn't really go either way.
- 29 AJ: Wow. And then what happened in your junior year? Did you start wearing skirts and dresses  
30 and heels and all that stuff?
- 31 NM: Yeah, a lot of . . . definitely more feminine cut clothing, I would say. A lot of lace and kind of  
32 sequins, all that jazz. But yeah, and skirts and dresses and jewelry and make-up. I honestly  
33 think that I just felt that I really needed to, to try and fit in because up until that point in high  
34 school, and even after that, I didn't have . . . I didn't date anyone. I didn't get asked out by  
35 anyone. I kind of wanted that, but also now looking back, I wouldn't have wanted that. But  
36 yeah, I kind of felt like the need to fit in and try and be normal, whatever that means.

- 1 AJ: What about dating? Are you dating anyone now? Who do you date? What's your sexual  
2 orientation, I guess?
- 3 NM: Yeah, so I'm not dating anyone now. I kind of identify as queer in that realm – more like  
4 pansexual. I don't know, I feel like for me the most important thing when dating is more of a  
5 spiritual, intimate, just mental kind of connection with someone – that's kind of the most  
6 important thing to me.
- 7 AJ: OK, so define queer in your existence. Because queer means a lot of things to a lot of different  
8 people, and I'm not sure everyone who might watch this has a working definition of queer. So  
9 what do you think queer is?
- 10 NM: I don't know, to me queer is just . . . I've never been asked to define this in my own words. I  
11 don't know. I think queer can mean . . . I guess in terms of dating and attraction and stuff, it can  
12 be more of maybe same . . . attracted to similarity maybe in presentation or identity. I think it  
13 can also be attracted to difference too. I don't think that there's any one solid way to define  
14 queer and I think that's why a lot of people sometimes identify with that.
- 15 AJ: Sure.
- 16 NM: And then I think . . . I describe my politics and more like world views as queer as well and just  
17 kind of envisioning this future of liberation and just kind of like honest state of being and living  
18 for everyone. Yeah, does that . . .?
- 19 AJ: Yeah, it's your definition so I don't think there's a right or wrong answer to it. I just wanted to . .  
20 . because it's frequently used now and again, well you noted that sort of everybody has a  
21 different view of what it is. But it's used in a way that there is some universal definition and  
22 everybody should know it. So what terms do you . . . so you call yourself queer?
- 23 NM: Yeah.
- 24 AJ: You actually kind of answered my next question, but how has that changed over time? Have  
25 you ever used other labels? You mentioned tomboy, or at least that's the label people put on  
26 you. Have there been other labels that you've sort of used for yourself other than gender  
27 queer, trans masculine, gender fucker, gender fluid, non-binary I think you said.
- 28 NM: Yeah.
- 29 AJ: But that's today. What's in-between those?
- 30 NM: So, when I first came out as queer, I didn't come out as queer I came out as bisexual. I didn't  
31 really like that term, but I also didn't know any other term to kind of . . . because I feel like that  
32 always kind of is perceived as a really binary attraction to people and that wasn't what I felt.  
33 Yeah, and then I kind of used the label gay for a little bit, but that meant something kind of  
34 different to me too – it wasn't just the kind of traditional what you think of when you think of  
35 gay. In my mind I had more of a queer kind of thought in my head when I used that word to  
36 describe myself. And, I don't know if I ever used a label other than like maybe trans or gender  
37 queer or non-binary to kind of describe my gender once I kind of came out with it.

- 1 AJ: No, that's cool. That's cool. Some people say, "No, I was always trans and that's who I am today  
2 and that's who I will be tomorrow – that's it."
- 3 NM: Yeah.
- 4 AJ: What challenges have you experienced as a gender-queer, trans masculine, non-binary, gender  
5 fuck?
- 6 NM: So growing up there was a lot of . . . kind of silencing by my family and stuff, about how I had to  
7 be. I think that that kind of put a lot of shame in myself and I guess . . . so I've only been out for  
8 less than a year, technically.
- 9 AJ: OK, OK.
- 10 NM: The first person I was dating, we were kind of in this more normative, like lesbian kind of  
11 romantic area. One of the biggest thing that I had . . .
- 12 AJ: But you never identified as a lesbian.
- 13 NM: No, but that's what it felt like. I almost felt like the need . . . because at that point I had bought  
14 a binder, I was kind of dressing more masculine, but also more androgynous. My hair was still  
15 long and when I would see this person, I always felt like I really needed to try and be more  
16 feminine. And it wasn't anything that they were doing, but it was just the kind of idea of how to  
17 be . . . I wasn't really comfortable with my gender identity at that point. And so I looked back on  
18 that and that was interesting because I had a binder but I would never wear it when I knew that  
19 I was going to see them. And that was a real challenge – to feel like . . . maybe that I couldn't be  
20 who I wanted to be around people. Yeah, and I think another challenge too that I've been  
21 noticing a lot lately is being fat and trans and kind of feeling like everybody is staring at you –  
22 whether it's for one reason or not, and that's a really uncomfortable feeling.
- 23 AJ: Yeah. Any sort of challenges with institutions or the medical industry or . . . you're a student  
24 here at the University of Minnesota?
- 25 NM: Those kinds of . . . I don't know, I'm graduating . . . what? Seven or eight months from now, not  
26 even.
- 27 AJ: Yay, that's awesome.
- 28 NM: And whose name is going to be on the diploma? Is it going to be Neno or is it going to be my  
29 dead name? I had to go get a new driver's license this summer because I would try to go out to  
30 the bars with my buddies and they would be like, "No, this ID isn't yours," because the picture  
31 looks like my old self and not me now. I mean, even just finding good health care – that's  
32 always kind of a struggle I feel like for a lot of trans and gender non-conforming folks.
- 33 AJ: Absolutely. Have you done a formal name change as of yet?
- 34 NM: No, I haven't. I mean, I want to eventually, but also it's expensive, it's a lot of . . .
- 35 AJ: Time consuming.



- 1 NM: Time consuming, a lot of paperwork. I was reading up on it too, it can really affect your financial  
2 history with loans and stuff, apparently.
- 3 AJ: Yeah.
- 4 NM: With aliases and credit scores and stuff like that. So, it's a challenge to be able to do all of those  
5 things.
- 6 AJ: It's something you've really got to think through. What about the positive aspects? Particularly  
7 since you have so recently sort of come out, how does it feel?
- 8 NM: It feels good.
- 9 AJ: Yeah.
- 10 NM: Yeah. I mean, obviously there are hard days and going back home to my hometown is always  
11 really difficult.
- 12 AJ: Are you harassed . . . like do people recognize you?
- 13 NM: So, a lot of don't recognize me, or if they do then their faces kind of . . . that strange look, like,  
14 "What did you do?"
- 15 AJ: Right.
- 16 NM: I had nightmares about this for a long time too, but going back to my hometown and having to  
17 use the bathroom in the local Wal-Mart, that was always really . . . that was something I had  
18 nightmares about. I had nightmares about being beaten up inside this Medford Wal-Mart  
19 bathroom. So just going back and knowing which spaces I can be in and which ones I might not  
20 be able to be in. But kind of other than that, being here in the Twin Cities, for the most part I  
21 feel really good being here.
- 22 AJ: Awesome.
- 23 NM: I don't know. I just feel like I'm probably more of myself.
- 24 AJ: Wow, which is so important.
- 25 NM: Yeah, it's really important. I remember, it was like two summers ago and I had a job interview  
26 and I was still kind of more feminine at this point, or felt that I needed to be for this job  
27 interview. I wore a pants suit with this pink shirt underneath it, it had lace and stuff. I  
28 remember, because I was sitting with my roommate before I was about to leave and I was like,  
29 "I feel so uncomfortable right now." I was like, "Why do I feel so uncomfortable?" I thought it  
30 was just because I was fat and I'd always felt uncomfortable. And then, for the first time, I put  
31 on a suit this past April and I wasn't uncomfortable. I honestly just felt like home, and that was a  
32 really powerful moment. I was like, "Hey."
- 33 AJ: Have you heard about this show on HBO where these tailors, they make suits for trans-identified  
34 people?
- 35 NM: No, I haven't.

- 1 AJ: And people's world changes.
- 2 NM: Yeah.
- 3 AJ: They follow these guys around and then they personally tailor a suit.
- 4 NM: Oh, that's cool.
- 5 AJ: It just changes everything for these guys in various stages of gender performance, full  
6 confirmation surgery to gender queer. I think it's called *Well Suited* or *Suited* or something.
- 7 NM: OK, I'll check it out.
- 8 AJ: That's cool, that's really cool – great story. Have you . . . so you said you just came out recently.
- 9 NM: Yes.
- 10 AJ: What's your relationship like with your family now?
- 11 NM: So, I had come out to a lot of the people in my life, but not all of them. I didn't come out to any  
12 family members right away, but I came out as Neno in January and I had a lot of friends who I  
13 thought would be really supportive and I thought I wouldn't have to explain anything and a lot  
14 of them were . . . not a lot of them, but there were definitely some who were like, "I don't know  
15 who you are anymore." One person used the term, "What are your gender goals?" Which I had  
16 never heard before but now I use as kind of, "Look what this person said to me, 'What are your  
17 gender goals?'"
- 18 AJ: Oh, wow. In like a demeaning way or were they being sincere?
- 19 NM: They were dead serious. "Are you looking to become a transgender?" That was the word they  
20 used. They were like, "What are your gender goals?" I was like, "What even are gender goals?"
- 21 AJ: Right.
- 22 NM: What are those?
- 23 AJ: "What are your gender goals?"
- 24 NM: Yeah. But yeah, so there were a couple of close friends that I kind of almost lost, which was  
25 really hard. So I didn't come out to my family right away, but I actually did come out to my  
26 parents this past August and that was really difficult. It was really hard. My mom apologized for  
27 having me, saying that she wouldn't have had me if she would have known about my conditions.
- 28 AJ: Oh boy.
- 29 NM: And that was really difficult to hear. And so, I've kind of slowly been like . . . at that point, I was  
30 like I can't unpack this for you right now – I can't do this. So I've kind of slowly been talking with  
31 them about what this means. We still talk and stuff, but they also don't call me Neno, they  
32 don't want me to get top surgery, they . . . yeah.
- 33 AJ: Are they supporting you . . . I mean, I know you're a college student. Are they helping to  
34 support your college career at all?

- 1 NM: Yeah, they are and they have been. I'm really grateful for that.
- 2 AJ: So they haven't stopped that?
- 3 NM: No, which is . . .
- 4 AJ: Which means that there is some hope for them to grow and understand – we hope.
- 5 NM: Yeah.
- 6 AJ: What about chosen family? Have you been able to sort of put together a network or a chosen  
7 family group?
- 8 NM: Yeah, there's a lot of folks I've been meeting here – before I came out and also after I came out.  
9 And they've been so supportive and just kind of . . . I don't know if any of us use the term  
10 chosen family to describe each other, but . . .
- 11 AJ: People don't really use that language, although in the house and ball culture it actually is, "This  
12 is my trans mom, this is my trans aunt – blah, blah, blah." But, yeah.
- 13 NM: Yeah, but definitely have a network of supportive people here that, in some ways, have kind of  
14 moved into maybe some of those roles.
- 15 AJ: Oh, that's good – that's good to hear. So, you sort of mentioned this a little bit, that your  
16 parents don't want you have top surgery, but to the extent that you feel comfortable, Neno,  
17 what medical interventions have you undergone in your gender journey? What are your gender  
18 goals? (laughter) In your gender journey and what thoughts do you have?
- 19 NM: So I haven't really taken any medical steps to transition. Top surgery is something that I really  
20 want. I've been binding for over a year now.
- 21 AJ: A lot of people have said that that's really uncomfortable. How do you experience it?
- 22 NM: I haven't had . . . because I know that you can break ribs and stuff from it.
- 23 AJ: Yikes, I didn't even know that.
- 24 NM: I haven't had that at all, but it's definitely painful. I've had a lot of back problems since I've  
25 started. This one time I slept in it and then I wore it all the next day – I had accidentally fallen  
26 asleep in my binder. It was like 6 o'clock the next day, at night, and all of a sudden I felt this  
27 terrible pain all throughout my body. It kind of felt like a combination between nausea and the  
28 fact that I was suffocating. I couldn't pin it right away, I didn't realize right away it was because  
29 I'd slept in my binder and then worn it all day the next day.
- 30 AJ: You just thought you were dying.
- 31 NM: Yeah, I just thought I was dying. I thought, "Am I getting the flu or something?" And then it  
32 finally clicked that no, it's because you've had this compression sheet wrapped around your  
33 entire torso for close to 48 hours – yeah, that's why you don't feel good.
- 34 AJ: That could do it, I would think.

- 1 NM: Yeah, so that's . . . it's painful, but it also . . . I feel like it's one of those things too – it's a physical  
2 pain but it helps a lot with dysphoria. So it's kind of a trade-off. So yeah, I want top surgery. I  
3 have never really thought about hormones at all, but with the current political state, it's one of  
4 those things that I've kind of been considering just because . . . being able to pass, because I feel  
5 like I can pass pretty well as a guy until I start talking and that kind of is a giveaway, I feel like  
6 sometimes. But, I thought about that with the election a lot, like would passing be something  
7 that would kind of really help me over the next four to . . . the next four years, that's how I'm  
8 leaving it. But, also access to hormones is also a difficult thing to navigate, especially with  
9 insurance. And it's not something that I ever really wanted and I didn't . . . like I remember  
10 being like, "No, I really don't want to take testosterone," but when that kind of happened with  
11 the election and stuff, I kind of remember this increasing fear of feeling the need to pass in  
12 order to . . . yeah.
- 13 AJ: What do you think is going to be the landscape for trans and gender non-conforming people in  
14 the Trump administration? And thank you for answering that question about medical  
15 intervention stuff, I really appreciate it.
- 16 NM: Yeah, I don't know. I woke up the day of the election – or the day after it, and I just remember  
17 feeling scared. I was scared for myself, I was scared for my friends and the people in my life. A  
18 lot of them don't really fit into this norm or hegemonic ideal, whether that's with race, class,  
19 gender – a lot of things. And, I was also really afraid for people I hadn't met yet – a lot of queer  
20 trans folks, a lot of people of color, immigrant folks, Muslim folks – just a lot of people. I just  
21 remember being scared. I don't know what it's going to look like for trans and gender non-  
22 conforming folks under a Trump presidency. I can't imagine that it's going to be good or that it's  
23 going to get better, I don't know. Like if the Affordable Care Act gets repealed, that's going to  
24 impact a lot of trans folks because they can't . . .
- 25 AJ: Thousands, tens of thousands – absolutely.
- 26 NM: It's also going to impact 20 million people overall and . . . I don't know, getting access to  
27 hormones and finding doctors. I was looking for kind of a gender therapist to maybe have my  
28 parents go to and talk about some of the stuff they were feeling, and the nearest one to my  
29 hometown was two hours away. So, I mean access in some areas is really limited for competent  
30 health care and I feel like it might get more limited. I think there's going to be kind of varying  
31 degrees of oppression going forward, kind of depending on how people's identities intersect.
- 32 AJ: Yeah, wow. Well, let's hope it just doesn't get worse.
- 33 NM: Right. I think . . . the trans community is brave, like it was trans women of color leading  
34 Stonewall and Compton and I think just that testament of . . . we fought back then and we're  
35 going to do what we need to do.
- 36 AJ: Yeah – no, that gives me hope too. Absolutely. Neno, what restroom do you feel most  
37 comfortable going in?
- 38 NM: Honestly, gender-neutral bathrooms are the most comfortable if I got to pick all the time.
- 39 AJ: Have you ever been harassed in the men's bathroom?

- 1 NM: One time in the men's bathroom in Coffman, actually.
- 2 AJ: Really?
- 3 NM: Yeah. I went in and I went into the stall and a group of like five guys came in behind me and  
4 they all stood outside of the stall for like 10, 20 . . . probably like 15 minutes.
- 5 AJ: What?
- 6 NM: I was getting really scared so I was texting every cis dude I knew on campus and I was like,  
7 "Where you at?" I was getting really scared because they wouldn't . . .
- 8 AJ: Were they saying stuff to you?
- 9 NM: They weren't saying stuff but they just wouldn't leave. It was really silent, which was really  
10 weird. Then eventually they left. I was like, "I'll stay here all night if I have to." When they left  
11 they said, "What a faggot." It was so weird because I had just walked into the bathroom and  
12 went into a stall – it wasn't . . . it was really weird.
- 13 AJ: I don't even get it.
- 14 NM: Yeah. It was . . .
- 15 AJ: I could see you having more problems going into the women's restroom.
- 16 NM: Right, which has also been . . .
- 17 AJ: A nightmare?
- 18 NM: Yeah.
- 19 AJ: I'm not trying to put words in your mouth
- 20 NM: No, no – but yeah. But either one, I guess I've kind of definitely experienced more looks and  
21 stuff in the women's bathroom than the men's, but there was that one incident in Coffman  
22 where it was really scary. I didn't know what was . . . but yeah.
- 23 AJ: Have women . . . like, I don't know, I experience you as masculine, as a guy, and I know that  
24 that's not your identity but that's just when you present, that's sort of the vibe I get. So just  
25 walking in a bathroom, they don't know gender fucker or . . . all they know is here comes this  
26 guy. He's a big guy, he's got on Tims, he's like, "Oh my God, I'm scared."
- 27 NM: Yeah.
- 28 AJ: That doesn't happen that much, huh?
- 29 NM: Not really. It depends, like the times I've used the women's bathroom on campus, and this was  
30 kind of more like earlier – like when I first started coming out, but it was fine. Maybe people  
31 would look at me but there was never a direct confrontation. Now, using bathrooms in the  
32 suburbs, that was really interesting. I went to the Chanhassen Dinner Theatre . . .
- 33 AJ: OK. Why? No, I'm just kidding – to see some good theatre and have dinner, right?

- 1 NM: Yeah, and then I had to use the bathroom. I was with a friend who is a woman, really cis  
2 woman, and she was like, "Oh, I have to go to the bathroom," and I was like, "Yeah, me too,"  
3 because I didn't want to go alone, but then when it came down to which one do I use, I just  
4 went into the women's room because she was going in there too. Yeah – I got a lot of stares  
5 and it was really . . .
- 6 AJ: Did you have on a suit?
- 7 NM: I had on a dress shirt and slacks, yeah. So it was really . . . but I think the weirdest . . . I don't  
8 know, I have a lot of conflict around picking one or the other because I don't really identify fully  
9 as a guy. There are parts of me that still kind of really identify as woman.
- 10 AJ: Yeah, I get it.
- 11 NM: There's that conflict to one or the other, even . . .
- 12 AJ: Right, and that's, therefore, the label gender fucker that exists, right?
- 13 NM: Yeah.
- 14 AJ: I got on my slacks, nice dress shirt, some nice shiny black shoes, and I'm going in the women's  
15 restroom because I can.
- 16 NM: Yeah, yeah. I know of one bathroom on campus that's a gender neutral one but it's multi-stall,  
17 which is kind of . . . it's on the GWSS department's floor, but they're just like, "Yeah, everybody  
18 can use it, we don't care."
- 19 AJ: Right.
- 20 NM: But, yeah.
- 21 AJ: But that's in the Gender, Women's Studies building, right? Ford Hall or whatever, because most  
22 of the ones I've seen . . . are there many on campus that you're aware of?
- 23 NM: That's not one in every building, for sure . . . no, there's not a lot. I can think of probably four,  
24 for sure – maybe five or six on East Bank, out of all those buildings.
- 25 AJ: Wow.
- 26 NM: And I know of one on West Bank.
- 27 AJ: Wow. What is trans life like at the University of Minnesota? Are there organizations? Is there  
28 sort of a visible trans community?
- 29 NM: So I'm in the Gender, Women & Sexuality Studies department, so there's a lot of . . . no . . . yeah,  
30 there's a lot of trans, gender non-conforming, queer-identified people. It always makes it feel  
31 like there's so many of us on campus, but I'm also in the Journalism department and it doesn't  
32 feel like that in those buildings. I know that there's a few groups on campus, I haven't joined  
33 just because I've kind of been so busy with school and work and stuff.
- 34 AJ: Sure.

- 1 NM: I guess the biggest thing for me on campus was . . . so I was able to change my name on the  
2 roster without having to . . . the only thing I had to do was log-in and click on the change name  
3 thing, which was nice because then I don't have to explain to professors, like, "Hi, this is on your  
4 roster, but I go by Neno." So that's really nice. But also, I've tried to talk to professors in the  
5 Journalism department and be like, "Hi, I use they/them pronouns," because they . . . it's really  
6 weird too because when they kind of mis-gender me in there, they don't ever use he, they  
7 always use she – I've never had someone mis-gender me as a guy.
- 8 AJ: Wow, that's interesting.
- 9 NM: Yeah, in that entire department. And so, I've tried to explain to them that I use they/them  
10 pronouns and they'll be like, "Those aren't grammatically correct." Or, we were talking about  
11 demographics one day in class and a professor was talking about males and females and I was  
12 like, "Well, yeah, but the gender binary, that's a bunch of BS." And she was like, "Well, what do  
13 you mean?" I was like, "Well, where would you classify me? Which one would you pick for  
14 me?" And she was like, "Well, female." And I was like, "Well, I identify as trans," and she was  
15 like, "Well, then male." I was like, "Well, I technically identify as non-binary," and she was like,  
16 "Well, for the purpose of this class there is a binary." And so that department has been kind of  
17 interesting, they've been less . . .
- 18 AJ: So this is in Journalism?
- 19 NM: Yeah, wherein like a GWSS class, you talk about your pronouns – like, you get to say your  
20 pronouns on the first day of class.
- 21 AJ: Wow, but it hasn't been hostile for you, really?
- 22 NM: No, not as hostile as maybe I might have thought it would have been or not as hostile as it  
23 certainly probably was even like 3, 4, 5 years ago, I feel like for a lot of trans folks.
- 24 AJ: Wow. When is the first time you ever met a trans or gender non-conforming person?
- 25 NM: I guess the first time I met someone that maybe kind of differed, like gender non-conforming,  
26 was one of my best friends in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. He was, and he still identifies as a guy, but he was very,  
27 very effeminate and that was always really frowned upon too. And so we were kind of little  
28 gender-queer kids kind of running around. He dressed very effeminately and all this stuff. So  
29 that was kind of the first time I met someone who maybe didn't prescribe to the norms, but the  
30 first time I met a trans-identified person was when I . . . the student counseling center had  
31 wanted feedback on how to make their services more inclusive for LGBTQ folks.
- 32 AJ: The student services center here at the University?
- 33 NM: Student counseling center at the University, and a trans guy was like a resident there and so he  
34 was leading kind of this whole . . . conducting all these interviews on how student counseling  
35 services could do better for serving trans and queer folks. So I met with him and I talked and, in  
36 a sense, it didn't feel like I was meeting a trans person for the first time because I, at that point,  
37 was really questioning my gender identity but it was the first time I'd met someone who was  
38 openly out as trans and claiming that identity. That was powerful.

- 1 AJ: Wow, do you still keep in touch with that person at all?
- 2 NM: No, it was . . .
- 3 AJ: Just a chance meeting, or a one-time encounter?
- 4 NM: Yeah.
- 5 AJ: Wow. Has there been a person that has had a real significant impact in your life related to your  
6 gender identity?
- 7 NM: In a positive way?
- 8 AJ: Well, I guess in a negative way too. But, yeah – positive mostly.
- 9 NM: I don't know, I've had a lot . . . I've met a lot of friends who identify as trans guys and it was kind  
10 of funny because we all came out as trans . . . I guess I shouldn't say we all came out, but we had  
11 all changed our names within probably a four-month radius of each other. So kind of going  
12 through that together and talking a lot about being at the U. When I wanted to change my  
13 name on the roster, I asked both of them, "How did you do it? How do you get in there?" But  
14 yeah, we've kind of just been together and been sticking through. That's been powerful  
15 because we're like all at different levels and we all identify maybe a little bit differently, but we  
16 also have kind of been able to walk through it together – through some parts really close  
17 together.
- 18 AJ: Awesome. What do you think the relationship is between the L, the G, the B, and the T, in your  
19 experience? Should we remain a sort of congealed acronym or should we succeed from the  
20 union?
- 21 NM: I don't know. I think that when people think of LGBT, they include trans in the acronym but a lot  
22 of times . . .
- 23 AJ: They're really only talking about gay or lesbian.
- 24 NM: Yeah, like fighting for trans liberation has never been part of the pronunciation when they kind  
25 of use that. But, at the same time, I don't know – I think that it can be helpful because there is a  
26 little bit more recognition of trans identities now and maybe we'll get there one day but right  
27 now we're not there. I don't know. It's kind of like a . . . a lot of sides. But yeah, I think that  
28 there has definitely been ways that the T has been erased and really kind of shoved out from the  
29 acronym. But then if you look at how some people use the acronym, they include every single  
30 possible identity.
- 31 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 32 NM: Yeah, I don't know.
- 33 AJ: LGBTQIA . . .
- 34 NM: +.
- 35 AJ: +, right.



- 1 NM: I don't know. I think there's a lot of interesting kind of pros and cons to a heavily discoured  
2 area of politics and stuff, and like labels for everything. Identities are super important and we  
3 need to recognize that but also identities were also kind of put on us by oppressive forces.
- 4 AJ: Some people say that the term, or the phrase, sexual identity and sexual orientation and gender  
5 identity is an overall phrase that could replace LGBT because it encompasses everything – all  
6 sexual orientations and gender identities. What is your thought around that?
- 7 NM: I think that can be helpful, but also it's really weird because gender identity and sexual  
8 attraction sometimes go together and sometimes they don't. Like you have queer people who  
9 don't consider themselves trans or don't identify as trans, and then you have trans people who  
10 don't identify as queer, but . . . I don't know, those identities are really important but also it's . . .  
11 like a lot of times they do go together too. But I think that that kind of wording could also be  
12 more inclusive and better kind of fit for everyone, instead a lot of identities having the + to  
13 represent.
- 14 AJ: And now that I've brought that up, it certainly could mean that cis gender people, they have a  
15 gender identity and a sexual orientation, they could be included in that too – which, I think  
16 actually . . . we talked about this a little bit earlier in your interview of me, that it really is about  
17 a broader humanity because we all do have a sexual orientation, we all do have a gender  
18 identity, and to continue to segregate that out and talk about it like, "Oh, that's a queer person's  
19 issue," as opposed to bringing everybody into the conversation. There would be some  
20 significant pros and cons to those things.
- 21 NM: Yeah, I think part of it too is there is always a binary between trans and cis people, like you're  
22 one or the other, and maybe gender is a little bit more complicated – we know it's more  
23 complicated than being one or the other. And the same thing with sexual orientation and  
24 attraction to – you're either gay or you're straight, there is no . . . when you generally kind of  
25 think about that. So yeah, I think that that could be helpful, but like you said, there is also some  
26 cons to that too.
- 27 AJ: What should the agenda be for the trans community going forward?
- 28 NM: I think . . .
- 29 AJ: You're a scholar in this – you go to school and you study gender identity and transgender  
30 movements and all of this stuff, I want to hear this. Tell us what to do, Neno.
- 31 NM: I think so much of what our . . . what the trans kind of agenda and what a lot of social  
32 movements really need to involve are a few basic things that break out into a lot of things – so  
33 like resisting and rejecting norms, like normative ways of being and living and having to exist and  
34 not having norms forced upon us, or at least resisting that as much as we can. And then  
35 breaking down systems of power and oppression – like breaking down the prison industrial  
36 complex and school to prison pipeline and the kind of entire medical system that requires trans  
37 people to have a certain narrative in order to get medical care for transitioning in order to be  
38 treated as a human when they're seeking medical care for something that isn't trans related.  
39 There's all those kind of things that we need to really try and break down and dismantle and I  
40 think the biggest thing moving forward for the trans community that we need to keep in mind

- 1           when we're doing . . . whether we're protesting or pushing for policy change or all those things,  
2           is working to find liberation for us and also other communities who have been marginalized or  
3           oppressed. The fight isn't just about trans people. I would really hate to look back 20 years  
4           from now, or be in the future 20 years from now and see that the trans movement has really  
5           taken a lot from the gay and lesbian movements and become really normative and didn't work  
6           to break down systems of oppression, just assimilated to them.
- 7   AJ:     Right.
- 8   NM:     That would just make me feel really sick inside. So like, for the trans community – actively  
9           talking about and working to break down racism and sexism and working to reject toxic  
10          masculinity among . . . like trans masculine folks, that's a huge thing that I've been noticing  
11          lately among trans masculine people, among some of them. Like working to fight anti-  
12          immigrant rhetoric and legislation and really xenophobic rhetoric and legislation, like this isn't  
13          just a fight for our community, this is a fight for all the people of the world.
- 14   AJ:     Right.
- 15   NM:     This is something we need to be doing because it impacts people in the trans community and it  
16          impacts queer people – it impacts so many people in our communities and we need to be  
17          standing with them even if we've never experienced that sort of oppression before.
- 18   AJ:     Sure – so powerful.
- 19   NM:     Yeah, just really recognizing that these things don't just . . . like transphobia isn't the only thing  
20          working against the trans community – it's racism and it's sexism and it's misogyny and it's  
21          xenophobia.
- 22   AJ:     Income and equality and capitalism.
- 23   NM:     Yeah, all of the things. We can't just sit there and say, "Oh, well we need to get rid of HB2 and  
24          transphobia," we need to be working to get rid of all of these things.
- 25   AJ:     Wow, fascinating. Thank you so much, Neno, for being willing to participate and share your life  
26          and your ideas. Is there any last thing that you want to say that I didn't have the foresight to ask  
27          you about?
- 28   NM:     I don't think so, no.
- 29   AJ:     Well, I deeply appreciate it. I do want to acknowledge that Neno Miller is an intern working on  
30          this project as well, so I just want to express deep gratitude for your assistance and your  
31          creativity and your hard work to this project. So, thank you.
- 32   NM:     It's been an honor working with you and kind of capturing stories and maybe helping kind of put  
33          them together for the final project.
- 34   AJ:     Awesome. Well, I'm glad we captured yours.
- 35   NM:     Thank you.
- 36   AJ:     Thank you. Until we meet again, my friend. Peace.

1 NM: Bye-bye.