

Damion Mendez
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

June 17, 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 Damion Mendez -DM
3
4 AJ: So, hello.
5
6 DM: Hi.
7
8 AJ: Today is June 17, 2016. I'm Andrea Jenkins, I'm the oral historian with the Transgender Oral
9 History Project at the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota. I'm here today with a
10 good friend and fellow advocate and transgender health advocate, Damion Mendez. Hey,
11 Damien, how are you?
12
13 DM: I'm good.
14
15 AJ: Yeah. Hey, Damion, can you just introduce yourself – state your name, spell it for us, what was
16 your gender assigned at birth, how do you identify your gender today, and what pronouns do
17 you use?
18
19 DM: Awesome – yeah. So my name is Damion Mendez. D-a-m-i-o-n M-e-n-d-e-z. I use he/him
20 pronouns and I was assigned female for my sex at birth. Now I identify as male, but with the
21 understanding that to be a male does not mean, you know, that you have to have certain body
22 parts or you have to have certain mannerisms, you don't have to follow expectations around
23 masculinity but you can still identify as male.
24
25 AJ: I love that, I love that. And so male pronouns then.
26
27 DM: Yeah, he/him pronouns.
28
29 AJ: Damion, tell me what is your earliest memory in life? What's the first thing you remember?
30
31 DM: I have very vivid memories of not ever fitting in with the people around me, maybe because of
32 the toys I wanted to play with, or the clothes I wanted to wear, the hairstyles I wanted to have.
33 I can remember one Christmas I received a dress and I was very unhappy and was really
34 confused. And then my cousin opened up his present and it was a Batman onsie and I took it
35 from him and I didn't give it back.
36
37 AJ: Oh wow, really.
38
39 DM: And I said that I would not have the dress, that that was not what I wanted – yeah, that's what I
40 wanted for Christmas. And those very vivid memories, yeah – just stick with me as kind of a
41 reminder that the sex that I was assigned at birth was not right, and nor should it have been
42 made for me because I think that with time I would have made my own choices had those
43 choices not been forced upon me by society, and also by my parents who, lovingly, let me play
44 around with gender. But when I told them at a very young age that I wanted to have a sex
45 change, they sent me to the Human Sexuality Program . . . I think I was maybe five or six and I
46 got diagnosed and the Human Sexuality Program told my parents that I should wait to do
47 anything as far as me transitioning or doing anything like that.
48
49 AJ: Any medical interventions . . .

- 1 DM: Any medical stuff, right – until I hit puberty, because when I hit puberty then somehow that
2 would be a defining factor and my knowingness, whether or not that was some kind of
3 childhood . . . just make believe kind of a thing. Which is unfortunate, because I think that they
4 were very wrong and I think that . . . we can always say that if we did things differently, different
5 outcomes would happen, but I think that the way that my life is and the way that it happened,
6 happened for a reason. And so, things would have been different, but they weren't and now I
7 have the experience that I have because of that – because I didn't get that intervention.
- 8 AJ: Wow. So, where did you grow up, here in Minnesota?
- 9 DM: So, I was trans-racially adopted from Colombia, Bogota – which is the capital, from an
10 orphanage called Ayudame.
- 11 AJ: Can you spell that?
- 12 DM: You know . . . a-u-damay. It's "help me" in Spanish.
- 13 AJ: OK. So it's a Spanish word, don't worry – we'll figure it out.
- 14 DM: And actually I've met a lot of people who have been adopted from that same orphanage.
- 15 AJ: Is that right?
- 16 DM: Yes. Well my two cousins were adopted from the same orphanage a year before me, one of my
17 family friends they adopted a young boy from that same orphanage, and then I've met lots of
18 people in community who have been adopted from that same orphanage.
- 19 AJ: Here in Minnesota?
- 20 DM: Minnesota . . .
- 21 AJ: So there was like a pipeline almost.
- 22 DM: Minnesota is a hub for trans-racial adoption because the U of M started trans-racial adoption.
23 I've done some research on this. It is typical for Minnesota residents to adopt from Korea and
24 from Colombia, those two countries are the main source of where we get our folks from trans-
25 racially. So, at six months, my parents went to Colombia and then met me and took me back to
26 America, but at that time they were living in Boston, Massachusetts. So all of my identification
27 is in Boston. My dad is an architect and my mom was, at the time, a hair stylist. Boston had a
28 huge financial crisis around 1989, so a year after I was brought there, and my dad lost his job –
29 they lost everything. So they moved back to Minnesota, which is where my mother's family is
30 from. My dad is from Scotland.
- 31 AJ: OK, wow. So he's an immigrant too.
- 32 DM: He is an immigrant too, absolutely - very interesting experiences as well. I grew up in, for a
33 while – before my parents were divorced when I was nine, in St. Paul right by . . . what is that?
34 Like Macalester College, in a very white, affluent, upper . . . I would say upper class
35 neighborhood, in a very nice home. It was like three or four stories, I was in all sorts of clubs, I

1 went to camps, I experienced, throughout my life and especially in the beginning years of my life
2 when my parents were together, a very nice life, a very cushy life.

3 AJ: Oh nice.

4 DM: And, I still always felt different, I always felt out of place. Although I went to a Spanish
5 immersion school for a couple of years, I still was one of the only few people of color, interesting
6 enough.

7 AJ: They were speaking Spanish but they weren't . . .

8 DM: . . . necessarily . . .

9 AJ: Latino or Latina or . . .

10 DM: Absolutely. And certain people are afforded those kinds of special schooling. Then my parents
11 got divorced and then . . .

12 AJ: When you were nine, you said?

13 DM: Yeah. My mom and dad had been married for 25 years.

14 AJ: Wow.

15 DM: My mom met my dad in England when my mother was 17, with my grandmother when they
16 were on vacation, and she didn't come home.

17 AJ: Oh really? She stayed?

18 DM: Yes, she stayed. And so, my mom literally kind of . . . very early on attached to this person and
19 then kind of they were just together, and then when they broke up, or when they ended the
20 marriage, she was on her own.

21 AJ: Was she devastated?

22 DM: She was . . . absolutely, oh my God – yes, absolutely. It took her . . . oh my gosh, almost a whole
23 year to really kind of pull it together, unfortunately. She'd never done any of the things you
24 have to do when you're on your own.

25 AJ: Yeah.

26 DM: So she brought me to Arizona because she wanted to get the heck away from him, from
27 Minnesota, from her family. She just wanted to get away. And so I moved with her, my dad
28 stayed in Minnesota – which was hard, I lost all of my friends. I was really close, at the time,
29 with a lot of my family, my mom's side of the family. I went from going to a Spanish immersion
30 school to going to probably one of the worst schools in the United States of America. Arizona
31 has the worst educational system and so . . . and it was English. I went from Spanish to English.
32 Through that I've not only lost a lot of my Spanish, I've also gained learning disabilities in
33 English. I have a hard time spelling words, I can read pretty well but it's more the spelling that
34 seems to be an issue, and then Math – I have a disability in Math. That year was just . . . yeah,
35 just a very interesting year.

- 1 AJ: What part of Arizona?
- 2 DM: Tucson.
- 3 AJ: Tucson.
- 4 DM: Yes, I lived right across the street from Sabino Canyon, which I later on found that while I was
5 living there, at the same time, many immigrants from Latin America, where crossing the desert
6 of Sabino Canyon to come into America.
- 7 AJ: Oh, so you guys moved to almost one of the entry points of people coming from South America.
- 8 DM: Yeah, which is really interesting if you think about the correlation of why I'm here in America
9 and the fact that had these lovely, wonderful white people not come and "rescued" me, that
10 could have been my reality, that could have been my entry point.
- 11 AJ: Absolutely.
- 12 DM: And so it was very much of a juxtaposition. I never thought about that until around a year ago
13 when I was taking a class at MCTC and it was like, The Process of Othering, specifically around
14 immigration and immigrants and not just how we perceive immigrants from a white lens but
15 also white immigrants coming to Ellis Island and how certain groups of white folks were put in
16 the "othering" category and were reduced to all of these different medical treatments and
17 things to make sure that they weren't diseased and how we have that conversation now when
18 we talk about immigrants coming from Latin America and them not being vaccinated or all of
19 these things, when really they have the highest rate of vaccination. Anyway . . . so yeah, just at
20 that point in that year it was very hard, I was very angry. I think I went by . . . no, I remember
21 going to several different therapists with my mother. Me and my mother have always had a
22 very . . . I don't know, a volatile, loving, hating relationship. There's always been kind of some
23 issues and I think that I was really mad at her for moving me to Arizona, I was mad that my
24 parents were divorced – so yeah, I was just really mad. And then she started dating other
25 people when she was in Arizona, and then I got really mad because I was like, "No, that's not
26 happening." And I think even in that moment I felt a sense of my dad is gone and so I must take
27 the role and the responsibility of my father and that is to almost protect my mother. And so
28 when these men would be around, I would just puff my chest up and just get in their face and
29 say probably some not very nice things – because I didn't want them there, that was my job,
30 they shouldn't be there. There was only a couple but they were . . . yeah, annoying enough to
31 where I remember them quite distinctly. And then . . .
- 32 AJ: Did you have siblings?
- 33 DM: No, I'm an only child.
- 34 AJ: An only child, OK.
- 35 DM: Which is interesting – that's a whole other interesting way of growing up and not really having
36 anyone else to talk to about some of these things or deal with some of these things. I never
37 really talked with my two cousins who were adopted from Colombia trans-racially, they seemed

- 1 to very much assimilate into white culture even though they're darker than me, which is quite
2 interesting.
- 3 AJ: Oh, that's interesting.
- 4 DM: All three of us are in relationships with white people, they're both married to white people and
5 have mixed-raced children.
- 6 AJ: So you guys are still close?
- 7 DM: Not at all, I don't talk to them. No, I don't talk to them. I don't talk to anyone on my mother's
8 side of the family. After my grandmother passed two years ago, I vowed to not speak to them.
- 9 AJ: Is that related to your gender identity?
- 10 DM: No, not at all – not at all. They're transphobic, but that's not it – I could care less, you can think
11 whatever you want to think. "I thought Courtney was trans because trans people only date
12 trans people." That kind of weird stuff.
- 13 AJ: Oh, OK.
- 14 DM: Just this really ignorant . . .
- 15 AJ: And Courtney is your partner?
- 16 DM: Right.
- 17 AJ: Yeah.
- 18 DM: Not that I wouldn't date trans people but just for you to make that assumption that we just
19 group together or whatever. I was just like, "Wow, you're unbelievable." No, it's really because
20 they're just really racist. They think they know everything because they have lots of money and
21 because they knew Paul Wellstone and whatever, whatever, whatever. I don't . . .
- 22 AJ: So they're super progressive.
- 23 DM: Well, when it comes to white progressiveness, yes – they're super progressive. They were
24 thrilled that Obama became President and thought that we were in a post-racial society and I
25 tried to tell them that some may say that yes, President Obama is Black but he did not grow up,
26 necessarily, in the same ways that they would assume that he grew up in. They think that all
27 Black people are the same, when they want to and when they don't want to. It was just like . . .
28 yeah, I don't want to be around you, you're not really good people. And so I just haven't really
29 talked to them since then.
- 30 AJ: So, I just want to go back a little bit to . . . because you said you told your parents that you
31 wanted a sex change. How old were you when you said that? And then . . .?
- 32 DM: I have to tell you this story, because the story, I think, really just encapsulates so many things.
33 So, I was probably six or seven, and I loved the TV show *Baywatch*.
- 34 AJ: *Baywatch*.

- 1 DM: *Baywatch*.
- 2 AJ: Pamela Anderson . . .
- 3 DM: Pamela Anderson, I don't even know. I was a swimmer at the time and I thought that maybe
4 when I grew up I wanted to be a lifeguard or something like that – like on the beach, wouldn't
5 that be cool? There was an episode where they found this body in the ocean. They brought the
6 body back to the autopsy room and the body was laying on the table and I just remember as
7 they were talking, she looked like a woman . . . she looked like a woman, and what they found
8 out was the guy who was doing the autopsy was like, "This isn't a woman, this is a . . ." And I
9 don't remember the language, I don't really remember . . . I'm sure it was probably very
10 transphobic and probably like a transsexual or, "This used to be a man," or something of that
11 nature. But the idea that this person that was laying on this table, that they couldn't tell up until
12 that point, triggered me to be like this must be possible. If this is on TV, is this possible? And I
13 went to my parents and I said, "I just saw this on TV, is this possible? Because I want that."
- 14 AJ: Right.
- 15 DM: And they were like . . . my mom was OK with it at the time, which is super interesting because
16 when I actually came out as being trans she freaked the hell out, and my dad freaked out when I
17 told him when I was little and then he was fine when I came out later.
- 18 AJ: Oh wow.
- 19 DM: Yeah, I don't know what that means – yeah, I don't know. But yeah . . . and then they were . . .
20 I'm sure my dad was concerned and my mother was like, "Calm down Michael, he's just a kid,"
21 that kind of thing. Whatever – both patronizing and real at the same time, but then was like,
22 "OK, well let's bring you to the Human Sexuality Clinic and get you tested," or whatever. And I
23 remember being there, I remember meeting with somebody and being in a room and them
24 asking me questions, but I don't really remember anything else.
- 25 AJ: Sure, yeah – you were pretty young.
- 26 DM: Yeah, and then nothing ever came of it. I remember after that, of course, always wearing boy's
27 clothes. I wanted to wear boy's clothes, I asked to wear boy's clothes, but for fancy things I was
28 made to wear dresses and shoes, heeled shoes.
- 29 AJ: Patent leather slippers.
- 30 DM: Everything – slippers, whatever floozy my mom . . . I think my mom really wanted a girl and she
31 wanted a girly girl, somebody that she could play dolls with and do her hair.
- 32 AJ: She was a hairdresser and you were assigned female at birth.
- 33 DM: Absolutely, yeah – but I was not about it. I was not having it, I made her cut my hair very short.
34 It's really interesting. I have pictures of me from when I was a baby up until right before I
35 graduated from high school . . . no, actually the picture is from when I graduated from high
36 school. It kind of goes like very feminine, because I was a baby and my mom dressed me – so
37 pink and pink and pink. The minute I made my choice boy, boy, boy. And then when I hit about

- 1 . . . when I moved to Eagan for middle school, which is like 6th, 7th, and 8th grade, you see this
2 switch and I go from tomboy to femme, femme, femme. I'm wearing make-up, my hair is
3 always done – it's very long, I wear big hoops, I definitely tried to emulate, I think, like J-Lo . . .
4 Latina women, because I just assumed that that's what you do. That was when I was young,
5 people always called me a tomboy, so I was just like, "Well, this must be when I remove myself
6 from this."
- 7 AJ: So you were trying to conform?
- 8 DM: Yeah.
- 9 AJ: Were you bullied in school at all for dressing like a boy and wearing boy's clothes . . . ?
- 10 DM: Yes.
- 11 AJ: . . . or people were just cool with it?
- 12 DM: No. I was absolutely bullied. I was called a lot of homophobic slurs like faggot, dyke, les – like
13 lesbo or whatever the young people say. Or always . . . always, always, always asked, "Are you a
14 boy or a girl?" That question . . . I cannot even tell you how many times I would come home
15 from school and just cry because I didn't understand – because why does it even matter? At
16 that point, I didn't even realize that I wasn't a boy. I don't think I'd really seen a lot of . . . I
17 hadn't been naked around a lot of people . . . yeah.
- 18 AJ: Yeah, because you don't have siblings or . . .
- 19 DM: No, I didn't. I just assumed that I was like everyone else and everyone else was like everybody
20 else.
- 21 AJ: Right.
- 22 DM: And then like the bathroom stuff would kind of come up sometimes because I would go into the
23 boy's bathroom – I didn't know what the hell the difference was, I didn't care.
- 24 AJ: Right.
- 25 DM: I just . . . I was just me. I just was probably very much oblivious to really anything that was going
26 on. Yeah, and then when I hit that puberty, I got . . . oh yeah, I hit puberty very young – when I
27 was like . . . the summer before 6th grade, I got my period and it was horrible because I was living
28 with . . . OK, so my mom stayed in Arizona and then I moved back to Minnesota and me and my
29 dad were living in St. Paul and then he moved me to Eagan because there was good schools. So
30 I was living with him and so when I got my period, I thought I was dying because I was bleeding
31 and I had lots of pain.
- 32 AJ: Right.
- 33 DM: I had sex ed, but I didn't assume that that horrible stuff was going to happen . . .
- 34 AJ: Was going to happen to you.

- 1 DM: We talked about tampons – we took one out and we put one in a glass jar and watched it blow
2 up and it was like, “That’s icky.” And I was hanging out with all the guys. I was like, “That’s
3 gross.” And then it happened and my dad didn’t know what was happening either, he thought I
4 was dying too.
- 5 AJ: Oh my gosh.
- 6 DM: And he was like, “You need to call your mom.” And I called my mom and I’m like, “Mom, I’m
7 bleeding.” And she’s like, “You’re having your period.” And I’m like, “What is this horrible
8 thing?”
- 9 AJ: Oh my goodness.
- 10 DM: “What is this? Why is this happening to me?” I just . . . yeah. So then when that happened and
11 I definitely developed breasts very, very quickly and because . . . I’m 5’2”, I’m a very small
12 person – same height as Prince.
- 13 AJ: Yeah. Rest in peace.
- 14 DM: Rest in peace, absolutely. Yeah, I had a very large chest, breasts – whatever you want to call it. I
15 was a 36C.
- 16 AJ: Yeah, for 5’2” that’s pretty good sized.
- 17 DM: Yeah, and they came (snap) . . . probably in the middle of 6th grade, I was fully developed, so I
18 was . . . yeah. So I was very much oversexualized by . . . ick, yeah, the people around me.
- 19 AJ: Boys and . . .
- 20 DM: Especially in an exoticized manner.
- 21 AJ: Right.
- 22 DM: Because I was . . .
- 23 AJ: Latina.
- 24 DM: I’d got a lot of the like . . . ick, the cat calling and all of that nonsense. But I was never . . . I didn’t
25 really get affected by that necessarily. I did date one boy, his name was John Dugan. He’s gay.
26 We knew he was gay – I knew he was gay, we all knew he was gay, and I think that’s probably
27 why I was attracted to him.
- 28 AJ: Right, right.
- 29 DM: Whatever. And actually I saw him last year . . .
- 30 AJ: The queerness, right.
- 31 DM: . . . at the Mondo Queer Beach Party.
- 32 AJ: Oh yeah.

- 1 DM: Or not the beach party – the yacht party. He was on the boat. And I was like, “Oh, look, there
2 you are – oh, 6th grade coming back to me.” But I did, I absolutely . . .
- 3 AJ: Did he recognize you?
- 4 DM: Oh yeah. We didn’t say anything to each other. It was more like, “Hmm . . .” and then we both
5 like walked away. I think it was just a little too much reminder of being in 6th grade and not
6 really being yourself, I think – just trying to be what everyone else wanted you to be. And then,
7 I eventually started having feelings about liking girls and I think that was like 7th or 8th grade.
8 Yeah, I didn’t really know what to do with that, but I knew that I was different and I knew that I
9 started to dress more and more on the masculine side and started to really start to feel like I
10 didn’t want to wear tight pants and tight shirts – they made me uncomfortable. I didn’t want to
11 do my hair – and I couldn’t even do it well anyway. I really couldn’t – I couldn’t do make-up very
12 well. I always poked myself in the eye when I would try and do anything around that area. I
13 couldn’t wear heels and so eventually I just started . . . yeah, I went from kind of like . . . I went
14 from like very feminine to punk, goth-ish, and so then there were ways for me to wear different
15 kinds of clothing that would be more androgynous. And then, I think, I came out to my mom the
16 last year of middle school, so 8th grade, and . . . I was starting to get bullied again about the
17 clothing that I was wearing. I knew that it had to do with my sexual orientation, because the
18 homophobic slurs began to come back up. And so, I was like, I need something. I was feeling
19 depressed, I needed some things to make some kind of relationships with other gay people –
20 youth. And so my mom . . .
- 21 AJ: So you came out to your mom as a lesbian?
- 22 DM: Yes, yes. And, my mom . . . because she’s just awesome like that and just has always been really
23 good around mental health and self-care and getting therapy for me and stuff, she hooked me
24 up with Face to Face on the east side of St. Paul where Janet was, Janet Bystrom.
- 25 AJ: Janet Bystrom, yeah.
- 26 DM: And, at the time, Janet Bystrom and Sarah and a couple other folks were doing the Pocketful of
27 Queers, so I joined. It was an amazing, eye-opening experience, not only because I had lived in
28 the suburbs, Eagan at that time, this was on the east side of St. Paul, so it was very different.
29 There were people of color, there were expectations around how you talk to people as far as
30 not only gender identity and sexual orientation, but also race and ethnicity and being culturally
31 aware. This was very new for me. I didn’t even know this shit happened, we were supposed to
32 be color blind and we were supposed to love everybody – it’s a small world after all. I
33 remember all of these little lessons that I was taught. And, yeah, I loved it there. The
34 interesting thing was, at the time there were a lot more cis gay men in the meetings that would
35 happen and so I became friends with Jonathan and Miguel and David and all of my friends were
36 gay white cis men. I loved it, I loved it. I had a great time, I love them all – they taught me so
37 much about life, about . . . because at that period of time I began to become very . . . the anger
38 and pushing away from my family was very, very real.
- 39 AJ: So more politicized maybe?
- 40 DM: Yeah, absolutely. And so a couple of times . . .

- 1 AJ: Around social justice issues.
- 2 DM: Yeah, I think . . . unfortunately at the time it was around gay issues, because that was the circle
3 of friends that I had.
- 4 AJ: Yeah, that's where you were.
- 5 DM: And Miguel was also actually adopted from . . . I think Guatemala by a white family. So there
6 wasn't a lot of race involved, but I would get in trouble because I wouldn't come home. And my
7 mom, being a white mother – because brown mothers wouldn't do this . . . p.s., and by the way,
8 my mom called the police and had the police come look for me. That was the first beginning
9 experience of a brown body being placed in a situation where the justice system, the police, the
10 state, all of this, had become to be involved in where my body was and where I could and
11 couldn't be. I remember several times the police would find me, and I'd be hanging out at
12 somebody's house – like in St. Paul, in a very nice neighborhood, watching *Queerest Folk*,
13 something so innocent. We weren't smoking pot, we weren't having sex – we weren't doing
14 anything. I was so good, unfortunately. And the police, we were walking into the house and
15 they came, they showed up, they had their lights on and they started yelling at me and they
16 were like, "You can't be here, your mom . . ." I don't even know. They were very angry and very
17 . . . they put their hands on me, they told me to get in the car, and I was like, "Fuck you, don't
18 touch me." As somebody who, at that time, still identified very much as white, I did not
19 understand that what I was doing was putting myself in a lot of danger.
- 20 AJ: Danger.
- 21 DM: A lot of danger. I got in their face, I was like, "Don't touch me," and they handcuffed me and
22 they put me in the back of the squad car and they drove me to my mom's and they dropped me
23 off. I was like, "Mom, how can you let them do this to me?" I remember being so mad at my
24 mom and the cop was right there. I was like, "Don't you see how they're handling me?" And
25 she was like, "Well, you shouldn't have left," or something like that and they would agree. They
26 were like, "Listen to your mother," or some crap like that. I was like something about this is so
27 not right, I don't know what it is, but it's not right.
- 28 AJ: Wow.
- 29 DM: So, Jendeen from All the Pretty Horses . . .
- 30 AJ: Jendeen Forberg, yeah.
- 31 DM: Yeah, came to a meeting, to talk about being a trans woman. This is the first time since when I
32 was whatever, like six or seven, that I'd heard any word like trans, that I'd seen a trans person in
33 my purview. And then she spoke to the space about her experience and her process and within
34 that 45 minutes, I came to the realization that I was trans.
- 35 AJ: Wow.
- 36 DM: It hit me like a lightbulb. I was like - oh my God, this makes so much sense, this makes so much
37 sense of why I identify right now as a lesbian but it doesn't feel right. I don't have any lesbian
38 friends, I have gay male friends. It didn't make any sense. I didn't feel like it fit – and this fit.

- 1 And I walked out from that meeting, well first I thanked Jendeen and I hugged her and I'm pretty
2 sure I probably cried, and then I went upstairs, walked up the steps and came out and my mom
3 was parked right out front of the building, she always picked me up, and I got in the car and I
4 said, "Mom, I have to tell you something." She's like, "What?" I was like, "I'm transgender."
5 There is no way that I couldn't have said it.
- 6 AJ: And you're like 13 or 14 years old?
- 7 DM: Yeah.
- 8 AJ: Wow.
- 9 DM: Yeah, I was a baby. I was a baby – oh gosh. Yeah. My mom . . . she was not having it. She
10 seemed a little supportive in the beginning, like when I kind of told her. She was like, "Oh, OK."
11 That kind of Midwestern, "Oh, OK." And then it was like, "Why can't you just be a lipstick
12 lesbian? Why can't you at least just look like Janet? Do you have to chop your breasts off,
13 you're going to mutilate your body?" I was at the point, obviously, where anything that she said
14 was not going to affect me – the letter had been signed and sealed my friend, it was going
15 down. I was like, "Where did you take me when I was young?" And they were like, "The Human
16 Sexuality Program," and I was like, "OK, I'm going there, that's where I'm going."
- 17 AJ: Wow.
- 18 DM: And so I started going to the Human Sexuality Program when I was 16.
- 19 AJ: Wow.
- 20 DM: And because I was underage, under the age of 18, I had to wait until I was . . . I had to wait for a
21 certain amount of time until I could do anything medically or surgically.
- 22 AJ: Sure.
- 23 DM: So I saw Dr. Zamboni for therapy.
- 24 AJ: Brian.
- 25 DM: Brian Zamboni, yes. And I was a part of the support group with . . . oh, what's the guy's name
26 that was extremely influential in the Human Sexuality Program?
- 27 AJ: Walter . . .
- 28 DM: Yes.
- 29 AJ: . . . Bocking.
- 30 DM: Bocking. I was in Bocking's support group and I had to take the MMPI, the MM . . . whatever,
31 those two tests I had to take, and I had to take them like 15 times and they're both like 500
32 questions, 800 questions or something like that. I remember spending a whole day in that
33 waiting room and they used to have these little cubicle desks that you could sit in and do your
34 little bubbling.
- 35 AJ: The ovals, yes.

1 DM: Yeah. And it really dates me when I say that because people . . . a lot of people don't think
2 about the old way of transitioning or these very rigid expectations, because I was ready. I had
3 been ready . . . I mean, I found some of the things that I talked with Zamboni about to be
4 helpful, but really why I do what I do now is because of what happened, because I don't think it
5 was good. I don't think that all of it was necessary, there was a lot of waiting, there was a lot of
6 waiting for the monthly case consultations where all the providers got together and would open
7 your case file up and talk about you, and then they would all decide whether or not you were
8 applicable to start hormones or to have surgeries. I was not interested in any of the support
9 groups and eventually just stopped going, and then got in trouble for that and was told that if I
10 didn't go back, that I wouldn't be able to start hormones. So I had to go back . . .

11 AJ: So sort of like a gatekeeper kind of . . .

12 DM: Absolutely. That just all absolutely leads into exactly why I believed in informed consent around
13 reduction and advocacy around hormone care because I think that so many people are placed in
14 these positions where - yes, I think that support is absolutely helpful and key, but there's a
15 difference between holding somebody and squeezing the life out of them just to get what you
16 need to hear out of them. There was a lot of . . .

17 AJ: I'm sorry to interrupt, but can you just define informed consent?

18 DM: Absolutely. So, for me, informed consent really looks like a situation where someone can come
19 in for hormones and use their own inner knowledge and wherewithal to justify and to give the
20 realness to the fact that you need this, there is no therapy letter, there's no doctor, there's no . .
21 .

22 AJ: Testing.

23 DM: Nobody needs to give you a diagnosis for you to tell me who you are – that makes no sense.

24 AJ: Sure.

25 DM: I just feel like that . . . it just opens people up to have a more autonomous relationship with this
26 process to where they are making their own choices and they have the power and the control as
27 to how they take their hormones or when they take their hormones or how much. If they
28 decide they're more like gender non-conforming, that they can . . . they don't have to follow
29 with these specific understandings of how hormones are supposed to be given to people, or that
30 you need to have surgeries, or you need to be on hormones or any of these things. So it really
31 just gives people – yeah, this ability to speak from their own perspective and have that only be
32 the justification for why we do things. And then also making sure that . . . I have not met one
33 patient who has not spent, or person for that matter, who has not spent years on the internet or
34 in books depending on the generation that you come from, reading about transsexualism, trans
35 . . . all of these things, long before you ever said that you were trans – you know what hormones
36 do, you know what hormones are going to do that's going to make you feel good, and the things
37 that could be a problem. We have been told these things over and over and over again – liver
38 disease, high blood pressure, cholesterol, diabetes. If you're obese these things go up, these are
39 all things that we know and we've known for a long time. So I don't really think that you need
40 to go over the steps with people, but just to like kind of make sure that they know what they're

1 doing – but again, that comes with what they say. You don't even need to . . . because I
2 remember going through the checklist when I was at the Human Sexuality Program of like,
3 "you're going to lose five years of your life because of testosterone, you are going to die earlier
4 than you . . ." Just all of these super morbid, and sometimes not necessarily true, statements.
5 We don't need to do that. I always ask folks that are in this space when I'm talking with them –
6 like, "Do you have specific questions? Are there things that you're concerned about or that you
7 want to just discuss around hormones and the possible side effects and the things that you're
8 going to see from them, as far as the positive?" And people are very forthcoming in things that
9 they're concerned about when you ask them what they're concerned about, not when you tell
10 them. Then they say, "Well, my mom had a blood clot because she was on birth control and I'm
11 about to be on feminizing hormones, is this something I should talk about with my doctor?"
12 Absolutely, that's really important, because then . . . not that we're going to deny you hormones
13 but we're going to make sure that we set you up with good primary care so that you're getting
14 tests and you're getting the preventative care that you need so that you don't ever have to deal
15 with what that would be like if you were to have something happen and then end up in the
16 hospital being a trans person – because that's never fun. So like, those kinds of ways of doing it
17 just to me seem just way better in the way of actually touching the person and getting them to
18 hear what you're saying and also hear what they're saying, and that back and forth just creates a
19 more open environment for where I have people calling me just to say, "Hey," or to let me know
20 that they did something really cool that weekend and they just wanted to share with me, or
21 they want to stop by and sit on the couch and just talk about how they're doing.

22 AJ: Yeah, because being trans is more than just medical . . . but speaking of medical, what medical
23 interventions have you personally undergone to date?

24 DM: Yes. So in 2006, I actually had top surgery before I was on hormones.

25 AJ: Really?

26 DM: Yes, which is not typical.

27 AJ: Right.

28 DM: Not a lot of people do that, and I would also say that through my own experience, if you can be
29 patient enough to wait . . . I don't like that, take that back. If you feel that your dysphoria is not
30 great to the point where not having that surgery until later on, you can do that. It just seems to
31 work better as far as the results that you get. A lot of my tissue has changed since then, I've had
32 re-growth of tissue, breast tissue. I actually just saw Dr. Buckley a couple weeks ago because I'm
33 having weird pain in my chest area and when she looked at it she said it was right in the area
34 where you cut and cut away the skin from the actual tissue. So, I don't know – I'm hoping to get
35 a revision, because I would like to just . . . yeah, pick some of that skin up and put it back in
36 place.

37 AJ: OK.

38 DM: But that was in 2006.

39 AJ: Wow.

- 1 DM: I was 17, it was right before Christmas. I was too young to even realize what I was getting
2 myself into – and not that it was a bad thing, but I don’t necessarily know if I fully was in the
3 process. I was just so excited and so ready for them to be gone that . . . it just was a very
4 different experience from when I got my hysterectomy in 2014. I was very nervous in 2014, I
5 was worried, I felt more anxious whereas when I 17, I was like, “Let’s do this, stick needles in
6 me, take it out – just get it out.”
- 7 AJ: Just do it.
- 8 DM: And it was a great process, I extremely love Dr. Buckley over at the U of M, big shout out to her
9 – she does great work. She’s very professional, she’s kind, she’s caring, she’s a human – which is
10 very hard to find in the medical community – to have somebody who is not plastic, and she’s not
11 plastic. She’s about . . . just about being a friend and a caregiver and also your surgeon at the
12 same time. She made it possible for me to not have to pay for my surgery, my surgery was
13 completely covered because she put it under breast reduction – she put it under like a breast
14 reduction code so I didn’t have to pay for it. She’s totally about that because she knows that the
15 system has been using us and our bodies and why not use the system to help us.
- 16 AJ: Did she do the hysterectomy too?
- 17 DM: No, that was Dr. Thorpe over at Park Nicollet.
- 18 AJ: OK.
- 19 DM: And that was a . . . yeah, I think that was just a more invasive . . . more public or personal
20 surgery. You have to be completely undressed. She uses the DaVinci method, which means she
21 uses the robotic . . . it’s like a machine.
- 22 AJ: Laser?
- 23 DM: No, it’s endoscopic, so there’s little things . . . but she’s in the corner on a computer and the
24 machine is doing all of the work, which is just creepy to me.
- 25 AJ: Medical technology.
- 26 DM: Yeah. With that surgery I ended up having a complication because I tore one of my stitches. I
27 actually felt it when it happened. I was at the Ball, it was one of the only Balls that I went to and
28 it was in that space where it was a dance studio by Hennepin, off of Hennepin. I was sitting on
29 one of the chairs watching people do their thing . . .
- 30 AJ: So like a Vogue Ball?
- 31 DM: Yeah, and I even walked on that, I walked that night – which was just a horrible idea.
- 32 AJ: Yeah, you had just had a hysterectomy.
- 33 DM: Yeah, exactly – who the hell does that? Billy was like, “Come, come – you’ll be fine.” Yeah, uh-
34 ha. I remember sitting down on the chair and just feeling this . . . like, pftt. I don’t know, that’s
35 all I felt – it was like a twinge. It didn’t hurt, but I felt it. I woke up the next morning alone in my
36 bed in a puddle of my own blood – just everywhere. I went to the bathroom and I pretty much

- 1 was peeing blood. So I called the nurse and was like, “What is this? What does this mean?”
2 And she was like, “How much blood?” I’m like, “What do you mean, how much . . .” “Well is it a
3 teaspoon, is it a tablespoon?” “Let me collect the blood for a minute and find out, I’m freaking
4 out here. It’s a lot.” And she’s like, “OK, well if it’s a lot, you need to hang up and you need to
5 call 9-1-1 because you’re going to pass out from the loss of blood and then you’re going to be in
6 big trouble.” “I’m not going to call 9-1-1, I’m not going to get into an ambulance – I’m not, I’m
7 not going to do that, there’s no way.” I called Billy, Billy lived like a little ways away – this was
8 when I lived in Minneapolis off of 17th Avenue, like Steven’s Square. Billy showed up and was
9 about to take me to the hospital and then Courtney showed up and then me and Courtney went
10 to the hospital and I spent like five hours in the waiting room waiting for them to bring me into a
11 room. I was going to the bathroom every 10 minutes to pee blood and then was wearing big ass
12 pads to collect the blood. Then I finally got into the room, they laid me on the bed and they
13 gave me a huge mat. By that time, it’s so gross – the blood started already coagulating, so it was
14 like . . . yeah, it was bad. I’m pretty sure I passed out because I don’t remember very much after
15 that, and then I woke up and it was like 12 o’clock at night, so I had been there the whole day.
16 Dr. Thorpe couldn’t come so it was going to be another surgeon that was going to do my surgery
17 and they were going to see if they wouldn’t have to do another surgery, but they had to because
18 there was too much blood, they couldn’t see anything.
- 19 AJ: Oh wow.
- 20 DM: So I went into surgery around 12:30, I had a blood transfusion because I lost so much blood, and
21 they fixed the spot, they got it all back up and then yup, I woke up and then I was in the hospital
22 for a couple of days because they didn’t want me to pop it out again.
- 23 AJ: Go to a ball.
- 24 DM: Right. Well, it’s interesting too – I think that there’s something else to this around the friability
25 of tissue after testosterone.
- 26 AJ: The what?
- 27 DM: Friability.
- 28 AJ: OK, what is that?
- 29 DM: This is a medical term that I’ve been told by Dr. Thorpe and a couple other doctors – doctors
30 that work gynecologically around how testosterone causes the tissue inside to be so thin that
31 it’s very easily broken and so that could be also something that played into the fact that it just
32 popped.
- 33 AJ: That played a role.
- 34 DM: Because I’d had the surgery . . .
- 35 AJ: Because you were on . . . OK, I’m sorry, go ahead.

- 1 DM: I'd had the surgery like two or three weeks before the ball – it wasn't like it was the day after. It
2 was like a certain amount . . . I wouldn't have just . . . and I wasn't dancing around, I just walked
3 but you know . . .
- 4 AJ: But hysterectomy patients, they do say you should probably chill out for about 6-8 weeks.
- 5 DM: And they're right – they're right. So I always tell . . . "Don't do what I did, don't do it. Keep your
6 butt on the couch, get people to wait on you hand and foot, because you deserve it and don't
7 rush it, because that can happen." Not only because of that, but also, like I said, because of the
8 friability of the tissue. I think that might mean that maybe we need to be even extra careful
9 because of that.
- 10 AJ: So you didn't have hormones before you had your top surgery, but you were on hormones when
11 you had the hysterectomy.
- 12 DM: Yes. So in 2007, about six months after my surgery . . . no, that's not true. Actually, no – that's
13 so interesting – now I remember. So I had my surgery, then it was Christmas and then I started .
14 . . I went back to school, because I was in high school. This was my senior year of high school.
- 15 AJ: Wow.
- 16 DM: Ahhh, oh my gosh. About a month after, I started on the AndroGel. Dr. Feldman, obsessed with
17 AndroGel, loves the AndroGel – has the AndroGel stickers, pads, pencils, pens – everything. I
18 don't like it, I hated it.
- 19 AJ: What's AndroGel?
- 20 DM: It's a topical . . . like testosterone . . .
- 21 AJ: A patch?
- 22 DM: No, it's a lot like the alcohol . . . the stuff that you put on your hands.
- 23 AJ: Oh, antibacterial . . .
- 24 DM: Yeah, it's like that. And they actually use it now a lot for cis gendered men who have low
25 testosterone, but that's a whole other conversation. And I hated it, it didn't work very well. I
26 was on it for a year, I didn't see very many changes at all – except for maybe gaining weight and
27 getting a lot of acne, which was very attractive by the way. And yeah, I . . .
- 28 AJ: Yeah, just what you need in high school – more acne, right?
- 29 DM: Right, totally. And let's put it on every morning because that's really fun – not. Oh, and then it
30 transferred and then I met Courtney, my partner that I'm still with now, and it transferred on to
31 her and she grew three very lovely whiskers and she said, "Either you get off that shit or we're
32 done." I was like, "Baby." I went to Feldman and I was like, "I just gave my partner testosterone
33 poisoning, you need to switch me on to an IM injection and she did.
- 34 AJ: That is hilarious.
- 35 DM: No . . . yeah, it happens actually more often than you would think.

- 1 AJ: Although it's really, really scary.
- 2 DM: It is scary, because it happens with the patch too.
- 3 AJ: And they didn't warn you?
- 4 DM: No.
- 5 AJ: "Hey, don't hug pregnant women or . . ."
- 6 DM: Don't sit on a couch, don't give somebody your sweatshirt that you wore – even if you had a
7 shirt on because it can go through the shirt and on to your sweatshirt and if that person puts it
8 on their sweatshirt it will get on to them.
- 9 AJ: Yeah.
- 10 DM: Your towels, your bedsheets – everything is contaminated. So if you're with somebody who is
11 trans feminine, that's not cool.
- 12 AJ: Right, that's not cool.
- 13 DM: That's not cool – and yeah, pregnant women too, you don't want to do that. So yeah, I was like,
14 "I've got to get off this." And then within a month of being on the IM injection, everything
15 changed. My voice dropped, my body . . . like my muscles popped – everything . . . I grew so
16 much more hair, which I'm still growing hair. I don't think it ever stops. Yeah, it was just a very
17 different experience from the AndroGel – very different.
- 18 AJ: Wow. Man, so what have been some of the challenges that you've faced since you've come out
19 as transgender?
- 20 DM: I think, as I've come out as transgender, it's been around the world and why the world doesn't
21 like people like me has always been something that's always been on my mind. When I
22 identified as lesbian, I was very much . . . not that I'm still not, but a very avid fighter for gay
23 rights. That was important to me, and then I was trans now and now came the, "Now where do
24 I stand? Do I fight for gay rights?" I absolutely do but there was this point of, "Do I fit in that
25 category anymore? Do I belong there?" Some people told me I didn't and then . . . yeah, what
26 was important for me for the gay community was absolutely not at all relevant to the trans
27 community. We were not worried about marriage or any of those kinds of things that were
28 happening when I was first transitioning. And yeah, just discrimination around your gender
29 expression. I think like for a good . . . I don't know, two years of being on hormones, I was very
30 much in that androgynous space and so you could flip a coin and somebody would call me he or
31 she, ma'am or . . .
- 32 AJ: Really? So mis-gendered – like every day?
- 33 DM: Every day, constantly. I remember I worked at Subway and every different person that I would
34 make a sandwich for would call me something else.
- 35 AJ: Wow.

- 1 DM: And I worked in a shop where I didn't know anyone that I was working with, so you can imagine
2 how awkward that was.
- 3 AJ: Yeah.
- 4 DM: It was just, yeah – not understanding why . . . I knew who I was, why can't you see that in me
5 regardless of this other stuff. And then there was this need for me to feel like I needed to pass.
- 6 AJ: Pass? What does that mean? What does pass mean?
- 7 DM: So to not get mis-gendered, to not be read as . . . I think in that space, as trans. I think there was
8 a part of me that was very much believing in this idea of once you're on hormones, once you
9 have surgeries – then you can become invisible, like that was the goal. That's not the goal
10 anymore. I am way more like the opposite now. No, people can make their own individual
11 choices, but I'm not about the life where you just go and you don't . . . no, I have to be involved;
12 I cannot not be involved. And I pass very well now. I think I very, very seldomly get mis-
13 gendered – it's usually by some stupid person about my height, my hand size or . . .
- 14 AJ: People who knew you from the past?
- 15 DM: No, just random people. I've gotten mis-gendered like at the bar, someone will be like, "You're
16 so short, you must be a girl," or something like that. Whatever. Or my hand size – I've been
17 told, "Oh, I never would have known you were trans, but then I saw your hands and they're
18 really small." And I'm like, "OK, thanks. I think that's just a complete backwards asinine
19 compliment, but thank you." And then when I talk on the phone I get mis-gendered sometimes,
20 which is so funny. I just kind of laugh about it now because what are you going to do.
- 21 AJ: What have been some of the joys since you've come out?
- 22 DM: Community, community, community, community, community . . . um, community. Yeah. Janet
23 introduced me to Roxanne and then Roxanne introduced me to the world.
- 24 AJ: Roxanne Anderson.
- 25 DM: Yes – oh yes. Roxanne Anderson. I would say that the two people that I owe everything to are
26 Janet Bystrom and Roxanne Anderson.
- 27 AJ: Wow.
- 28 DM: Yeah, absolutely without a doubt. Janet has done so much for me and my emotional mental
29 health, coming to terms with the fact that I'm a brown person and really, I think, helping me in
30 that space to be OK with being mad at my parents or being mad at society or being mad at the
31 world for being fed a lie my whole life, which was that I was not a person of color and that we
32 don't see race – which is a bunch of hogwash. And the anger that came from that – and that's
33 why Janet was like, "You need to go talk to Roxanne Anderson, because Roxanne understands
34 trans-racial adoption, understands what it's like to live in multiple worlds all at the same time
35 because of gender, race, sexual orientation . . . all of these different things." It was just perfect,
36 Roxanne was like . . . and we have the same birthday.
- 37 AJ: Is that right?

- 1 DM: Yeah, October 10th.
- 2 AJ: Oh wow.
- 3 DM: They're like 30 years older . . . like 20 years older than me . . . 30. I don't know, but the same
4 birthday.
- 5 AJ: Same birth date – birthday twins. Cool.
- 6 DM: It is cool, it's really cool. And Roxanne really helped me . . . yeah, with the anger and with the . .
7 . Roxanne, I remember . . . I don't know what came up, something about how I was back when
8 they first met me, but Roxanne will tell you I was angry. I was angry at the world – I hated
9 everything, I hated everyone. I didn't have anybody. I didn't have community, like that – like
10 brown, trans, queer community. And without that, being a brown trans queer person, I don't
11 know how one can survive without completely imploding in some manner or form.
- 12 AJ: Wow. Man, you talk about this identity of being brown and trans and queer, and we're at the
13 end of a very, very sad week in brown, trans and queer history. A week where we have seen our
14 brown, Black, trans and queer family slaughtered in Orlando, Florida at the Pulse nightclub. As a
15 Latino trans masculine identified person, what are your thoughts around that?
- 16 DM: So I actually didn't even find out that it happened until Monday. My mother, my white mother,
17 which I was very surprised about, texted me and said, "Did you hear about what happened in
18 Orlando?" I was like, "What happened in Orlando?" I had no idea what happened and she was
19 like, "Ahh . . ." She said something about people were murdered, there was a mass shooting. I
20 was like, "Of course there was." So I went online and I just very briefly looked at kind of what
21 was going on on the Google feed, just very, very briefly. I saw that there was a shooting, I saw
22 that it was the LGBT . . . well, no – in that article it was very much gay, it was that the gay
23 community had been affected. I did not realize at that time that they were brown, they were all
24 brown.
- 25 AJ: Right.
- 26 DM: And that they were all either very much Latino or Afro-Latino. I did not know that. And so I
27 said, "That's sad," and then I went on with my day.
- 28 AJ: Sure.
- 29 DM: The next day I came into work and EJ Olson, our community operations director here at Family
30 Tree Clinic, had made an altar on the front desk – candles, asked if people wanted to put
31 personal objects on the altar, and then had put a list of the names of the individuals that had
32 lost their lives. So I went over there and I read the names and it all just hit me in that exact
33 moment – these are all Latino names, all of these names. And then I was like, "OK, now I need
34 to look more into this, now I need to know more." And so I went online and I looked and I read
35 articles and I . . . we had KFAI on and we were listening to the all talk. I think I went through a
36 moment of just . . . of immediate shock and numbness, so I was really sad, but there was
37 nothing there. I wasn't feeling anything. I was sad, but that was it. And then Wednesday it hit
38 me. I got to work, I don't remember what happened – something happened where I was on

- 1 Facebook and someone posted something and I had to leave, I couldn't even be at work
2 anymore. I just couldn't. And I went home and I cried the whole day, just about the sad . . . the
3 horrific nature in which this happened. I thought about the ways in which these people had lost
4 their lives and what they experienced – like right before they passed and horrible that must
5 have been and how alone they felt and the families that are left behind, who are mourning the
6 loss of these folks and have no real understanding of who to blame . . .
- 7 AJ: Right.
- 8 DM: . . . as far as who is responsible, and then it turned into this Islamophobic debate and I really
9 don't think that we need to be discussing that at all. I don't think that that is relevant. I think
10 that his religious . . .
- 11 AJ: Because it was a Muslim shooter, right?
- 12 DM: Right. I don't think that his faith necessarily has anything to do with what happened. I think
13 that what happened could very well have been the effects of society on this person as possibly a
14 gay person. I know that I've read some things that he had a Grindr account, that he identified as
15 gay, and that he also frequented that club on a regular basis.
- 16 AJ: Right, it's sort of humorous in many ways.
- 17 DM: It is, in many ways. And I find that we need to talk more about mental illness within our
18 community, I think we need to talk about the lack of infrastructure for brown people – brown
19 queer trans people, to receive any type of culturally competent mental health services, inner
20 homophobia, inner transphobia, inner racism. I think all of these things are in the root cause of
21 this horrific event. It does not excuse his actions, but it speaks to a larger problem in our
22 community which is brown people fighting other brown people, queer people fighting other
23 queer people – like what is . . . we need to do some research on that, something about that,
24 because I'm really sick and tired of white gay lesbian, even sometimes bisexual people, that
25 have been posting about this issue and talking about things like how they're affected by it. I've
26 read one specific quote from someone who was talking about how they have a physical
27 reaction, like a bodily reaction when they're in public and they try and hold their boyfriend's
28 hand and how upsetting that is for them, and how this incident reminded them of how they're
29 not safe. But something that Saul said last night really impacted me in a way, because I was
30 raised by white people and I don't experience these things on a daily basis, but for some of our
31 community, or some of our African-American, Afro-Latino community members, this is a daily
32 thing.
- 33 AJ: Right.
- 34 DM: Death, murder, violence towards bodies that look like you are a daily event, so for these folks to
35 just . . .
- 36 AJ: Yeah, I think I actually said that.
- 37 DM: Yeah – no, I think you're right. I think both of you did – yeah. The commodification, the usage
38 of this horrible thing, this tragedy that happened, to talk about your injustices in the world,

- 1 makes me . . . want to throw things because I'm just . . . I'm done. I'm sick of you using and
2 exploiting our pain and our loss to say that you understand and that you are Orlando. This
3 #IamOrlando, please stop. Please stop. Because the people who are Orlando and who were
4 Orlando, if they would have gone to those organizations, they would have never received any
5 actual services.
- 6 AJ: Sure.
- 7 DM: So it's just unfortunate and it definitely affected me as far as my anxiety and my depression –
8 they have been very high. I don't really want to be out in the world, I found myself just going
9 right back to Egan, right into my little cocoon, and I just watched Netflix.
- 10 AJ: Are you going to go to Pride?
- 11 DM: Yes – yeah. I'm going to go to Pride in very specific ways. I want to be there to just be a witness
12 to things that are happening for my community, because we all know that every year there is
13 always an incident between our fabulous brown indigenous queer trans LGB folks having conflict
14 with either police, Pride guests, security, people who think they're security because they're
15 drunk – whoever the hell feels like being the hall monitor that day, and we have to deal with
16 that. I think that as community we need to show up, if we can . . .
- 17 AJ: If we can.
- 18 DM: . . . for people to, again, be a witness. So if you see something that goes down, you pull out
19 your damn phone, you call whoever you need to call, and you get a group of 300 brown people
20 in that space so that this can be witnessed. We cannot allow these things to continue without
21 someone having some fricking responsibility. Jamar, Trayvon, all of these folks that have lost
22 their lives and there has been no . . . and we know this, there is not going to be any
23 accountability. But I'm done with that and we need to figure out how to change that because I
24 need some accountability.
- 25 AJ: Yes, yes – I hear you. I'm with you.
- 26 DM: Some people think that brown people are angry, I think that they're right. I think that we are
27 really angry and I think that we are very justified in our anger and I think that we need to have
28 some accountability because I don't . . . since the Orlando shooting, and prior to the Orlando
29 shooting, two other African American trans women were murdered and no one is talking about
30 it.
- 31 AJ: Yes.
- 32 DM: That's a problem to me, that we can bring up and uplift brown people but through the uplifting
33 of certain brown people, Black people are othered – and that's my problem. If we want to come
34 together, we need to be talking about all of these things and we need to be just having genuine
35 conversation and the one group of people that I find to be having the best type of conversation
36 around the othering of Black people by other brown bodies, is Dark Matters.
- 37 AJ: Yeah, Alok Vaid.

- 1 DM: Yes.
- 2 AJ: And . . .
- 3 DM: Yeah, their names . . . but yeah, I truly . . . when I heard that I was . . . I was just so enlightened
4 by that because we talk about how white people take up space, we talk about how cis people
5 take up space, but I think there's also something to be said about masculine-identifying people
6 taking up too much damn space and about . . . that there is a reality around skin tone and skin
7 shade and sometimes lighter folks, and especially folks who pass as white, sometimes need to
8 take a back seat because it's not that . . . we don't do that. We have different understandings
9 and realities because of that and it's not fair and that doesn't mean that I'm ever, "Oh, you've
10 suffered more than me," or, "That's not fair because . . ." It's not any of that, it's more like,
11 "This is the reality and we need to be held accountable and we need to let the people who need
12 to speak, and who never have their voices uplifted, be uplifted." And if that means you need to
13 shut up, then you need to shut up. And that's where I'm at these days I'm just trying to . . .
14 when I'm in brown space, I'm very, very aware of that.
- 15 AJ: Wow.
- 16 DM: And I'm also aware that I was raised by a white family and I'm very real about that. It took me a
17 long time, I was very afraid to be real about that – that people wouldn't want me in space, but I
18 think that by being real and by being truthful about your identity and where you come from and
19 the experiences that you have, people have . . . hopefully, a more trusting sense of you because
20 you're upfront.
- 21 AJ: Sure. Yeah, I think that's the reality of being authentically trans too. Right?
- 22 DM: Right. Absolutely – they're so parallel.
- 23 AJ: Where do you work? Tell me a little bit about what you do.
- 24 DM: So, I definitely first want to mention that I started out in community at the Minnesota Trans
25 Health Coalition. I have been volunteering there for five-plus years.
- 26 AJ: Shot collar.
- 27 DM: Shot collar. I speak on behalf of MTHC at schools, classrooms. I've gone to the U of M and
28 talked to up and coming medical students.
- 29 AJ: Right.
- 30 DM: I've gone to clinics, I've gone with Roxanne Anderson and Alex Iantaffi to Bemidji and we talked
31 to some doctors up there – we've done a lot of stuff and I think it's really important that we
32 have a brown and also gender identity diverse group of people speaking on behalf of the trans
33 community because not one of us completely encapsulates our community and so we have to
34 show that we are very different in all of our ways.
- 35 AJ: Absolutely.

- 1 DM: And then through being at the Minnesota Trans Health Coalition and Roxanne Anderson being
2 badass, I was eventually kind of linked into the process of Family Tree Clinic, using that space as
3 a space to not only train some of the Family Tree Clinic staff by going and shadowing people at
4 Shaw Clinic, which is the time when we give trans and gender non-conforming folks hormones
5 that they are prescribed if they don't like to give themselves an injection. And then they also
6 had a community listening session there and I met Alissa Light, which is the executive director of
7 Family Tree Clinic, and also Erin Wilkins, who is now my supervisor.
- 8 AJ: Oh wow.
- 9 DM: With Roxanne's pushing and emailing and texting and probably bothering the shit out of Alissa, I
10 got an interview.
- 11 AJ: Oh wow.
- 12 DM: I'm very humbled by that and I'm also humbled by the fact that CeCe McDonald and Kaya . . . of
13 course I'm not going to remember Kaya's last name . . . both African American trans women, as
14 far as this position – they were also interviewed.
- 15 AJ: Oh really.
- 16 DM: Yes, and it was between the three of us and I received the position. And candidly, I think that
17 there are probably very real reasons why I got the position over them. And no, I don't
18 necessarily think that it makes me happy all the time to know that I took a position that should
19 have been for a trans woman of color because we know that trans women of color are the folks
20 who are experiencing all of the inequalities, experiencing the least amount of proper care within
21 the medical system around hormones or around anything. But I also think that, unfortunately, it
22 takes a certain type of person to do this job because you are in a space where . . . for a while
23 there, I was one of maybe two or three trans people that worked in the organization and one or
24 two of the brown people that worked in the organization, predominantly white cis female.
- 25 AJ: Yes.
- 26 DM: There were days, Andrea, when I did not want to be here and when I did not think that we were
27 going to be able to do this – where I thought that there was no way that a brown person could be
28 seen here without having some kind of just horrible traumatic experience. There was a lot of
29 conflict between myself and the providers, not Yukiko, but the cis white female providers.
- 30 AJ: Yukiko . . . Y-u-k-i . . .
- 31 DM: Y-u-k-i-k-o.
- 32 AJ: K-o . . . Yukiko, just like it sounds.
- 33 DM: Yeah. And yeah, I don't know . . . and then on top of that, we were also beginning to centralize
34 racial justice and anti-oppression work at Family Tree.
- 35 AJ: So maybe what you're doing is you're making this place more accessible so that CeCe and Kiana
36 or . . .

- 1 DM: Kaya.
- 2 AJ: Kaya, could potentially work here in the future.
- 3 DM: That's where I've come to – the conclusion that . . .
- 4 AJ: Because they may not have . . . given the environment that you described, they may not have
5 been successful in that environment.
- 6 DM: No, I think they would have had a lot of emotional, spiritual, physical bodily reactions to
7 sometimes the things that happened in the past year. I do agree, I think that . . . I want
8 absolutely, and I've told them from the day that I have gotten here, that I want to see a trans
9 woman of color, specifically Black, to come into this space and have a position of power - please
10 and thank you. Whether that means they're another trans health advocate, whether that
11 means that we create another position, I don't care – but we need that because there are very
12 few spaces in which there are Black trans women who have positions of power, and of actual
13 power. And so, that will happen.
- 14 AJ: That's awesome.
- 15 DM: Oh yeah – it will, it will. We've got to get more funding, we're doing it and we have some grants
16 on the way, we're going to do what we can so that we can get that. I know that although I'm
17 doing a good job at what I do, I am not a trans woman so I can't do very much for the trans
18 women that I'm seeing. I can . . . from a trans perspective, but not from a feminizing
19 perspective. I don't know what feminizing hormones do to my body. I know what they do, but I
20 didn't like it and so I probably just pushed it out of my brain.
- 21 AJ: Exactly.
- 22 DM: I don't know what the hormones that you put into your body, that are feminizing do, or the
23 experiences or the emotional, physiological changes – all of these things, that is not my
24 experience and so I cannot . . . I can't speak to that, and that's not OK. It's not OK, it's never
25 been OK. I have lots of feelings about it – you know, when I go into spaces and I do trainings, I
26 always say we need to get a trans woman in here as well because I cannot do that and it pains
27 me that the people that really need to be speaking on these subjects, who would do a way
28 better job, aren't here and aren't being paid for that. So yeah, it is my goal to absolutely make
29 this space accessible for those people so that we can start seeing more African American trans
30 women as clients.
- 31 AJ: Wow. Man, Damion, this has been a fascinating discussion. I'm so grateful for the opportunity
32 to sit down with you. I have about three minutes worth of battery life and tape left here, so tell
33 me where do you think the trans community is going to be in the next 50 years?
- 34 DM: Where we've always been – front and center for whatever happens, for whatever community
35 we've always been. That's historical. Trans women, African American and Latina trans women
36 have always been at the forefront of anything, and I think that will absolutely continue. I think
37 that the things that are happening are going to continue to push our community to get more
38 and more angry and to get more and more ready to see some change, and if that means civil

- 1 disobedience or . . . I don't know, mass sit-ins, mass bathroom-ins, I don't know – it's going to go
2 down.
- 3 AJ: Right.
- 4 DM: And we will be there.
- 5 AJ: Wow.
- 6 DM: Because that's what we do.
- 7 AJ: That's powerful.
- 8 DM: It is.
- 9 AJ: That's the perfect place to end. Thank you, Damion.
- 10 DM: Thank you.