

Maxwell Poessnecker
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

July 6, 2017



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.

Andrea Jenkins
jenki120@umn.edu
(612) 625-4379

1 Andrea Jenkins -AJ
2 Maxwell Possnecker -MP
3

4 AJ: Good afternoon. My name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian for the Transgender
5 Oral History Project at the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota libraries. Whew,
6 that's a mouthful.

7 MP: Sounds like my title.

8 AJ: And, today is July 6th, 2017. I am on campus at the University of Minnesota in the Anderson
9 Library and I'm talking today with Mr. . . .

10 MP: Yeah.

11 AJ: Maxwell Poessnecker.

12 MP: Poessnecker, yes.

13 AJ: Wow, I said that right. It's taken me about a year to get that name down, but I got it. How are
14 you today, Max? Is it OK to call you Max?

15 MP: Yes, absolutely – either one. Good, good. I'm glad that I'm finally here.

16 AJ: I know, we've been trying to get this going for a little while. But, it's happening and I'm really,
17 really thrilled. So, Max, I'm going to have you start out by stating your name, please spell your
18 name because it's a little bit of a challenge and so we want to make sure we get it right. Tell me
19 your gender identity as you claim it today, your gender identity assigned at birth, and the
20 pronouns that you use.

21 MP: Sure, sure. So, my full name is Maxwell, M-a-x-w-e-l-l and Poessnecker is spelled P-o-e-s-s-n-e-c-
22 k-e-r.

23 AJ: Wow.

24 MP: It's a long one, yeah.

25 AJ: What's the origin? I know you've got a lot more to tell me, but . . .

26 MP: German.

27 AJ: German, OK.

28 MP: Primarily, yes. Let's see. I use he/him/his pronouns as well as they/them/their pronouns and
29 different spaces account for different pronoun use. But, predominantly he/him pronouns. I
30 identify as trans masculine. I was assigned female at birth and now I've gone through
31 multitudes of identities but . . .

32 AJ: Really?

33 MP: Yeah, I found that . . . so let's see, 2017 . . . in 2015, I graduated from grad school and so there's
34 a period in time, I grew up in small, conservative Nebraska, and then when I moved to Mankato,

- 1 which is where I did my masters program, that was the first time that I really started to think a
2 lot about gender identity.
- 3 AJ: OK.
- 4 MP: So, I had taken my first feminist theory course and thought to myself, “I definitely don’t identify
5 with a feminine persona,” and so I was identifying as gender non-binary for a while, gender
6 queer . . . kind of different terms for a little while. And then, I thought that I was a non-binary
7 trans man and then that still didn’t feel right and so now I’ve just kind of stuck with trans
8 masculine.
- 9 AJ: Wow. That’s really fascinating because . . . you know, maybe you can help to distinguish
10 between . . . because I think a lot of people think those are very similar identities. I think they
11 are somewhat similar, but clearly there’s some distinctions for you because you have sort of
12 traveled through them.
- 13 MP: You mean like the non-binary piece.
- 14 AJ: Yeah.
- 15 MP: I think the big thing for me was I’ve always appeared to be much younger than my actual age
16 and so I’ve really struggled with finding myself to gain credibility in professional settings. I have
17 this struggle, or I had this struggle at one point – and I still do, but this idea of what society
18 deemed masculinity to look like and not wanting to conform to societal expectations. So, when
19 I was thinking about transitioning, thinking about what hormones would do to my body . . . so
20 providing facial hair and lowering my voice. While these were the things that I wanted from a
21 transition, I didn’t want them because that’s what society wants me to have.
- 22 AJ: Right.
- 23 MP: And so, to keep this non-binary trans identity really helped me to kind of remove myself from
24 the status quo of what masculinity looks like in our culture . . . yeah, so.
- 25 AJ: Wow, that’s pretty awesome. Go ahead.
- 26 MP: No, no, no – I tend to say “so” a lot when I get to the end of my points.
- 27 AJ: Got it, all right. I’ll pick up on that – cool. Wondering, has there been other identities prior . . .
28 did you ever identify as lesbian or gay or . . .?
- 29 MP: Oh, yeah, for sure. Let’s see, when I was in high school . . . to give you some context, I grew up
30 in a town of 100 people.
- 31 AJ: Whoa.
- 32 MP: And I commuted 12 miles one way to school . . .
- 33 AJ: I bet I had more people than that in my homeroom.
- 34 MP: I know, right. We have college classrooms that are huge. I graduated with 24 kids, so being out
35 wasn’t really a possibility. I was out to a couple of friends, and by being out I don’t think that I

- 1 really knew what that meant for me. I just knew that I had this sexual attraction to traditionally
2 feminine bodies. I knew that there was something, obviously, different about me but I couldn't
3 name what it was.
- 4 AJ: Sure.
- 5 MP: So, when I went to college . . . my first year in college I came out as bi and I was dating a cis man
6 at that time. We broke up because I started realizing that I really wasn't physically or
7 emotionally attracted to him. So, then I came out as a lesbian. To this point I was only out to
8 my friends circle. I had joined the Pride Club at college and I had, later on that semester, came
9 out to my family. Coming out about my sexual orientation surprisingly was much more difficult,
10 or my family took it more extreme than coming about my gender identity.
- 11 AJ: Huh, that's interesting.
- 12 MP: Usually people can understand sexual orientation . . .
- 13 AJ: Right.
- 14 MP: . . . but it's difficult with gender identity. So, then I got to a point where I was like I just don't
15 like the sound of the word lesbian – I was like, "This is not a word that I identify with," so I was
16 like, "No, I'm gay." Then I went to grad school and I came out as queer and then I started to
17 really think about my gender identity and so I came out as trans, so I just identify as a queer
18 trans guy.
- 19 AJ: Wow. Thank you for going through that, I appreciate it. And, you know, it's not necessarily
20 uncommon in my interviews that people sort of transgress through multiple identities, but you
21 have really sort of given thought to distilling it down to a very fine point, so I kind of wanted to
22 give you the opportunity to expand on that a little bit.
- 23 MP: Yeah.
- 24 AJ: Tell me about your earliest memory in life growing up in . . . what's the name of this very small
25 town in . . . Montana you said? No, Nebraska.
- 26 MP: Nebraska – yeah. So, I was born in Atkinson, Nebraska, which is a little bit larger. And then,
27 until about junior high, my parents had split, and then I ended up moving to what I consider my
28 hometown, Page.
- 29 AJ: P-a-i-g-e.
- 30 MP: P-a-g-e.
- 31 AJ: P-a-g-e.
- 32 MP: Just like a page in a book, yeah.
- 33 AJ: Just like flip a page, OK.
- 34 MP: So, yeah – 100-150 people. And, I grew up in a rural farming, agricultural, conservative
35 community. Growing up in a town like that, everybody knows your business.

- 1 AJ: Sure.
- 2 MP: Sometimes for good, most times for bad – especially when you’re somebody who seems to be
3 like a black sheep like myself. I was an only child and so that was always an interesting dynamic
4 growing up. But . . .
- 5 AJ: And, your parents split?
- 6 MP: Yeah, they . . .
- 7 AJ: So, was there a step-parent?
- 8 MP: Yeah, so my mom was young – she was 19 of two days when she had me. So, you know, a kid
9 having a kid and they separated but didn’t actually get divorced for two, three, four years after.
10 So, like 4th or 5th grade at that time, my mom’s boyfriend but now my step-dad was in the
11 picture. A few years later, then my dad got married, so I have two step-parents. I found that by
12 living with my mom and my step-dad, my step-dad was more of a parental figure than my dad, I
13 felt. Since then, my dad and I have kind of grown apart and I find that I call my mom and my
14 step-dad my parents.
- 15 AJ: Yeah, that’s reasonable – that makes sense. What was it like in the household? You were this
16 kind of . . . I mean, you described something different about you. Did your parents pick up on
17 that?
- 18 MP: So, yeah, for the most part, when I was really young and up until junior high, I had presented in
19 more of a masculine fashion. So, I had short hair and I wore boy’s clothing – I was what would
20 be considered a tomboy. I worked on the farm and I helped my step-dad. I milked cows, I did 4-
21 H, and all that stuff.
- 22 AJ: Yeah.
- 23 MP: And then when I got to junior high, because when you’re trying to figure things out it seems
24 really black and white, so you don’t know the complexity and the fluidity. And so, I kept thinking
25 to myself, “If I like feminine presenting girls than that must be what they also like.” And so, then
26 I grew out my hair and I started wearing dresses and I wore make-up. I really actually felt pretty
27 good about myself for a little while. It was nice to feel pretty and get this attention. And so, it
28 wasn’t until college when I really was like, “Nope, that’s definitely not me.” I remember there
29 was a point . . . oh, gosh, I was young. I was probably 5th or 6th grade and I remember my mom
30 taking me to a doctor’s appointment, and it was a gynecologist. At that time, I had no clue what
31 a gynecologist was and my mom told me that she was worried about how my body was
32 developing. I’ve always been a fairly small-chested woman and she told me . . .
- 33 AJ: Which is kind of good, retrospectively.
- 34 MP: Yeah, I know. Binding wasn’t awful for me. But, I remember thinking . . . OK, you think my chest
35 is developing at a much slower rate, and so she ended up taking me to this gynecologist and
36 they drew blood and all this other stuff, these exams. Looking back, I had a conversation, and
37 my mom was testing my hormone levels.

- 1 AJ: Ahhh.
- 2 MP: I don't know that she necessarily thought that I could have grown up to be trans but it was really
3 peculiar that . . .
- 4 AJ: That she was interested in that . . .
- 5 MP: Yeah, and that she took a medical approach to try and figure this out rather than just having a
6 conversation with me. So, that was one of my earliest memories.
- 7 AJ: Had she had a conversation with you, do you think you would have been able to say, "I don't
8 really feel like a girl."
- 9 MP: I mean, growing up I never had role models, I never had language. I think that's why it took so
10 long for me to articulate my identity because it took moving away from that culture that I was
11 exposed to. I probably could have articulated to the point where I was like, "I like wearing boy's
12 clothes and I don't like having long hair." But, I don't necessarily know that I could have
13 articulated or felt that it would have been OK to articulate that I wanted to be a boy. But, I
14 remember even . . . oh, gosh, 2nd or 3rd grade, being on the playground and sitting off to the side
15 and thinking . . . you know, at that time, you're starting to think about sexual attraction and I
16 remember thinking to myself it would be much easier to be a boy and like a girl than it would be
17 to be a girl and like a girl. And so, then I was already associating gender identity but thinking
18 that that was completely off the table because there was no way that I could ever be a boy.
- 19 AJ: Wow . . . no, I get it. I've been there. So, in elementary school you were this tomboy kid and
20 there was only 100 kids. Did you get teased? Bullied?
- 21 MP: Oh, for sure. Absolutely.
- 22 AJ: By the girls or the boys?
- 23 MP: Predominantly by boys. I remember in 8th grade we were playing flag football and this one kid in
24 my class who always was . . . he was just kind of the class bully. I had tackled him or had done
25 something that essentially pissed him off and he . . . I don't remember his exact words, but I
26 remember him verbally attacking me and he said something along the lines of, "What's your
27 issue? Do you have a dick under there?" Or something like that.
- 28 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 29 MP: It was just super verbally aggressive and then, from then on, he would ask other girls in our class
30 to rely information to him when we were in the locker room together.
- 31 AJ: Oh, really . . . like what's under your . . . ?
- 32 MP: To check me out. Yeah, exactly. And be like, "Well, yeah, does Max have genitalia?"
- 33 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 34 MP: Yeah, just really super gross.

- 1 AJ: Huh, wow. I'm sorry. Again, bullying is not uncommon for gender non-conforming folks too,
2 but it's very sad when it happens. So, you've kind of gone through this question, I guess, but
3 just talk about the first time you really realized that you were not the gender you were assigned
4 at birth. I know you said college sort of opened up this whole new world and new language and
5 new concepts, but when did you have that moment where you were like, "Oh, that's me."
- 6 MP: Yeah.
- 7 AJ: Or, maybe you didn't have a moment, maybe it was just a gradual over time type of thing.
- 8 MP: I don't remember a specific moment, but I remember, like I said, when I was in grad school
9 really thinking that I don't like my given name. My given name was Michelle and my middle
10 name was Angelina, so a very feminine name.
- 11 AJ: Yes.
- 12 MP: And, you know, I've always predominantly expressed in a fairly masculine . . . stereotypical
13 masculine tone and just kept thinking that I really am dissatisfied with having hips and having a
14 chest and carrying my weight in certain areas of my body. And, it wasn't until I got to grad
15 school and I had been exposed to other trans-identified folks and I had started dating my
16 current partner in the spring of 2013, and she went to college at Hamline and lived in the Cities.
17 Hamline, surprisingly, has a really large population of trans students.
- 18 AJ: Yeah, it is kind of surprising, but they do.
- 19 MP: Yeah, and her previous partner was trans and so I think that I was just really curious. So, I
20 started asking her questions about what her experience was with her partner and how being
21 trans was for him and so I started to think about maybe that's the journey that I wanted to take
22 too. So, really, I honestly attribute a lot of it to my partner because she was the first person who
23 validated these feelings of uncertainty and really gave me a direction to work through them.
- 24 AJ: Wow, that's pretty incredible. And you guys are still together?
- 25 MP: Yeah, over four years now.
- 26 AJ: That's awesome.
- 27 MP: Yeah.
- 28 AJ: We've already answered this question, what terms do you use to describe yourself and how has
29 that changed over time, and there's been quite a few transitions. Anything else you want to say
30 about that at all?
- 31 MP: I don't think so.
- 32 AJ: What have been some of the challenges, Max, for you in beginning to express your true gender
33 identity? And, I'm going to throw in sort of another question that is not really related but you
34 did bring up your old name, so how did you come to the name Max?
- 35 MP: Yeah. Well, I knew that I wanted to keep . . . so, I guess to talk about this a little more. When I
36 was in grad school I knew that I didn't want to go by my given name, but I didn't know what

- 1 name I wanted to go by. So, I knew that “M” was . . . whatever name I came up with, I wanted it
2 to start with an “M”.
- 3 AJ: To keep some continuity in your life.
- 4 MP: Yeah, yeah – and I think that was when we first had met and I was going by “M”.
- 5 AJ: Yeah, you were going by M – yeah.
- 6 MP: And so, I went by “M” and I used they/them pronouns and I was really in this gender non-
7 conforming space. And so, while I was working through a name . . . it was really hard for me to
8 move from this non-binary space to, “I am going to be trans masculine.” I don’t know why, but
9 it just really was difficult to take on 100% this masculine persona.
- 10 AJ: Sure.
- 11 MP: And so, I wanted to keep “M” and I wanted to keep a similar syllable and sound, so Maxwell just
12 stuck. And, I don’t know a lot of Maxwells.
- 13 AJ: It’s like a cool-ass fucking name. I love that name.
- 14 MP: Yeah, so Maxwell just kind of stuck. I don’t know a lot of folks with that name.
- 15 AJ: Yeah.
- 16 MP: And then my middle name is Lee, so L-e-e and kind of like my given middle name, Angelina, I
17 wanted to keep something from that and so it’s a little segment. And my parents told me at one
18 time that had I been assigned male at my birth, Lee would have been my middle name.
- 19 AJ: OK, wow.
- 20 MP: So, it just made sense.
- 21 AJ: Challenges? What have been some of the challenges for you?
- 22 MP: You know, surprisingly, in terms of my transition and kind of physically moving through the
23 space, I’ve always kind of had a husky build and so I really haven’t had any issues with using the
24 restroom or passing. Even before I had started T and had had top, I was even passing
25 sometimes 50% of the time. Really, I find the challenges, because of the work that I do in higher
26 education, particularly as a director of our LGBTQ Center, I’m Queer for Career and so . . . that’s
27 like the big challenges – feeling . . .
- 28 AJ: I haven’t heard that one before. I’ve heard Gay for Pay.
- 29 MP: Like Gay for Pay, yeah.
- 30 AJ: But, Queer for Career is a new one for me, so I just got a little chuckle out of that – sorry.
- 31 MP: And so, the challenge is feeling like I constantly have to be educating and being an activist in all
32 different spaces in my life. Granted, I hold those identities really close, but it’s really exhausting
33 to feel like I constantly have to be the token trans person, to educate the people at my work.
34 I’m being asked by other people in the Minnesota state system who are like, “Will you come do

- 1 ally trainings? And do a presentation around gender identity.” I’m one of the few out trans
2 people . . . I’m the only out trans person I know at Century and there’s not a lot of us in the two-
3 year college system.
- 4 AJ: Sure, yeah. Well, thank you for doing that work. It’s kind of . . .
- 5 MP: But that’s also not uncommon.
- 6 AJ: It’s a kind of a blessing and a curse in some ways.
- 7 MP: Yeah.
- 8 AJ: Yeah, and you know, you used the phrase passing, I mean I thought you were going to say the
9 biggest challenge is convincing people that you are trans.
- 10 MP: Yeah, well along . . .
- 11 AJ: I think a lot of people would be like, “No way, you’re shitting me, get the hell out of here.”
- 12 MP: That could be. I haven’t had that experience yet, but that’s good to know that I’m passing to the
13 point that it would be unbelievable. But, I think with that, though, I think a lot of trans guys I
14 know have the same issue with this idea of trans guys look a lot younger than they are. So, that
15 might be another challenge that I have is feeling like I have to grow out my beard to look as old
16 as I am.
- 17 AJ: Yeah. I get that. How old are you?
- 18 MP: I’ll be 27 in September.
- 19 AJ: All right. You’re actually still pretty young.
- 20 MP: Yeah, young. But when people are like, “You’re not a day over 18,” I’m like, “What??”
- 21 AJ: Right, yeah – no, that’s right. Exactly.
- 22 MP: I mean, it just gets . . .
- 23 AJ: And ageism is real. People will . . .
- 24 MP: Yeah, and people don’t think it exists because generally . . . I mean, they think it exists but
25 generally it’s the reverse where it’s ageism against elderly populations.
- 26 AJ: Right, exactly. But, no, young people get sort of minimized and diminished too because of age.
27 It’s a real thing. What have been some of the more positive aspects?
- 28 MP: I think . . . I mean, of just being out? Is that the original question?
- 29 AJ: Yeah.
- 30 MP: Well, obviously, mentally and emotionally I feel amazing. I mean, it’s great to be able to be out
31 in my work and in my life – socially and now completely to my family. But, I really like the fact
32 that I can utilize my identities to really create a lot of space. Having been perceived and
33 identified as a white woman for 20-some years of my life, now I’m taking on these identities of

- 1 being what, in our society, is perceived as the most privileged person. And so, I really have
2 access to a lot of space and I can kind of be an undercover feminist, if you will, where people
3 don't know I'm trans and I'm just this white cis-appearing guy that is trying to create change for
4 marginalized communities.
- 5 AJ: And even almost heterosexual.
- 6 MP: Yeah.
- 7 AJ: I mean, I don't know your partner's gender identity.
- 8 MP: She identifies as cis, a cis woman. But yeah, that too is . . . often times we are seen as being a
9 straight couple, even though we both identify as queer.
- 10 AJ: Right, right. But, just seeing you walking down the street, nobody knows that, right? Yeah,
11 that's . . . you do have access to some spaces that I will never actually be able to enter into. I
12 mean, I can be in those spaces but I'm going to be a Black woman, that's what is going to be the
13 reality. Whereas, you . . . so, you talked about using that privilege in terms of being an
14 "undercover" or low-key feminist. I don't know which phrase you used . . . did you say
15 undercover?
- 16 MP: I think I said undercover feminist, yeah.
- 17 AJ: Are you using that to address race and other sort of oppression types – you know, disability
18 oppression and that kind of stuff.
- 19 MP: Absolutely. I find that in my role . . . and I think, too, marginalized communities kind of get this
20 expectation put on them, but because I have a deep social justice lens, people automatically
21 assume that because you're the director of LGBTQ services, you also know how to address
22 issues around ableism and racism and Islamophobia and whatever else. While that's true to
23 some extent, I'm not . . .
- 24 AJ: You have an awareness.
- 25 MP: Yeah, like I'm not the overarching knowledge . . .
- 26 AJ: Expert.
- 27 MP: Yeah, exactly. That's why we have other folks that work in those areas. But, I mean, so much of
28 what I do in my role is always through an intersectional lens and there's only so much that I can
29 understand having lived . . . you know, my lived experience is as a white person and really trying
30 to make sure that I'm including the voices of other communities that I don't have identities as,
31 making sure they're always at the table.
- 32 AJ: Sure, that's awesome. You know, you and I, before we turned on the camera you were telling
33 me that you went home to Nebraska to visit family. What's your relationship like with your
34 family these days?
- 35 MP: Yeah, so . . . it's kind of shifted as it would have been even 10 years ago. For the most part,
36 growing up my mom and I were like oil and water. We constantly fought, she was always trying

1 to tell me what to do and how to run my life. My dad and I bonded and we liked to do all these
2 hunting and fishing and all that kind of stuff together. And, since then, really since moving away
3 from Nebraska, the tables have kind of turned where my mom and I are super close now and my
4 dad and I really don't even really talk on the phone that much. I attribute a lot of things to that
5 my mom has had some health concerns and I think me coming out as trans and her knowing the
6 reality of the life expectancy rate and the concerns around trans identities, I think she's really
7 embraced our relationship. And so, even when I was home this weekend and I was talking to
8 my mom about the struggles of having to come out to my grandparents. She's like, "No matter
9 what they say, you know that I always love you and I accept you just the way you are." And
10 that's nothing that I would have ever imagined her to have said 10 years ago.

11 AJ: Wow. Is that about her parents? Or are these . . . ?

12 MP: These are my dad's parents. My dad's parents, I finally came out to last weekend and my other
13 grandparents, I've been out to since maybe the beginning of this year, maybe end of last year.
14 My grandma, my mom's mom, actually had a double mastectomy about a year ago, so
15 essentially, she had undergone the same procedure that I went through for top surgery back in
16 March. And so, she was really supportive and, I think, from the sake of making sure that I
17 receive adequate health care, she was really involved in my life when I was going through the
18 process of getting top surgery.

19 AJ: That is fascinating. Wow. You guys had the same procedure, so she was giving you healing tips.

20 MP: Exactly. And she was like, "And this is how you have to take care of your drains," and, "This
21 worked really well for me." Yeah.

22 AJ: That's awesome. What about chosen family? I know you have a partner of four years now, or
23 five years. Have you guys created a support network of queer family?

24 MP: Oh, yeah – for sure. We have one roommate and she also identifies in the community. Yeah,
25 we have just a ton of really close friends and a lot of them are folks that she went to college with
26 at Hamline, a lot are folks that I went to grad school with. But, I find that we're really an
27 independent couple, we do a lot kind of on our own. But, generally whenever we have get-
28 togethers, we find that the majority of the people that we share space with do identify in the
29 queer community in some shape.

30 AJ: Do you have friends that . . . just straight white guys?

31 MP: I don't know that I have a lot of straight cis white guys in my life. I definitely have a lot of white
32 straight cis colleagues who . . . like, I'll go out to happy hour with, but nobody that I'm going to
33 be like, "Hey, do you want to go kayaking this weekend?" Or, "Hey, do you want to go to the
34 Pride parade?" Or, something like that. So, it's more like a casual, like, "Let's get a drink."

35 AJ: Just workplace kind of thing. But, you get respect from that community, for the most part.

36 MP: Yeah, and a lot of that is having access to that space. That may not have been the case five
37 years ago.

- 1 AJ: Very likely not. Wow. So, we've talked about this . . . you keep answering my questions before I
2 ask them, Max, but it's all good.
- 3 MP: I talk a lot.
- 4 AJ: No, it's totally all good but I just want to make sure if you want to talk a little bit more about
5 this. To the extent that you feel comfortable, tell me about any medical interventions that you
6 have undergone or that you plan to do.
- 7 MP: Yeah. So, I started . . . gosh, like mental health therapy, oh maybe three or three and a half
8 years ago.
- 9 AJ: Where did you go, do you mind . . . ?
- 10 MP: So, I can't even remember the first person.
- 11 AJ: Private?
- 12 MP: Yeah, a private person.
- 13 AJ: OK.
- 14 MP: The person I go to now, her name is Joanne Garlich.
- 15 AJ: OK.
- 16 MP: Super great, super awesome. I've been fortunate in that I've only had to go to two therapists.
17 The first one was . . . I remember she said to me at one time, she was like, "Well, don't you think
18 that using they/them pronouns just makes it harder for other people?" I was like, "Maybe, but
19 that's . . ."
- 20 AJ: That's not my concern.
- 21 MP: Yeah. So, I was like, "See ya." And then, I found the person who I still see probably like once a
22 month now. So, for me, it was really important, as it is for most people, is to try to find access
23 to health care. And so, I wanted to wait until I was employed full-time to get insurance before I
24 started hormones or have any surgery. So, I just started T in April, the end of April, in 2016. So,
25 just a little shy of a year now. And, I had top surgery on March 1 this year. And those are the
26 only procedures that I've had done and really plan to do. Bottom surgery isn't anything that I'm
27 interested in, primarily because it's not something that I feel super dysphoric about.
- 28 AJ: Right.
- 29 MP: And, because it's expensive and really complicated for female to male trans folks.
- 30 AJ: Yeah, and . . . I mean, I suspect the technology is getting better but it's not the greatest.
- 31 MP: Yeah, yeah. And, I think just this idea of taking a graft from your arm to construct genitalia and
32 then taking a graft from your butt to put back on your arm. It's just like . . . it seems like a really
33 complicated, long enduring process. I am super supportive of anybody that wants to do that,
34 it's just not something that I desire for myself.

- 1 AJ: Yeah, no – thank you for sharing. What kinds of LGBT or trans-related organizations have you
2 been involved in? You mentioned in school that you guys had some kind of GSA or some kind of
3 group?
- 4 MP: Yeah, a Pride group.
- 5 AJ: Pride group, yeah.
- 6 MP: Pride group was what it was called, at my alma mater, which is Wayne State College in
7 Nebraska. Yeah, I'm just trying to think . . . my involvement with community organizations is
8 really limited because so much of it has been through higher ed.
- 9 AJ: And that's fine, Queer for Career – that what you do every day, so why, at night, go out and be
10 involved in some volunteer organization when you're doing it as your daytime gig.
- 11 MP: And now I advise the Pride group at Century. But, I've gone to tons of different conferences like
12 the Trans Equity Summit and I was just recently at a Human Rights Campaign Time to Thrive
13 Conference for K-12 educators. And, I think that a lot of my involvement with organizations is
14 through conferences.
- 15 AJ: Sure, that makes perfect sense. When did you first meet a trans-identified person?
- 16 MP: Well, an open trans-identified person . . . I don't think it was until grad school.
- 17 AJ: Do you remember who it was?
- 18 MP: Yeah. At the time, I don't know . . . they might be going by a different name, but at the time, I
19 think they were going by the name of Eli and I was 22 or 23 years old then, yeah – 22. And I
20 think he was like 16.
- 21 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 22 MP: I was like, "Damn, you're this young high schooler and you're already on T and had your top
23 surgery day." All this stuff. Yeah, I was like . . . I look back and I'm like, "Shit." I really honestly
24 think if I would have had the language and role models in my life, I probably would have been
25 out so much younger.
- 26 AJ: Yeah.
- 27 MP: Yeah.
- 28 AJ: Cool. So, in accessing medical care, have you had any challenges or insensitive people?
- 29 MP: I mean, I've been fortunate enough that I haven't had any traumatic experiences. I've had some
30 unfortunate experiences where they will say . . .
- 31 AJ: Like microaggressions.
- 32 MP: Yeah, like being mis-gendered or having them tell me, "Well, we can't use your preferred name,
33 we have to use your given name." Or, back earlier this year when I was getting ready to have
34 top surgery, I had to have . . . what is it called? Where they had to check for lumps in my chest.
35 Why can't I think of what it's called?

- 1 AJ: Oh, a breast exam? A mammogram?
- 2 MP: Mammogram, there we go. I had to have a mammogram and this reminds me of a point you
3 said earlier. I was passing so people . . . the staff at the front desk thought that I was a cis guy
4 and so when I came back out, they were like, "Well, I don't think your health insurance will
5 cover this as you're a male-identified person, as a man." I was like, "What?"
- 6 AJ: I'm not paying \$800 for this.
- 7 MP: Yeah, I had strategically not legally changed my name and gender marker yet because I wanted
8 to make sure that that was covered, because I knew that's a possibility. And so, my chart said,
9 "M" on it, but I had to show her my ID. I was like, "Legally, I'm still female." And so that was
10 really awkward.
- 11 AJ: Yeah, that's awkward. It's not mean really, but it's awkward.
- 12 MP: No, yeah – it was super awkward. A lot of it though, I attribute once again to being a white,
13 seemingly straight person. So, I think that I've been fortunate to have fairly good experiences.
14 Maybe I've had bad experiences but I just haven't been cognizant of them.
- 15 AJ: Well, I hope you don't feel bad about it – you should feel OK . . . you should feel great, actually.
16 I guess I would just ask that you please use that privilege to help create space for other people.
- 17 MP: No, absolutely.
- 18 AJ: That's all I'll say about that because it's awesome to be able to walk through the world with no
19 problems, that's how everybody should be able to function. Man, you've really helped to work
20 through a lot of my questions.
- 21 MP: I knew we were short on time.
- 22 AJ: What do you think the relationship is, though, between the broader LGB community, which you
23 have been a member of, and the trans community?
- 24 MP: You know, I think some of the most damaging experiences that I've had have been with other
25 LGB folks and cis folks, obviously.
- 26 AJ: Sure.
- 27 MP: I really think that in order to really push forward and really make the changes that we need to
28 for the trans community – like our own community needs to be on board with having a better
29 understanding of trans identities and lived experiences and just really breaking down cis
30 privilege. So, yeah . . . I don't know. Like Pride is a great example. I love Pride, but I also hate
31 Pride because it's such an inaccurate description of where Pride even came from and the true
32 identities that it should actually be representing.
- 33 AJ: Yeah, it's a complicated thing. Do you think the acronym should remain intact or should trans
34 people go off and kind of do their own thing? I know that's a leading question, but I don't want
35 to dictate your answer.

- 1 MP: Yeah, I don't know. I've never thought about it much. I think that the T was thrown in there
2 because people were like, "Well, I don't know what to do with it."
- 3 AJ: Right, yeah.
- 4 MP: So, we just kind of stuck . . . I mean, I think, overall, our identities aren't salient and so, gender, I
5 think, affects sexual orientation just as expression affects identities as much as it expresses
6 sexual orientation. So, I think it's important that we really, I guess, just try to do a better job at
7 really helping educate the fluidity of all of these different identities and how they play a part in
8 everybody's life. So many folks have told me, "Well, I don't think about my gender identity or
9 my sexual orientation," because they've never had to, because they've had those privileges,
10 right.
- 11 AJ: Yeah.
- 12 MP: And so, often times, that's an LGBTQ issue. Or pronouns, that's like an LGBT thing.
- 13 AJ: Right. Yeah, part of my work going forward is to really try to help everybody understand that
14 sub-conscious or conscious, you have a gender identity. Everybody on the planet has a gender
15 identity, it's just that some people are extremely fortunate that they don't have to think about
16 it. I think that there are some people who have a lot of challenges around gender identity but
17 they don't recognize it as such. But, if we had a more gender-inclusive world, they might be less
18 likely to have some of the challenges that they're having – particularly, I think, it really leads to
19 sort of what has been now known as male-toxicity. Toxicity, in terms of just feeling like you
20 have to be hyper-masculine to be a man and that's just not the reality.
- 21 MP: Yeah.
- 22 AJ: Where do you think the community will be in 50 years? And, thinking about it in the context of
23 Eli, who you met when he was 16, that young people are coming out younger, their parents are
24 supportive and the medical system is helping with hormone blockers and all of these kinds of
25 things, schools are being supportive. Where do you think the community will be in 50 years,
26 given that context?
- 27 MP: Well, a year ago, I feel like my answer might be different because it's so hard to think about
28 what the future is going to look like with our current administration.
- 29 AJ: It know it is. We will get through it, Max. I feel hopeless too, but today I'm saying we're going
30 to get through this.
- 31 MP: Yeah, because it's like we built so much up and we're tearing some of it back down, but just
32 thinking about my time in high school, I felt like I didn't have any visibility, there wasn't any
33 language, and, of course, there was. I think that had we had a lot of more visibility and the
34 social media like we have today, for better or for worse, it's still creating talk and conversation.
35 And so, I think, that we're providing more and more of an opportunity for young people to really
36 identify and find themselves at a much earlier age and to give them the language and the space
37 to have conversation about that. Because I think when I grew up, that wasn't a conversation
38 that you had. I think that we're able to . . . overall, whether it be about gender identity or just

- 1 sex or whatever it might be, all these taboo topics, I think that as a society we're doing a better
2 job of educating parents to have these difficult conversations with their kids.
- 3 AJ: Wow. Max, is there anything that I have not had the foresight to ask you that you think is really,
4 really important to state?
- 5 MP: Gosh.
- 6 AJ: Or even marginally important, or humorous. It doesn't have to be earth shattering or anything.
- 7 MP: Yeah, right – like I've got to end on this monumental message.
- 8 AJ: Yeah.
- 9 MP: I think that this project is great. It just goes to show that this is such a small slice of the voices
10 that make up our community.
- 11 AJ: Oh, my gosh, yes.
- 12 MP: And so, thank you for giving me the opportunity to be able to share space with you.
- 13 AJ: Yeah, I hope we can do much more of this.
- 14 MP: Yeah.
- 15 AJ: I guess I do have one question that just kind of occurred to me. You are working with LGBT
16 queer-identified young people in academia. What are the numbers like at a school like Century
17 College? Are there trans-identified people? Is there a lot of queer kids?
- 18 MP: Yeah, Century is the only two-year college in Minnesota with an actual center.
- 19 AJ: Wow.
- 20 MP: So, we're lucky that we have that but it's also like, "What the hell? Get your shit together."
- 21 AJ: You needed it, right?
- 22 MP: Yeah.
- 23 AJ: And to the other schools, "Why not?"
- 24 MP: So, our little closet that we have is always full. Students are constantly in there – all the time.
25 Unfortunately, we just did a climate survey and . . . this was before I got there, and it didn't ask
26 for gender identity or sexual orientation. So, I don't have the demographic.
- 27 AJ: You don't know the numbers.
- 28 MP: I don't know the numbers. And, one of the things that I'm pushing for, and unfortunately
29 because I work in the state system, it has to come from the system office is asking for having
30 those questions present on applications. That would provide an example for all the colleges in
31 Minnesota to be able to take on and so that way we would all have the demographic and then
32 Century wouldn't be the only one with a center because everybody else would see that you
33 have so many queer kids.

- 1 AJ: That they need one, right.
- 2 MP: Yeah. I don't have any tangible numbers but I can tell you that we're fortunate that we have a
3 Gender Studies department that really provides a lot of visibility for my work and the student
4 populations that we need to be serving better.
- 5 AJ: Sweet. Well, Max, thank you so much for this opportunity to sit down and share your life. I
6 mean, I'm really privileged to be able to hear from people like yourself and others. Thank you
7 for entrusting your story with me and until we meet again, my friend.
- 8 MP: Yeah.
- 9 AJ: Peace.