

Moe
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

December 2, 2015



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 Moe -MN
3
4 AJ: Hello. My name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian for the Transgender Oral History
5 Project at the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota. Today is December 2, 2015, and
6 I am in the home of Moe. Moe, I'm going to ask you to introduce yourself, state your full name,
7 your preferred gender pronouns, your gender identity and your gender assigned at birth.

8 MN: My name is Moe. I am a trans man. I was assigned female at birth. Is that all the questions?

9 AJ: And your preferred gender pronouns.

10 MN: Oh, he and him and his.

11 AJ: OK. A lot of people go by they/them/their these days.

12 MN: That's true.

13 AJ: I don't want to make any assumptions. So, Moe, thank you for having me in your home and
14 being willing to be a part of this project. Can you tell me just the first thing you remember in
15 life? It doesn't have to be related to your gender identity, though if it is, that's fine. But, just
16 the first thing you remember.

17 MN: That's a great question. My first memory is a body memory and an individual memory. I
18 remember lying between two bodies and one being more round, which I later understood to be
19 my father, and one that was more flat, which I later understood to be my mother. And looking
20 around the room and there being this sheep bordered . . . I don't know, it must have been
21 wallpaper, in the home that I . . .

22 AJ: Sheep?

23 MN: Sheep, I believe they were sheep - yeah, that were in my view. And, I just remember being
24 there and looking around – that's my first memory.

25 AJ: Is that right?

26 MN: Yeah.

27 AJ: Wow. How old do you think you were?

28 MN: I think I was less than two years old only in so far as I didn't actually remember . . . memory is a
29 funny thing. My best friend moved down the street later on and in her house there was similar
30 wallpaper and I asked my parents about it. They were like, "Oh, yeah . . ." I told them this
31 memory and they said, "Oh, yeah, that's from when we lived in Martinez." We only lived there
32 until I was two, so it must have been sometime during that.

33 AJ: Right. Martinez? Where's that?

- 1 MN: It's in the East Bay area of Berkeley and Oakland, it's a further out . . . well, at the time it was a
2 small town and now it's probably considered a suburb, it may have been considered a suburb
3 then.
- 4 AJ: Yeah. So, you moved when you were two.
- 5 MN: Yeah.
- 6 AJ: Where did you move to?
- 7 MN: Just a few towns away, to a place called Walnut Creek, California. It has its own BART stop and
8 it's quite different from when I grew up there.
- 9 AJ: Yes, I've spent a little time in the Bay and I remember that stop.
- 10 MN: Yeah.
- 11 AJ: Walnut Creek. So, you were born and raised in California?
- 12 MN: Yes, I was in California until I was 17.
- 13 AJ: Wow, OK. What was elementary school like? Did you go to elementary school in Walnut Creek
14 or did you guys move?
- 15 MN: No, I went to elementary school in the neighboring town called Lafayette. I went to the same
16 school from when I was a baby, somewhere between three and six months old, to when I
17 graduated from 5th grade. So, it was a small . . . it still exists, it's called Meher School.
- 18 AJ: Which kind of school?
- 19 MN: The Meher School.
- 20 AJ: Meher. M-a-h . . .
- 21 MN: M-e-h-e-r. It's name after a person named Meher Baba who is a central religious figure in
22 Sufism, which is a form is Islam and mysticism. My parents weren't practitioners but that
23 community had a school and they took babies.
- 24 AJ: OK.
- 25 MN: So, that's how I ended up going there and then I just stayed there.
- 26 AJ: So, you stayed there for quite a while.
- 27 MN: Yeah.
- 28 AJ: Did you sort of absorb or pick up any sort of Sufi practices?
- 29 MN: Not practices so much, but I think the thing I would think of, having heard friends who went to
30 Catholic school and sort of right and left, "Well, there's Jesus," "There's the cross." Similarly,
31 there is some imagery and different teachers that are more prominent in my mind and I think

- 1 that was just something in the ether and in the background of my life. I didn't think much of it
2 one way or another, it was just what I was habituated to. It's only in time that I've realized that
3 that's not most white suburban children's experience.
- 4 AJ: So, I know that you're a writer and I'm a writer, I'm just curious. Is Rumi out of that Sufi
5 tradition?
- 6 MN: That's a good question – so yes, Rumi is a Sufi poet. So, the group of the Sufi community that
7 school is run by is run by a group called Sufism Reoriented, which is a U.S. based . . . hopefully
8 I'm not misspeaking, but yeah, there's two primary communities – one in Lafayette, California
9 and one in Washington, DC. They're primarily white membership but there are different people
10 of Middle Eastern descent who are also involved, but it's primarily white suburban folks in
11 California. I don't know so much about DC – DC it's actually in the city, I believe. I've never
12 been there though . . . I mean, I've been to DC but not to the Sufi community there.
- 13 AJ: Not to the Sufi community. Wow. So, school in this sort of spiritual community and you weren't
14 necessarily a part of the spiritual practice, did you experience any sort of outsidership or
15 bullying?
- 16 MN: Not so much bullying.
- 17 AJ: Difference-ness? I don't know.
- 18 MN: Yeah, I think that . . . not around that. I think that that was just sort of . . . sometimes my friends
19 who were part of that community, they would get to do things that I wouldn't get to do and I'd
20 kind of be jealous because they were doing a different thing. But, I didn't feel kicked out or left
21 out in that way.
- 22 AJ: That's cool.
- 23 MN: Yeah.
- 24 AJ: Any sort of, I guess, other-ness around your identity or . . .?
- 25 MN: I think that I always felt . . . I was a tomboy, and that was fairly socially accepted. I was a kid in
26 the 1980s and I was sort of athletic and especially . . .
- 27 AJ: Jeans were pretty common for young women at the time, for girls.
- 28 MN: Yeah, exactly. And my parents let me wear . . . as I got older and was given a little more style
29 freedom, I wore boys clothes towards the end of elementary school. They were accepting of
30 that at the time.
- 31 AJ: Not boy-inspired clothes.
- 32 MN: No, from the boy's section.
- 33 AJ: From the boy's section. Wow. How did those shopping trips go?

- 1 MN: I don't have a lot of deep . . . I don't remember how that got started. I do remember that my
2 dad and I had matching shirts.
- 3 AJ: Huh.
- 4 MN: That I think that he . . . so, one of us . . . I imagine that he brought that in somehow but yeah,
5 just a boy's and a men's striped . . .
- 6 AJ: So, you didn't have that whole, "Oh, my God, they're forcing me to wear a dress and curl my
7 hair and all of this stuff." That kind of trauma that I've heard from other trans-identified men?
- 8 MN: Not from them very much, they were pretty accepting of my . . . at least my fashion choices.
- 9 AJ: OK.
- 10 MN: I was always a little bit quirky. I remember in high school and stuff I wanted to wear Converse
11 shoes when we would go to different fancy . . .
- 12 AJ: A wedding maybe.
- 13 MN: Yeah, fancier things. I'd have to ask them what they thought of it, they let me do it. I was fairly
14 independent minded, but they had rules. They weren't rule-less for sure, but clothing was not
15 something they were . . .
- 16 AJ: Deeply sort of rigid about.
- 17 MN: Right.
- 18 AJ: That's cool. I mean, clothing sometimes . . . for trans-identified people, it's a big thing.
- 19 MN: Right. I think, for me, that was much more from peers. So, when I went to middle school, I had
20 this really visceral memory of wearing a Monterey Bay Aquarium like Hanes t-shirt with some . .
21 . it was a white shirt with this box and it said, "Monterey Bay Aquarium," and boy's jeans and
22 talking to the librarian about the dress code and just remember thinking, "Oh, there's no way . .
23 ." There was just something about that conversation, there was no way that I violated the dress
24 code because so much of the dress code was about policing sort of femme . . .
- 25 AJ: Feminine . . .
- 26 MN: Dress.
- 27 AJ: No short shorts . . .
- 28 MN: Yeah, and so maybe there was no logos and that was kind of geared towards boy's wear or what
29 have you. But, so around that time I think I felt a lot of social pressure to . . . I was clearly not
30 the greatest example of girlhood. There was some social pressure to move that way, which I
31 did. So, in middle school and the beginning of high school, I dressed with much more femininity
32 than I would later in life. And then, sort of towards the end of high school, I started wearing
33 boy's clothes again and I cut off all my hair.

- 1 AJ: Towards the end of high school.
- 2 MN: Yeah.
- 3 AJ: When was the first time you realized, internally, that your gender was something other than you
4 were assigned at birth?
- 5 MN: In that sort of way, not for a very long time. I first heard the word transgender in high school,
6 but I . . . yeah, but I didn't understand its meaning and reference to me.
- 7 AJ: Sure. So, in your early childhood you were just expressing yourself as a kid, you didn't really
8 have any notion that . . . I've heard a lot of people, through this interviewing process and even
9 beyond, that man, I knew I was always a – this – but I had to conform to this. Or, I always knew I
10 was a boy but . . .
- 11 MN: Yeah, I think that I always knew I was different maybe would be a better expression of that for
12 me. But, for me, that was really hard to sort out. I couldn't be specific about that in terms of
13 gender. I just felt not akin to sort of the general white suburban environment that I was in and I
14 think that I didn't . . . at various times I experienced that as about different things. And some of
15 that was bodily.
- 16 AJ: Sure.
- 17 MN: But, I just didn't have the language for it. It sort of felt pre-verbal, just visceral.
- 18 AJ: So, you were in high school and you started to hear about these terms and then towards the
19 end of high school, your senior year I suspect, you cut your hair off.
- 20 MN: Yes.
- 21 AJ: Was that a point in time when you sort of said, "Hmmm."
- 22 MN: Funnily, no. I just created a different narrative. So, I went to this funny high school where you
23 had to go backpacking in either Death Valley or the high Sierras of California for three weeks to
24 graduate.
- 25 AJ: What?
- 26 MN: And so, it's hard to do your hair that way, so I was like, "Well, I'll just cut it off."
- 27 AJ: Sure.
- 28 MN: My sister cut me and my nephew, who at the time must have been about five – she cut both of
29 hair with a razor at home down to a two – it was short. And it was not a good haircut because it
30 was just a solid two, which doesn't look good on me. But, at the time I didn't know that.
- 31 AJ: So, you wore a lot of caps, I assume.
- 32 MN: Exactly – yeah, yeah. And so, I think people just sort of chalked it up to me being sort of a free
33 thinker or something.

- 1 AJ: California, you're in the Bay area.
- 2 MN: Yeah, although I was like the only person . . . the suburbs, yes.
- 3 AJ: Can be conservative.
- 4 MN: Yeah, and so I think there was just some . . . yeah, I don't know. I just did my own thing and I
5 was . . . I don't think people thought of me as eccentric but I think that people didn't suspect me
6 to do what other people did for whatever reason.
- 7 AJ: For whatever reason.
- 8 MN: Yeah.
- 9 AJ: They're just like . . .
- 10 MN: An individual.
- 11 AJ: An individual, yeah.
- 12 MN: Yeah, I don't know.
- 13 AJ: Do you feel like you had good relationships in high school and grade school?
- 14 MN: With my peers?
- 15 AJ: With your peers?
- 16 MN: Yeah. I was . . . at least in elementary school I definitely had friends, a good group of friends.
17 And then, middle school, you know, I don't think . . . well, some people it is their social highlight,
18 but for me that was not the case. I did experience people sort of being mean and a little vicious,
19 but not in a way that, I think, is extraordinary in middle school.
- 20 AJ: And it wasn't related to your gender expression really?
- 21 MN: Not specifically, not in a way that was with any articulation. And, in high school – yeah, I did
22 have good friends. I just kind of flew under the radar at school.
- 23 AJ: OK.
- 24 MN: People didn't really . . .
- 25 AJ: That's cool.
- 26 MN: Yeah.
- 27 AJ: So, what terms do you use to describe yourself today?
- 28 MN: In terms of gender?
- 29 AJ: Yeah, in terms of gender.

- 1 MN: You know, I think . . . that's a good question. I don't know. Male, I identify as a transsexual, I
2 would say that – a transsexual man.
- 3 AJ: OK.
- 4 MN: And I identify as a transgender man too. Often times . . .
- 5 AJ: What's the difference?
- 6 MN: That's a good question. Well, yeah – so some of it, I think, is just a nuance difference of
7 language. I think some of it has to do with the history of the word transsexual, so in my mind
8 the history of the word transsexual is a clinical term that has been used in primarily medical
9 settings to describe the experience of being trans in allopathic medicine. I find some of the
10 ways that that's been explored within medicine to be deeply problematic and with many abuses
11 of power in which providers have not given trans people the time and space and respect to fully
12 be themselves.
- 13 AJ: And agency.
- 14 MN: Right – and agency, for sure. Yeah. And simultaneously . . . but perhaps there is more of an old
15 school mentality to that word that I subscribe to in terms of the way that I think of myself. I
16 very much respect the idea of a gender spectrum and that people fall in different places of that.
17 I find myself to be on sort of one end of that which, I think, especially within trans communities
18 is notable as time sort of unfolds and there is sort of more space for people to be truly
19 themselves, that I don't identify myself as somebody who has a gender that is particularly queer
20 or non-conforming.
- 21 AJ: Fluid.
- 22 MN: Fluid, yeah. I feel pretty solidly like I'm a boy. Of course, everybody has got their little nuance,
23 but it doesn't feel that nuanced in the grand scheme of things.
- 24 AJ: You're strongly identified as a trans male.
- 25 MN: Yeah, yeah. And in my day-to-day life I don't . . . yeah, I think it also feels to me important to be
26 alive to the reality of how I walk through the world and that for me I'm perceived and treated
27 and socialized in an active day-to-day way as a white man in the United States and that is . . . I
28 mean, identity is complex and all that, but the intersection of those two things really define a lot
29 of how I move through this world. Those seem to be the primary frames that I often think about
30 things through, not to say that other things are less important in terms of class and ability and
31 all that, but yeah – not with any attempt to lessen those but just that . . .
- 32 AJ: It's who you are, it's your . . .
- 33 MN: Yeah, walking down the street, that's what I think about.

- 1 AJ: Right, exactly. But, you brought up this really, I think, fascinating point. I guess . . . well, before I
2 dig into that a little bit, how has your identity shifted or changed over time? Or, has it? I don't
3 know.
- 4 MN: That's a good question. Yeah, I mean, it definitely has. When I was . . . and, for me, that's always
5 been kind of tied to sexuality in a way that I've navigated gender and so by the time I was in high
6 school, I sort of understood that I was not very heterosexual and I wasn't very good at it. So, I
7 knew that about myself and . . .
- 8 AJ: Did you ever have a boyfriend?
- 9 MN: Yeah, so I had a boyfriend actually during that time when I cut my hair. So, I think that it wasn't
10 so much that, "Oh, I'm not attracted to men," or, "I'm not attracted to women," I just kind of
11 knew that I wasn't very good at heterosexuality as a . . .
- 12 AJ: Way of being.
- 13 MN: Yeah, like I just wasn't . . . I didn't do very well in those settings. I wasn't very socially successful,
14 but also, I just didn't have a lot of social rev for it. I don't know, I just wasn't very successful –
15 that's the way I think of it. So, yeah, I had a boyfriend and then I had a girlfriend in high school,
16 and kind of true to my nature, they were pretty private relationships – they weren't very public.
17 Yeah, and I think they each made of me what they will – or what they did. But so, during that
18 time I think I . . . I don't recall how I identified in terms of gender. I sort of knew I wasn't
19 straight, I think probably the word I used was bisexual and then, for a period of time in my life, I
20 really strongly identified with the word dyke as both a gender identity and as a sexuality.
- 21 AJ: Now that's interesting because while in some ways, in many contexts, dyke is a negative
22 connotation and then, I think, in most . . . for a lot of people, the context of dyke is just a
23 synonym for lesbian, right?
- 24 MN: Right.
- 25 AJ: But, you call it a gender identity too. I can imagine that but I just want to hear you talk about it.
- 26 MN: Yeah, well, I mean I think . . . for me, something about language . . . I think in time, it's funny to
27 think about this, because in time language has sort of become a little bit more like loose in my
28 life. So, I think part of it is my youth and I had a lot of feelings and thoughts. Since I'm so old
29 now. But, I think, partially that was something that I was called and so that was a word that was
30 used on the street, like in passing or called out windows and stuff.
- 31 AJ: Provocatively or . . .?
- 32 MN: Yeah, although I'm trying to think . . . actually, as I say that, what is funny is that I was actually
33 was called faggot a lot more during that time in my life. So, it's funny – was I actually . . . I
34 associate that with my word selection but as I'm thinking about it, actually I was called a faggot
35 much more. I wasn't like . . . I didn't get slurs thrown at me on a daily basis or anything, it was
36 notable when it would happen – it wasn't part of my day-to-day. But, yeah, I think maybe . . .

- 1 AJ: So, people read you as a guy – essentially? Some people.
- 2 MN: Yes, yes – exactly. Right. Yeah, that’s the funny thing.
- 3 AJ: A gay guy.
- 4 MN: Yeah, the people who hated me thought I was a gay guy – or maybe they didn’t hate me, but the
5 people who felt enough . . .
- 6 AJ: Animosity . . .
- 7 MN: Animosity to speak out of their cars as they drove by – yeah, right, exactly. They perceived me
8 as a gay man. And so, yeah – but in terms of dyke, I think that for me it had to do with a certain
9 kind of . . . of course there are dykes who are all over the spectrum in terms of gender. I think in
10 my youthful moment it was something that I highly associated with masculinity – which, now
11 I’m not naïve enough to think that that’s the only way you can be in that identity. But at the
12 time, I had a strong association. And also, I think, to me, it was something about sort of being
13 like, “I’m not on your terms.” Again . . . yeah, I’m not going to . . . yeah, my language isn’t about
14 trying to map to what will make sense at my parent’s house – whatever. This is who I am and
15 it’s coming from a history of being what people have been historically called who are in my
16 social position, and then also a word that people who are my elders have reclaimed.
- 17 AJ: Dykes on bikes.
- 18 MN: Right, exactly. There is a generation above me that had already reclaimed that, I wasn’t the one
19 reclaiming it.
- 20 AJ: Right.
- 21 MN: I hoped, and in some ways, still do still hope to emulate the tradition that they paved the way
22 for.
- 23 AJ: Do you drive a motorcycle?
- 24 MN: No – no, no, no. I’m not that hip. In terms of, I think, the dykes in the past have . . . I just honor
25 and respect them as people who have called things as they saw it and, of course, those
26 communities also replicate all the highs and the lows of us pulling it together.
- 27 AJ: I do think there is some reality to your perception of the term being more closely associated
28 with what people generally consider to be more masculine traits or actions, way of dressing,
29 way of being, as opposed to people who identify as lesbian and even more so as femmes, and
30 who, in the past, dated dykes. Right?
- 31 MN: Right. And, of course, there’s femme dykes.
- 32 AJ: If you were a femme, you really wanted to be with sort of this butch-y, dyke-y kind of person –
33 or at least that’s what society sort of forced those communities, our communities, into . . . along
34 those binary kind of lines.

- 1 MN: Right.
- 2 AJ: Very interesting. What have been some of the challenges that you've faced since expressing
3 your true gender identity?
- 4 MN: You know, I think there's multiple levels to that. I think part of that is just personal or
5 emotional.
- 6 AJ: Sort of internal struggles.
- 7 MN: Yeah, sort of just coming to terms with that, that that was my truth, was challenging for me.
- 8 AJ: Sure.
- 9 MN: And then, I think, in terms of structural, I think there's been multiple times in my life in which
10 I've . . . where there have been sort of systemic barriers to access to health care and the like and
11 simultaneously I think that I've also been positioned with a lot of privileges to then navigate
12 those barriers. So, both of those realities are true at the same time.
- 13 AJ: So, like college educated?
- 14 MN: Right.
- 15 AJ: Did you . . . ?
- 16 MN: I've had health insurance for most of my life, there's been small periods in-between but by-and-
17 large, I've had health insurance.
- 18 AJ: Sure.
- 19 MN: And so, then it's a matter of having a health insurance plan that doesn't cover the services I
20 need, which is a very specific struggle – that's not . . . yeah, it's specific.
- 21 AJ: But, it's specifically related to gender identity.
- 22 MN: For sure – yes, of course, of course.
- 23 AJ: How about acceptance in schools and other institutions?
- 24 MN: Yeah, I mean . . . I just always am a fairly private person, so in school context I've just never
25 talked about it one way or the other. So, when I went to MCTC, I just didn't talk about it. I think
26 people just perceived me as a very masculine woman. I was medically transitioning at the time
27 and then when I went back to school to go to nursing school, I showed up the first day and I
28 didn't know if people would think I was a boy or a girl. We did this terrifying, horrible activity
29 that I would never recommend to teachers, which is that you . . . well, that's not true. It was
30 fine, it was well intentioned – so there was maybe 60 people in the classroom and I was maybe
31 number 44 or something like that, I was way down the line. You were supposed to turn to your
32 neighbor, talk to your neighbor, and then you went and had to answer these four or five
33 questions, like: Who was your neighbor, what's their name, why are they in the nursing field . . .

- 1 AJ: You introducing the other person.
- 2 MN: Exactly, so it was an opportunity where this person was going to publicly pronoun me to the
3 entire cohort, and this went on for a fair amount of time – like 20 or 30 minutes, because if you
4 think about it, it took about a minute.
- 5 AJ: Yeah, it takes a while.
- 6 MN: I just remember the whole time thinking, “I don’t know if this person thinks I’m a boy or a girl.” I
7 have no idea – which was a very specific moment in my medical transition. And so, she
8 pronoun-ed me correctly and that sort of . . .
- 9 AJ: Set the tone, huh?
- 10 MN: And people . . . like I had a classmate, we had to do physical exams on each other, which I sort of
11 refused.
- 12 AJ: OK.
- 13 MN: Sort of, as in I did. I was like, “I have to have this specific lab partner.” And, I had a weird
14 interaction with a peer during that, in which I think she was confused about my gender and said
15 some awkward things to me about physiology and I just sort of was like, “Um-hmm, yes, moving
16 on.” I don’t remember exactly how I responded but I was like, “Um-hmm, great.” I didn’t have
17 much of a response and I think she then, in turn, felt so embarrassed that it just kind of never
18 came up again.
- 19 AJ: Wow. What have been some of the joys of expressing your true gender identity?
- 20 MN: Yeah. I think . . .
- 21 AJ: Did that internal turmoil go away?
- 22 MN: Definitely some of it. I think that there’s a life long struggle for me in terms of being embodied
23 that I accept as part of my life arc and wouldn’t expect that to change – that’s part of who I am.
- 24 AJ: Sure.
- 25 MN: I think that I’ll always have some pain and struggle around that internally and that’s the way it is
26 and I accept that. I also think that, for me, medically transitioning and socially transitioning freed
27 up a lot of time and energy that I had directed inward to direct outward. And that, would be my
28 biggest why people should be true to themselves is that . . . yeah, I feel like everything I would
29 want to say about it sounds very over the top or sentimental or something, but I do think that . .
30 .
- 31 AJ: No, here’s the thing. People aren’t hearing that, people aren’t saying that. In fact, I think quite
32 the opposite. I think so many people live their lives in service of what other people think their
33 lives should be.
- 34 MN: Right.

- 1 AJ: That because you've lived it, your life – yay, everybody should know this, but people don't.
- 2 MN: Right. So, on that note I think that accepting and living into my truth has allowed me to be more
3 outwardly engaged and more alive to the world and alive to other people's struggles and my . . .
4 yeah, just in terms of the day-to-day work I do and the person I want to be and the world I want
5 to see. It's made me more open and facing outward instead of facing inward out of shame and
6 fear.
- 7 AJ: What work do you do?
- 8 MN: I'm a nurse, I'm a registered nurse.
- 9 AJ: Wow, that's awesome.
- 10 MN: I do home hospice, so I visit people in their homes when they're enrolled in hospice.
- 11 AJ: Wow, that's kind of tough work.
- 12 MN: It is, I love it very much. It has a lot of my heart.
- 13 AJ: Awesome. So, what's your relationship like with your birth family now?
- 14 MN: Oh, yeah – they're characters. I love them. Yeah, I love them.
- 15 AJ: I love them, you said.
- 16 MN: Yes, I love them very much.
- 17 AJ: So, there is a relationship.
- 18 MN: There is a relationship. In moments, it has been challenging and they were initially not very
19 accepting and I think that we kind of came to a breaking point in which they realized that I
20 would . . . that we would just not have a relationship if they didn't sort of accept the basic terms
21 of who I was. They've done a lot of growing, I think I've done a lot of growing. I think I'm more
22 mature than when I initially . . . I was sort of post-adolescent, early 20s wild child, and I've kind
23 of pulled it together a little bit. So, I'm sure I'm much . . .
- 24 AJ: Pulled it together a lot to get through nursing school.
- 25 MN: Yes – yeah, yeah. And, you know, I think I'm committed to having a relationship with them and
26 they're people who that is . . . my desire to have a relationship with them can be a healthy thing
27 for me, and I think that it does require that I compromise and I have different . . . I let things fly
28 with them that I would never let fly with anybody else. They're the people that raised me and I
29 have a lot of respect for them. It is possible . . . I think for some people there is just no way you
30 can stay in a healthy relationship and then that's clear that that's what you have to do, but I
31 think that there's a level of compromise that both ends of . . . both myself and the rest of them
32 can kind of take on to try to maintain. I believe in love as a practice but also love as practice –
33 like you've got to practice at it and that means that you've got to go with it.

- 1 AJ: Yeah, no – compromise. You’ve got to compromise regardless of your identity in order to be in
2 a relationship with people, I think, and particularly family. So, good. Are they still in California?
- 3 MN: No, my parents live in Washington state. So, I generally see them about every six months to a
4 year.
- 5 AJ: Nice.
- 6 MN: I have two sisters and they both have children.
- 7 AJ: And they’re in the northwest too?
- 8 MN: No, one of them lives in Ohio and the other lives in California.
- 9 AJ: Oh, cool. So, you get to kind of travel all over the country a little bit, huh?
- 10 MN: Yeah.
- 11 AJ: And the children, the nieces and nephews, are they aware? Are they cool? Do you guys have a
12 relationship?
- 13 MN: My experience with kids is that kids are never the problem, sometimes adults interfere. I think
14 that can very much be said about my family. I think we all, as adults in the family, would have
15 done things differently if . . . in hindsight, and that was a challenge a little bit. But, the kids –
16 yeah, they’re wonderful.
- 17 AJ: Great.
- 18 MN: Yeah. I’m limited in my closeness to them in terms of geography and I’m probably not the most
19 engaged uncle in the world – I mean, I’m sure I’m not. But, there’s no ill will is maybe what I
20 would say. Yeah.
- 21 AJ: Wow, that’s good. Research states that people who . . . transgender people who have
22 relationships with their families tend to have better outcomes, to use sort of clinical voice.
- 23 MN: Exactly.
- 24 AJ: Which is clear in your . . . you’re able to sustain yourself, make a living at something that you
25 really enjoy and are passionate about.
- 26 MN: Right.
- 27 AJ: And unfortunately, that’s not the reality for a lot of trans-identified people.
- 28 MN: Right.
- 29 AJ: So, kudos, I guess.
- 30 MN: And to the Norton-Westbrooks for pulling it together.
- 31 AJ: Yeah, kudos all around.

- 1 MN: Yeah.
- 2 AJ: Absolutely. So, you kind of talked about this a little bit, but just thinking back . . . or, I guess, to
3 the extent that you feel comfortable, can you tell me just about the medical interventions that
4 you have undergone as part of your transition?
- 5 MN: Yeah, for sure. I had top surgery a handful of years ago and I have been on testosterone for a
6 similar amount of time. I'm trying to do a little math . . . I'm kind of bad at this. I think it's five
7 years . . . I think it's five years.
- 8 AJ: I'm foggy on all that stuff too.
- 9 MN: Yeah. So, yeah, so that's sort of been the medical decisions that I've made. I think the thing
10 that probably impacts my most day-to-day is being on hormones.
- 11 AJ: Right.
- 12 MN: That's sort of . . . yeah, yeah.
- 13 AJ: Wow, thank you.
- 14 MN: And, I currently . . . I'm currently filing a suit against my . . . or a complaint against my employer
15 because they have a trans exclusion in their benefit package.
- 16 AJ: Health insurance, OK.
- 17 MN: Yes.
- 18 AJ: Does it say, "Unless medically necessary," or . . .
- 19 MN: No.
- 20 AJ: They don't even . . .
- 21 MN: Yeah, they don't even throw you that bone, it's an explicit exclusion – old school. So, yeah, a
22 lawyer at OutFront, Phil Duran, is filing an equal employment opportunity complaint on my
23 behalf, which . . . you know, I have a wise doctor so she knows how to code things. So, you
24 know, I get my hormones coded through the ICD code of hypogonadism instead of GID.
- 25 AJ: GID, yeah. Gender Identity Dysphoria for my transcriptionist who will be trying to decipher all of
26 this.
- 27 MN: Right, but I don't know if the ICD has changed. I know they changed the DSM but I don't know if
28 the ICD, the medical codes, if those are up-to-date. I'd be curious if they still say identity or
29 dysphoria.
- 30 AJ: And ICD . . . can you just state with the ICD is?

- 1 MN: Yeah, the ICD is . . . in the same way that the DSM is used by psychologists, ICD is used by MDs
2 and DOs in certain contexts. So, you know, renal cell cancer has an ICD code, hypogonadism has
3 an ICD code, and so often times . . .
- 4 AJ: It's like the International Code for Diagnoses?
- 5 MN: Yeah – oh, yeah, I don't know what it actually stands for, that's a good question. But, yeah, the
6 thing in US health care is that . . .
- 7 AJ: I know that there have been 10 of them.
- 8 MN: Yes, exactly, because they just came out and they changed . . .
- 9 AJ: Exactly.
- 10 MN: It definitely . . . it's a big thing in terms of how things get paid for because pretty much
11 everything in the U.S., something gets paired and then there's an ICD code that has to go with it.
- 12 AJ: Well, good luck with that. I know it's just a challenge to have to go through that process and
13 then you sort of . . . you potentially put your livelihood at risk as well.
- 14 MN: Right, yeah. And, I think part of the reason why I decided to do it is because my immediate co-
15 workers are extremely supportive and so it does feel like it's a much more administrative . . . I
16 do feel very secure in terms of my job.
- 17 AJ: It's not the employer per se, it's the insurance plan that they have.
- 18 MN: No, it's the employer.
- 19 AJ: It is the employer.
- 20 MN: Employer, yeah, because they use Blue Cross Blue Shield which has plenty of trans-inclusive
21 benefit plans, they just have opted to choose one that's not. That's often a financially-
22 motivated decision so I wrote them a strongly worded letter, to which they said, "We don't
23 agree with you." So, that's how the complaint arose as the tactic.
- 24 AJ: Well, trans-related medical services – wow, they're expensive and it puts it out of reach of a lot
25 of trans people, but it is considerably less expensive than most medical procedures that . . . like,
26 the cost of treating a diabetes person over . . . I mean, trans medical-related services are
27 miniscule – like literally, infinitesimal compared to that.
- 28 MN: Right. And there's that San Francisco study . . . do you know that San Francisco study?
- 29 AJ: I do not.
- 30 MN: I think it's the city . . . I think it is the city or some state, whatever – California has changed their
31 law in terms of what has to be covered or not covered and so there was a lot of concern over
32 what was . . .

- 1 AJ: As has the entire country. I mean, Obamacare says you cannot exclude trans people from trans-
2 related medical services.
- 3 MN: Right, and the application of that will be forever interesting.
- 4 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 5 MN: But, so the San Francisco study looked at that very concern, which is what would happen
6 financially in terms of now having trans-inclusive health care and it turns out that it didn't . . .
7 they set aside all this money anticipating that it would cost them way more to offer trans . . .
8 and, of course, yeah – it was pennies, it didn't cost them anything.
- 9 AJ: It's literally pennies.
- 10 MN: So, that's wild. And, you know, yeah. So, it will . . . and yeah, because I feel so . . . that I have
11 job security, it feels important . . . you know, that I have the security to file a complaint.
- 12 AJ: So, that's important too.
- 13 MN: Well, again, good luck.
- 14 AJ: I'm pretty good friends with Phil and I have good confidence that he'll . . .
- 15 MN: Yeah, he's done right by me.
- 16 AJ: Absolutely. Has there been any specific moments or persons or organizations that have had a
17 significant impact on you related to your gender identity? Other than Phil Duran at OutFront
18 Minnesota?
- 19 MN: I went to RECLAIM when I was first getting it together.
- 20 AJ: Is that right?
- 21 MN: Yeah, I did.
- 22 AJ: Wow.
- 23 MN: And that was important.
- 24 AJ: What is RECLAIM? Just so people . . .
- 25 MN: It's a non-profit in town that primarily works with LGBTQ youth. When I went there, the
26 definition was under 25; I don't know if that's current anymore.
- 27 AJ: Yeah.
- 28 MN: And so, when I was getting all the medical interventions that I was speaking of, I needed letters
29 for . . . which, now the standards are different and all that, but at the time that was . . .
- 30 AJ: It was a big challenge.

- 1 MN: Yeah. So, that was partially why I went there, to get those letters. And, yeah, so there and TYSN
2 was coming up when I was coming up too.
- 3 AJ: The Trans Youth Support Network.
- 4 MN: Support Network, yeah. And so, that was a big mover.
- 5 AJ: Which, unfortunately, is no longer around.
- 6 MN: Yup. I'm trying to think . . . and then obviously lots of less official, more community-based
7 people.
- 8 AJ: Just community based, right.
- 9 MN: That's been invaluable.
- 10 AJ: So, name a name.
- 11 MN: I love Katie Burgess. I just remember meeting her and being like, "You're so dreamy," and also .
12 . . I've never told her this, but I just remember being like, "You're an adult," which I think she
13 would think was funny because we're not that indifferent in age.
- 14 AJ: Right.
- 15 MN: And also, I just remember being like, "OK, you've figured something out that I need to figure
16 out." And, you know, yeah – all kinds of people. Maybe because I'm thinking of TYSN, I'm
17 thinking of her. But countless friends and just people . . . I think that's that source of pride that
18 you can develop by realizing that you're in relation with other people through the identities you
19 share.
- 20 AJ: Wow, that's awesome, man. Let's talk about romance.
- 21 MN: Oh, romance.
- 22 AJ: Relationships, love.
- 23 MN: Yeah, I've had a little.
- 24 AJ: So, your sexual identity is . . .?
- 25 MN: I guess I would . . . I wrote on that sheet queer and gay.
- 26 AJ: Yes.
- 27 MN: Sure, that seems good.
- 28 AJ: OK, Queer and gay.
- 29 MN: Queer and gay. I mean . . .
- 30 AJ: Are you in a relationship right now?

- 1 MN: I'm dating, but no. I got out of a long-term relationship a while back, about a year ago.
- 2 AJ: OK.
- 3 MN: I've dated people all over the gender spectrum. I have my soft spots for different niches.
- 4 AJ: Sure.
- 5 MN: But, yeah. I think that I'm generally . . . well, in Minnesota it's a funny thing. People . . . I don't
6 know, I try both not to think about how people think of me and then also that, of course, is
7 living in an interactive live world and you can't avoid how people think of you. That's not really
8 a realistic nor a goal I'm going for. So, yeah.
- 9 AJ: Do you feel like your gender identity impacts your romantic life or your relational life?
- 10 MN: Yeah, of course – yes, insofar as it's something to navigate with people. I think that often
11 people dating cis people, it's rare that those people don't have some . . . and other trans people,
12 that we have feelings about one another's genders. People have had a lot of feelings about
13 mine, and I'm sure I've had feelings about theirs, but because of our positionalities, at times
14 that's felt . . .
- 15 AJ: More about you than . . . yeah.
- 16 MN: And, I've had a lot of wonderful, supportive partners, and I've had hard moments with lovely
17 people.
- 18 AJ: Yeah.
- 19 MN: And, I would say, just as in so far as being trans is present in my life all the time, it's also always
20 present in romance.
- 21 AJ: Yeah. And it can be tough.
- 22 MN: It can be tough, yes. And, you know, I think I've had the whole spectrum . . . I've had a range of
23 experiences of people being surprisingly on top of their shit and being like . . . and people being
24 like, "Well, that was just fucking awful." I think there's more extremes than that in terms of the
25 whole range of things that I actually don't think are romance but happen in the context of
26 romance. I'm thinking about intimate-partner violence and the like. But, I think that . . . yeah,
27 yeah, it's just part of the thing.
- 28 AJ: Do you do online dating?
- 29 MN: I have, I have.
- 30 AJ: An easier way to sort of navigate – you know, you can put your identity out there and people
31 can see a decision or a choice without having to . . . I mean, you meet somebody at a restaurant
32 and then you've got to kind of decide when to tell them.
- 33 MN: Exactly.

- 1 AJ: And how to tell them, whereas online you can just kind of . . .
- 2 MN: It's happened both ways in my life that . . . so, I was in a long-term relationship while I medically
3 transitioned. That was an open relationship so there were new people in my life throughout
4 that time. But, in having been single this past year, and so in some ways dating more as a trans
5 person who has medically . . . in that era of my life this past year . . . what was my point about
6 that? Being online, it's an interesting platform because you do have this opportunity to say
7 something about yourself. And, again, I think it's a funny combo because I wouldn't, upon
8 meeting someone that probably wouldn't be the first sentence out of my mouth.
- 9 AJ: Right.
- 10 MN: But then, if it's going to be a deal breaker for somebody . . .
- 11 AJ: You kind of want to know.
- 12 MN: And I probably don't want much to do with them if it's going to be a deal breaker.
- 13 AJ: Exactly.
- 14 MN: So, I think that even though it's maybe not organic to my disposition, it is organic to my situation
15 so then it's good to get it on the table. But, I also have had situations where it's not on the table
16 and you figure it out. I think there's no right or wrong way to do that, you've just got to figure
17 out what your own boundaries and needs are around safety and trust building.
- 18 AJ: It takes more time.
- 19 MN: Yeah.
- 20 AJ: That's for sure. Have there been times when people have been really super helpful, and you've
21 talked about this a little bit – like Katie, for example, or people have been really super
22 insensitive and just really made life difficult for you.
- 23 MN: Yeah, I mean I think again all those things. I think that there have been challenges with various
24 people, both close and further away in my life, in terms of being supportive or not. People have
25 not always been supportive, but I've always had supportive people in my life – and for that I'm
26 very thankful.
- 27 AJ: It's similar to, I would suspect, how everybody walks through the world.
- 28 MN: Right, exactly. I think in some ways that's just a human thing, you just . . . yeah, right.
29 Sometimes people show up and sometimes they can't. I'm sure I'm the same way – I'm sure I've
30 been able to show up and I've not been able to show up other times.
- 31 AJ: Yeah.
- 32 MN: So, yeah.
- 33 AJ: Oh, wow.

- 1 MN: But I do think that I've had particularly good close friends and lovers who have really made my
2 life possible, that feels true for me. They've invited me to be myself and that's been a big gift.
- 3 AJ: So, one of the things that we kind of talked about before we started rolling was where . . . so,
4 sort of where you sit on the gender spectrum in your own mind and this . . . you know, I hesitate
5 to say this new phenomenon, but it certainly is a much more visible phenomenon around
6 gender non-conforming people and how people are sort of exploding the notions around the
7 binary. And, I'm just interested in what are some of your thoughts or feelings around that.
- 8 MN: Well, I think that's beautiful. I love that that is happening. Yeah, I also don't know if . . . my
9 sense is that that is something that has been going on for a long time and simultaneously there
10 is new moments in terms of language and presence and all of that.
- 11 AJ: Yeah, which is why I'm really hesitant to say this is something new.
- 12 MN: Right, but there is something new about language or presence, I think. Yeah, it feels like
13 something that I'm so . . . I'm glad to be witness to and it also doesn't feel like my experience.
14 And then, simultaneously, part of my experience is being positioned with that group of people.
- 15 AJ: Right, that's what I'm interested in hearing about.
- 16 MN: So, I think . . . it's important to me to always maintain respect and love for those people and find
17 ways to be good advocates and in solidarity with that group of people. In times, it's sort of like .
18 . . it seems far away from my own experience.
- 19 AJ: I mean, really, when you think about it, transgender and gender non-conforming are actually
20 opposite notions.
- 21 MN: Right, yeah – that's interesting.
- 22 AJ: And, you know, it's only until very recently that this language, this newness of language . . . it's
23 very common now to hear trans and gender non-conforming.
- 24 MN: Right.
- 25 AJ: Three years ago, that was not language; five years ago, that was not a combined statement. It
26 was transgender people and androgynous.
- 27 MN: Right, exactly.
- 28 AJ: Gender non-conforming wasn't even language, I don't think. I know Leslie Feinberg really sort
29 of played with that imagery a lot.
- 30 MN: Right.
- 31 AJ: And coined words like ze and hir, but never really used that language around gender non-
32 conforming.
- 33 MN: Right, yeah.

- 1 AJ: And certainly sort of identified very masculine.
- 2 MN: Yeah. It's something I wonder about in terms of . . . I think the concern I sometimes have in that
3 large grouping is that I think it's important, of course, to build solidarity through alliance, and I
4 also, maybe because I'm a writer, I believe in specificity.
- 5 AJ: Yes.
- 6 MN: And so, it bothers me when I feel like things are being talked about in such large groupings that
7 no one is really getting their voice heard. Or, the people with the most access are kind of
8 getting lifted up in a group. I think, in a similar way, just whenever you group people and then
9 you don't talk about what makes us different, we run the risk of replicating the systems of
10 oppression that have gotten us into the conversation the first time. And so, it's not to say that I
11 think gender non-conforming is a more or less privileged position than being a transsexual, I
12 think they're just different. I do think . . . and obviously there are people that identify as both
13 and by no means am I trying to take away from that, but I think that those, as categories, what's
14 being captured with those words is imprecise and, of course, there's a mess that comes with
15 that that's beautiful, but sometimes there is an imprecise mess that's messy.
- 16 AJ: That's challenging and problematic.
- 17 MN: Yeah. But, you know, I also trust that youth will figure that out or something. That's something
18 that I'm sort of like . . . you know, kids. I don't know, they're probably smarter than me and
19 they'll figure it out. There's probably something that the elders in my life have figured out that
20 hopefully in time I'll grow into myself in terms of understanding and perspective.
- 21 AJ: Wow. So, what was it like coming out to your family? What did you say?
- 22 MN: That's a good question, I don't remember. I didn't plan it, which I would not necessarily advise –
23 it just sort of came out.
- 24 AJ: Were you outed?
- 25 MN: No, I had actually kind of concocted an elaborate scheme so that my friends didn't say anything,
26 there was a lot of buffering and being like, "Don't do this," which was . . . whatever. I did what I
27 felt was necessary at the time, but I asked a lot of them. Yeah, so I don't actually . . . I
28 remember we were having dinner at my house and then we went to this concert. The concert
29 was actually very sweet, but yeah, they were just . . . my mother, I remember her saying, "I
30 don't understand what you're saying, but I love you."
- 31 AJ: OK.
- 32 MN: And I was like, "OK, I'll take that." And then my father had a lot harder go of it, that wasn't his
33 response and it wasn't his response for some time.
- 34 AJ: I know you write about your father quite a bit.

- 1 MN: I do. We have a . . . he's somebody who has deeply impacted me and something that I think
2 that he has taught me is that people can change. I think that maybe that's . . . and I say that as
3 somebody who struggles to see that in my daily life. Sometimes, I'm really like, "People are who
4 they are and they are not moving." Sometimes that feels like a really hard . . .
- 5 AJ: Which is actually not that far-off base.
- 6 MN: Right. I think that that can be a hard truth and I think that he reminds me that there are actually
7 times and moments in our lives where we have invitations to profoundly be moved by one
8 another. I think that he is somebody who has let himself be profoundly moved and changed and
9 I think has gone from a place of not being able to accept or acknowledge what I was saying to
10 him to, I think, in some ways, especially amongst my family of origin, I understand that he wants
11 to have a genuine understanding of who I am. I think that that intention is amazing.
- 12 AJ: That's beautiful – what more can you ask really?
- 13 MN: Right. And, of course, we miss each other through the lines sometimes but that's being in family
14 and all that. But, I think just his ability to move in that has been, amongst other things – he's
15 really . . .
- 16 AJ: Do you see your father in yourself sometimes? Is that a phenomenon for you?
- 17 MN: Yeah, it is – it's a funny thing. Yup, it is. People sometimes think we look alike, which is not
18 inaccurate.
- 19 AJ: OK.
- 20 MN: I've got a little more hair on the top of my head. But, we've both, especially now, we've got the
21 same little scruff going on. But not just physical. There's things about us that are similar and I
22 think there's a lot he's taught me by example in terms of conscious masculinity that is important
23 for me. And, you know, I think parts of masculinity that need to be examined and maybe re-
24 done this generation around. He's taught me both of those things – like I do my own dishes. I
25 love you dad, but . . .
- 26 AJ: You've got to change some things at some point.
- 27 MN: Yeah, exactly.
- 28 AJ: Have you ever worked or been involved in any kind of trans or LGBT organizations?
- 29 MN: Yeah, I used to work for RECLAIM.
- 30 AJ: OK.
- 31 MN: Later on . . . right before . . . well, while I was going to nursing school. So, I did that and I would
32 do trainings with that. I used to go to PHS to the youth groups.
- 33 AJ: OK, Program on Human Sexuality.

- 1 MN: Yeah, Program on Human Sexuality to talk to the kiddos and then Katie Spencer, who is a dear
2 friend of mine, told me that I'm too old.
- 3 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 4 MN: And that they need people who are younger. I'm officially not cool, which is fine – I accept, I
5 accept.
- 6 AJ: Welcome to the not cool club.
- 7 MN: Youth don't want to talk to me about their sex lives anymore, that's fine.
- 8 AJ: I would say that you are much cooler than I am.
- 9 MN: I don't think that's true.
- 10 AJ: Oh, man. So, what do you think . . . you talked about this relationship between transgender and
11 gender non-conforming and some of the challenges and realities of that.
- 12 MN: Right.
- 13 AJ: What do you think about the relationship between the L, the G, and the B – and the T?
- 14 MN: Oh, yeah. Well, you know, I think that there is sort of the historical and structural realities of
15 that, which is that I think oftentimes LGB issues have been foregrounded with the political
16 forsaking of trans issues. And, simultaneously, a lot of people who are historic figures of the
17 LGB movement were actually trans, often trans women of color. So, you know, that reality is
18 not lost on me.
- 19 AJ: Great, right.
- 20 MN: I think that that's an important context. And, you know, I think that I also . . . so, that's one
21 piece of it. And, then I think in terms of individual . . . that's more a big picture thing, I think
22 there's also movement to rectify those dissonances, but I think there's a lot of work to be done
23 to center the people who have historically led those movements and give them the space and
24 power and respect that they deserve.
- 25 AJ: Because you said something a little bit earlier when we were talking, when you were growing up
26 and going to high school in California – people would harass you because they thought you were
27 a gay guy.
- 28 MN: Oh, right – yeah, so that was definitely kind of the beginning of college that that started
29 happening. Yeah, which has been a really funny arc in my life.
- 30 AJ: But, the point I just want to make about that, though, is that people were harassing because you
31 were not conforming to gender norms.
- 32 MN: Right, but they expressed that as a commentary on my sexuality.
- 33 AJ: Right, exactly.

- 1 MN: Yeah, and so, I think, for me that's been an interesting thing in terms of my own sexuality
2 development in that I think that because I am attracted to masculine people and to men and the
3 reality of my faggotry has sort of become like more . . .
- 4 AJ: I love that.
- 5 MN: The reality of my faggotry has become more pronounced in time versus in that time that I
6 definitely slept with men but I didn't tell any of my friends that because I didn't think that made
7 me a very good dyke, even though dykes can sleep with men. Whatever – all of that. But, I was
8 young. So, yeah, I think that speaks to . . . those things are interrelated and I think that . . . but
9 obviously distinct. I mean, I think that . . . I think it's about recognizing what . . . again, naming
10 what are the places that we can come together and then what are real differences and what are
11 we going to do about those real differences in that regard. And, I think that gay or straight . . .
12 all of that, I think something else that I've thought about in time, the further into my transition
13 or whatever you want to call it, is that to me whether someone has been to a workshop or read
14 something on the internet about trans people or whatever it is, that actually is all learnable. You
15 can learn the information, but I care much more how somebody approaches me and if
16 somebody . . . even if somebody asks the wrong "questions", if I can tell that they are trying to
17 find me, I'm much more likely to move into that than if I just feel like they're trying to make a
18 spectacle of me – even if they have all the right handouts and they went to the conferences and
19 they know all the things, there is something much more ethereal about people.
- 20 AJ: "Come on, you can tell me, what's your real name?"
- 21 MN: Real name - right, exactly. So, you know, I think that in time that that's the human element that
22 has gotten integrated into my life is kind of assessing that in people. And, that doesn't seem to
23 have much to do with whether they're gay or straight or . . . so, I think the idea that . . . yeah.
24 And, then I think also because I'm not straight, people just have to deal with me – I'm part of
25 their sexual and social communities and so they've got to make sense of myself, not me, and
26 they've got to make sense of themselves.
- 27 AJ: That's the thing about trans identities – we are hetero, we are dykes, we are lesbians, gay,
28 faggotry, all of that exists within the trans community. Bi. Wow. So, there's been a lot of really
29 increased visibility around the trans community lately.
- 30 MN: Yeah, it's wild.
- 31 AJ: Wild, right. So, Caitlyn . . .
- 32 MN: Jenner, I know.
- 33 AJ: What's your thoughts?
- 34 MN: Well, so a funny story about Caitlyn Jenner is that I didn't know who she was. I still don't really
35 understand who she is except that she's a famous trans woman. I still don't . . . maybe she was
36 an athlete – is that right?

- 1 AJ: Yes, Caitlyn Jenner was the world's greatest athlete.
- 2 MN: OK, so that . . .
- 3 AJ: Caitlyn Jenner won the Decathlon in the 1976 Olympics, which you have to win like 10 events to
4 win the Decathlon. You have to gold medal in 10 events.
- 5 MN: Yeah.
- 6 AJ: It's crazy.
- 7 MN: Yeah, that's a big deal.
- 8 AJ: Yeah, it's kind of a big deal. Caitlyn Jenner was the epitome of male-hood.
- 9 MN: OK, got it – got it. So, I didn't know who she was except that then she was this famous trans
10 woman.
- 11 AJ: Right.
- 12 MN: And, you know, I haven't tracked the story very much, all of that. I know that people . . . yeah, I
13 just know things peripherally. The story that I'll tell about Caitlyn Jenner, though, is that I work
14 with . . . the two people I work with the most closely, intimately, in my day-to-day work life, is a
15 chaplain and a social worker. We were outside a visit. I had not disclosed to my co-workers that
16 I was trans, that was not something relevant.
- 17 AJ: Yeah, they don't need to know. You're a very attractive young man.
- 18 MN: I don't know about that. But, also, in moments that I would seem like I would want to tell them
19 because we do have a very . . . there is a very specific kind of intimacy to the work that we do.
20 We're dealing with people who are dying and there's a lot of things about bodies that come up
21 in that. My relationship to death is not separate from my relationship to having a body . . . all of
22 that. So, anyway, we were standing outside this visit and we're taking about bad TV and when
23 you can't sleep, you watch bad TV. And they're like . . . both of them admitted that they'd been
24 watching *I am Cait* and so I legitimately was like, "I don't know, what is that?" And then we had
25 this very funny experience, which I've had in other contexts, where cis people explain trans
26 things to me because they don't know that I'm trans.
- 27 AJ: Right. Oh, my God, I've never had that experience.
- 28 MN: It's an acquired taste . . . it's a thing. And, so they explained it in a way that was totally
29 respectful. But they were like, "She's this trans woman and it's about her transition – blah, blah,
30 blah, blah." and I was like, "Oh." And I was like, "This is too funny that this is happening." But,
31 the point of this is that later on, as I was going through this health insurance stuff and realizing
32 that I was going to file a complaint, I realized that something that I needed for myself to do that
33 was to kind of reconcile the organizational structures and differences of . . . OK, if the
34 organization and structures that aren't in support of me in this moment but I have these really
35 strong individual relationships and I need to really feel the difference of that to continue

- 1 working this job, so it became important to me that I tell them what I was doing which involved
2 me explaining that I was a trans man. I had this strange reassurance that I rarely have that
3 they're going to understand what I say. I've definitely had experiences where I've explained to
4 people that I'm a trans man and they think that I'm a trans woman because they don't . . .
- 5 AJ: Right, you're a guy to them. They don't . . . so they think you're getting ready to come to work
6 in some heels and . . .
- 7 MN: Right. And so, I think there's lots of trans misogyny . . . there's all types of things that are
8 wrapped up in that, but it is what it is. I was like, "OK, they are clear on who is a trans woman in
9 their mind," which is perhaps problematically now Caitlyn Jenner, but whatever. They have
10 some basic definition. And so, in turn, they might have some basic counter definition of what a
11 trans man is.
- 12 AJ: So, in many ways, Caitlyn, who has been out for like three months, has helped paved the . . .
- 13 MN: Which is so funny – right, exactly.
- 14 AJ: . . . some understanding, for you.
- 15 MN: Yeah, in this very funny way. Right. And, it's also just so funny to be in this moment where it's
16 like people know what you're . . . people think they know what you're talking about, which is so
17 different than when people are like, "Wait, I'm sorry – what? I literally don't understand the
18 words you're using." To being like, "Oh, yeah, well I read that in *Elle* magazine so I pretty much .
19 . . I'm an expert. I am really well versed." So, it's not better or worse, it's just a different . . .
- 20 AJ: I'm so sorry, that was hilarious.
- 21 MN: I'm glad you liked that. It's just a different moment and I'm very curious what you think but I'm
22 not interviewing you.
- 23 AJ: Right.
- 24 MN: But, I would love to hear your thoughts.
- 25 AJ: I will tell you my thoughts. And, you know, what I will say is though is because, you know . . . I
26 don't begrudge Caitlyn for coming out. I'm deeply empathetic that she lived for 65 years with
27 this internal turmoil that I know from deep experience that trans people, a lot of trans people,
28 go through. And so, I'm happy that she finally feels comfortable enough because of people like
29 yourself, because of others who have really sort of created this awareness that she was able to
30 come out. I think it's hilarious that her story, her reality show, helped to create some space for
31 you to be able to talk to your co-workers. I think that's a beautiful thing. But, that's the power,
32 I think, of this visibility, that's the power of our stories, that's the power of us sharing our
33 authenticity with people.
- 34 MN: Right.

- 1 AJ: I think Caitlyn has some real symmetry and challenges around privilege and sort of her political
2 leanings are much different from mine.
- 3 MN: Right.
- 4 AJ: And so, all of that being said, we have to deal with the complexity of human nature and that's
5 what Caitlyn represents.
- 6 MN: That's for sure.
- 7 AJ: Yeah. Last question, 50 years from now, what do you think the transgender community will be
8 like?
- 9 MN: Oh, wow. I have no idea. But, I . . . well, this is a funny thing to say, but I will say it. I hope that I
10 get to be an elder to that community, which . . . there was definitely times in my life where that
11 didn't seem like a possibility.
- 12 AJ: It's highly likely.
- 13 MN: But I think the idea of making it to 80. I think most of my young life I didn't think . . . I couldn't
14 even think about that. I don't know if I'll quite make it to 80, people in my family don't tend to
15 make it quite that long. But, you never know.
- 16 AJ: Medical advances keep happening, honey.
- 17 MN: That's true. But, all that to say, I feel I'm ready to be surprised. I think it will be super different
18 and there will be some core . . . some things never change. I think they'll be some real truths
19 about beauty and pain that will continue to move through, will be through lines. What I will say
20 about having gone to PHS and doing the youth groups and seeing kids on hormone blockers, it's
21 just a different world. A conversation I had with my . . .
- 22 AJ: They don't ever have to come out.
- 23 MN: Right, yeah – it's so wild. It is so wild to me. And then also the frame of having to . . . they'll
24 have a different set of issues and questions, but I hope that those feel like more open questions
25 than I think some people in the past and present still face. My dad asked me . . . I saw him, he
26 was in town just actually just for a day and we had this very interesting conversation where he
27 was saying, "Recently, I was thinking about what would I have done when you were a child and I
28 had actually known that you were trans. What would I have done?" He was like, "Would we
29 have moved to Amsterdam?" I was like, "Well, no, we would not have done that because we
30 were not moving to Amsterdam." And I was like, "I can tell maybe you Googled that or
31 something, but you don't really know what you're talking about." It's just that there was . . . I
32 think what I appreciated about his question was like, "I'm a real person in a real moment in a
33 real period of time and there are different options and things that were possible and now other
34 things are possible. They're not better or worse, hopefully they're moving . . ."
- 35 AJ: They're just different.

- 1 MN: They're just different – yeah. I don't know. So, that's how I'll vaguely answer that question.
- 2 AJ: So beautiful. Thank you, Moe, for your time, for your candidness, for your openness.
- 3 MN: Yeah, thank you.
- 4 AJ: I really appreciate it.
- 5 MN: You're welcome – thank you.