

**NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT**

**MOIRA AIRINGTON AND NICOLE WHITE**

**Interviewer:** Tyler M.

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Tyler M: Hello, my name is Tyle, and I'll be having a conversation with Moira [Airington] and Nicole [White] for the New York City Trans Oral History Project in collaboration with the New York Public Library's community oral history project. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans-identifying people. It is April 15<sup>th</sup>, and this is being recorded at Moira and Nicole's home in Westchester. Alright, so, Moira, why don't you start by telling me a little bit about your childhood?

Moira Airington: Sure, um, so I had a—I grew up in New Rochelle it was just, it was the working-class area of it. I...I didn't have a particularly exciting childhood. There was no—It wasn't—I was never the kid that was some...I was never some prodigy child that was destined to do great things. Um, I am fortunate though, that my mother wasn't one of those people who rigidly like pushed gender norms and stereotypes on me. She wasn't unfortunately as good at being supportive of me when I later did come out, but yeah, I guess I'm kinda like dancing around, but anyway, so, my childhood was pretty boring. I didn't have a lot of friends until much later when I got into high school, and even then, I didn't have a lot of friends, and everyone that I knew back then, I don't really talk to or see now, and...honestly, I can't really remember a lot of my childhood and maybe because some of it was so...empty. Like looking back, it just feels like my childhood was this kind of empty void and just completely unrelated, I guess unrelated—I don't know if it's completely unrelated to the part of me being trans, but that's basically my childhood.

Tyler M: So, Nicole, can you tell me a little bit about your childhood?

Nicole White: Yeah, my childhood was interesting. There's some similarities with the fact that—I didn't—I struggled to make friends when I was a kid, but it was in part also because my parents' careers. Like my dad was working for the government in a capacity that caused our family to have to move every couple of years from place to place, so I ended up moving every two to three years for most of my childhood up until high school and that made creating any lasting friendships very difficult and also it tended to create—it tended to be with people who already were kind of outcasts socially and so I kind of...you know, as far as friendships it wasn't really going anywhere but I did form very strong relationships with my siblings at home, especially with my two brothers because we were always—we were always going outside and looking at nature and insects. We'd catch bugs all the time, every place that we went to and it was always a really great time to have with them, and...so that's kind of what kept me a pretty well-adjusted kid when I was younger and made all the moving much more tolerable.

Tyler M: Nicole mentioned her siblings. Do you have any siblings, Moira?

Airington: [Laughter] That's—yes, but...so my mom had only ever been married once to my dad. He's the only person that she had ever had kids with. I'm the only child that she had and the only child the two of them had together. My dad, on the other hand...I know of two sisters that I have—half-sisters that...last I remember, they live up in Maine, and they have—this is everything I was told when I was 10 years old. I was told that they have between the two of them, seven kids, and I've never met any of them. A few years ago, when I was talking to an uncle of mine—my father's brother—he told me that, yeah, my dad had a bunch of other kids across the country

apparently, and a few...maybe about a year after I had that conversation with him, I happened to be on Facebook and I stumbled across someone else's profile, and they looked like the spitting image of my dad if he were maybe...if he were still alive and maybe thirty years younger and had the last name Airington. I messaged him, never replied, so I...yeah, I assume that I have more family that's out there on my dad's side, but they're a mystery to me. Family's always been kind of a...difficult thing for me. I don't know a lot of my family but...it's whatever.

Tyler M: Is that true of your extended family?

Airington: The only family that I really grew up with was my...my dad's siblings, my mother's siblings, my mother's siblings except for one of them—they all had each one kid. So, it was my mother's sister and one of her brothers that each had one kid, so that's it. All those people, those are really the only people that I grew up with. Oh, and my grandma, but before I was born my dad's parents had both passed away, my mother's father—my grandpa, passed away when I was 2 years old, so I only really grew up with my mom's mom, my grandma. So, that small collection of people, that was really it for me, and...I'm...kind of okay with it. Like I could try to—I have been to other like family functions, I've met other relatives and I kind of remember their names, I remember some faces but they're really just related strangers at this point.

Tyler M: What was your relationship like with the family that you did grow up with?

Airington: It was good. My aunt and uncle from my dad's side, they've...passed away. I do still have one uncle who's survived. I have a kind of tenuous relationship with him, because he's kind of old-fashioned is I guess a nice way of putting it. I know that he has some...I guess I'll just call it "casually racist" views that...it seems like he's trying to be better about...trying to change his mind a little bit or at least not share any problematic views, but...it's not a close relationship. I don't—I haven't spoken to him in probably...I don't know, two months?

Tyler M: So, who was the person in your family that you would look up to for guidance?

Airington: Oh, my Aunt Fran. My Aunt Fran. My mother's sister. Yeah, she was the...third person that I came out to as trans, and she was actually the person who like...after we were out having dinner, I came out to her and we were in the village, and I told her and she took me to The Center and I started doing counseling there and The Center referred me to Callen-Lorde and...I don't know how much longer it would have taken me to find Callen-Lorde and The Center on my own. I didn't have internet access at my—at home. I was relying on the library at that time. I was like...twenty years old at the time, and... basically my aunt kind of helped save my life at that point.

Tyler M: What year was this?

Airington: Oh...it would've been 2006? No, 2005...Yeah, it would've been...yeah. 2005. So, like I told my—I told her that I was like questioning for a while and wasn't sure...I told her, and she said, "why don't you go here?" And yeah, so we walked from the east to the westside and she

showed me The Center and was just like, “yeah, just go here” and I was like, “oh, okay” and we walked in, I got some information, came back and started counseling and...and the rest was pretty much history. I was doing like weekly counseling sessions. The people at Callen-Lorde were surprised with how quickly I was getting through my counseling because by then I knew that this was right. I knew this needed to happen. I knew that I needed to not look like some dude for the rest of my life and it needed to happen yesteryear. So...yeah.

Tyler M: So, Nicole, who did you look up to for guidance?

White: For me, I really looked up to my dad and my older brothers, especially my older brother Chris, who was really kind of instrumental in kind of teaching me how to navigate school ‘cause he was usually in the same school as I was, just a couple years ahead of me, so he could, you know, he was often a voice of wisdom for how to relate to other kids. And my dad always had a...he was always very down-to-earth and always very encouraging, and you know expressed a lot of pride in us and he was always interested in doing projects around the house and you know, getting us to help out, which always gave us a lot of great things to do and a sense of accomplishment. We completed some project and you know, created something either in the house or in the yard that wasn’t there before. It was...I would say they were my most...my biggest influences as I was growing up.

Tyler M: And what was your relationship with your mom, was she...[inaudible]?

White: My mom was...it was always a little bit dicey. Like whenever my mom was around it felt like we were always walking on eggshells and this was before I ever transitioned or anything like that, it was just because there was a lot of—there was a lot of tension because of things that were—things that were unsaid, that I wasn’t—as a kid—I didn’t know anything about. So, and a lot of that I still don’t know anything about. You know, just conflicts with my mom and her family conflicts between, you know, her and my dad that we weren’t privy to, but...which would flare up now and again, and oftentimes, it felt like you know, we the children were kind of—kind of scapegoated in a way, in terms of like verbal abuse [laughter]. You know, just that, it just felt to me like she wanted something different for herself than to live as kind of a...you know, kind of a housewife, taking care of five kids, and kind of being overwhelmed by all of that when she wanted to do something and be more independent, but...I haven’t gone through it all in-depth with her, ‘cause it’s just very difficult.

Tyler M: Could you tell me a little bit about your other siblings?

White: My other siblings...I have...so I told you about Chris, my older brother that’s just two years older than me. Then I have another brother, David, who’s the oldest, who’s...like three and a half, four years older than me. Then I have two younger siblings, Ivin and Erica, and...Erica was...Erica’s the sibling that’s just younger than me and Ivin is the youngest and when Erica was born, we were actually living in Puerto Rico, so she is the only one of us who was born in Puerto Rico. The rest of us were born in the states and most of us born in El Paso, so. But yeah, I have great relationships with all of my siblings. With my sister, it was...growing up, she was, kind of not really

included in a lot of games that we played, a lot of the...adventures that we had, just because she was... just related to us a lot differently as the only female sibling at the time, in the family. And just, I think she just felt very excluded most of the time. It was very difficult for us to kind of meet halfway. 'Cause we were all, you know...all of the other siblings, kind of you know, seeing her as kind of...the only one who's different, and it was not very...good, especially since my parents treated her differently, as a girl because it was a lot of very traditional, Catholic upbringing, and...so it was, yeah, it was kind of difficult, but now, we have a much better relationship. You know, she's...she's independent of my parents and...yeah, we get along great.

Tyler M: So, you mentioned...that one of your siblings was born in Puerto Rico.

White: Mmhm.

Tyler M: Can you tell me a little bit about...being Puerto Rican in the states?

White: I can't speak to her experience directly, it's...you know, at the time when we were living there, I was barely two years old, so I don't have too much memory, other than we had a next door neighbor that had a pet iguana that we hung out with a lot, and... she was, yeah, even younger than me, so, we lived in Puerto Rico only briefly before we left to Florida, so you know, we're not really connected with Puerto Rican culture, but it is a place that we did live for a certain amount of time and, yeah, when he heard about the...you know, the hurricane, and the ongoing disaster that's kind of going on, it kind of...made us feel like one of the places that we lived was no longer, like...no longer a home. It's...it's sad.

Tyler M: Do you want to...pause for a little bit, maybe take a break?

White: [whispers] Sure. Sure.

Tyler M: So, Nicole, you mentioned that...let's start over again. It's fine, this is gonna be edited [laughter]. So, Nicole, you mentioned feeling...having some relation to Puerto Rico and...feeling like it was part of your home.

White: Yeah, I felt like it was...it's one of our homes—each of the places that we went to and lived in, left an impression on our family, and...Puerto Rico, I don't have many memories of it, but I lived there when I was just a toddler, and, that I still remember it. Which is pretty interesting, because there's large parts of my time in other places that I barely remember, when I was much older, but Puerto Rico was...I do have some memories from my formative years there, and it was...it feels like, you know, all the places that I've lived in were our home for some time, that they're places that...we could go back to, and still know people, still you know, meet some friends who still live there, so, it's...it's very hard to hear that anywhere that we've been is, you know, suffering.

Tyler M: So, can you tell me a little bit more about the places that you've been throughout your life?

White: Uh, yeah, so, before El Paso, we lived in Puerto Rico briefly, and then we moved to Florida, where we spent the most time, and Florida probably left the biggest impression on me because of that, and we lived out in the boonies, in Leesburg, which is, I think it's two hours south of Miami, so we were...way far away from anything resembling the city areas of Florida, way in the countryside where we had this really old house with a big plot of land, where we were just running around, climbing trees and studying all the wildlife, and it was...Florida was really beautiful, and we really loved it. After Florida, we moved to Houston, which we didn't—I didn't like it quite as much. We lived in a newer house in Houston, but the wildlife was much less beautiful. There was a lot of wasps, I remember [laughter] but not a whole lot of much else. It was a very—whereas we were kind of living in the wilderness in Florida, we were kind of living in the suburbs in Houston, and it was kind of all very stratified, plots of land and everything laid out on a grid and it was very...kind of...we still had adventures there, but it was very—mostly just motivated by our friendships with the people at school and you know, with some teachers, and with each other...and then after Houston, we moved to...California, if I remember correctly. We moved to California, where...no, I'm getting it wrong, we moved to Hawaii and lived on the island of Oahu after Houston. So, we lived there for a short period, maybe 18 months, and Hawaii was a very different experience than Houston, like we were still living in kind of a suburb, but a suburb in Hawaii is completely different from a suburb in Houston. It was just completely...it was so much natural beauty to the island, that it didn't really register so much and as a kid, I kind of regret living there as a kid, because I didn't appreciate it in the way that I would today. And I also met some excellent teachers there, when I was in middle school that I still remember, and made some friends as well, and I think that was the place where I was the...generally the happiest as a kid, and so it was kind of a jolt to leave Hawaii and move to California where we lived in the desert [laughter] and...[laughter] just taking us from one school to another school again, and you know, remaking friendships, and meeting some new people and making some friends again, and meeting more teachers that, you know, I kind of fell in love with. I had a great English teacher in high school, Mr. Schloss, who I still...he was just the best teacher I've ever had, probably, and just right up there with a teacher I had later, when we moved back to El Paso. And we moved back to El Paso after California, and I finished high school there and it wasn't technically El Paso, we were living in Canutillo, which is kind of a town just east of El Paso—well, just west of El Paso, across the mountain, and... made some longer lasting friendships there, just because after El Paso we didn't move again afterwards. I continued to move because of college. At college, I was moving back to Houston, where I went to Rice, and...then got my undergraduate degree, went back to El Paso and then studied at UTEP: University of Texas at El Paso, and then finished my master's degree living in Ohio with a co-op program, working at the Air Force. So, it was—I've been to a lot of places [laughter], and some of those friendships have obviously lapsed, but I still have a lot of memories. So, yeah, I just want to like, plug...another one of my favorite teachers was my calculus teacher in El Paso, Mr. Dobbin, and he was...he was just fantastic. He had purchased his own textbooks in Mexico, because the ones that the high school had—the default Texas curriculum textbooks, sucked [laughter]. So, he bought good ones, and I learned so much in that class, not just about calculus but also just about what... it took for me as a student to really truly find my success. I really needed to connect with the material, and that was something that I, a lot of times, had difficulty with, in the past, like I was never...as a student, I was always making

good grades and I learned the material very easily, but most of the time my head was in another place. I was way ahead in terms of my reading level, and I was just not connecting with any classes, and then took that class and the material was just—I was into it, and it just struck me in a way that I hadn't experienced before in other classes, so, yeah, that was a really great experience and I'm glad I had him as a calculus teacher before I left for college because that made it a lot easier.

Tyler M: So, Moira—

Airington: Mhm?

Tyler M: Why don't you tell me a little bit more about your relationship with your family?

Airington: So, right now, I kind of don't have one...not a family, but just an active relationship with them, so...let's see...so, my dad's side of the family, I grew up with an aunt and two uncles. Again, one uncle, and my aunt passed away, I still have an uncle who is alive, still living in New Rochelle, my father passed away when I was very young. Funny enough, he passed away not too long after he told me about my half-sisters, and...I still remember—I still remember exactly where I was standing when I was a kid, when my mom told me that my dad was dead. But, anyway, so that's my dad's side of the family. My mother's side, who I had...kind of more relatives involved in my life, most of my mother's side of the family lives in Long Island, so growing up without a car...they may as well have been over in Italy. My mom's side of the family is mostly Italian, so they may as well have been in another country, because it was hard to make time to go see them, and even if we had the time, it was kind of difficult having to navigate public transit with me, my grandma, and... it was hard. So, again, I don't really know them, Actually, the only one relative that lived out in Long Island that I did know, that I did have some kind of relationship was my cousin Carmine; he was much older than me. I think he's like, thirty years older than me, but he was still my cousin and I love my cousin Carmine had this like Hulk Hogan, handlebar mustache and ugh, his nephews and nieces called him "Uncle Mustache." Yes, he was—I love my cousin Carmine. But...and...so, he was the only relative out there that I kind of had any real relationship with. Then there's my aunt and uncles, my mother's siblings. They're all still alive. My mother passed away several years ago. Let's see, my Uncle Joe is living in...I think he's living in Brooklyn, but we never see him because he is the worst at keeping in touch with family. Although to be fair, so am I. He...he had remarried after he had my cousin Steven. My cousin Steven actually lives up in Poughkeepsie, which now that I think about it, there's no real reason why I don't go see him, since now I have access to a car and he lives not that far north. But my Uncle Joe had remarried and had...has another son, who is like...I think four or five at this point. So, I have a four or five-year-old cousin. And then my Aunt Fran had gotten divorced from her husband; he moved out to Florida, I don't know why. And then my cousin Julian, her son, about a year or two ago also moved out to Florida to be out there with him. Previously, they were living in Jersey, but then after the divorce, my Aunt Fran moved to the Upper West Side of Manhattan, and... my Uncle Paul moved to Florida, and my cousin Julian stayed in Jersey for a while and then, yeah, then eventually moved. And there's my Uncle Chris, who right now is living in Provincetown, and he's still dating this guy he had been dating for a while, like for the longest time, but they aren't

married for whatever reason, I don't know. It's...it's always been this weird relationship where they're kind of dating but kind of not, I don't know but...we actually went out to visit him with my Aunt Fran, and, what was it, like a year and a half ago? It was like a year and a half ago, and it was good to see him. It'd been a long time since we'd seen each other. And yeah, the last time we had seen each other it was actually at my mom's funeral, and I was twenty...no, it was at my grandma's funeral, when I was twenty-five, so that would have been seven...almost seven years ago. So that would have been 2011. And when I was back in school. Yeah, so my relationship with family is...I still see my Aunt Fran, because she's really been the one who's the most...I guess active in my life. She's felt like more of a mother to me than my actual mom, who was a...my mother wasn't a bad person, she was just a bad advocate, and after she passed away, when I inherited her things from when she was staying in a nursing home, she was staying in a nursing home because she had...she was a unmanaged type 2 diabetic who had developed many health problems that required ongoing care management, one of them being renal failure, so she needed dialysis. So she just was living in a nursing home that had dialysis on site. So I inherited a few—a bunch of...all of her things, and among them was, an activity that I guess they had the residents doing at the nursing home, and it was some xerox copy of a questionnaire from some magazine. One of the questions was, what do you fear the most? And her answer to the question was, now—this was, again, this was 2010, so this was well into my transition—she had written down, the path my son had chosen. And she underlined “son” twice. So, here I am, several years into my transition, my mom knows my name, knows my pronouns, and...she was one of the first people that I had come out to, although she was pissed that I wasn't the first one that she came out to. Well, not pissed, just...she was, I guess, she was offended that I didn't come out to her first because she was my mother, and all that fun stuff. But...yeah, my Aunt Fran, there was none of this stupid expectation of how I'm supposed to interact with her, and she was more willing to be an ally and advocate for me, than my own mother was. There was an incident where I was visiting my mom, at the nursing home, and we were outside at a little courtyard, and she introduced me to one of the other residents, as her son. And she used male pronouns to refer to me. I waited 'til after the other person had left, and I confronted her and asked her why she was introducing me as a male-identifying person when she knew that was wrong. She told me because she felt that she would be embarrassed. When, if you're really going to be an advocate for your own child, if you really care about and love your child, and if they're going to have the courage to do what they need to do to be happy, and be successful, you should probably support them. She wasn't. So that's my...[laughter] that's my...wonderful family. The only person that I really had any grudge with was my mom. Because she failed at every opportunity that she could have, when it came to accepting me as trans. She wasn't a monster that kicked me out of the house or disowned me, but when I said like, “hey, there's this group that I found for the parents of trans people. It's great, we should go to it, you could ask a lot of questions, you could get a lot of support from other people” and she just kind of said, “no, I'm okay. I'm not freaking out. I accept you as you are.” but she really didn't. I told her, “this group isn't about me, it's about you. You getting to be with other people who...who have had to kind of come to terms with accepting their child as they are, mourning the loss of the child that they kind of expected their kid to grow up to be, and accepting that this is okay. And realizing that their child is happier now. That if they continue to try and force this identity on their child, that they'd be miserable.” [Laughter] Yeah, so...and...I'll never know how my dad would've reacted to me transitioning, since he died when I

was 10. Long before I ever kind of really knew how to put words to not feeling like “the other boys.” And that’s kind of a bummer. And I try really hard to not lionize him and make him out to be this ideal person in my mind that I will never get to know. That he was perfect. And just realize that he was just another person. He was just a human being. I love him, I miss him, and there are a lot of things that we connected on when I was a kid, that my mother and I didn’t connect on. I definitely felt closer to him than my mother, and I won’t lie and say that there weren’t times where I felt like I wished that it was my mom that passed away instead of my dad, but if it happened, who knows, I could be here saying the reverse. Family things have been tricky. And actually, when Nicole and I started dating, I remember the first time she flew out to El Paso for the holidays, I stayed here in New York. Because we...we had kind of, just kind of started dating, and we hadn’t moved in yet, although we would move in a few months after that. This was in December of 2014. We would move in together in February of 2015 [laughter]. But...but yeah, but the year after, December of 2015 when I flew out with her, beforehand, I was thinking about, what I was about to put myself in the middle of. I was going to be in a house with four of her siblings, two—I would be kind of inheriting four siblings, two in-laws of those siblings, her parents, and then whatever friends or family were going to stop by, and it’s been a long time since I’ve ever kind of been at this kind of big family gathering situation where it’s just this really intimate gathering of family, and it was...it made me really miss my parents, and just having a family. ‘Cause for so long, I’ve just...been alone. I’ve kind of almost literally been alone, on my own, trying to scrape by with working, and supporting myself, and trying to make sense of how I’m going to fit into the rest of society, not fitting in like every other girl because I’m tall, I have like giant shoulders, and yeah, I don’t have the most feminine face. I’m not naturally drawn to being super femme and demure, and I don’t...I didn’t want to lie and sort of put on this facade of being super cutesy and femme, ‘cause it’s not me. But at the same time, on some level, I wanted to be accepted, and... I digress. It felt like a really...it was something that I hadn’t had for a long time...a family, and I was getting kind of nervous, and maybe...a little emotionally overwhelmed by it, and...the big thing I was afraid of was while we were in the middle of having dinner, I would just start breakdown crying, thinking about my mom and dad who haven’t been a part of my life for a while at this point, and mostly my dad who wasn’t a part of my life really through most of it. I mean, it’s been...22 years since he passed away. Sounds like an unreal number now. I know people who have been alive not as long as my dad has died, has passed away. So...[laughter] that’s my...that’s the diatribe of my relationship with family stuffs.

Tyler M: You mentioned a little bit of...somewhere you mentioned not being drawn to a really feminine or strongly feminine presentation. So, could you tell me a little bit more about how you relate to your gender and your feelings on that?

Airington: So, the funny thing is...I... when I was 16, I shaved my hair off. And originally it was partly because I wanted to try--this is when I still identified as male, when I was still in high school. Probably I just wanted to try it out and see how I liked it, and I really enjoyed being bald. I enjoyed not having this mop of hair that I need to deal with every morning, and that I have to take care of, shampoo, and get trimmed every so often, and when I started transitioning, it became pretty clear that it would be easier for me to pass as female, for people to acknowledge me as female, if I had hair on my head. Even if it wasn’t long, if I had hair. But I resisted that for a long time, I

started actively transitioning when I was 20, and I didn't start growing my hair back until I was 23. Because...I was trying really hard to have this like...Shanae O'Connor, no hair, but still kind of badass woman vibe, but unfortunately between my weight, my body type, my fucking hideous voice, and I had only really gotten control over my voice after around three years of starting transition. Right when I started growing my hair back, that was when I finally managed to get control over this. Instead of having this super deep dude voice. But I digress. But getting back to all the gender stuffs. For a little while, I tried wearing a little bit of makeup, like some mascara, some eyeshadow. And it just felt so...I know that I identify as more feminine than masculine, but the makeup didn't feel like an essential part of who I am. It didn't feel like a thing I needed in my life to help me express my gender. But...my tools do. Downstairs, I have a yellow and black toolbox that I have had since I was a young teenager. I've had that thing since I was thirteen years old. I still have it. I still use it as my toolbox, I love that toolbox, and I know this is a weird place to have it, but in the bathroom right now, sitting on the window sill, there's a pair of channel-lock pliers that were my dad's. I have kept them that long, I have never owned another pair, because I love that pair of channel-lock pliers. I love my tools. My tools define me more than I felt makeup defined me, and it was less because I didn't have it growing up as a kid, it's not because it was something I was socialized to accept as a part of my life, but it didn't fit me. And it was hard initially, kind of finding how I felt comfortable interacting with...kind of everyone else. And at first I did think that I needed to sort of squeeze myself into this mold of what it means to be a woman. And it was really miserable at first. I felt better than trying to be a dude, but I still wasn't completely happy. It wasn't until slowly I realized that it was okay for me to be a fucking dykey trans woman who's...loud and doesn't wear fucking makeup, and sometimes my hair might be a little bit of a mess, or it's okay for me to not have hair. Although, I am waiting until I lose more weight to shave the hair off again, but...yeah. So, I started transitioning when I was twenty, it wasn't until I was...twenty-five when I really felt comfortable with my body. And I was...I had gone back to school at this point. After high school, I took a long break to figure out transition stuffs, and when I finally felt comfortable enough...or at least, that I didn't want to wait any longer to go back to school, being in college was the first place where I was being acknowledged exclusively as female. There wasn't a single person who was like misgendering me, no one gave me odd looks when I used the women's bathroom, and...at first I didn't want to like, you know, fuck it up by letting anyone else know that I'm really trans, and...after the first semester, with all the interactions I had, I realized that my trans--I realized that the people around me, were cool enough where I could trust them not to try and invalidate me being female because they know that I'm trans. So, little by little as I started to kind of slowly come out to people, and towards the end of that second semester, I wound up giving a lecture on what it means to be trans to a group of people as part of a day of lectures by other people. And it was great. And that was what really helped me. I feel like my experience at college helped me to feel more comfortable in me being some butchy trans woman, and that's fucking okay. That I don't have to be the Hollywood trope of the person that transitions from male to female, and then they learn how to put on makeup, and do their hair, and how to walk in heels. Well, fuck heels. Fuck heels. No, give me my Bates EMT boots any fucking day, or give me a comfortable pair of fucking sneakers [laughter]. No, no. No heels. No. I'm five foot nine, I'm tall enough. And now I'm totally, unabashedly, non-femme. I'm femme-ish as I kind of like to say. I'm femme-ish. Yes, I identify more as feminine than

masculine, and yeah, if you want me to pick one of the binary, then yeah, I identify more as a woman. But at the same time, fuck gender.

Tyler M: So, Nicole, I'd like to ask you the same question. How do you relate to your gender?

White: For me, it's...there's a kind of...I guess it was difficult for me, when I started transition because I definitely have a more feminine presentation, and I really like to be in touch with that part of myself, but...I knew starting out that there were some things that I couldn't overcome, and things that--or, I wouldn't be able to overcome for a long time, at least. And that I would have to accept—to some extent—accept the parts of me that I couldn't change until eventually, that wasn't an issue, or what have you. It was kind of a balancing act in the beginning, between my dysphoria and my eagerness to move forward with my transition, because I would...I was trying to apply makeup competently, and with no one to teach me. So, it was very difficult to...you know, fail, and then look at myself in the mirror and feel waves of dysphoria killing my self-esteem. And...at the same time, I was really excited that I was on this path to realizing myself as I should be, and...it just took time to kind of...to...find a way to...find a way that I could present myself to where I was comfortable in how I looked, and comfortable with myself, and just...how do I put it? Just...keeping myself happy even though I didn't have everything that I wanted. So, yeah, and I still don't, but it's...more of a... I know that eventually, I'll be in a better place and I'll have...better control over those things that initially I had no control over. Like I initially had no control over my voice, I had no expectation that I could ever have GCS [genital confirmation surgery] because I had no idea where my future would go, and if I would be—if I would still be employed, or if I would have a job that could pay for GCS, where I would end up, and part of what made it difficult is I started transitioning when I was living in Ohio, and that was temporary. That was just while I was finishing my master's degree. And when I left Ohio, I went back home to El Paso, so I had to go back home and not only do that, and find that balance for myself, but also cope with interacting with my parents who had not...who had just started learning about what my experiences were. And they weren't on board yet. So they...they started their kind of journey of acceptance not long before I showed up. And... they've come a long way, but it's still an ongoing source of conflict, and I'm glad that I'm no longer living with them, because it's one thing to have to deal with dysphoria that's coming from your own head, and it's a completely different level of anguish to have to deal with someone else judging you according to their standards, so. But I am...I'm pretty happy with how things have turned out for me, and I really...feel like I have—in a lot of ways I didn't expect—embraced that feminine side of me that I had only just begun to explore when I had first came out to myself.

Airington: It's also funny that when we first...when you first started dating, you were looking for some, cute femme person, and then you found me. [laughter]

Tyler M: Speaking of...why don't we talk about...how did you two meet?

Airington: Alright, so [laughter] I'd been dating for a while with...varying degrees of success, there was like...a couple of cis dudes that I went on dates with, I was dating another--this other trans girl that was living in Brooklyn, and that did not end well. And then a couple weeks after her and

I broke up, I found Nicole's profile on OkCupid, and... if I'm honest, I almost didn't message her. Because I... read through her profile, and we seemed pretty compatible, OkCupid was telling me that we were very compatible, but...it was something about the pictures she had posted, that...made it seem like maybe she was a little more high maintenance than her profile was letting on. It was a really, really dumb [laughter] thing to think, and I'm so glad now that I didn't let myself succumb to it, but I thought because of the way that she was posing, the face that she was making into the camera—it wasn't to the level of duck face for cupcakes kind of nonsense, but it felt kind of close. I felt like she might be someone who is a little more susceptible to following trends or being kind of a little bit obsessed with pop culture stuff, more so than I am, and I am not down for that. But...in spite of that, I messaged her, and we started talking pretty much immediately about anime, which I was totally down for. Like, oh, this is going well, okay, let's keep going. And we chatted for a week, and then, "hey, so do you want to meet up and do a thing?" I was living in White Plains at the time. I had...yeah, I was living in White Plains at the time, and I was actually living at what was basically a shelter [laughter] which is a whole other thing. The funny thing is I was working as an EMT, living in a shelter. But, anyway, so we met up at an Asian restaurant that was not too far away from where I was living, because I didn't have access to a car, but Nicole was able to rent a car pretty easily. We met up, and... holy hell, she was so nervous. Really really cute, and I'm glad that her hair when I met her, was very different from her hair in her pictures, it looked much better, because it was—

White: [laughter]

Airington: In the pictures, it was either short or it...it was either short and straight, or it was kind of long and straight, and when I met her at the restaurant, it was longer and curlier, and looked much better on her. But dear God, you were nervous. You were so nervous.

White: Still can't believe that I... was actually trying to straighten my hair in El Paso [laughter]. It gets so hot there, and...

Airington: Well, that's just it. You take a piece of metal and put it outside and there's your straightening iron [laughter]. But yeah, and that night...we talked a little bit over dinner, and I like to think I impressed her with my chopsticks skills as I'm a tenth-degree black belt in chopstick-fu. But in all seriousness, we talked a lot, and...it was very clear that she was very nervous. And although I wanted things to progress fairly—pretty quickly, I also didn't want to scare her off...which...is kind of funny because while we were...when we went on a walk later, after dinner, while we were talking, I don't know why I let it slip, I told her about my involvement in the New York City fetish scene, and...the moment the words left my mouth I thought, "oh, what did you do? What did you do? Don't scare this poor girl off, she just moved here and she looks super nervous", but I knew it would seem worse if I kind of—if I tried to backpedal it, so I just leaned right into it, and I walked her to her car, hugged her, went our separate ways. The next date though, I was determined, like, I'm kissing her tonight, after this date, or it's unlikely something will happen. But I didn't want to feel like I was forcing myself on you.

White: Yeah.

Airington: So, I spent the last...I spent I think the last...it was either before the date or it was towards the end of dinner, where I came up with a brilliant plan. I'm like, "I'm a genius, I totally got this." I thought to myself, okay, I'll walk her to her car like I did last time, and then, when I hug her, as I'm pulling away from her, I'll put one hand on the back of her neck and gaze deeply into her eyes.

White: [laughter]

Airington: This way, I'm not...my face isn't just lunging towards her like a plunger towards a toilet. But I'm also giving her this signal like...hey, I'm into you. Wanna suck face?

White: [laughter] Which is what I did, exactly.

Airington: Yes, because the moment my hand touched the back of her neck, she was kind of like...she had her arm—she had her hand inside my jacket, on my jacket sleeves, the moment my hand touched the back of her neck, her arms tensed up, she grabbed my sleeves, and then she yanked me into her, and it was some of the worst kissing I've ever—

White: [laughter]

Airington: Ever experienced, except for this cis dude that I went on one date with, and one only because he was a creepmonster, but that's a whole other story. But it was, again, her kissing was terrible. It was so bad, baby.

White: [laughter]

Airington: And I made that very clear [laughter], I made that very clear to you, much later. But in the moment, my thoughts were, "Yes! Score! Victory! She's terrible at this but we can work on that."

White: [laughter] Yes, that was fun.

Airington: Yeah so then [laughter] we then made our way to the back of the car where we then Titanic-style made out and fogged up the windows.

White: Yes, I still remember that. [laughter] Yes, that...was fun.

Tyler M: So... Nicole, I'd like to ask you, how do you feel about...God, I'm really, I'm really tripping up today, I don't know what it is. Sorry, please edit this out. [laughter] So Nicole, Moira mentioned that she got her care at Callen-Lorde...how were you able to access care?

White: When I first arrived in New York, it was difficult for me to set up a care provider. I was kind of...I was going from place to place, in Westchester, trying to find someone who was able to...able to prescribe my hormone therapy, but...I kept on kind of getting the run around,

and...ended up trying an endocrinologist in Scarsdale, and set up an appointment, and...I was there on time, and she waited about an hour and a half to see me after that, and you know, I just kind of wrote it off as they were busy, but then she saw me and said she couldn't give me any treatment at all, and just said that she could refer me to someone else, but I was kind of upset, so I just said "no" and left. That's when...after that, I talked to Moira, and she suggested that I just go to Callen-Lorde—

Airington: Mhm.

White: And save myself the trouble of searching through Westchester for an endocrinologist to...find someone who could do it. 'Cause she was getting her care at Callen-Lorde already, so it was...it was also convenient for both of us, since we could kind of coordinate and do our appointments on the same day, through Callen-Lorde. So, I ended up...I called them, and set up an appointment, and it was very easy for me to set up a care relationship at Callen-Lorde, and I'm still going there for primary care, and it's been great. It's probably my most...I would say it's, yeah, it's my best interaction with healthcare, has been at Callen-Lorde. Everywhere else...

Airington: Sucks.

White: [laughter] Everywhere else has kind of sucked, yeah.

Tyler M: So...you two had your first date—I'm assuming—in New York City?

White: Mhm.

Airington: Actually, our first date was in White Plains. If I had greater ability to travel, and I had more free time, I probably would have suggested someplace in Manhattan, but--

White: It wasn't long after we met, that we did go to the city...

Airington: Right. Yeah, like when I took you to your first fetish play party.

White: Yes, yes.

Tyler M: So, I would like to ask...what are some memories and experiences that you relate to New York City...that really define it for you?

White: Hmm...I think one of the things that really defined it for me, and I think will always define it—well, for me—is the day that Moira proposed to me.

Airington: Oh, yes. [Laughter]

White: Because we spent that whole day in the city—

Airington: Yes.

White: And it was...it was just utterly enjoyable and romantic and fun. And I really...I kind of really bonded with the [laughter] kind of culture of the city. You know, the fact that there was so much there, and we had only just touched the surface of it...and, yeah, I think that day will...that will always be how I remember New York City as. A place where...traffic surrounds us, but there's incredibly beautiful experiences that you can have there, and then you can go to a ska concert on a boat, and then go for donuts at like 2am.

Airington: [laughter] So, to expand a little bit on it, on this day. So, it was our one-year anniversary of our relationship, and I had already made plans to propose to her. And... I took her to--we went to Dave and Buster's for lunch, Henry Hudson for drinks, then we went to the Rocks Off the boat concert, to see the Voodoo Glow Skulls and Mephiskapheles, there was some other trash band playing before the Voodoo Glow Skulls but, who cares? The Voodoo Glow Skulls and Mephiskapheles were awesome. It was her first time at a ska show. It was not mine. And it was...awesome. It was so good. And then, afterwards, now, I had already had this planned out. I'd called the Donut Pub, which is my favorite place to get donuts, and I had—because they have the best black and white cookies in the five boroughs, come at me if you want to disagree—anyway, so I called them and asked like, “hey, I wanna propose to my wife using black and white cookies, could you make me a custom batch of six black and white cookies and they all say ‘marry me’?” Dude on the phone says “I could make you a giant 12 inch black and white cookie” literally, my response was, “I love you” with this sort of food lust in my voice. [laughter] So, I agreed, it wasn't...the best part was...so, I worked out a code phrase with him, so when I walked in, I could just say “do you have any fresh black and white cookies?” to the person behind the counter and they would know, oh, this is the couple. So, when we got to the Donut Pub after the concert at 12:22 in the morning, I was worried a little because there was like...two trays of black and white cookies in the window, and three more on the rack behind 'em. So I'm worried that, oh, man, if I ask, is Nicole gonna think something's up? But then I realized oh, yeah, she's oblivious, she won't suspect a thing.

White: I was exhausted. And oblivious.

Airington: And your nor--your baseline is oblivious. So, I uttered the code phrase and the dude behind the counter, my ginger-haired brother as I call him, just poker-faced and said, “uh, yeah, let me check in the back” comes out, I have my phone ready to take pictures, and she sees it, and doesn't acknowledge that there's lettering on it, just sees: giant black and white cookie, she turns to me with this, “baby, look, there's a really big black and white cookie! How funny is this, you asked for a fresh black and white cookie and he brought this out?” and then she realizes that I have my phone out, pointed at her, as if I'm taking pictures, and everyone else around us is getting really excited for how early in the morning it is, and she looks back, sees that it says “marry me” immediately dissolves into tears.

White: That was a great moment.

Airington: Fortunately, I had planned ahead, and I had parked not too far from where the Donut Pub was.

White: That was a great moment, 'cause we had just come off a concert where I had just seen ska uniting people from across the city--

Airington: [laughter]

White: Including us, who had never--me, from Texas, and you, who came from New Rochelle, you didn't live in the city, but you worked there.

Airington: Yeah, but I'm a New Yorker.

White: You're a New Yorker.

Airington: So, to say "oh, you, from Westchester" as if it's some far off land--

White: It is a far-off land.

Airington: No it's not.

White: But it is.

Airington: No it isn't.

White: It was just...yeah, it was great. And I think that, kind of...that kind of became my...my picture of the city, and it... yeah, still is, because it's...the city's got problems, but it's ultimately a place where people are having all of these experiences every single day of the year, and... that one was just ours. It just happened to be ours. But it is...it is a beautiful hive of humanity.

Tyler M: So, Moira, I'd like to ask you how—I'd actually like to ask the both of you—how does...how [grunts] this is gonna be...I mean, I feel so embarrassed right now. [laughter] So, Nicole, what is it like being in a visibly queer, or...visibly lesbian relationship, and a trans woman?

White: It's...it's really great in a lot of ways. So, the...the wonderful thing that emerged from our relationship, and just when we got together, it was so convenient that we both had similar experiences with our gender identity, so we didn't have to explain to each other--

Airington: What it means to be trans. [laughter]

White: What it means to be trans, or what it means to be dysphoric, there was no... we would say what we were feeling, and the other person would know, because they had been there at some point. We both had similar experiences, and it was so easy to discuss being trans, and what we were facing, and...it was--it's something that's not really...was not easy for me when I was

looking for relationships, after starting transition. I was...I had searched for some relationships when I was still in El Paso, and then coming to New York...you know, just trying to make friends, even. It was...being trans can be kind of a stumbling block, because you meet someone and you have to—especially since I wasn't...I wasn't passing very well—it's something that just...demanded some kind of explanation, which gets in the way of everything that you want to do with friends. You wanna, you know, you wanna hang out and have fun, play board games maybe, or if you're on a date, you want to just get to know the person, and enjoy their company, and have some thoughtful conversation, among other things, and the fact that we could just do that right off the bat, without this kind of...trying to translate some very very difficult emotions into cis language. It made things very smooth, and living in a trans relationship has been also very very rewarding for both of us, because we...in a lot of ways, we share kind of the same hangups with family, so we both...both of our mothers [laughter] both had a lot of trouble accepting us, so we, you know, we can comfort each other from a really—from a place of shared experience, and we do that on a regular basis. As far as the way other people view our relationship, it generally hasn't been a problem, but most of the time...we don't get any—we haven't gotten any...kind of—

Airington: Flak.

White: Yeah, we haven't gotten any flak from people in New York, or even in Westchester which is kind of more conservative than the city. I think people just prefer to mind their own business, which was something I had noticed when I had started to transition in Ohio, that even though I was—I was definitely not passing then, but I was walking around and no one was giving me any crap for it, because just this...this might be more specific to America, but everyone was so focused on minding their own business, and just ignoring anyone else's...plight, or anyone else being different, and just focusing on the reasons why they were....why they were doing what they were doing, and just ignoring me, and, to the most extent, ignoring us when we're out. People who aren't...able to understand how we are in a relationship, don't even bother walking up and asking. It's...we only...we generally only interact with people who are already pretty...pretty accepting and socially conscious, and it's been...it's been great. It's kind of an automatic filter [laughter] so. I'm sure, if we were both really.... really boring looking people, it would be a different story, and we would have to kind of broach the subject with people, as they come into our social circle eventually, and just like bring them up to speed. But because we're so open about who we are, and our relationship status, it's been surprisingly easy. The only places it gets hard are when we're interacting with...interacting with faceless institutions, which don't have any kind of...none of that works there. The people may be minding their own business, but to you, they're still—you're still just a name on a piece of paper, and... they will react to you in whatever way that they see fit. So, that is...still difficult, but it would be difficult in any case.

Tyler M: Moira, what are your feelings on the subject?

Airington: So, some of the same. So, it's actually kind of a two-part thing. First, specifically being in a relationship with Nicole...I... really early in our relationship it became really clear that I am—I'm the first person that she's ever dated. And by that, I mean, the first person that she's ever

gone past the first date with. 'Cause let's face it, when you go on the first date with someone, you kind of—depending on how you or the other person feels—it may not feel like a date until you meet with the person again, and then you go, okay, yeah, this...this is someone that I want to see again, so yeah, that last one, that was totally a date, yeah. And I realized that she hasn't really dated anyone for any extended period of time...ever. I was the first person she ever dated, I was her first partner, girlfriend, whatever, first everything. I was her first kiss. That night that we kissed for the first time in the parking garage of the galleria mall, was the first kiss that she had ever had. And, mind you, it was terrible [laughter] and I will always remind you that it was terrible, but it's...but knowing that I got to...knowing that her first kiss was with me, and I'm not some—at least, I like to think I'm not—I'm not some monster who's going to try to take her for all she's worth and then leave her, or that I'm going to abuse her. Just knowing that I'm not that person and that I'm someone that will want to be with her, and want to be someone that she'll want to be with, for as long as she wants to be with me, it...I know this is gonna sound a little weird, but...it gave me some comfort knowing that I could stop—prevent her from having to go through a lot of the...kind of bullshit that I had to deal with, when it comes to dating, because...there was a couple of dudes that I dated, some of the women I dated, not all of them were terrible, but some of them were. Especially the other trans woman that I dated immediately before, turned out to be just...an asshole, and I was so...angry—and I still am, really angry with her—and even now, this is four years later, I'm still really angry about everything that happened between her and I, and at the same time, I hope that she's doing alright wherever the fuck she is. But just...even though I can't go back and change all the awful relationship things that happened to me, or all the things that I've—all the people I've been involved with, I can at least stop her from having those same awful experiences with other people, where she's looking for—and especially 'cause she's really early—she was really early—in her transition, and I was—even then—I was like an old salty dog when it'd come to transition stuffs, I mean at that point I was what...eight years deep into my transition? And..yeah, I figured, I could at least be someone who prevents her from having to suffer through some relationship--a relationship with a suboptimal partner just because they kind of validate their gender, because I lived through that. I went through that. I dated someone for three years, and it was okay—it was great for the first year, okay for the second, then the final year it was...it was awful. So, yeah. It is partly that. That I kind of did want to be like a shield for her, to stop her—to prevent her....to give her some kind of...some kind of emotional support in the way of a partner, so she wouldn't feel a need to keep going out and seeking a partner, and ignoring maybe some of their shortcomings, and flaws, even if they're ones that could be detrimental to her, and that would never change for the other person. So, that's part of it. But...it wasn't just that I wanted to protect her in spite of my attraction to her. No, I'm genuinely—I was genuinely attracted to Nicole, and I still am, and as far as how my...trans-ness relates to my relationship with Nicole, and... how I feel about being in a clearly queer relationship, good. I...part of the reason why I started to...kind of, I guess, out myself, in college, was...when I got to what I call the “and now what?” stage of my transition, where I got to a point where I felt confident in my own presentation, I felt confident that everyone was acknowledging and accepting me as I wanted to be...recognized, I felt, okay, I've gotten to this point, now what? Now, what do I do with this? I've gotten to a place where—I've largely gotten to a place where I want to be, so now what do I do with this? What do I do? Then, the answer was to be more visible. Just to be someone who...lives out. Who, just makes it where

I maybe don't go around wearing a shirt that says "I'm a transsexual, deal with it" although, I should get something like that, but anyway [laughter] but there actually was an incident in my second semester in school, where there were three dudes in my class, talking about some friend of theirs who was dating someone, and found out that—and he found out that the girl that he was dating, was trans. And one of them said that...one of them said, "oh if that were me I would have punched her in the face!" And I was right—I was sitting within earshot of them, and looking back, I realize that they didn't know that I was trans, which is...sort of a good thing, that I was passing well enough, but I confronted them on it, and I...I made them realize that, look, you don't know who's trans around. You don't know who among you is part of the community that you just made fun of. And the funny thing was that all of the people in that group, they were all non-white people. They were all people who belonged to some minority group, and...I was just trying to—even though I didn't do it as eloquently as I'm describing now, I was a lot more...brash when I confronted them—just remember that there are minority groups that exist beyond skin color, and...just because you're not part of that group, doesn't mean that it doesn't matter. And... I say all this to get back to the point of...I... even though being in a queer relationship kind of makes us more of a target for less tolerant people, good. Good. I want people who aren't tolerant of queer people in general, or just anyone else, I want them to know that there really shouldn't be a safe haven for them. There shouldn't be a safe haven for bigotry. And... if me being openly queer, not just when I'm out with Nicole and we're being disgustingly adorable in public, just...even when it's not the two of us together, just when I'm by myself. I...almost take pride in looking...I... want to represent the...I guess it almost comes back to the "be the change you want to see in the world" that I want...people to be able to see in their community, other people that are like them. And... like when I first started transitioning, there was no one I knew that was like me. I literally knew no one else that was trans, until...much later on in my transition. It wasn't until...support groups aside, it wasn't really until...college when I started—until after college when I started getting involved in the kink community that I really started meeting a lot of other trans people and was seeing them regularly. But...I digress. [laughter] But anyway, now as I... pull us back from my tangent...but it is easier being in a relationship with another trans person, because like Nicole said, I don't have to fucking explain what dysphoria is. And it does—it has made my life a lot easier, not just dating-wise but my own emotional wellbeing, because...until I met Nicole, I wasn't as—and even shortly after I met her, I was kind of not as emotionally stable as I am right now. Us, kind of being together, and as my...housing and employment situation became more stable, I became more stable, but she definitely—being with her, has definitely helped me be a healthier, more well-rounded person.

Tyler M: Aww. Can I ask you, since you both had different times of transition...what's a little less problematic way to say this? Whenever you started experiencing...whenever you started taking steps towards—

Airington: When we started our trans-puberty? [laughter]

Tyler M: Yes, so whenever you started taking steps towards making yourself—or feeling more like yourself. Nicole, for you, what year was that?

White: That was...that was in...2012.

Tyler M: And how old were you?

White: That was...I was 22, going on 23.

Tyler M: And Moira, you mentioned that you were 20?

Airington: Yeah.

Tyler M: And so, you both had...you both had that experience right around the same age, but in different times. So, how do you feel, Moira, that things have changed...over time?

Airington: Things like my personal life, or societal, like bigger picture?

Tyler M: Societal.

Airington: Okay, it is...when...I mean, it's...definitely with the explosion of social media has made trans visibility a lot more common. More people are at least aware of what it means to be trans, or maybe they even know someone who's trans, and...I've definitely had to explain myself less to people, as time has gone on, and that's not because like, oh I've let all my friends know and now they just know, no, it's...I've been cycling through people over the years, and...so, yeah, it's not the same people I'm explaining it to, but it does seem like it's—even though it doesn't seem like...treatment of trans people has gotten really great, but things are getting better, like I mean, I remember when we were driving to... I think we were driving to I think we were driving to a... T & G party, that...we were on the highway, I was driving, and we were listening to the radio—I know, gasp, who listens to the radio anymore? But we were listening to the radio, and they'd announced that trans people are going to be allowed to serve in the military. And, I... I started crying. Fortunately, it was gridlock traffic, so it wasn't super dangerous, but I started getting really emotional because when I had gone back to college, I wanted to serve—I did want to join the military, so they could pay for my tuition,' cause I was in the paramedic program. And that was...that was a barrier that I had to encounter, that I had to deal with, and I... I struggled to keep it together in the recruitment office, so I could leave and get back to my apartment and bawl to pieces. And I know with the current administration—the current Trump administration, that it's kind of been brought back into question, but even just in that moment, knowing that going forward, other trans people aren't gonna have to deal with the bullshit that I had to go through, going into that recruitment office and telling someone that I want to volunteer to do something that all—that so many other of these fucking cis people don't want to do, I want to serve my country, and I want to get my tuition paid for in return for it, let me do this. Let me do this, because I'm qualified—I have all the qualifications that I need, let me do this thing. And it was nice knowing that other trans people weren't going to have their...it's gonna sound corny that they weren't going to have their honor insulted by being turned away and told that they're not good enough. Not good enough to serve and risk their life for their country. But...yeah, it does seem like it's gotten better, but there is a long, long, long way we need to go. Even for...even for

protecting people who are in same-sex relationship, there's still a lot of—there's still a lot of... there's still people getting their undies in a bunch over people who want to marry someone else of the same sex, and that's something that organizations like the Human Rights Campaign's been fighting for, for decades. And it still hasn't been completely codified in law, and it would be nice if organizations like the Human Rights Campaign would actually fight for trans people, instead of just focusing on gay people, not realizing that some trans people are also gay people. But...I digress. But again, it does seem like it's gotten better...overall. But it's going to be a long, slow road till we get to a point where this is just...the norm. Where kids are taught in school, what it means to be trans. 'Cause if I had been taught—if that had just been a part of sex ed, learning about sexual orientation and gender identity, I probably would have come out in school. It was immediately after high school when I started questioning. And it was because of a Myspace profile. I saw someone else's Myspace profile and thought, huh, maybe that's—I think this is the thing that's kind of not been right. This is the thing that's been gnawing at the back of my brain. And... yeah.

Tyler M: So, Nicole, did you experience any struggles between the intersection of being trans and also of being Hispanic?

White: Mmhm. Yes, the big challenge between my being trans and my... the culture that my family came out of, is...the fact that there was—in our culture, there is a lot of traditional sexism that kind of underlies many of the Catholic teachings that are on top of that, and... the traditional gender roles are very strictly enforced. So, being trans is is...kind of—it's kind of difficult in that environment because, for example, my sister had a quincinera, right? And... then I come out as trans, way past my teenage years, so...there's not gonna be a quinicinera for me. [Laughter] And... this... it kind of defies a lot of the way things usually go in Hispanic culture. And...the way that...especially since...you know, I ended up marrying a woman, that adds to that, because there's so much of that—there's so much in the traditions of weddings, and such that...we just didn't have any attachment to because of that fact, and I had—when I was growing up, I wasn't really attached to those traditions, because of the way that my family had travelled around the country so much, and we had interacted with people from a wide variety of experiences, and I never felt like the traditions that my parents really believed in were...I didn't feel like they were more valid than anyone else's traditions. We had gone...literally across the country from Florida to Hawaii, and everyone had different expectations of what...of how to live. So, when it came to my parents trying to enforce those kind of traditional ideas, and catholic teachings with respect to my being trans, it was kind of...like they were speaking from a time and culture that I could never have shared because they grew up in Mexico. Or at least, my dad grew up in Mexico, my mom grew up with her parents, who—her parents who had grown up in Mexico. So they're very very strongly rooted in that culture in a way that I could never be, and when I came out to them, they found...they found the idea of me being trans extremely...disruptive to everything that they had wanted for me, and...very much all of that came from those roots, and...I think the way that especially my mom uses Catholic teachings to kind of hammer her disagreement home, is...less of the motivation than the fact that I...turned out so different than the life she wanted me to have. Because she want—and I think this is something that... I wish she were here, so she could answer herself, but I also don't want her to be here—

Airington: No... no.

White: But I think that she wanted to live vicariously through her children in...in a lot of these ways, and that's why she was very...she'd been very adamant that she wanted to have a daughter, and the fact that she only had one daughter was kind of disappointing to her, she wanted to have more, especially since...my sister was also—also came out of the same experiences as me, in that she wasn't connected to that culture very much, and I feel that...my mom lost all her chances to have a child that could have lived the life that she wished that she had had. And...with me, it's...doubly the case because I not only abandoned—well, not abandoned—but I didn't share the same culture that she grew up with, but I also lost the religion that she taught us, you know, she taught her children, so...I became an atheist in college, and that was...I only recently told my parents that about...I think a year and change ago?

Airington: It would have been...two...years ago.

White: I think a year and a half ago.

Airington: No, two and a half, because it was—because you flew out to Texas the year that we met, in 2014, then the following year, December 2015, we flew out together, but your plan was you were gonna tell your parents that you were an atheist when we got there, and I told you “fuck no, you're going to tell them now” because I didn't realize that she hadn't told them, so when I realized, I said, “nope, you're gonna tell them now, before we get there, so we don't have this giant blowup” because her parents are very Catholic, and I don't want this giant blowup of a) them trying to convince you that you're not Catholic and b) them blaming me for “turning you atheist” because what changed from last year and that year? [laughter] Oh, me. They would naturally blame me.

White: Right, and—

Airington: And it's a good thing that you did—that I made you do that.

White: Yeah, they.... I was kind of...I was one of the favorites when I was growing up, kind of the...gentle, middle child, that was always...was always kind of respectful to my parents, and...didn't get into trouble. They really liked me, and I felt like that was—that made it especially difficult for them, that I shared so little with what they saw as important in their values, even though all of those things that had made me such a likeable kid were still there, like I'm still achieving great things, I still have great relationships with people, not getting into trouble or anything, it's just the fact that I chose a very different path, and...it's an ongoing source of tension between me and my parents, but for the most part my dad is...is over feeling...angry, and...feeling sorry for himself, and...being afraid for me. He's mostly—mostly just wants me to be happy, and my mom is still...it still feels like she doesn't know what she wants. So, when we talk about it, she's very adamant that she doesn't accept my identity, but I feel like she's still trying to figure out—trying to figure out a way to...kind of...rationalize or put these puzzle pieces

together in a way that makes sense for her and her values. Which is...it's a challenge, and I don't—I wouldn't want to be there. But yeah, I wish her all—I wish her the best of luck.

Tyler M: So, Moira, you mentioned having some housing and employment difficulties in the past.

Airington: Mhm.

Tyler M: Could you talk a little bit about those?

Airington: Yeah, so...alright, so...we have to turn back the clock all the way back to...so, when I first started transitioning, I was...I was doing all the counseling stuffs to qualify for hormones, and... kind of in the middle of that, my—so both my mother and grandmother were in not-great health situations. My grandmother...her health started to deteriorate sooner than my mother's, which was kind of unfortunate because the house that we were living in, was in my grandmother's name, so...when she became the permanent resident of a nursing home, the deed had to get transferred to my mother's name, and...we already knew that...the house was something that really...that we really couldn't take care of the house anymore, it was so old, and...it required a lot of maintenance, it needed a lot of repairs, so we had to get rid of it. We sold the house and moved into apartments. And, so this was...so we ended up closing on the house at the end of February and... the apartments that we moved into, I wasn't sure I would be able to continue to pay for it because I had just started a job as...working as a messenger. Like a bike messenger in Manhattan. So, I wasn't sure if I'd be able to actually keep this place on my messenger's salary. So, I went to Ali Forney on my 21st birthday. I was sitting there, in the Ali Forney center, registering for emergency housing in case I became homeless. Fortunately, I wasn't. 'Cause the money from the sale of the house went towards the first three months of rent for the apartment, so I didn't have to worry about that for three months. But after that three months was up, by that time I had gotten a job working at a bicycle shop, in New Rochelle. So, I was no longer commuting from New Rochelle into Manhattan every day. Which I had done for the past three months. So, by May of...this would be 2007 at this point, I got a job working at a bike shop, and I was making just enough, but still enough to support myself and all was well, until a new management company took over the building, and they jacked up my rent what was it, like 100 bucks a month? When they took it over. Which was...classy. So, still struggling. Fortunately, the bike shop was giving me fairly regular raises...then fast forward to 2011, went back to school, and I was kind of relying on working part-time at the bike shop, and using the income from that and some of my student loan money to pay my rent, and I got laid off. I got laid off from the bike shop. And I... I don't want to say that the general manager hated me because I was trans, I feel like it was something that made him uncomfortable...and he refused to call me by my name. He refused to call me Moira until I kind of...gave him a reason while he should. Meanwhile, the store manager, the person I worked under, kept telling him to call them Moira. When I started working there, I didn't have any of my legal documents changed... but all that happened later, so anyway, so I went back to school and had to scramble to find a job. Wound up working at Spencer's Gifts and it was something. But I also had to take out a private student loan, in addition to my federal student loan, which had a terrible interest rate. Eventually I moved from New Rochelle to White Plains, because my job was now in White Plains. I was going to school

in Valhalla, which is about ten minutes north of White Plains. So, living in White Plains made it easier to go to school, and to get to work. But the only place I could afford to live in was the YWCA, which is basically a shelter. It wasn't terrible, at first. But...then, this one person moved in, to my cluster and she wasn't bad. She wasn't bad until she learned that I was trans. I was prepping my Halloween costume. I was going to cosplay as myself when I was seventeen. So I was finishing up this ball cap that I was making, and I was explaining to her—I was explaining to a roommate, why it was a costume, that I'm trans, and I looked very different when I was 17, and then this other, new roommate walks in, and this first roommate tells the other one that I'm trans, and she freaks out and I'm not gonna go over all the bullet points of the things she said, but they were all terrible. It was...so many of the anti-trans tropes, and probably my favorite because it was so ridiculous, of the things she said was...she said, "now, when I come out of the shower, I can't just walk around with a towel wrapped around my waist and my titties hanging out!" it was such an insane and unhinged thing. I've repeated that same thing to cis women of all ages from all backgrounds and they all agree that it's an unhinged thing to say. And fortunately, the management, the director of the YWCA was 100 percent behind me so I didn't have to worry about losing my housing, but I still had to deal with her every day until I moved out of there. It was about a year and a half that I had to deal with her. And I was fucking miserable. And then someone else moved in, who also didn't like trans people. So, yay! [Laughter] Fortunately, I moved out shortly after that person moved in. But in that period between when I moved out of my apartment in New Rochelle and when I moved into the YWC, that was the second time that I was pretty sure that I was going to be homeless. I was working between Spencer's and Sears where I had started working. I was working between fifty hours a week and spending an hour to an hour and a half each way on buses going to and from school and work, and just trying to...survive. And we were both trying to cling onto this apartment. And I knew that I was barely making it, and I thought that I was going to be homeless. I was lucky that the YWCA was in White Plains, and they made it easier to keep going to school, although ultimately, I had to drop out anyway, because after I got my EMT certification, I couldn't find a job with an agency, because I was in school. And they considered school a work restriction even though I was still in school to become a paramedic. So, if I got a job with an ambulance service as an EMT, about a year and some change later I'd be a paramedic, so they wouldn't have to hire another person, they could just upgrade me, and then hire an EMT. But, yeah. So, there was that. And then fast forward a few years, to me working for my second ambulance service, and this was towards the end of my career with this agency, because they had put me with a partner that...I had worked with him before, and I had to report him for a couple...for a few dumb safety violations, and it was the same dumb thing that he did...twice. And supervisor spoke to him, twice. So, you'd think after that, that he'd get his shit together. But no, instead he decided to hold a grudge on me because I snitched on him. And so, they partnered me with him, *again*, even though I had asked them not to put me with this guy anymore. So, the agency I was with, had a policy about, if you're gonna put the ambulance in reverse, and you don't have a patient in the back of the ambulance, your partner has to get out and spot you. So, I needed to put the ambulance in reverse, I asked him to get out and spot me. He said he wouldn't, because we had a backup camera. So, there was like a monitor inside the cabin, where I was, where I could look at the monitor and there was a camera behind us that would show us what's behind us. After a back and forth of me telling him I need someone there physically to stop people from walking behind the ambulance, I finally get out

dispatch on the phone, and I wanted them to say out loud that he needs to get out and back me up. So, they confirmed it, then he wanted the phone. He takes it and starts referring to me with...male pronouns. And... now, he and I had had a conversation around what it means to be trans, and I had thought by this point, even if he was holding some kind of grudge against me, he understands that my trans-ness does not take away from my humanity, but apparently, he didn't. So, he goes right ahead and uses the wrong pronouns to refer to me while talking to dispatch, which by the way, they all knew me. This paramedic that I was partnered with, he had only been with the agency for...I don't know, seven or eight months? I had been working there for two years at this point. They all knew me. So, after he gets off the phone, he leans forward, points his hand at me and says, "When I look at you, I see a man." And at that point, I had checked out. I was done. I got out, pulled out my personal phone, called up dispatch and told them I can't do this anymore. I am done for today. I am done. I'm not working with him anymore, bring us back to base. Got back, filled out all the paperwork I was supposed to about the inci—filled out an incident report, and I was expecting that this guy was going to get fired. Surely, surely this would do it. Surely this would be the last straw. No, no. Instead, they wanted to—it said, HR wanted to set up a meeting between me, this guy, and himself, so it could be the three of us: me, this guy at HR, and this schmuck, like hashing it out. And I remember, I was standing right outside, on my phone, having the conversation with this guy explaining that I don't want to give this guy another opportunity to harass me or verbally assault me. The head of HR then said to me, "well you know, we should really have a meeting like this, so we could move forward like adults." As if he's implying that me, not wanting to be in a room with this monster, who thought that...who thought that ignoring the reality of my gender, was totally cool, as if me not wanting to be in a room with that person, means that I'm a fucking child. So, I went to the CEO, the owner of the company, who works out of the base that I worked out of. I told him the whole thing, and by the way, there's no "he said, she said" about this. There's a camera inside of the ambulance that records everything. Not just the video, but also the audio. And everyone at dispatch heard what had happened, heard what this schmuck said. So, there was an objective truth to what happened inside of that ambulance. I told the CEO about it, he said he'd look into it. A couple days later, he calls me and says that they gave him a... that he personally pulled this guy in and gave him a stern talking to. He reviewed the footage with him and showed him why it wasn't okay and promised that he wasn't gonna work with me again, and they were gonna make sure that he doesn't do this again. I tried to impress upon him that this isn't good enough, and what if he has a patient that's trans? Given that he doesn't respect a coworker that is trans, what guarantee do you have that he's going to respect a patient that's trans? Someone who is in the back of an ambulance, one of the most vulnerable states they're ever gonna be in, you're really gonna trust this...asshole with a trans patient, when he has a proven track record of not respecting a trans *partner*? So, he didn't find that compelling, so I decided I'm done with this. And I found a job working at a grocery store not too far from where Nicole and I live, and I worked there. I quit my job working as an EMT, which, by the way, becoming an EMT, I had to take a class for that. I had to go through a four-month class, I had to take a practical exam and a written exam, and I even had to recertify myself. I had to renew my certification on my own time. And I felt like...when I originally became an EMT, I thought, "yes, finally, this is my chance to be a healthcare professional, to be...respected." All that went down the fucking toilet. They respected me for fuck all because I am just a disposable EMT and was a paramedic. So, I know that was a lot, but...it's.... very little

of my troubles were directly related to my trans-ness, but all of them were compounded by my trying to deal with all of my... issues about being trans, and now I have one more thing that I have to worry about. I just want a place to sleep where I am safe. Yeah. But the thing with...the last one was the worst. Because this was a field where I had actively pursued, and I felt like this is someplace where I do have skills, and I've honed these skills. In fact, a week after I quit, one of the supervisors called me. It was—ironically—the day before my first day of work at the grocery store. He called me, and when I returned his call he even said, “you're one of the best EMTs that we have, and you always come prepared, and you're organized, and you've got nothing but glowing remarks from our patients and their family” and this was the same person that wanted to make me a field training officer. Someone who, when they hire new people, goes out on the road with these new hires and... kind of shows them the finer points of the job. And I refused because the pay kind of sucked. But he was basically trying to get me to come back, by telling me that after reevaluating the situation, they finally fired the jerk. And I told him I'm not coming back because if you didn't do it the first two times, where I went to HR and the owner, if they didn't do it the first two times, I don't trust them to protect me. I don't trust them to keep me safe. So, sorry, but you just lost one of your best providers and I am not coming back. I'm fortunate enough that... where my wife's income is high enough to where I can afford to tell them to fuck off. I can tell them that I am no longer going to suffer their abuse, their neglect, their...them completely ignoring my suffering, my anguish, which is real, and the abuse of this person, who thought that my humanity was forfeit the moment he felt that I was ordering him around. That I was overstepping my bounds. So, but I know that this wouldn't have been a reality for me a few years ago, before I met her. And I know this isn't a reality for a lot of trans people.

Tyler M: So, I'd like to ask both of you, is there something that you want the world to know, or one thing that you'd like to say?

White: If there's one thing that I'd like to say, I think it's that...nothing good... nothing good in terms of societal progress has ever gone from waiting for it to happen. It has to be fought for. And every front on that battle field has people sacrificing themselves. Sacrificing their time, their safety, sometimes their livelihoods, and... it's something that we need to...we need more people to join in that, because the trans community is too small to win every engagement. We need allies. And we're not the only ones. Every minority group that is being oppressed needs allies outside of it, and for people who are privileged enough to not have...not be in those groups, and not face that history of oppression, they have the...best positions in order to advance progress, and it's...it would be...we would live in a very different world, if people who were comfortable accepted that they also need to sacrifice that comfort in order to make sure that the world continues to become a better place, and they better figure this out quickly, because in a lot of ways, it's becoming a worse place.

Tyler M: Moira?

Airington: Hmm...so, it's actually two things...two very different things, but they do go hand in hand. The albeit new, but continued allowance of trans people to serve in the U.S. military, and also casting trans people to play trans characters in movies, tv shows, and whatever media.

Because, allowing trans people to serve in the military allows everyone to see the valor and bravery that is inherent in trans people, because we're people. We are brave and courageous, along with being smart and funny and creative, and the more... young trans people can see themselves as being heroic...as being strong and brave, the more confidence young trans people will feel about themselves, and the more that people... young trans kids can see themselves being portrayed on the silver screen, and the big screen by...other trans people, and not as the punchline of a joke, not as the sex worker that's supposed to be thought of as gross, but as the protagonist who's struggling, and who is just trying to live their life. Like recently, a movie, a Fantastic Woman, a trans person playing a trans person. The more that we see our own stories being told, the more we can see ourselves as real-life heroes, the more trans people will be accepted by society at large, and the more confident other trans people will be in themselves, when they're starting to transition themselves.

Tyler M: Thank you so much to both of you for offering your time, and your voices, so that everyone can listen and can have this.