

NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Aoife

Interviewer: Elliot Wesselborg

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Elliot Wesselborg: Hello my name is Elliot Wesselborg and I will be having a conversation with Aoife for the New York City Trans Oral History project in collaboration with the New York City public libraries community oral history project. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans-identifying people. It is July 26th, 2020, and as a result of social distancing due to COVID-19, this interview is being conducted remotely. Hi Aoife! It's nice to be talking with you.

Aoife: Hi, it's nice to be talking [laughter].

Wesselborg: Yeah [laughter] can you start by introducing yourself?

Aoife: Yeah, I'm Aoife. I use they/them pronouns. I'm currently a student and I do different types of education work which is fun. Yes, it's kind of very topical but yeah.

Wesselborg: Yeah. Tell me about your life growing up.

Aoife: Okay, growing up. Let's see, so, like I recently mentioned earlier, I was born in New York City and lived there until, like, lived there full time until I was about four. Then I moved to Connecticut, to Stratford, Connecticut for school because yeah my family's like, "School systems in Connecticut are a bit better" so we were like, okay. My dad stayed in New York so I kind of, I spent the weeks in Connecticut and then weekends in New York. Mostly until I got a little older and then would still travel a lot between the two. Umm, childhood [laughter].

Wesselborg: What did you like doing in New York on the weekends?

Aoife: Lots of exploring. We used to live on 42nd Street. My dad's a building manager so he gets an apartment with his job because he has to be at the building all the time. So we used to live around there and I'd love going to the American Girl Doll store. There's just so many things and it's so exciting and busy. I usually wouldn't get anything but just like walking around and it seems like a whole different world. I loved doing that. Being a kid in the city was fun like going to the park and all the playgrounds. I had some friends in the city that we had—my mom used to be a nanny so she had some friends who were nannies who nannied people similar to my age and my siblings' ages so we were friends with the kids and we'd hang out and do whatever and just like galavant around the city in a very silly kid way. Yeah.

Wesselborg: What was life like in Connecticut?

Aoife: Umm, it was fine. I don't know, I feel like Connecticut's weird, and my town is like, my town is very diverse in a lot of ways but it's also very typical suburbia in a lot of ways too. It has that aspect to it. And my parents were both immigrants and my mom's like — so it's always really just me and my mom living in Connecticut. My dad would be up here on some weekends but my parents are separated now so, yeah, he doesn't come up and hasn't really for a while. So my neighbors definitely think we're all like absolutely super weird. And we're definitely not like a "normal American family" quote-unquote. So it was weird being a little bit weird in our typical

suburban town. Overall everyone was pretty chill. I did get bullied in high school but not for being gay or queer or anything. Everyone was like, “You’re a nerd” “You’re annoying” and I’m like, oh okay. But I didn’t get bullied for being gay, everyone was just like, okay, whatever, fine. So it’s like, it was a pretty good place to grow up. I did a lot of sports which was interesting. Played instruments in school and stuff like that, so, yeah.

Wesselborg: When you say your family was weird, can you talk a little bit more about that?

Aoife: Yeah, so, I mean I think my mom says that her family even—so both my parents are from Ireland. They met here. But I don’t know my mom was like, “Yeah, my family’s just weird even back home. People think we’re weird”. I’m like, okay. So I think just the way we go about doing things and thinking about things are not like the exact way a lot of people in suburbia go about thinking. Especially, you know, like white middle-class and upper-middle-class people in suburbia go about doing things. I don’t know, and then my mom’s a single mom with four kids and I’m like, I’m like the weird kid. We’re all really a little bit weird but it’s like I’m like the weird queer trans sibling. So we did like at the beginning of the quarantine, to change things up, we did a themed dinner each night of the week, and so we did drag night one week. We did drag night, yeah, and we were having our dinner outside and so we went and sat on our back porch. Everyone was in like ridiculous drag and our neighbors were just sitting there and they were just like —and they turned around and went inside and I was like, “oh, I’m sorry”. So it’s like, some things like that which are a lot more tangible and you can tell but then also just the way that my mom thinks about stuff and the way she raised us versus just the way a lot of my classmates and friends did stuff, so yeah.

Wesselborg: What’s your relationship with your family like? It sounds like you guys are close.

Aoife: Yeah I’m super, super close with my mom. I’m very close with my sisters too. It’s always weird coming back from school because they’ll have grown so much in the months that I’m gone so it’ll be like a little rocky transition when I get back. They’ll be slightly different people and I’ll be a different person but then I’ll feel like, a few weeks it’s like good and we’re all just like—me and my sisters are very like silly and just tease each other a lot and just do stupid things but I love them a bunch. We’re very close and I’m very close with my mom. I’m not as close with my dad, that’s been a rocky relationship. But then I also have an older brother who kind of does his own thing he still lives at home. We’re getting on okay right now but we used to be really close when we were younger but we’re not as close now because we’re very different people. In high school he was like one of those boys that played lacrosse and was cool and I was just like big nerd, like, yeah.

Wesselborg: What were the norms around gender and sexuality in your community?

Aoife: So it was mostly like straight, cis, people. There are a decent number of queer people in my town but the norm definitely is straight and cis and respectable monogamous relationships. That's why I was always like, oh yeah I'm going to date a guy and it's going to be, you know, like all those perfect high school relationships. It's kind of what I pictured but that's not what happened obviously. I guess not obviously but that's not what happened. But yeah, I guess everyone's pretty accepting of the sexuality part. I think I came out my junior year or senior year of high school 'cause I started dating someone. At that point I identified as a girl and I was like very femme looking, I had super long hair and you know dressed in a very stereotypical way just like jeans and whatever and leggings and what not. I dress super differently now, in a way that's a lot more comfortable. And the person I was dating she was also very femme and normal and we were both super nerdy and I did sports. I think that's definitely a part of why I was kind of accepted more because I was captain of two different varsity sports teams and stuff and I was like the top of my class. So I was like, oh, whatever, like I'm fine. But I think the gender thing is a lot more difficult. Sorry, I think I'm going to sneeze. [sneezes]

Wesselborg: Bless you!

Aoife: Sorry [laughter]

Wesselborg: [laughter] It's fine.

Aoife: Yeah my family was very quickly accepting of my sexuality. Ooo, sorry! I'm so sneezy! [sneezes] I have such bad allergies and I was like — earlier so I'm — okay sorry! [laughter] I'm probably going to sneeze a bunch more. But they were very quickly accepting of my sexuality. [sneezes]

Wesselborg: Bless you!

Aoife: Ahh I'm sorry! For the most part, you know, there's like weird things now and when it gets complex they're like very understanding of the simple— like more simplistic stuff they're like, "Okay you're gay that's fine, cool, whatever". My grandma—my grandma is 93 and she lives in Dublin and when I told her I was gay, she was like, you know, she wasn't like upset or anything she was actually like, I guess she was like, she had some her friends she was like, "Oh I have a gay granddaughter. Oh, you don't? Oh, oh well. I do." She's funny. But the gender thing is a lot [sniffs] more difficult to understand especially since it like, I think, especially since it's like a non-binary trans where I'm not like, okay, it's confusing. And it's something that a lot of people in my community haven't really thought of before. I had one, I mean two, trans people

in high school, and my high school was pretty small so I basically knew everyone in the high school. So there were two out trans people in high school, both trans men. One of them was in my year and we were good friends. The other one, Sam, he was—he just graduated this year so he was a little bit younger, but that was it. And I know my friend Noah, he got bullied a lot and people gave him a really, really hard time. It was mostly, you know, the like straight, cis, boys that were very very difficult to him. So the gender thing was definitely a lot more difficult. I remember my senior year of high school I'd be really nervous to be presenting in a way that was not feminine or not like, not stereotypically feminine. If I wanted to wear a button-up to school I'd be like, ooo I'm a bit nervous about that. I remember posting on my finsta this button-up I bought and I was like, "Should I wear this to school? Haha, do we think people are going to be mean about it?". I was really nervous. And then my friends were like, "Oh my god, wear it to school, if anyone's mean to you we'll like beat them up". I need to grab a tissue really quick, I'm sorry!

Wesselborg: Okay!

Aoife: Kinda felt okay to be like queer if it wasn't a certain way. I think it would have been really scary to try and wear like a tux to prom. I wore a huge ball gown, which I loved but I definitely would not wear now. Umm, so yeah, the gender non-conforming part I think is a lot harder for people to understand/accept here which is...interesting. [sniffs]

Wesselborg: Going back a little bit, can you talk a little bit more about that relationship you had in high school with a girl?

Aoife: Oh, yeah, umm let's see. That was my first relationship. So I was always like, basically from 8th grade I was like, okay I don't actually want to date a guy, and I was like, "yeah haha I'm straight" for a long time because I was really scared of coming out. So I think I had like, a few friends that I told. One of my best friends, the summer before high school she was like, "Oh I just want to let you know, I'm bi", and I was like, so I was like, she's one of my best friends and I trust her a lot so I was like, "Oh, okay. I'm not straight either. I'm not quite sure how I identify but like..." And so she was the only one that knew for a really really long time. [sniffs] But I definitely never—I guess I like—I don't know, you know like the talking stage phase or whatever? I guess I had that with a few different people where we'd talk or whatever but then I'd always get really scared and never actually move past that to be in a relationship with anyone. I was like, haha no. Especially because I wasn't out to my family and I didn't feel like I could date somebody and not have my family know, just 'cause I'm very close to them and that would feel bad. So I think I—I came out to my mom and my sisters and my brother at the end of my junior year of high school. My mom actually was like, asked if I was gay, and I was like —

and I kind of told myself a while before I was like, scared about coming out, but I was like, if anyone asks I'll be honest. So I was like oh, okay, well I guess that's going to happen, so then I told my sisters and my brother because I wanted to go to Pride that year with my friends. My mom was like, "Well you have to tell your siblings" and I was like, okay. My brother just straight up did not believe me. A lot of people were really surprised and did not believe me when I told them I was gay, which was like my dad didn't believe me either. He thought I was trying to play a joke on him—

Wesselborg:—[inaudible]—

Aoife:— And I told my dad because at that point I was dating a girl and I was like, oh I want to let you know I have a girlfriend. He thought me and my sisters were trying to play a joke on him and my brother thought me and my mom were trying to play a joke on him and I was like oh my god. [sniffs] A lot of people in school were like, "I would never have thought you were gay!" and I was like—like my friends were like, "Okay, yeah mhm" but I think people just thought I was one of those people that was really dedicated to my schoolwork. That I was like, "No I have no time for a relationship". I was like, "Haha good! That's what I wanted you all to think" [laughter]. But no so it was just this girl I took classes with. She was my friends' friends, she was a junior and I was a senior. It was just a very sweet, pure, first relationship. We dated for like a year or something and we went to prom together and stuff like that. [sniffs] That's how a lot of people found out I was gay 'cause they were like, "Oh my god, you're dating this girl?" and I was like, "Yes" and they were shocked. Yeah, so that was, I don't know, like I said, just a very pure and sweet first relationship that I think was a really good introduction into dating for me. It wasn't, there was no trauma related to it or anything. We broke up because I was leaving for college. We were like, it's probably the best thing to do, so I mean I was really heartbroken about that but [sniffs] I do think it was for the best.

Wesselborg: How were you—when you were first figuring out you might not be straight, what did that look like for you?

Aoife: What did that look like? Umm, that was very stressful and very confusing. So I had— in my mind the first time I was like "ooo am I not straight?" was in fifth grade. I have this distinct memory of being like, "Oh, am I gay?" and I'd be like, "No, I'm not gay because I want boys to like me and because I want boys to like me that means I'm straight", but really that was probably just like, I don't want people to hate me I want to be accepted. And I didn't really think about it until the end of middle school. I was kind of like huh, and then I had a huge crush on this actress. I was like, oh my god, I have a huge crush on her, and I was like, is that normal? I was like, do I really like boys? Then I was like, maybe I like boys and girls, I don't know. Then I

was like, no, I just like girls. And then as, pretty much throughout high school I was like, okay I'm a lesbian like I like girls whatever. When I got to college my gender identification changed so the way I identify my sexuality has evolved too so, yeah.

Wesselborg: Were you going online to find information or talking to people? [laughs] What was that like?

Aoife: You know I took, like all closeted gay 14-year-olds I was you know like am I gay? And it would be like, "Do you like someone of the same gender?", and I'd be like, this isn't helpful! [laughs] You know I did those little stupid things. I was definitely—my friends had me read gay fanfics 'cause my friends loved fanfictions. So I had to be like, huh or, you know, I absolutely loved Kurt and Blaine in Glee. I was like, maybe I just think gay guys are really cool 'cause there wasn't much lesbian representation. But then I was like—and looking back now there's definitely a gender aspect that plays into that too. But yeah, I don't know, definitely just a lot of thinking myself. I don't think I did too much reading or anything on it or searched up too many things online. [sniffs]

Wesselborg: Did you know any openly gay or any bisexual or whatever people at that point?

Aoife: Umm, let's see. So that was—I think I did so one of my sister's friends, my sister is—I have two sisters one of them is 5 years younger than me, and so she had these friends when she was in early elementary school who were twins who had two moms. And so I guess one of the—so it was these two kids and one of them really really liked me and just loved me. I don't really know why but whatever. So she'd like—I remember their family invited me and both my sisters to their birthday party. I met her moms and they were super super sweet. You know I'd see them around at school events and stuff so I knew them. They were a happy married lesbian couple. There's actually like three lesbian couples on my street which I didn't know until recently so I guess I did know gay people but I didn't know they lived there. Then my mom has a friend back home, her name's Marion. Her and her wife have three kids and we visited them and I was in fifth grade or something. They were super sweet so like I did know gay people but like so I was like okay gay people are like—I didn't know a lot of gay men but I somehow knew a lot of lesbians when I was younger which amazing.

Wesselborg: What was the first queer community that you were a part of?

Aoife: I guess like either a small group of queer friends I had in high school. I didn't really go to my GSA [Gay-Straight Alliance] in high school because I did a lot of sports so it was always like I

think I went to a few meetings my senior year but it was kind of weird I didn't really like it. Um [inaudible]—

Wesselborg:—What were they doing in the GSA if you remember?

Aoife: I don't remember hugely what they were doing. I know one time people were just talking about their ships and people were just like, "Oh my god like Sirius and James Potter", I was like, "What is happening here?". I was in there in my track uniform waiting to go practice I was like— I really okay so the beginning of senior year I went to the GSA because the girl that I had a crush on who I ended up dating her best friend was, identified as a lesbian back then. She doesn't anymore, but she did then, so she went to the GSA. So my ex-girlfriend went to GSA with her and I didn't know if my ex was gay at that time and I was still trying to figure it out but I was like, okay, I'll go hang out with this person and you know whatever. Yeah it was funny, we started dating and she wasn't out to her family or her parents or anything or anyone really except for like two of her friends so... I have a bad habit of getting into relationships with people who aren't out to anybody then have to come out by telling their family and friends that they're in a relationship with me which is great, love that, awesome. So yeah, just like weird stuff and, I don't really know, lots of playing games. I think one time I went and everyone just played four corners. So it was just a bunch of queer kids hanging out. But I also had a few queer friends in high school and we'd just hang out and do whatever which was really nice to just— yeah.

Wesselborg: Going to college, what did that look like for you?

Aoife: So college was very stressful, the whole going to college thing. Neither of my parents went to college and my brother went to college for one semester then dropped out so I think he was home by Christmas my senior year and he didn't, like, he did a really non-traditional application. He applied really late to a state school and decided to go in the summer. So the college application process was absolutely wild and I had to figure out a lot of stuff on my own. My high school's a bit underfunded and wasn't, like, they were definitely helpful in some ways but in a lot of ways I had absolutely no clue what I was doing. I applied to four schools. I don't even know exactly why I applied to the schools I applied for. I only applied to Smith [Smith College] where I'm going now because—so we're still friends with one of the family's my mom used to nanny for and we were visiting them in the summer and Fritz—the lady who my mom used to nanny for's mom—was like, "Oh have you had of Smith College?". I was like, no I haven't. I hadn't heard of the majority of liberal arts and whatever colleges. I just don't— I still don't know a lot of them exist and then people will be like this school or that school and I'm like I literally don't know what you're talking about, like I truly do not. So Fritz was like, "Oh my

mom went to Smith and she loved it. I think it was probably like, seems like a really you place” and I was like, interesting. So I applied because they didn’t have an application fee. I was like, I may as well apply because it’s free to apply so why not. But I didn’t know much about it. So I ended up trying to decide between Fordham [Fordham University] and Smith because I got very similar financial aid packages from the two which is like my financial aid is one of the very top decisions in where I was going so I basically going to decide based off financial aid. So since they gave me the same financial aid I was like, where to go? And I had toured, I’d actually toured Fordham but I hadn’t been up to Smith. I think I went on like two college visits. The summer before I’d gone on a bunch because my friend asked me if I wanted to go to Pittsburg with her and I was like, “Oh my god I’d love to go to Pittsburg with you! I’ve never been to Pittsburg”. I thought we were just going to Pittsburg but it turns out we were doing a college tour road trip.

Wesselborg: Very different things! [laughter]

Aoife: [inaudible] I had no clue but I wasn’t interested in any of the schools we toured. They were all you know like huge or whatever, not interested. So I was like, okay, I had no clue what was happening. I truly thought I was just going on a short vacation with my friend. I was like, okay cool, but no. So I myself went on two or three college tours. I hadn’t been to Smith so I was like, you know, did some research on it and whatever and I was like, okay cool. I didn’t know anything about it so we went up one weekend not for an official tour since it was three days before the commitment deadline was due and I was like [laughter]. So we just went up and walked around campus and I saw a bunch of queer couples and I was like, oh my god what the heck and stuff and the town was lovely I was like, oh I really really love it here, and I was like, okay mom I really want to go here I want to go here. And I went home and I committed to Smith and then found out a bunch of stuff about it. I didn’t find out that it was a really gay school until I was in one of the groupchats with all the incoming first years. I was like, okay I legitimately didn’t know that. So everyone was like, “Did you come to Smith because it was gay?”, and I was like, “I didn’t, I didn’t know it was gay”. [laughter] I’m sorry I legitimately didn’t know that. Yeah so Smith was exciting and I was really excited because I got accepted early for whatever reason. I sent a normal application but then got a letter from the dean of admissions in February they were like, “I want to let you know you’re part of a special group that got early acceptance!” So I don’t know I felt excited that I was like—I was like oh they like me that feels nice. So yeah, I ended up going there and being really clueless about college. I just didn’t know much about it. But there is—I did a orientation group for first-gen students and then applied for and got accepted into this program called “First Gen Out Loud” which has been so so so amazing and it’s been so good that have other first-gen students and students with similar financial backgrounds and experiences on campus who just understand a lot of things that most

students on campus don't so that's been super helpful and my college experience so far. [sniffs] I kind of went off track there but yeah.

Wesselborg: No, that's fine! Were you interested in going to Fordham because it was in the city?

Aoife: Yeah that was a big part of it. I was like, oh it's in The Bronx I can go to the city really easily. It was just a pretty campus and I was like—at that point I wanted to be an English major or something so I was like whatever it's a good school. I'm kind of glad— I was definitely hung up on the fact that it was a religious school. I was like, that kind of scares me. Me and my friends had a running joke, at track one day we were talking about college my friend's like, "Yeah but like Fordham" and I was like, "Yeah but it's also a Jesuit university", and he's like, "Yeah but your family's Catholic, right?", and I was like, "Yeah but Tyler it's a religious school" and he was like, "I don't get it like you're Catholic, you'll be fine". It took him like—one of the other kids who did track was like so confused because I felt really weird about being like, "I'm gay!", at that point in time especially since there was a lot of people around I didn't want to just say it. I was still very shy and stuff about my sexuality in front of people then. So eventually my friend was like ohhh. Then I posted something online and this other kid was like, "So that's what you meant when you talked about being.." and I was like, yeah yeah. So yeah, that was definitely a concern to me. I'm sure it would have been fine but I feel really really lucky to have such a big queer and trans community now. I definitely don't think I would have had the same realization about my gender identity if I had went to Fordham.

Wesselborg: How'd you get into queer and trans communities at Smith?

Aoife: That's a good question. How did I? So, let's see. So in Smith we have our houses and the houses are relatively small for campus dorms. There's 60 people that live in my house, which is like I guess a pretty small dorm. And we have "Head of New Students" who are sophomores who help move the first years in and bring them to orientation and you do different activities with them and stuff. So one of my "Head of New Students", they're called "HONS" just like [laughter] a shorter word, my HONS whose name is Julia, when they introduce themselves they did pronouns like them and Isabella and the other HONS and Julia's like, "Hi! I'm Julia, I use they/them pronouns I think". They were still kind of figuring it out then but I was like, oh, interesting. They were like very androgynous looking and I was like, huh. You know I met a lot of like, very quickly met a lot of other really androgynous and gender non-conforming people and one of my best friends was like this really rad queer, androgynous, person and I was just like, oh, this is really interesting. So then I actually started thinking about my gender and I'd recently just cut my hair super short, and how I presented and how I wanted to be seen and I

was like, oh, very very interesting. And I took a bunch of women and gender studies classes, which you know we talked a lot about gender theory and trans academics and stuff like that and I was like, woah, mind blown. And so then I was like, maybe a month or two into my first semester I was like, okay I think I'm going to try using they/them pronouns, but I was very scared about it. But at the beginning of classes teachers would be like, "Okay, what are your pronouns?" in my new classes I'd be like "They/them or she/her I don't know". And I changed my twitter bio pronouns but I didn't tell anybody and so then eventually my best friend was like, "Hey, I noticed you changed your bio, do you want us to be using they/them pronouns for you?", I was like, "Yes please". But I was too scared to talk to anybody about it so my friend texted the groupchat with my group of friends in my house and was like, "Hey can you use they/them pronouns for Aoife they..." like blah blah blah etcetera etcetera. So then everyone started using they/them pronouns for me and I was like in transition and I had started dating this person and they were like, "Wait", like I hadn't said anything to her and then she asked me and I was like, "Haha yeah" and she was like, "You could have told me that!". I was like, "Yeah, I know but like...". I don't know I was scared about it and I remember right before that, like a week before that, having—so we have this thing called "Winter Weekend" in the houses it's like a big house party, like themed and it's organized or whatever like it's cute, so everyone gets a bit drunk and whatever so I was hanging out in Julia's room with them and a bunch of other people playing a drinking game and being stupid. For legal purposes we were not drinking umm but yeah [laughter]. And I remember I was just talking to them about gender and I was like, "I think I might be non-binary like I don't know I want to use they/them pronouns" and they were like, "Yeah!" and they were so supportive and we had a really good conversation about it. It was really really sweet and that definitely helped a lot and then just having a bunch of friends on campus who were gender non-conforming just having trans people all around me and all these really cool people that were slightly older than me and I was like, oh my god, amazing. So yeah, and then we have, we jokingly call it "Gender Club", it's called "Transcending Gender" but it's for trans and GNC [gender non-conforming] students so I started going to that this year which was really nice and just slowly seeing a lot more of my friends be like, "Oh, I'm using they/them pronouns" or using he/him pronouns or like trans or gender non-conforming it's just, I don't know, it's nice.

Wesselborg: What are some of the dynamics of being trans at a women's college? Or a historically women's college, I don't know what you want to [laughter] specific term but...

Aoife: Yeah we definitely use "historically women's college". It's always fun explaining that to very cis/straight people who are like, "I don't get it" and I'm like, "Okay well not everyone at this school is a girl" and they're like, "But you're all women" it's like [inaudible] just like explaining that trans students go there. I was trying to explain that to— I work at a camp right

now, and I was trying to explain it to the lifeguard who's this [inaudible] woman who's super into Girl Scouts. She's very sweet but I was like ha ha ha [laughter]. That was interesting. I don't know, I mostly found it pretty accepting but I also exist in the Women and Gender Studies—like so I'm a Woman and Gender Studies and Anthropology double major, and especially in Women and Gender Studies the majority of the professors and students are very cool about it and it's super whatever. But there are like, there's some terfs on Smith campus. There was, we have the Smith Confessional, and someone posted a very long just really terrible TERF-y [Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist] message. We all knew who it was, this girl Rhianna, she's terrible. And it was really really terrible she was talking about people being like, "Okay you identify as non-binary but men are still going to know what gender you really are so they can sexually assault you" but she used a lot harsher language and everyone was like —. [inaudible] So yeah, there are definitely some people on campus that are very not cool with it and there are some professors that are a little weird about it but in my experience the majority of my professors will be like, "What are your pronouns?" and really try to respect that. And most students are cool with it, though I do have trouble with a lot of people misgendering me even after they know my pronouns and being like, "Please stop". Or, you know, people victimizing themselves when you're like, "Hey you used the wrong pronouns for this person" and being like, "I'm so sorry I'm such a bad person". It's like, okay, don't do that. But overall it's a very comfortable environment and North Hampton is also a very queer town so for me as a very, I guess I'm usually pretty androgynous, or like as a white androgynous trans person it's been mostly comfortable. Yeah.

Wesselborg: I know you mentioned that you knew some trans guys in high school, how did that work for you going from more of a queer identity to also claiming a trans label?

Aoife: For me personally just within myself it felt very comfortable. I was just like, that makes sense. It just makes so much sense and feels very right. I was definitely scared to talk to people about it not knowing what people's reactions would be and how it would change relationships and stuff. But for me it felt very— it just felt— the logical—not even logical it just felt like yeah that makes sense. I mean I'm queer in all aspects of my identity very much with the bell hooks definition of what it means to be queer it just felt fitting and just yeah.

Wesselborg: Who are some of the other people you've read that have resonated with you?

Aoife: Okay umm, other people I've read that have resonated with me, okay I'm looking over my bookshelf I'm like—definitely Audre Lorde. I love love love Audre Lorde. *Zami* [*Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*] is one of my all-time favorite books and I've told all of my friends to read it. Umm, let's see, Audre Lorde, bell hooks— I am blanking right now because I can not umm

Angela Davis, Kim TallBear, Kimmer, the oral history anthology *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold* [*Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community*], I loved that. The com-com-ba ba ba ba, how do you say it?

Wesselborg: The Combahee River Collective.

Aoife: Combahee River Collective, umm yeah just I feel like I've done so much reading over the past two years that has been so so insightful and I've learned so much from so yeah I just, like, yeah.

Wesselborg: How have—especially as someone who—or have you pursued any medical transition at this point or [inaudible]...

Aoife: Not at this point—

Wesselborg:—yeah?—

Aoife:—No.

Wesselborg: How do you navigate being open as a trans person while also probably getting read as cis?

Aoife: Yeah—

Wesselborg: —[inaudible]—

Aoife: I get read as a cis girl all the time and surprisingly I get read as a cis, straight, girl a lot. I don't really know how. It's fine, it's cool, whatever. One of my best friends is a guy—one of my best friends here is a guy, and we'll go out together to get coffee or anything and people just assume we're dating and I'm like, I know we both look like twinkies but we're not dating! It definitely annoys me a bit. I don't love people addressing me as "ma'am" or as a girl or anything. It's kind of exhausting but I don't usually correct people 'cause usually there's just not a point in correcting them. Yeah, I don't know, I—it used to bother me more than it did now I'm just kind of like, okay, whatever, 'cause like, I don't know, it is annoying and I do usually bind my chest. I haven't been doing like, I don't usually do it as much during the summer, especially when it's super hot out and I'm outside, like I work outside all day so I don't want to die. Yeah, like no—

Wesselborg: —[inaudible] would be a plus [laughter]

Aoife: [inaudible] Yeah I usually just it's weird but I feel like I look more androgynous and masculine during the winter months but like, yeah. I don't know but when people do think I'm like, do assume that I'm a boy, no one like no strangers have assumed that I'm non-binary, but when people do assume I'm a boy I'm like, ooo, thank you! I was on a trip to New York with this group I'm part of at school and we were dressed business-y so I was wearing a blazer. It was a woman's blazer that I bought at the thrift store 'cause I don't have business clothes. I was just wearing a blazer and corduroy pants and a button-up like whatever. My hair was a bit shorter than this now I need to give myself a haircut. But I was just walking down the street minding my own business. I wasn't on my phone or anything. This man runs like turns the corner really fast and smacks into me. He starts yelling at me, pushes me and hits me and he's like, "You need to watch where you're going buddy" blah blah blah and I was like I was just in shock like what the fuck. And so my friend Gav was like, "Hey!" and so the guy was like, "No don't "hey!" me! Your friend needs to watch where the fuck he's going!" and I was like, oh my god he thought I was a boy! That's fun! So it was kind of a traumatic experience in a way but I was also like, he thought I was a boy, that's nice! That was kind of affirming! So whenever people think I'm a boy I'm like okay cool! I think it's kind of fun but, yeah.

Wesselborg: So you said you work at a camp right now? What's that like with kids?

Aoife: Okay so I work with kids a lot anyways. I work at a preschool in Northampton during the school year which is so totally different from what I do right now. I work at a Girl Scout summer camp because I could not find any other job and I need to make money, so yeah, I work at a Girl Scout summer camp where all the counselors have to be girls which I didn't know until after I was hired so I was like okay I guess I'm just really not going to be out, that's fine, whatever, it doesn't matter. So it is very interesting everybody you know just refers to me as a girl and everyone's like, "Okay girls! "Okay ladies!" blah blah blah and it's like oh my god this environment is absolutely bonkers. I deliberately don't call my group of campers [inaudible] "Okay girls, let's go!" I just— I don't do that. I'm like okay there's no need to do that. I'll be like, they're in units, so I'm like, "Okay Tall Timbers!" or whatever or literally just use their individual names. It's very interesting. I'm the only queer presenting or trans presenting counselor, staff member. I think there was one queer-looking 14-year-old camper there one week but apart from that [inaudible] have tattoos and short hair or whatever and it's definitely very very strange. Yeah I thought the kids would be, like, catch on about it but they really don't like one of the kids this week was like, "Do you have a boyfriend?" and I was like, "Do I look like I have a boyfriend?" and she was like, "You look like you've had a lot of boyfriends", and I was like [laughter] I was like, "I don't know what that means!" [laughter]. And there was another

counselor and she told that counselor that she looks like she could make out with one boy and she would have one boyfriend but she'd have to be careful that her boyfriend didn't leave her for someone hotter. This kid was—

Wesselborg:—Oh my god! [laughter] Yeah this kid sounds crazy!

Aoife: She was a lot. She was a lot. But I was like, and all my kids every week will be like, “Do you have a boyfriend?” I'm like, oh my god like stop [laughter] y'all are wild! So it's definitely very interesting and it's very hard gender-wise working there and everyone being like, “Girls” “You're a girl” and I'm like, oh my god, okay, so yeah that's a weird place to work at.

Wesselborg: Is that different than the preschool you work at during the year?

Aoife: Yeah, so the preschool in Northampton a lot of the kids there have gay parents and trans parents and gender non-conforming parents [inaudible] school and I think the teachers, who I'm a teacher's aide for, they are definitely queer and trans teachers at the school so it's very like— like the kids read books on pronouns and also I work with young like I work with toddlers so I think they're a little less, “Boyfriend?”, they're just like, “Please play with me” “Please push me on the swing” [laughter]. They're very sweet but I feel comfortable enough at work to be like, “Oh these are my pronouns, please use them” and like the teachers, if a kid refers to me with the wrong pronouns will be like, “Hey remember Aoife uses they/them pronouns, can you do that?” so it's such a different environment.

Wesselborg: Do you think some of those parents have chosen that preschool specifically because it does affirm queerness and transness?

Aoife: Yeah, I think so. Especially the queer parents, you know like lots of kids will come to school dressed however like lots of boys will come in dresses and skirts and you can tell the kids just get to wear whatever they want as long as it's weather appropriate. So I think parents do specifically choose that school for reasons like that.

Wesselborg: What's the town of Northampton like in terms of queerness and how much do interact with the town?

Aoife: So the town of Northampton is—has been nicknamed “Lesbianville USA” and stuff. It is a very gay town which is really nice but it's also like when I first got there I was like, oh my god I love Northampton, and I don't interact with the Northampton community a huge amount. I go to coffee shops and what not, though I do miss coming here when I get a lot more engaged with

grassroots organizations there. Especially since I think I'm going to have you know a bit more time this year with our senior year so I do want to do that more. But it's also a very white town and a very gentrified town so while I love parts of it there's also parts of it that are like—have—hold their problems and yeah.

Wesselborg: Do you have any specific examples of that?

Aoife: Umm I probably do let me think. So I mean it's—you can just see it very much just walking around in downtown Northampton there's a large homeless population but then there's also you know people going into stores, into like small boutiques and buying a pair of earrings for like \$150. But then some parts of the community you can tell very much care like there are certain cafes where you can pay extra so you can pay for an unhoused person's meal later if they come in. Then there's also places you can tell really don't care um yeah.

Wesselborg: Going back a little to New York City, how has your relationship with that place changed as you've gotten older?

Aoife: Um so my dad lives in Manhattan because like I said he lives in the building he works at so being younger I didn't really know much of the details of New York economically and socio-politically. I spent my time basically between Manhattan and The Bronx. Both my parents used to live in The Bronx and they have family friends there and stuff and people we visit so I basically split my time in New York between The Bronx and Manhattan, downtown Manhattan, and sometimes the upper east side because that's where the kids that my mom's nanny friend's nanny lived. So it was kind of weird being on the upper east side being like, so you're fancy, because I'd never be able to live there but having friends that live there 'cause my mom was a nanny was kind of a funky little situation but whatever. So definitely weird being a kid who lives in Connecticut close to New York, everyone's like, "Oh my god New York!" and I'm like, "Okay, yeah, New York" like I love New York and it was always weird being the one that knows everything slightly more about New York but not as much as a New Yorker would know but still knowing how to use the subway and if people went to New York they'd be like, "Oh my gosh you'll have to show me how to use the subway!" "You'll have to do this, you'll have to do that" and I'm like, "Ahh okay!". But last summer was the first time I'd spent a significant chunk of time in New York so I really learned a lot more about the city last summer and met a lot of really amazing people and did a lot of things in New York that I'd never done before so I think my relationship with it definitely changed a lot and I got more familiar with different aspects of it.

Wesselborg: Where were you living while you were there?

Aoife: I was living with my dad in the financial district in downtown Manhattan which I hated. I hated living there. It was like—I lived right by Wall Street so I'd be like you know leaving the apartment wearing my disgustingly ill-fitting jeans that I'm currently wearing right now and a t-shirt and I'd have my chest bound and had super short hair and I'd look all weird and everyone would be like—and I'd hop on the train to go to midtown and we had all these people just like all these men in their suits with their briefcases and I'm like, I do not belong here! And then I'd like, so the apartment building that my dad works for now is a luxury apartment building and yeah it's annoying. But you know I'd go to walk in and they'd be like— people would be looking at me weird to like er-umm the person I was dating last year would visit me a lot in New York so she was also super queer and androgynous presenting and we'd be walking down the apartment and into the building and people that would be going into the building before us would deliberately not hold open for us because they'd assume we were not going in there. Then like, then we'd go in behind them and they'd be like—they'd be like looking at us and to the person at front desk I'd say hi to them 'cause I talk to them all and they know who I am so the people in front of me would be like, "Oh [inaudible] weird" and like [inaudible] fine, so yeah. And then living my dad was a whole other thing and I ended up having to move back home very unexpectedly. So yeah so that was fun.

Wesselborg: Where were you hanging out last summer in New York?

Aoife: Where was I hanging out last summer? Umm where was I hanging out? Mostly in Brooklyn 'cause I had two friends that were also doing internships in New York so I'd go to hang out with them in Brooklyn and we'd go to different queer bars and stuff which was super fun. I also spent a lot of time at museums and stuff and just like around midtown too 'cause I was at the library all the time but yeah.

Wesselborg: What queer bars were you going to?

Aoife: Where did we go? We went to Mood Ring, we went to Happyfun Hideaway, umm where else did we go? I know we went to this place that was called like "Jupiter Lounge" [Jupiter Disco]. There was this other place that name I can't remember but they projected skate videos all over the walls and that was fun for dancing. I'm struggling to remember names but yeah we'd hop around different bars and dance and do whatever and it was fun.

Wesselborg: Are there queer bars in Northampton or is that kind of the first time you'd really done that?

Aoife: That was the first time I'd really gone clubbing. It was fun. But yeah then with one of my friends that was there we'd go out in the fall sometimes and go. There's like two gay bars in Northampton, there's The Basement and then there's Majestic [The Majestic Saloon], so we'd go to The Basement or Majestic or both and like dance and there's drinks and whatever and there'd just be like [inaudible] like either —'cause my friend, their partner was abroad or they were in DC for the semester and my at-the-time partner was abroad so we're like okay let's go clubbing together. But yeah mostly Majestic and The Basement in Northampton which are both fun queer places.

Wesselborg: What like—what was the crowd like there? Who went there?

Aoife: Umm the crowd—okay so I was definitely on the very young side of the crowd there. I mean I shouldn't have even been there, neither should my friend, so I was definitely probably the youngest person there but that's on me. But even if I was 21, we're going to pretend I'm 21 whatever, the crowd was still a little bit older. There's definitely people in their mid-twenties to early thirties so I was like a baby. That was in The Basement. The crowd at Majestic is younger usually, usually people who just graduated college in the area or like early twenties. Still mid-twenties but I felt like I fit in more age-wise there and The Basement definitely felt a lot whiter than Majestic. Whenever I go to The Basement I feel it'd mostly be like mostly white queer people but then Majestic would be like more of a mix of like white queer people and Black queer people and queer people of color and a lot more like—I feel like I saw a lot more trans people at Majestic too or more gender non-conforming and androgynous looking people um yeah.

Wesselborg: How does that compare with the scenes you were going to in New York?

Aoife: I think the scenes where I was going in New York were mostly just a lot more like I think they were mostly more diverse. I think Majestic was more similar to the places I'd go in New York but some places I would go in New York there would still be weird white guys trying to chat up me and my friends and I'd be like, "Stop!" and they'd be like, "Oh" and it's like okay no stop it! And just like still kind of weird but yeah.

Wesselborg: What was it like working at the Oral History Project [New York Trans Oral History Project]?

Aoife: I really loved it. It was really stressful at times but not super much because of work at the Oral History Project I had a lot of personal stuff going on last summer that was a huge mess like family stuff that happened and like that's why I had to very impromptu-ly leave my dad's

apartment and come home 'cause a lot of stuff happened. It was very bad. So my summer was very stressful because of that. Which made working kind of hard but Michelle [O'Brien] was so super accommodating and so kind and sweet about it. And I felt like I learned so so much last summer and met so many amazing people like being able to see Miss Major and Tourmaline have a conversation I was like mind blown, amazing. And I really felt like I was really radicalized last summer like I'd heard the term "radicalized outside of the institution" when I was at—you know the communist journal Michelle [O'Brien] works for, Pinko?

Wesselborg: I don't.

Aoife: So I—she invited me to one of the like a little things for that where there were three or four people on the panel and it was just like they gave out the mission statement pamphlet or whatever. And I think that's where I heard from an older queer woman, I don't know if she was trans like I don't—I don't remember. I do remember she was an older woman and she was definitely in the queer community but she's talking about how she hadn't gone to college and she used to hook up with people and then steal books from their apartment and she was radicalized doing her work on the streets. And I truly felt like I became a lot more radicalized and learned so much more than I could at school hearing it directly from especially like trans black women. I learned so much. So I was like okay this was a really good internship. I learned so so much and met so many amazing people. It was just a really good experience. I also met a lot of poets. I love poetry and write bad poetry so it was so cool to meet a bunch of punk anarchist poets in New York. I'm still in contact with some of them they're just so fucking cool and that was really really amazing to be like, oh my god you're just wow like I can't believe I know you. Yeah.

Wesselborg: Were there any moments from interviews that really stand out to you in your memory?

Aoife: I would always be super nervous during interviews. I'd be like oh my god . My mind would be racing like what do I say next? I want to be actively listening but I also don't want to sit there and be like uhhh. Aside from being stressed, one part of like— one time where I was super stressed because I was doing an interview with one person and then I'd asked about their earlier life and they were like, "Oh I really don't want to talk about that" and they got really upset and I was like oh my gosh. At the beginning of the interview I was like, "Is there anything you want to talk about specifically? Anything you would want to skip over or avoid?" and they hadn't said anything and so then I felt really bad. I was like, "Okay we do not have to talk about it. Let's move on" but I felt really bad because they got upset and I was like, ahh! Yeah. What else? Another interview I did was with a professor at one of the universities in New York and I

just like— she was so—she was like in her fifties maybe. She was so sweet and I just—it was really interesting hearing about her experience in academia after coming out as a trans woman. I don't know, I felt like we had a good connection. We got along well so that conversation was really good. I don't know I feel like I—I'm like who did I even interview last summer?

Wesselborg: [laughter] Yeah.

Aoife: My memory's terrible but yeah.

Wesselborg: Was there anything that really surprised you that like— or anything just about New York or political histories that you just, like, really opened your mind?

Aoife: I can't think of anything super specific but again just hearing so much first hand and reading through transcripts to edit them and be like oh wow this is stuff I would never have known, this is so useful. And going to like, it was "Stonewall 50" last summer so the library did a bunch of events and going to one of those which were hosted by Black trans women and just being like, hearing things and being like—I remember bringing my notebook to these events and I'd be like oh my god writing stuff down and that completely changes how I think about so many things. I just remember the way I thought about so many things in the world changed so completely last summer which I was really really thankful for. I'm really thankful for the ability to grow as a person as well as with my political ideologies. Yeah.

Wesselborg: What were some of the things that shifted for you?

Aoife: Umm some things that shifted...I feel like I definitely learned a lot more about sex work and the politics of that last summer and supporting like— learning a lot more about the decriminalization of sex work and the different like all the stuff surrounding that as well as the laws surrounding it. That was something I was really really interested in and learned a bunch about and still learning about. That was I think kind of where I was introduced to prison abolition versus reform and stuff and that was super super informative and really kicked off to all of the knowledge and thinking I do like reading and work I do around—not like— I don't do— like I'm not saying I'm an activist or anything like work myself as in reading and thinking and stuff around that now so yeah. Stuff like that like really just very big things and being like, oh I don't identify as a liberal or a democrat that's too central I wanted like, like leftist and really realizing was kind of a shock and leaving New York where I was with all these queer, trans, communists and I was really vibing with it I was like, yes! I'm loving this! Amazing! And then being like okay not everyone thinks like that, I forgot that like—

Wesselborg:—Yeah!—

Aoife:— Like liberal people are like, “Bro that’s too much” and I’m like, “It’s not enough!”
[laughter] Yeah.

Wesselborg: Definitely. Yeah I think also yeah the idea of education outside of an institutional context is profoundly different and, I don’t know, yeah. I’m really glad that I’ve also been able to see more of that side of things because I think especially, yeah, coming from a liberal arts college context it is pretty drilled in that education means classrooms and theory.

Aoife: I was very tempted to not go back to school after last summer so I was like what I doing at school? There’s so much I could just be learning on the ground with people and I could probably be doing more. But I’m deciding to go back to school because of my scholarships right now. My education is basically being paid for by my school and stuff and other scholarships so I’m like okay I feel like it’d be really stupid to drop that right now so I may as well finish my education while it’s being paid for for me. So yeah so I’m still at school but I had a very hard time deciding whether to go back or not because I felt like I wasn’t doing anything very productive or helpful so that definitely has changed how I—the things I did at school too, yeah.

Wesselborg: What kind of stuff are you doing now that you weren’t doing before?

Aoife: So my first year I was part of the First Gen Out Loud program. I also felt like my first year there was such a huge adjustment period to being at a liberal arts school and being in a completely different environment than I had ever been in. It was a much wealthier and much whiter environment than I was used to like there was—there’s still a bit—of a culture shock to me and I wasn’t necessarily expecting it. Like oh okay culture shock! So just adjusting to Smith and kind of learning what it was like was interesting. And sophomore year I felt like I’d learned a lot and I was like, okay I’m ready to like—the beginning of my sophomore year was a mess it was really bad. Once October hit it was like—it was bad it was really bad. I was going to take the semester off but then I was like ahh. It, yeah, it was just a big mess. But I worked with The Narratives Project as an intern and did a lot more stuff on campus surrounding first-gen students and low income students and mutual aid projects and stuff, which felt really good. And also I started the Transcending Gender meetings and talking about what trans students would do on campus but then me and my—four of my friends from First Gen Out Loud applied for a grant from the school to start a podcast project with the other Seven Sisters to talk about first gen and low-income students on campus and the school you know and staff were like, “It’s a good thing! [inaudible] the schools are doing well!” but part of what we knew was like how are the schools failing low-income and first-gen students. So we started that then we didn’t get

very far because then we got sent home for COVID [COVID-19] but hopefully next year we can do more with that. Yeah and also just having a lot more conversations with my friends around hard things and having conversations with my friends at home especially about it—it just—and my family which is super interesting like my mom’s been reading a lot of—reading—she’s currently reading *Sister Outsider*. She’s reading stuff like that and examining her own whiteness as a white immigrant and her experience with white like—and talking about that with my mom and my sisters and my friends at home that are white and just talking about class with people and stuff. It’s just been—and like mutual aid and redistribution of resources and just—I think a lot of it has been recognizing my own privilege and being able to utilize that I think. Yeah.

Wesselborg: Going onto COVID what was [laughter] a horrible horrible time but umm can you talk a little bit about, especially as a first-gen, low-income student, what that was like for you?

Aoife: I wouldn’t [inaudible] as a low-income student. Definitely first-gen but—

Wesselborg:—Okay—

Aoife:—Yeah I—a lot of my friends are low-income students but I wouldn’t quite feel comfortable saying I’m a low-income student but I def—

Wesselborg:—[inaudible]

Aoife:—poor compared to a lot of people that go to Smith ‘cause people are like, “Ha ha I have trust funds” “Ha ha I’m a legacy student”, I’m like, [inaudible] but yeah I wouldn’t personally identify as a low-income student. But—it was interesting [laughter] being sent home and I felt very lucky to have a home to go to where I knew I’d be, you know, have somewhere to live and be fed and etcetera etcetera. My home environment, my gender’s not really acknowledged at home no matter how many times I ask my family is still like, “Aoife, that is a girl” and I’m like, okay. But so that’s not ideal but it is mostly a very safe space for me to exist in, though I prefer to be independent and be in a queer community. I haven’t been able to move out yet because money and I’m also technically a high-risk individual for COVID so that’s fun but it’s been very isolating at times being away from all of my friends who are queer. I have only a few queer friends left in my hometown, one of them who I can’t see at all because her parents will literally not let her out of the house because they are terrified of COVID. Actually think most of my queer friends who lived here moved—one’s in California, one’s in Georgia, they’re all over the place and I’m like, okay that’s great. So just like not seeing queer people, I haven’t really seen anyone anyways, but that’s kind of exhausting. But then also I talk a lot about politics and that’s kind of mostly all I talk about. Not all I talk about but you know it ties into everything I think

about you know whatever if that makes sense. It's just the framework I view the world through is a women and gender studies framework and my family not necessarily always being interested in that, especially my sisters, and I guess I can't expect them to be because they're 14 and 16. Like, just feeling like I don't have lots of space to talk about my interests and do stuff around them and being super unmotivated by online school and barely being able to finish the semester. But it was pass/fail so that was good but yeah that was super weird and it was really weird to just all of a sudden be sent back home and miss a bunch of things and all my friends and I don't know it's also weird because I feel like—so my Fall at school ended up being kind of traumatic because I was dating someone for a year and I was super in love with her like, "We're going to get married!" blah blah blah whatever and then she was like, she called me and was like, "Hey I have to tell you something." I was home when she called me because she knew it was going to be a bad conversation and she told me that she had been cheating on me and started dating this 30-year-old French guy 'cause she was abroad in France and I was like, I choose not to see it [laughter]. But I had to so we broke up and it was really traumatic and then we kept talking and she was really manipulative and I had to, you know, my therapist hospitalized me and stuff. It was a lot. It was a lot. And I'd been dating her for the majority of my time at Smith so it was weird to have that be a thing so I don't know I felt like being home was like and being away from that environment I was really able to heal and move on from stuff which was not what I expected, but nice. So yeah, I'm kind of thankful I was able to come home and especially since I wasn't working for so long because I was like, I don't want to die, and having so much time to just work on healing myself felt really—like I felt really lucky and fortunate that I was able to do that.

Wesselborg: What's the dating culture like at Smith, would you say?

Aoife: Umm incestuous [laughter] if that makes any sense. That's how my therapist likes to refer to it. I kind went on a little bit of a bender after my traumatic breakup and yeah that was a bit of a messy few months and my friends were like, "Ha haa" and I was like, "Ha ha, LOL" —

Wesselborg:—It's all good! [laughter]

Aoife: [inaudible] 'cause I'd be like, "Okay I hooked up with this person who hooked up with my friend" or "You should date my friend" it was a whole very intricate web like in The L Word and everyone's connected and it's horrible and literally you can't go on a date with someone without them having dated or hooked up with or something with a whole bunch of other people who connect back to other people who probably connect back to you at some point. It's a lot. It is a lot. It's kind of exhausting the politics of it all. It's like wow, okay, cool cool cool cool cool, great, but it is really nice to just have the kind of assumption be that everyone's queer and

not be like, “I think that person’s queer” like that, that is nice. So yeah it’s, it’s kind of uh, it’s interesting. It’s like I just love being surrounded by queer and trans people. I’m a very trans-for-trans dating person. I like dating trans people but that’s nice to be like, “Trans people! Yay!”. Yeah, it’s funny, a lot of people who I briefly dated or whatever I ended up being really good friends with and we’re still super good friends so I ended making a lot of close friends by being like oh and going out on dates and stuff. I know I really wasn’t ready for a relationship for a while so I don’t really know what I was doing. I was just being a big mess but I’m really happy I met a lot of really wonderful friends so that was fun!—

Wesselborg:—Yeah—

Aoife:—Like that really helped [inaudible] oh that’s not my ex but someone I dated and I’m like, I love you so much and you are a wonderful friend. So that’s fun. Very much the culture there you become friends with your ex or whatever mostly.

Wesselborg: Yeah. What are some of the issues trans students are engaging with there?

Aoife: Different like—I know the admittance policy you have to identify as a woman when you’re applying to Smith like you can identify as a trans woman they changed that relatively recently but you can’t be a trans man or a gender non-conforming person and apply. Well you can be a gender non-conforming woman but you can’t be non-binary or agender or anything, you have to identify as a woman. So us being like— I know some people are like, “Well why should trans men go here if it’s a historically women’s college” and I’m like, “Okay maybe it should be a gender minority college” like that’s a weird phrase but that’s kind of what Mount Holyoke [Mount Holyoke College] does. They accept trans men, I think, I’m not sure about that but they use different terminology than Smith does around the gender of their students that’s more like gender minority— like people that basically aren’t cis men and it’s a more comfortable environment for people that are not cis men. Which yeah so stuff like that and for prospective students staying over there, any student that identifies as trans is not allowed to have prospective students stay with them because their parents might be like, “[gasp] My daughter isn’t staying with a girl! That’s dangerous!”. So stuff like them being like, “Okay cool” we’re being like, cool, that’s fun.

Wesselborg: Love the predator narrative—

Aoife:—Oh yeah—

Wesselborg:—bleeding over there!

Aoife: It's wonderful we're like, oh I feel like that should be changed. People wanted to change stuff like that. I feel like the restroom thing is pretty good with all gender restrooms. Umm, what else? Definitely a lot of understanding about Smith as a historically women's college and changing rules about how people can identify at the school and people being just generally respected at the school and I think a lot of—I know I said before—I'm relatively pretty comfortable as a white androgynous non-binary person at school and I think a lot of the work that we need to do centers around Black and Indigenous and POC queer and trans people 'cause—so I know we worked to try and support those communities and what their needs were because they definitely had a lot more and still have a lot more needs that need support and need to be met than white trans people on campus. So, yeah.

Wesselborg: What are some of the things that they're pushing for?

Aoife: Um so, what happened even this year? I'm like oh my god.

Wesselborg: Yeah I know, it's like a world away at this point but [laughter]

Aoife: [inaudible] goes to Smith is a predominately white institution so the Black student orgs and community groups and stuff do so much amazing work on campus and one of the big things is a spa—like dif—like having physical spaces on campus for these groups and hiring therapists, hiring Black female therapists at the wellness center and hiring a trans therapist and having point people that different student groups can talk to you know like we have a point person for low-income and first-gen students. He's also trans and he went to Smith, he's wonderful, his name's Toby [Davis] he's great. I've talked with him a few times, he's awesome, very helpful to have him around so there— he was only hired to do this stuff this year. He was unofficially doing it for years before and not getting paid for all of his work so it's great that he finally is actually getting paid for it. But still there's been a lot put on him and a few other people who like—so just Smith putting money into supporting these communities instead of being like, "Okay, you're here, look at us we're diverse!" like support us and other communities once they are at Smith don't just let us get there and feel so unsupported 'cause that is a big problem that a lot of students have experienced and continue to experience. So yeah, I know that wanting a tangible space for like—tangible safe space for like undocumented students have their own safe space to go and someone for them to talk to. We're currently—our new library's under construction so we're like, okay, like different groups are like, okay give us space in the new Neilson [Neilson Library] and K-Mac's like— 'cause that's our president Kathleen McCartney, she's like, "We don't have space" "we can't give you space". So it's been very difficult being like—she doesn't necessarily help as much as she could—

Wesselborg:—Yeah—

Aoife:—I kind of don't like her. We all like to say she's a class traitor because she is. She was like, "I'm a first-gen student", I'm like it seems like you're a class traitor but go off.

Wesselborg: [inaudible] I also wanted to ask a little bit about the dynamics within the trans community at Smith and particularly how binary people and non-binary people...what that looks like.

Aoife: So I feel like I know mostly non-binary trans people and then I know a lot of trans people who maybe like identify as non-binary but use he/him pronouns and then trans men. I don't know a huge amount of trans women at Smith. I'm not sure why that is but I do think it's a problem that there's not a lot of trans women at Smith and definitely has not exactly, like I said, not exactly sure what that is but it's definitely because I don't think—part of it I think is because the environment is not supportive enough and etcetera etcetera. Yeah but the interactions, I don't know, I played around with the idea of using he/him pronouns but it seems kind of scary to do on campus 'cause it's like, "Oh my god are you a boy?" like, "Man on my school campus?". I'm like okay I'd say that about a cis man but damn okay. It's, yeah, generally I feel like I haven't really felt any tension between binary and non-binary trans people in the community though I do think it probably is a bit harder to be a binary masculine trans person on the campus and I'm sure it's very hard to be a binary trans woman on the campus too especially with the TERF's that like to be TERF-y.

Wesselborg: Would you say in general there is a lot of overlap between queer and trans communities there?

Aoife: Yeah so the official statistic I think was at around 70% of the students identify as not-straight. That's the official statistic so I think it's definitely much higher. So essentially everyone at Smith is somewhat queer even if they're like, "I'm queer!" and they're like, okay I'll go and kiss a girl at a party, but then definitely a smaller trans population but I think basically all the trans people I know are queer. I don't think I know any trans people that are like, "I am straight!" But like, I feel like—I'm sure there are but all of the trans people I know are very queer in a very complete identity way.

Wesselborg: This is a little bit different of a direction but do you have any intergenerational relationships with queer or trans people?

Aoife: I have a few which is kind of cool. I interviewed this woman called Janet Aalfs for an oral history class I took Spring of my first year and she's in her sixties and she's a lesbian who's done a lot of work in The Pioneer Valley and is a community member and does a lot of things within the community and she was the poet laureate of Northampton. And so meeting her and having her to reach out to is really great and then also just some of my professors like in the staff a lot of the staff at Smith are queer. There's this woman Rachel Simmons who I did this program with, the Phoebe Lewis Leaders program [Phoebe Lewis Leadership Program] I don't know the exact name of it we just call it Lewis leaders, and she is—she's in her forties. She is a lesbian, she has a daughter, she's currently dating someone, yay for Rachel. She's awesome. We got super close this year, I walk her dog who I love, his name is Charlie, he's like my child. You know I house-sit for her and stuff. It's nice to know her as an older lesbian and we talk a lot about gender and she fills me in on stuff and I fill her in on stuff and we kind of teach each other about stuff but it's also like—house-sitting and she was on vacation and she went to go play Spotify but I was using the Alexa in her house and she was like, she texted me and was like, "I'm crying, are you listening to Brandi Carlile on my Spotify?" and I was like, "I'm sorry!"—

Wesselborg—Nice!—

Aoife:—And she was like, "I love it! Amazing!" and I was like, "Thank you Rachel" [laughter]. Some of my professors are queer which is really nice especially learning from older queer women and gender non-conforming people. My therapist is a lesbian, a gender non-conforming lesbian, so that's a different sort of relationship but it's also really nice because she's like I don't know how old she is but she's obviously older than me and has a wife and kids so just being connected to like—oh one of my english teachers in high school is a gay man. I kind of judge him now though because he's a bit too central politically where I'm kind of like, "Micheal, that's not the move" and I'm just like okay honey. But yeah, so I have a few relationships with older queer people which is nice.

Wesselborg: I also wanted to talk a little bit about being trans in the workplace, applying for jobs, how you're thinking about that, navigating that...

Aoife: So when I apply for jobs—when I've been applying for jobs at home I just am like, I am a girl, and it—especially here I don't know people in—it just doesn't make sense to do anything else. It also I feel like would decrease my chance of getting a job and I'm like, okay, I just need a job. So like I said my current job now it's like I applied and they were like "gender" and it was literally "male" "female". I was like okay female I guess 'cause also it's like [inaudible] so at my job everyone refers to me as a girl and it's like I wasn't out at all and I'm not really out at work but a lot of my co-workers followed my Instagram where it's very clear that I'm like—my

identities are very clear on my Instagram. So I'm like, okay, but now they still don't use my pronouns like okay, whatever, that's fine, like it's annoying but it's fine. Northampton, I think, was different like I said at the preschool it was fine being like, "Oh can we use these pronouns for me? Thanks". What's interesting though as an intern with The Narratives Project a lot of the people in First Gen Out Loud even when I'd say my—like we didn't do pronouns as often in that space and if we did I'd be the one to be like, "Hey [inaudible] pronouns?" and people would refer to me as a girl and not really like—either ignore or there wasn't as big of a—there were definitely like queerness and transness were not as prominent in that group as other identities. I'm the only, for the two years I've been there, I've been the only white person in that group but I've also been the only openly trans person in the group which is interesting. Not the only queer person but that is a group where there's less openly queer people which has been interesting. Yeah, but, I know since I will be moving back to Northampton soon and I'm going to be signing a lease on a house with some of my friends so I will be working off campus this year. So I think when I apply to jobs depending on where I'm applying applications will be different like if I'm applying to certain local businesses that I know and the gender thing on the application is different I will probably be more honest with it, but if I'm applying to somewhere like Stop & Shop it will just be like female because yeah.

Wesselborg: What would say are the biggest challenges you've faced relating to your sexuality or gender identity?

Aoife: That is a good question. I feel like everybody in my life has been generally accepting of things, if not just kind of confused on the gender thing just not understanding it but not like necessarily harming me for it. My gender is not really like— I'm not really referred to—like my pronouns aren't used at home and stuff like that but I'm not really invalidated past that. It's not being like, "You can't identify like that, that's stupid". Sometimes I get stuff like that but mostly from my youngest sister who's really young so I'm like okay you're learning, whatever. It's different. I don't know, I feel like with most—for the majority of the time I've identified as trans which is like almost two years which was weird to me 'cause being in a bubble like Smith definitely being a very queer and trans bubble and Northampton being the same and then last summer working for the Trans Oral History Project and being surrounded by queer and trans people was also a bubble and then I guess the longest time I'd been somewhere that's not within that bubble is the past five months being at home. That's also weird because I've mostly literally just been in my house so—I don't know like internal like constantly changing how I want to look and how I dress and stuff. Just figuring out how I'm comfortable and what I want to do going forward has been kind of, not so much a challenge for me but like I don't know how to convey that to certain people in my life, you know?

Wesselborg: Yeah.

Aoife: Yeah.

Wesselborg: Is there—I'm kind of moving into wrapping-up portion of things but is there anything else you want to make sure we cover before I just kind of do some wrap-up questions?

Aoife: Nothing that I can think of.

Wesselborg: Okay.

Aoife: [inaudible]

Wesselborg: Okay then I wanted to ask if there's a time you've ever felt very seen, especially in your gender identity?

Aoife: I would jokingly say that time that man like—

Wesselborg:—Okay—

Aoife: [inaudible] street in New York but that's not my actual answer, it's just like a joke. Let's see. I feel like there definitely are—I don't know I have this friend at school who graduated this year, their names Gav, they did Lewis Leaders with me and they—they were a senior this year, they identified as non-binary and they've had top-surgery and I just admired them so much. I'd seen them around campus a few times and was like, "Oh my god that person's so cool, I'm in love with them" but then just saw them at Transcending Gender a few times I was like, wild, so we ended up doing Lewis Leaders together and becoming friends and I don't know they were slightly older than me so I really looked up them. And just like, I don't know, just something about our friendship felt very comforting and very reassuring and they just made me feel very seen and very valid and, I don't know, them just having this confidence and belief in me and tell me like, "We can talk about whatever" "I'm here to help you" and stuff. I don't know, they just made me feel very secure and stuff in my identity and being who I am. I was like, yeah, Gav is this amazing person who's done all this stuff and etcetera etcetera. I'm like, they think I'm capable of doing what I want to and transitioning the way I want to etcetera etcetera so I'm like that feels— that felt really good and I just look up to them so much and I feel like, yeah. They always checked in on me and so, I don't know, definitely just having that relationship with someone who I admire but I'm also friends with has been really good.

Wesselborg: Yeah, that's the best combo when you get that, yeah. This might be a big question but where do you see yourself in five years?

Aoife: Where do I see myself in five years? Let's see. Maybe in grad school. I don't know because the workforce scares me and I have no clue what I want to do so I'm like, "Ha ha maybe I'll just keep going to school"—

Wesselborg: Honestly, same I'm like okay let's avoid that as long as we can!—

Aoife: [inaudible] Yeah, I don't know, maybe in grad school, maybe like—I definitely like doing grassroots organizing work and working in something related to abolition work and decrim-sex-work stuff and definitely working directly with other trans people and queer people. Definitely still learning a lot. I definitely want to have my own little cute apartment that's full of plants. By then my dog should be living with me which is great. Umm yeah so definitely doing community-centered work I think. That's the best answer I have.

Wesselborg: There's also this I forgot to ask earlier but you mentioned trans-for-trans relationships—

Aoife:—[laughter] Yeah—

Wesselborg:—can you talk a little bit more about that?

Aoife: Okay so one of my friends, now my friend, my friend Ember who's non-binary like in their tinder, I met them through tinder, and their tinder bio said T for T and I was like, "LOL that's funny" and they were like, "Ha ha like it is but I'm serious" and so we went on a few dates or whatever but we ended up just being very close friends and we still talk every day it's—and they're a senior they graduated this year. And being like, oh, it's nice seeing people that are trans and just not having to explain that and be able to just have conversations and being just kind of like that relationship existing in a different space and, I don't know, there's just something about it that feels more comfortable and just different with the labels too. I'm not quite sure what I feel about labelling my sexuality at this point like I don't know. I truly don't know. So it's like, I don't know, I just feel like very comfortable especially dating non-binary trans people it just makes a lot of sense and just feels very comfortable and just like re—like I haven't had a long-term or serious relationship with a non-binary trans person but my ex who ended very messy was—kind of identified as non-binary but kind of didn't and then was like, "I wanna use they/them pronouns" and I was like, okay, and then this was like after we broke up and I was like fine. Then they were, she was referring to herself as she/her pronouns so I was

like, “What pronouns should I be using for you?” and she was like, “She/her pronouns it doesn’t even matter”. I was like, okay I’m confused. She was confusing but yeah it just feels like there’s a lot of space for growth and healing and working together in trans relationships that seems really wonderful to me.

Wesselborg: Yeah. So are there any last words that you want to put on the record?

Aoife: Thank you for interviewing me—

Wesselborg:—Yeah—

Aoife: Been doing this for over a year now so I’m glad it was finally done—

Wesselborg:—Yeah—

Aoife:—This is my first time being interviewed for an oral history collection, woo that’s fun!

Wesselborg: [laughter] Yeah on the other side of the microphone for a second. But yeah, thank you so much for your time. It was great talking with you.

Aoife: Yeah, it was wonderful!