

NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

EMMETT METIER

Interviewer: Lily Dawson

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Transcribed by Savannah Blanchard

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Lily Dawson: Hello, my name is Lily Dawson, and I'll be having a conversation with Emmett

Metier. This interview is being conducted jointly for the New York City Trans Oral History Project in collaboration with the New York Public Library's Community Oral History Project, and for LGBT Oral Histories of Central Iowa, a project of Cornell College. The New York City Trans Oral History Project is a project centered on the experiences of trans identifying people, and LGBT Oral Histories of Central Iowa is an oral history project documenting the experiences of LGBTQ identified people in the state of Iowa. It is July 14th, 2020, and due to social distancing as a result of COVID-19 this interview is being conducted remotely over Zoom. So, Emmett, how has your week been?

Emmett Metier: Pretty stressful, things are, uh—I'm in New York right now. I'm in my apartment and things are opening up, so I'm trying to apply for jobs right now, and I also just finished my MFA and we're having issues with our school finishing our degree requirements correctively. So, we're having issues with administration and correspondence between students and faculty and administration, so lots going on [laughter]. Yeah.

Dawson: I'm sorry.

Metier: It's okay!

Dawson: Okay, so when and where were you born?

Metier: I was born in Fort Dodge, Iowa in 1993.

Dawson: And what was your family like?

Metier: Um, I grew up in a middle class family. My mom was a second grade teacher, she went back to work full-time when I started first grade and was working part-time while my brothers and I were little. My dad operates a water conditioning service, so he just does stuff to make water safe and healthy for consumption and bathing and washing. I grew up with two older brothers, who are both cis, and they are both eight and six years older than me. So I was the baby, and I was the girl. My family was a pretty, I feel like, they were a pretty normal middle class midwestern family. Protestant values and work ethic, and middle class values, but also not the most functional. And yeah, my parents just were dealing with not having very healthy childhoods of their own,

so it wasn't always a really great time in my family when I was young. Yeah. But no major complaints, no major issues, like a pretty standard family life.

Dawson: Can you remember, like, your earliest memory?

Metier: My earliest memory was, we moved in—my parents built our house that I grew up in—and we moved when I was about three or four. But my earliest memories was my mom and my brother putting me down to nap in a crib, and I was angry, and I smashed my bottle of milk against the headboard. Or, I remember crawling on the floor upstairs and saying “hi” to my dad on the porch. And then I also remember asking for my mom—asking my mom for my pacifier in the kitchen. And then I also remember in our old house, before I was three, I remember my brothers... My brother had a microscope, and I remember our cat was sitting in the tree in our backyard. And I remember my brother took the pliers, like took little needle—like tweezers—to pull a dingleberry off my cat's butthole and put it under the microscope for us all to look at [laughter]. So those were my earliest memories.

Dawson: What are your brothers like?

Metier: Um, they're pretty decent, my brothers. Growing up I wasn't super close to them because there was an age difference, and I was the baby. They definitely, like, teased me a lot but they were still very protective. We're not very—we don't have very close relationships now but we do get along pretty well. They both live—one of them lives in Minneapolis and the other lives in Montana—Boseman, Montana—and they're both married and homeowners. Yeah. Pretty normal [laughter].

Dawson: So what was your mom like?

Metier: Um, my mom was very interesting. My mom really was very loving. My mom didn't have a very—my mom had a pretty terrible childhood. Her dad died when she was six, and it was like a quote-unquote farm accident, but my dad and my dad's parents suspect it was suicide. So she was six and she was the oldest, and her—she had a two year old brother and a newborn when her dad died, and so she was raised by a single mother who was pretty depressive, like manic depressive. My mom had to grow up and take care of her brothers when she was six and her mom was pretty like—very awful to her, very verbally abusive. So my mom, when I was growing up she—since I was like the baby and I was the only girl—she put a lot into our relationship as kind of like a retribution for her childhood. Saying that all she wanted was a daughter to take care of, and so that was a lot of pressure. My mom really did her best, but like, I don't know. It's like from a different age where people don't really want to face their issues

healthily. Like, they don't want help to face their issues, and they don't do therapy. So they don't really know how to fully heal from their trauma, and so yeah. There was definitely, there was a lot of difficult things between my mom and I, like even when I was a child. I mean, overall she was very loving, but she—when I was in third grade she started teaching second grade at my elementary school and I remember being on the playground and the kids being like “oh, Mrs. Metier is so nice,” and I was just like “oh she's nice to you.” But, I mean, I don't know. She, like, tries her best, and I don't hate her. I remember one time when I was a teenager, my mom was really being very awful towards me, and saying some things that were making me cry, and I remember my grandma on my dad's side—my paternal grandma—told me just to have sympathy for my mom. And telling me how she and my grandpa used to see my mom's mom say terrible things to her in front of, like, everybody in the family. And I remember my mom's mom—my maternal grandmother—saying really awful things to my mom in front of me when I was a little kid, so, you know. I think part of growing up is not to be hateful and spiteful towards your parents for the things that they did wrong, but just have more compassion and empathy, and just patience with them. So, yeah.

Dawson: Do you remember, like, when you came to terms with that, or... ?

Metier: Um, I think it was... Well, I came out to my mom initially as a lesbian when I was 18. It was right after I went to college, like a month or two after I went to college [phone dings]. I was visiting my mom and I came out to her, and she had a pretty terrible reaction. When I was a teenager she would kind of make, like, snide comments kind of thinking that she was suspecting that I was gay or bisexual, and saying she wasn't very approving of it. So all throughout, you know, my college years and the time I spent still in Iowa after college, my relationship with my mom was really strained. And I think a lot of that was because she put so much of her own—like my mom used to tell me when I was a kid, she would teach me how to cook, how to sew, like domestic duties and tasks, but it never was quite framed as “this is how you are, how you function and survive on your own.” It was always framed as like “you're gonna find a husband this way.” So when I came out as gay to my mom it was not received well. I couldn't be around her ever, it was like—ever. But then it wasn't until I moved away to New York that my mom wasn't able to see me as much anymore, and so we have started to repair our relationship since then. But it's never going to be a super close relationship. I'm still not very open with my mom about my life, and I don't think I ever will be. Yeah.

Dawson: How did you come out to your mom?

Metier: So, I should have known I was queer, homosexual, gay, trans, whatever, when I was young, like very young. There was all the signs when I was young, but I was just

very ignorant and ignored them. I went to college, and there was this girl that moved across the hall from me, and she was a lesbian, and out as a lesbian, and obviously a lesbian. And then two days into college realized I had a crush on the girl across the hall, and I was like “oh, I’m gay!” Even though I should have known—I should have realized that in high school, but whatever. And so I didn’t really see it as an issue of trying to hide it because all my friends I made my Freshman year of college were all gay too. I think like a month or two after—I went to university of Iowa for college—so I think a few weeks after I started school my parents wanted me to come visit for the weekend. So my dad drove down and he picked me up and I got in the car from Burge Hall, and then we got on [phone dings] I-80. Right when we got onto the exit of I-80, like that’s a ten minute drive from when my dad picked me up. My dad picked me up from the dorm, and he saw me get into the car and he was like “wow, you look great, you look so happy.” You know, I was just this fun bubbly little freshman college student [phone dings] having [inaudible]. And then ten minutes later we got on the highway and I’m like “I’m gay” and he was like “oh, okay” and he didn’t quite know what to do about it. So then we went back to my parents’ house. We got back to their house and my mom was in the laundry room, doing laundry, and I was like “I guess I’ll tell my mom too,” and I was like “I’m gay.” She was like “no you’re not. You’re just saying this because it’s fashionable, and you’re like—this is what your friends are doing. You’re just doing this because, it’s—you’re not really gay, you just think you are.” And before that she made a comment—this is back when people are still on Facebook—and people are posting pictures of us together on Facebook, and my mom made a comment to me on the phone. She was like “so I see you’re on Facebook and you’re hanging out with all these gay boys, but I don’t know, why aren’t you hanging out with straight boys at college?” And I was like “I don’t know.” So yeah, it never, it really honestly didn’t get... until I was 25, I think, when my mom was able to accept that I was queer. So it took like seven years of just not bringing it up and not talking about it, and just dealing with snide comments.

Dawson: You mentioned there being, like, I don’t want to say warning signs, but you know, signs of something when you were young. Can you go into that?

Metier: I remember... I mean first of all, I identify as transmasculine, but I also identify as butch. I still—I don’t quite see myself as a woman, but I still very much identify myself within lesbianism even though I have started medically transitioning and gone through those steps. But I remember when I was like five my dad was brushing my hair, or we were in the bathroom doing something, getting ready for bed. And I was wondering, I asked my dad “what happens if a kid has two mommies instead of a mom and a dad,” and I kind of imagined the two mommies being someone who’s, like, a more masculine-looking woman and someone who’s a more feminine-looking woman. I asked my dad “what do you call it if you have two mommies?” That was one thing. Then, also in

elementary school, I used to sneak into my brothers' closets and put on all their boy clothes and kind of play in my room wearing their clothes by myself, but my mom wouldn't—my mom always dressed me up super girly all throughout elementary school. I really never had any autonomy over the way I dressed or looked. Then, I think like in fifth or sixth grade, I was in choir and the girl that sat next to me, I had a crush on her. I didn't know I had a crush on her, but I had a little tape recorder and I recorded her voice in choir so I could go home and listen to her voice. [laughter] Yeah. Then I asked my neighbor, I think that same year, I asked my neighbor if she ever thought about kissing girls and then I, like, leaned in and I kissed her. Then she screamed and I ran away [laughter]. But I was—I was pretty deep in the closet after that.

Dawson: So did you see gay people growing up?

Metier: No. Never. Because I never—because I grew up in a pretty small town. Fort Dodge is like a—it wasn't a farming town but it was still like a post-industrial manufacturing town. It's not really part of the suburban sprawl of Des Moines, it's just, you know, there's Fort Dodge and it has Hy-Vee, and WalMart, and Target, and a population of 20,000 or so people and just farm land. And we never travel—we didn't really travel much when I was a kid. So I never actually got to see gay people in real life. I think the first time I—I would only see gay people in the media, and it mostly, you know, was still pretty negative, how gay people were portrayed in the media when I was younger. So that really internalized a lot for me, especially with having a masculine gender identity. I just remember when I was younger, representation of, like, butch women in mainstream media was very negative. They were all definitely portrayed to be very abject and grotesque, and not something that was positive at all. I think the only time when I was younger that I saw gay people in the media that was positive representation was the first iteration of Queer Eye. Yeah. But I never, ever saw gay people, queer people, at all in person when I was a kid. Never. But there was, when I was in high school, I had a voice teacher who was gay. But it was, like, if there were people in our community that were gay, it wasn't talked about. It wasn't, you know, they weren't open about it at all.

Dawson: Do you have any favorite places or memories of Fort Dodge?

Metier: No. I hate that place so much. [laughter] I, um, yeah. No. If I never had to go back to the town I grew up in ever again, I would be very happy. The best things about my childhood was being able to play The Sims. Because I could play The Sims and just, you know, have a life that wasn't the life I had. And... Yeah, I really hate Fort Dodge, Iowa.

Dawson: When you played The Sims, did you play as a man or a woman?

Metier: I would, hmm...

Dawson: I only say that because I would always play as a man.

Metier: Really? I think my protagonist was always a woman. Um, and I do remember making gay Sims, and I remember when I was in fourth grade I made these two gay men, and I made their house like very kitsch and camp and flamboyant. I would have them have the WooHoo bed in the front yard, and... but then I would make gay Sims, but I would just like torture them and kill them in the end because, you know, I felt ashamed of it. Then I remember the first time I made queer Sims, I made a lesbian couple, I think probably in like sixth or seventh grade, and I was like “you know what, I’m gonna let them be happy this time and I’m not gonna kill them,” and that was a big [inaudible]. [laughter] Yeah.

Dawson: How did you kill your Sims?

Metier: Drowning, fire, starvation. It was fun when The Sims 2 came out because there were way more creative ways to kill your Sims. I—Yeah, The Sims 2, I think The Sims 2 was one of the best, it’s probably—I don’t know. The Sims 2 has its own great qualities out of the Sims franchise because it was, like, the campiest one. It was just the more over the top. Like if your Sim had too many dirty dishes, they could die from a mob of flies that would eat them alive, or they could stargaze and get crushed by a satellite. Just, like, weird ways to die [laughter]. But there’s always, to take the ladder out of the pool was the big thing.

Dawson: I remember you could play a fiddle challenge with the devil or the grim reaper.

Metier: I don’t remember that one.

Dawson: If your Sim—sometimes when your Sim was dying, you could stop their death by performing a particularly beautiful song to the grim reaper.

Metier: That’s hilarious! [laughter] That’s funny. I still play The Sims.

Dawson: Really?

Metier: Occasionally. At the beginning of quarantine for COVID, my first reaction was to play The Sims. Because I think now I play The Sims in really deep, depressing moments.

Dawson: Were you online in other ways, or using the computer, when you were a kid?

Metier: Yeah, I um... I remember I was on this children's chatroom education site called Whyville, and I used this website called—and I was on Neopets, and I was always on MSN messenger with my cousin. Then when I became—when I got into middle school, like seventh, eighth grade, I started going on the—I went on the Teen Vogue forums because, okay, I started—the end of seventh grade I was not popular, I didn't have any friends. Middle school was awful for me and I was at my grandma's house, and we didn't have cable at my parents' house, but my grandparents had cable. I was watching MTV and then The Hills comes on, with Lauren Conrad, and she's talking about her internship at Teen Vogue, and so I was like "okay." My grandma went to the grocery store and I had her buy me a copy of Teen Vogue and then I decided maybe I can make people like me by being cute and pretty. So then in middle school I started going on the Teen Vogue forum. Then, you know, Tumblr wasn't a popular thing when I was in high school. There weren't any, like, really positive online spaces that I remember when I was a teenager that were affirming for me at all. It wasn't until I started Tumblr in college that there was more queer spaces that I could see online, and online life became more of a habit for me, or a part of my life.

Dawson: What kind of queer community was there on Tumblr at that time?

Metier: Um, I don't really remember. It's so wild because my conception of queer life when I was in college is wildly different from what it is for me now. Yeah. I just, hmm—I just remember very basic, like, second wave-y, third wave-y queer feminism, nothing too radical. It was just very wildly different from the queer circles and communities I interact with now. There also wasn't much of a queer community space that was very affirming, or that I felt that I fit in with when I was in college either. Yeah.

Dawson: Do you remember first becoming aware of gender?

Metier: Okay, so actually, there was this Tumblr website—there was this Tumblr page called "Lesbians who Look Like Lesbians" and I remember I followed it, and people just would post cute selfies to get followers, but it wasn't ever thirst trap selfies like lesbians on TikTok now. [laughter] Thirst trap lesbians. It was, like, kind of different. But I remember I was on that website—that Tumblr page called "Lesbians who Look Like Lesbians"—and then they would have tags on it, and then I saw one that was "ftm" and I

had never heard of that before. I remember I clicked on it and I was like “I don’t know what that is,” and I looked it up and I was like “oh, that’s weird, that’s interesting,” and that kind of just sparked something in me. But I never was like—I never really had the confidence within myself, or support from anyone around me, to kind of be a little bit more open with gender when I was in my early twenties and in college. It wasn’t until—I remember when I was in college, I definitely knew I was very different in terms of gender. I knew I was very uncomfortable with, like, a feminine gender presentation. I kind of saw myself wanting to have—I knew myself to have a more masculine energy within me, but I didn’t feel comfortable with it, and I really suppressed it. It wasn’t until I moved to New York that I was able to kind of open that up within myself, and kind of, like, express a more authentic representation of myself. Yeah.

Dawson: How did you do that? How did you open up with that side of yourself?

Metier: I think part of it was, um—I moved to New York alone. I kind of just—I was really depressed. When I was—I stayed in Iowa City for two years after graduation, and I lived with one of my high school friends and I worked at some coffee shops, I worked at a grocery store, I did babysitting. I was super depressed, I didn’t have a lot of friends, I was very socially anxious, I had a lot of stuff to work on, like a lot of trauma to unpack from when I was younger, that I wasn’t able to work on. I had undiagnosed ADHD, that I wasn’t diagnosed until I was 23. But I think like my last year in Iowa I bought a binder for the first time. So my last year in Iowa I bought a—I was wearing a binder every day, and then I moved to New York and I still had a lot of guilt and shame attached to the masculine part of me that was inside of me. And I think a big part of it was just being alone, and not having anyone—not knowing anyone—not have anyone tied from my past—like anyone from my past around me, just being completely detached from the issues and the trauma of growing up and being a young adult in such a secluded and isolating place. There was just a part of me where I was like “I can do this, I can be whoever I am” and “people can see me and they’re not gonna remember me.” That’s the great thing about New York, is that you do whatever the fuck you want and no one’s gonna give a shit because they’re so busy with their own lives, and they’re probably never gonna see you again and if they do they don’t remember you. So I just started doing that. Also, it was just being able to be in sexual relationships when I was in New York. I wasn’t really able to explore my sexuality when I was in college and when I was still in Iowa, at all. Being able to explore my sexuality in New York and having very gratifying sexual experiences was another thing to just kind of root me and justify me within my difference of gender.

Dawson: Talk me through some of those experiences.

Metier: Can you be more specific?

Dawson: Do you have a particular memory of a sexual experience that felt revelatory or gratifying?

Metier: Probably just the first person I kind of hooked up with in New York City. I had a few times—I had tried having sex a few times when I was in college, and nothing really came of it, it wasn't anything too exciting. I didn't really enjoy it. I remember thinking that maybe I was asexual because I didn't enjoy sex. I think it was just when I came to New York and I started having a sexual—my first two sexual relationships were pretty drawn out. They weren't anything, like, romantically involved. They weren't ever some sort of big romantic ordeal, but we were having sex a lot. In both of those relationships I was just a top, and I was like "oh, I'm a stone butch." Then I started using a strap-on, and then I was like "okay, this is how I enjoy sex" and that's desirable, other people desire that in sexual partners, and it's okay to be that way, and it's okay to do that. Because I knew when I was younger I kind of thought that would be the kind of role I would take on in sex, but again, I wasn't comfortable with myself and so I didn't really try to pursue it. But also I feel like it's not too common in younger people to explore that too much. I think when you get older you kind of have more idea of, like, sexual roles and positions and dynamics, that maybe when you're in your early twenties aren't quite a thing yet, because people are still developing their own ideas about themselves.

Dawson: Who is—or who is the first sexual relationship that you had in New York?

Metier: [laughter] I don't really want to talk about it. Like, I don't really need to—we're still friends, she and I are friends, and we have a friend group so I'm going to not really go there.

Dawson: Very fair. So you talked about buying a binder in Iowa. How did you decide to do that, what was that like?

Metier: I just was sick of having breasts, and I remember I would wear an Ace binder at home just to try it out, and then I just decided that I wanted to buy a real one. So I went online and I bought one. And I bought one, and I wore it every day for like two years and it was disgusting. [laughter] It was so gross.

Dawson: You also mentioned beginning, kind of, medical transition, what does that look like for you?

Metier: So I turned 26 last April, I'm 27 now. I—you know, when I started moving to New York and I started being able to explore gender more I knew I wanted to have top surgery, and I was kind of thinking about T. It wasn't quite something—it was something I was more reluctant towards. So back in like January of 2019, I made my first very close, um, very intimate friendship with someone who was also—who was a trans man. And that, yeah, that friendship is so special to me. But, I think like last April, last March, he asked me if I would start trading him my Adderall for his excess testosterone and I was like “okay, sure.” So I took two shots of his tiny dosage and I was like “okay, I'm actually going to go to the doctor to do this now.” So I made an appointment at Callen-Lorde and I started T. Then last summer—you know, it was the second that I turned 26 and I wasn't on my parents' insurance and I started taking—I was on Medicaid because I was in grad school—that I started medically transitioning. So last May I started T and I started getting serious about top surgery, and I had top surgery in December. That was, like, a pretty big moment for me, because it was always something that I wanted and it was something that I never thought I could do. It was something that I was afraid that my—I was afraid my family would disown me if I did that. It was something that I never thought I would be able to afford, but I was able to afford because I live in the wonderful state of New York and I was able to figure out the system and get on the insurance and get everything in order to get the surgery done at the right time. I got it done two weeks after finals of fall—like two days after finals of fall semester, so I had all of winter break to heal. Then another big part of it was that, you know, for a while in my life I didn't think people really cared about me. I didn't think that there was any value in myself, and so I never thought I would take the route of doing a fundraiser that a lot of people do, because I never—I'm not—back then I wasn't very outgoing, I didn't really have much of a community. I also just really internalized shit from when I was younger, thinking that no one cared about me or wanted to be my friend, or saw value in me. So I never thought I would get top surgery because I never thought that anybody would care enough about me to help me with recovery. But I was able to do it and that was a great—really, a really great moment in my life, of understanding. Like the emotional development that I've come to of everything that I've worked through on my own of really just unlearning and processing trauma and pain. Yeah. Cool. [laughter]

Dawson: Who helped you with your recovery?

Metier: So I actually, um, I was dating someone who had top surgery and they were there with me when I was planning the top surgery, and then they broke up with me and it was really upsetting. They also said some really hurtful things to me when they broke up with me. That was very intentional to get at the negative things that I felt about myself. Like, I was very vulnerable with them and they exploited that. So when they broke up with me, I called my aunt, crying, and I asked her—because it really triggered

that insecurity in myself, thinking that no one cares about me. Just thinking that I wasn't valuable to others, to be cared about. So I called my aunt, crying, asking her if she would come visit me, come with me to help me with my surgery, but then my mom told her not to do it. So there was a few months—when my mom found out about the surgery she didn't talk to me for three months and told my aunt not to come help me. Then my ex and I got back together, and then they broke up with me again. So then I called my aunt, crying, and was like “can you please come?” Then I called my mom, and I cried to my mom and was like “please, can Nancy come,” and so my aunt came. Yeah, so my aunt was there for like two days, and then I just had my friends come in and check on me. But again, I didn't really want to ask too much from people, I didn't want to be much of a burden, so I honestly didn't really rely on people too much after my aunt left. I remember three days after my surgery I did my laundry, and then I regretted that. [laughter] Yeah.

Dawson: What's your relationship like with your aunt?

Metier: Really close, because my mom wasn't very emotional—my mom really can't provide emotionally for me when I was younger, and so my aunt was definitely that for me. And so yeah, my aunt is kind of like a second mother to me. She grew up in—she lived in Cedar Rapids so when I was in Iowa City I would always see her all the time. I am definitely much more open about my life with her than I am my own mother.

Dawson: She's your mom's sister?

Metier: She's my dad's sister. But another part of—reason I think why my mom didn't want my aunt to come is because my father is currently not speaking to his sisters. So that was another strain.

Dawson: Can you—do you want to talk about that?

Metier: He's not speaking to his sisters because, um, with issues with my grandma's will. Also, there was a lot of stuff with that. A lot of triggering violence came up with that, during that process. Yeah.

Dawson: So did you crowdfund part of your top surgery payment?

Metier: Nope. I got it completely covered by Medicaid.

Dawson: Wow!

Metier: Yeah. [laughter] I was lucky. You know, I was also really fortunate because I never thought that I'd be able to afford it. I also never thought I could afford to take time off work. Like, I never thought top surgery could be a possibility for me, but I got it completely covered by Medicaid. I got it done in December while I was in graduate school, so I wasn't missing work and my cost of living was just factored in when I took out my student loans and my graduate assistantship. I really didn't have to come up with anything for it, which I'm pretty fortunate that that happened. Yeah. [laughter] Living in New York and getting New York Medicaid is probably the best thing to ever happen to me, because it gave me the resources to transition. Like, the insurance I had before, I had Blue Cross Blue Shield of Iowa, which doesn't cover anything for transgender services, as far as I'm aware. Also I was able to start therapy, like really start therapy, with Medicaid because before I was—my insurance copay for therapy was forty dollars and before I started grad school I was so broke that I could not afford the forty dollar copay for insurance—for therapy. Medicaid is the greatest blessing for me. It really helped me become a healthy person in every way, and I'm just so grateful that I'm so privileged to live in New York where I'm able to get access to health resources that I haven't had otherwise. That comes to privilege too—being able to access Medicaid in New York—because I know other people aren't able to get it easily. But it was something that I really dedicated a lot of time to, was just to figure out the system was a big drain on my life last year. Yeah.

Dawson: I'm curious if there was a point where it went from being something that was unrealistic or impossible to possible and happening.

Metier: Um, I think it was just getting Medicaid and also going to therapy—like dedicating myself to therapy, and really pushing my comfort zone, and really working on myself and working on having friends, and building confidence and self-esteem in a way that I never had before, was a way where it became possible for me.

Dawson: Can you talk to me more about the trans man friend that you had?

Metier: Yeah, so he, um... So my first sexual relationship in New York, whose name I will not divulge, he happened to be her best friend from college—the college that they both dropped out of. They went to a really elite private arts college—a private liberal arts college—that's no longer open or functioning or existent anymore. She was best friends with him, and when we were sleeping together during the—she didn't really integrate me into her life at all, but she always talked about him in a really interesting way. And I was very, like, intrigued by who he was because his parents were both artists, and he grew up in Tribeca, and he came out as trans when he was a teenager, he started hormones and had surgery when he was sixteen. He was in some documentaries about

trans teenagers and health. So we started hanging out, so the girl—my former sexual partner and I—we started just hanging out as friends and then, you know, I started going to bars with them, and the trans man friend, he and I started clicking. Before I went to grad school I was working as an art handler for a shipping company and he was being a gallery assistant for someone who was doing a show in New York City, and they needed to de-install the show and take it back to New Haven. So he asked me if I would help him, and that day we de-installed the show and we drove a U-Haul truck together up to New Haven. His mom lives right outside of New Haven so we drove up the entire time just talking, and then we went to his mom's house and stayed up all night just talking. Then we spent the next day helping this artist do work in her studio and just talking. We took the train back to the city and we just talked, then we got back to Grand Central at midnight and he was like "let's go get a beer" and then we just kept talking. Then we walked from midtown all the way up to his apartment around 96th street, talking. We got into his apartment and his boyfriend was there, and we just went in the hallway and were talking all night. And then I realized I just spent, like, over 48 hours with him, without showering or changing my clothes—not even changing my underwear—and had this friendship with someone that was just so quick where I felt understood in a way that I never really felt with anybody before. It was just such a quick and intense friendship. And it was the first friend I had that was trans, and that was special, and he was so intelligent, and we had a lot of the same ideas, and he had a life that I was very interested in. Yeah, it's great, in fact when we became friends it was so intense that his boyfriend was like "are you guys going to start sleeping together? I'm not quite sure what's going on." [laughter] But, you know, his boyfriend and I are also really good friends and it was just amazing to have a friendship with someone for the first time—because I always wanted to be friends with someone who is a trans man or trans masculine and I never had that. I finally became friends with someone who understood me and felt me in that way, and was also just an intelligent and worldly person, like that wasn't all we talked about. It was awesome. It was amazing to have felt so seen by somebody. It was so great. Yeah.

Dawson: What was doing your first T shot like?

Metier: He picked me up from school, I was working at my grad assistantship job and I remember I picked up some books from the library. He picked me up in his car and we drove to my apartment, and he was like "okay I want the Adderall," so I get out the Adderall, and then he—[laughter] and then he had his little baggie of T, and I took the shot, and I was like "okay." I just remember the next day I was like "am I going to feel anything?" I wasn't quite sure what was going on, and I was reading things about people doing microdosing and using testosterone to transition in a nonbinary way, and it just became more and more pressure in myself. It just became overwhelming and

unbearable that I made an appointment at Callen-Lorde [Community Health Center] to start it with a prescription. Yeah—and it was really annoying because they made me go there to get my first shot the first three times, and I would wait there for like two hours to see the nurse. I was so thankful that I started it during the summer when I wasn't in class and I didn't have a job, so it was whatever, I had time to kill. It was a pain in the ass. [laughter]

Dawson: Can we go back to the University of Iowa and talk about your friends from your first year?

Metier: Yeah, I lived on the arts floor. Which I shouldn't—honestly, I shouldn't have gone to the University of—I shouldn't have gone to the University of Iowa, it wasn't the first—it wasn't the best match for me, it's definitely still a state school and a sporty college. But I remember—growing up in such a small town and being so sheltered—I remember when I was in third grade my family drove our minivan to Washington, D.C., and that was my first time in a big city. I just remember going to Washington, D.C. was such a big moment in my childhood because there were tall—well, there's not tall buildings in Washington, D.C. because nothing can be taller than the monument—but, you know, there was large buildings and there were people everywhere and there were blocks and blocks and blocks, and I never got to see that as a kid. So growing up in such a small, rural, conservative town like Fort Dodge and then moving to Iowa City [laughter] it's just so funny because when I was 18 I thought Iowa City was, like, a cosmopolitan metropolis. [laughter] I was just like “wow” and there was people that were liberal, and for me that was, at the time, so big. But now I look at Iowa City with like “ugh, it's liberal.” [laughter] For me it was this big experience, I thought Iowa City was a big city. I was kind of overwhelmed by it. So I lived on the arts floor in my first year, I had friends with two other women who were queer and two other guys—two guys that were gay. I was the art student, and then one of the girls was a dance student, and then the guys were acting and opera performance, and we were just kind of this little clique that hung out. Then we didn't really stay together as a clique through college, by the time college was over we kind of filtered off. I really don't have contact with any of them anymore all too much, unfortunately, but that's what happened. I actually got a message from the girl that I was friends with in college who I had a huge crush on. They just told me that they're starting T and I was like “wow, join the club.” [laughter] So, yeah. But I guess through college we kind of had this close clique, we were kind of, you know, just very naive, small town Iowa kids who weren't very worldly. We were kind of hippie-ish, like, sophomore year we got a house together. Well, I didn't live with them, I stayed in the dorms but I was always there, but I lived there in the summer—but we lived in this beat up old house that was just kind of this bohemian place and we were always listening to music and records and smoked a lot of weed, we did some psychedelics

there, just hanging out. You know, I was a vegetarian, I was kind of just a college hippie in college, it was kind of weird. Definitely not like that now. But I was pretty depressed in college, I mean other than that friend group there wasn't much of a queer community that I felt... There weren't any people who were capital Q queer, there was just definitely people who were very, like, normative in their lives and their values. There was—I went to the LGBT club on campus and the president—at one point one there was one of the presidents of the club, we had drama together, and then he said really derogatory things towards me for kind of being butch-y and it kind of made me feel bad about myself in that way and kind of pushed me back in the closet for being masculine in my gender. A bunch of the women who were lesbians were very into sports and were from Chicago suburbs and were sporty, and I wasn't really into that either so I didn't really have the queer community space in college at all. I was pretty depressed throughout most of college, like very depressed. I admitted myself to the psych ward twice throughout college and was pretty withdrawn from most things. The only way I was able to graduate from college was I was an art student, so I didn't have to write a lot of papers or study, I just had to paint. [laughter] So, yeah.

Dawson: When did you see capital Q queer people for the first time?

Metier: When I went to Grinnell [College] to visit my friend who went there. I was just like “wow!” We went to—one of my best friends from high school, we've also lost touch—they went to Grinnell. When I was in high school, my college teachers—my high school teachers wanted me to apply to Grinnell but my parents were like “that's not happening” because they were afraid about the cost of it. So one of my friends from high school went to Grinnell and they drove down to Iowa City to pick me up in their car and some conservative Iowa politician had a rally there so we went to a counter protest with Grinnell students. Then we went to a Rocky Horror Picture Show party at Grinnell and I was just like “oh, these people are, like, cool” and then I made out with a girl for the first time there. Yeah, it was great seeing capital Q people, but again, there wasn't much of that in Iowa City and I didn't get to go to Grinnell all too often so, yeah.

Dawson: What was the Rocky Horror Picture Show like? Where was that?

Metier: Uh, it was in some auditorium in the middle of campus, I don't remember it. But there was a gymnasium in the same building, because I remember a year or two later I went to a drag show in the same building in a gymnasium.

Dawson: How was the drag show?

Metier: Hm?

Dawson: How was the drag show?

Metier: It was fun! I thought it was fun. I don't remember it all too much. I used to go to Studio 13 in college and see the drag shows there, but Grinnell was something different. Because I remember Studio 13 was all about, like, glam queens and Grinnell was just being weird, and it was kind of fun. [laughter]

Dawson: Who did you go to Studio 13 with?

Metier: My friends that I made my freshman year of college is who I went there with, the two boys. I lost friendship with them. One of them started dating somebody who was very controlling and abusive and kind of forced him to end his friendships with everybody else. That was when we were 20, and as far as I know he's still with this man, and it's really upsetting. The last time I saw him I was at a bar and I tried to go up to talk to him and his boyfriend—his abusive boyfriend—said something derogatory to me and grabbed my glasses off my face and threw them on the floor. Very jealous, unhealthy, toxic person. I feel bad that he's in this relationship still, but there's nothing to be done. Then the other friend, the other guy friend, we... He's someone who has a lot of shit to work through with his childhood and being gay in small town Iowa. He has a lot of trauma in his life that he just hasn't addressed and it has made for our friendship to be very volatile, like lots of fighting and intense, and then we'll get back together, and it just got to a point when I told him—when I had my friends in New York City—and he was starting drama again, it just got to a point where I told him “I can't deal with this anymore.” So, yeah, it's sad for—it's really sad that people come and go out of your life. I've had a lot of people that I was really close with when I was younger and you just are—you know, the people I was friends with younger just were not healthy at that time, and we don't know how to process or function as adults and so those friendships don't ever—those friendships had to end eventually because we weren't emotionally matured and developed and it's pretty sad, but it's life. Yeah.

Dawson: How did you decide to move to New York?

Metier: I was so sick of living in Iowa, I was just so sick of it. I was crying all the time because I was depressed and I needed to get—figure a way to get the fuck out of it. I had a BFA in painting, so it's not like I had a degree that could get me a job anywhere else. [laughter] My professors would tell me “oh if you go”—I'd ask them “what do I do after college?”—and they're like “you go to grad school,” and I was like “okay.” So I started preparing the portfolio to go to grad school, and I had three schools that I wanted to go to. My qualifications was I wanted it to be on the East Coast, I wanted it to

be in a large city, and I want the program to be something that I can apply with a painting portfolio and not have to stick to painting, because I knew I didn't want to continue painting all the time. So I applied to three schools. I applied to Temple [University] in Philadelphia, and I applied to CUNY Hunter [College], and I applied to Pratt Institute, and the only school I got into was Pratt Institute. I didn't want to pay for it, it was too expensive, so I was thinking about alternatives of how to get out of Iowa without going to grad school. I got into a summer program called The New York Arts Practicum and the basis of it is, um, students—art students—who aren't from the New York City epicenter, or other schools outside of New York City, have them apply for this program. They would match you with a mentor artist, and you spend two months there working with this artist and meet as a group, and you guys just do studio visits and site visits and it's just kind of this thing to, like, give students of what it's like to be an artist in New York City and if it's something you want to do. So I did that program and I was like "well, I guess I'm in New York City so I should stay here. I don't want to go back to Iowa, there's nowhere else for me to go." So I stayed there. I didn't have any friends there, and I was very socially anxious so I got jobs, I was working at coffee shops and I kept getting fired from them because I am an Aries. Yeah, I'm an Aries, so I would get fired because I would just get angry. I was babysitting and then I realized "oh my god, I can't be in New York City without having connections or any network, I like—I'm not going to go anywhere here." So I decided to go to Pratt. I got a job, finally, as an art handler for a shipping company. That was interesting, to say the least. Then I went to grad school, and so I'm at Pratt, and I was excited because I was like "okay, I'll graduate from Pratt, I'll have my MFA." I was really proud of the work I made before—again, I used to have really low self-esteem and I never thought I could like—as an artist, I would be good or make anything valuable, but now I don't feel that way at all. I'm pretty happy about the work I have, I think it's really strong and I do think I have a lot of potential. So I was excited to graduate from my—with my MFA, go out in the world with my portfolio, do residencies, get work, but then COVID happened. So now I feel like I'm back at square one, but it's okay. Yeah.

Dawson: Are there any kind of residency programs that are still open, or... ?

Metier: So I was gonna apply for two summer programs that were both closed, and I'm applying for a mentorship fellowship program called the Queer Art Mentorship. That's due in like a week or so. It's another thing for me, but I think honestly right now—dealing with COVID—one, I feel like there's too much going on in the world that being so solely focused on my career as an artist just feels ungodly. I can't imagine just going to my studio and making my shit and just not paying attention to everything that's going around in the world right now. And then two, just dealing with this economy, I think my biggest thing is just basic economic survival. So, right now, it's just trying to find work

and make art when I can, but I'm not in a rush to become a big major artist, and I don't know if being a big major artist is even an option anymore, so it's fine.

Dawson: What work are you most proud of that you did at Pratt?

Metier: I'm really proud of my thesis work, but I haven't been able to finish my thesis project yet. If you look up my name, there's my website. I think my work is pretty linear in how it's created, from the paintings I made in college and the paintings I made after college. I started making work my senior year of college, I was just so depressed and I wasn't functioning, and I had untreated ADHD... Sorry, I gotta close my—do you mind if I take a pause for a second to get some water?

Dawson: Absolutely, yeah.

Metier: Thanks. Okay, thank you. Alright, so, the art that I make. My senior year of college I was just struggling mentally and I was painting and I didn't really have an idea of what to paint. I really didn't have a developed style. I didn't really like drawing figuratively too much, I wasn't really that great at it. I just thought about how I didn't have, like, any control over my body, and so I started making paintings where I would build panels and I would put paint—sorry, one sec— um, I would put paint in squeeze bottles and I would water it down. I would just draw microbiological motifs with the watered down paint, and the paint would expand and I would just keep building the layers. The fact that I didn't have absolute control over the paint, I kind of thought as allegorical of how I didn't feel control over my body. So that's how I was painting in college, and then after college I continued drawing these motifs and painting these motifs, but I was just using paint brushes. And then after I moved to New York and before I went to grad school—the year before grad school—I was reading a lot. Like, all I did was I went to work and I read, because I didn't have any friends, I was too anxious to go out and meet people on my own. So I would just walk around the city all the time and read books, and that's what I did for fun. I was introduced to “[A]Cyborg Manifesto” by Donna [J.] Haraway—I see you smile—I love “[A] Cyborg Manifesto” so much. And then at the same time, I also read “Testo Junkie” by Paul [B.] Preciado, and so—yeah you should read that. It's like a mix of “Cyborg Manifesto” with Foucault and a hint of Judith Butler, but it's autotheory and it's also sexy. How it's written, is Paul Preciado administers testosterone, like he was—now he identifies as a trans man, or whatever, I don't know. He's a transmasculine person, he was experimenting with testosterone but not as a means to transition, but like a way to biohack the codes of the body. That was the first time that I read stuff about being trans and transitioning in a way that kind of clicked with me, because I never thought I was a man trapped in a woman's body, I was just kind of like “this doesn't work.” So that was the first time that I saw recognition of

transness that I kind of felt attuned to. But yeah, he just writes about how gender is constructed biologically, and he writes about his experiments with testosterone and Viagra and birth control and pornography, and how those are all coding gender. Then he writes it with cyborg theory. So, you know, I started reading that and it was kind of a shift in how I thought about my work, I was thinking about the cyborg body as a trans person. I was using a lot of digital influences and trying to kind of mix computer culture references with my biological motifs and I was like—I started grad school and so I started painting, I was still painting, and I was thinking about the cyborg body, but I was making abstract paintings. So it never really got across anywhere, they were just, like, abstract paintings of shapes, and it never really got to cyborg. Then there's another book by Paul Preciado where it's an essay, it's a manifesto called the "Countersexual Manifesto." At the end of my first semester of grad school, "Countersexual Manifesto" was published in English. It's been out since the early 2000s, it was published in Spanish and French, but they finally translated it to English, and so I read it, and it's continuing talking about cyborg theory but about dildos. So he's writing about the dildos as a body, and he writes, like, if the phallus is the construct and the vision and idea of a patriarchal society, then the dildo is the cyborgian other. I was like "oh, that's genius!" So I was like "okay, obviously making these paintings isn't working, so what I need to do is I have to make these paintings into dildos." So then I taught myself mold making, and I started making plaster molds out of [inaudible] and cast them as silicone. Then I was still just making them as objects to hang on the wall, and it still wasn't doing anything. I always wanted my work to represent the inside of the body. I just want to be inside of a body and think of the body as a cyborgian other, and just making the pieces wasn't—the objects wasn't working. But still these silicone objects were always getting dirty and collecting dust, so I was washing them in a bucket and I was looking at the bucket with the water and the silicone objects moving in it, and I was like "that looks pretty gross and intestinal and very carnal and bodily," and I was like, "that's interesting." So I got a big 17 gallon tub from the hardware store and painted it green. I filled it with water, and I put my iPhone in a waterproof case, and I put it underwater. And I started just putting my sculptures in and playing around with them. Then I started playing with editing the video, and then I would just have these, like, video pieces of the sculptures moving in water, but you don't know what's going on, but it looks very gross. Like, it looks like something is gurgling in a stomach. Then I would cut the video with—I would green screen different parts of my body, so I would have it dismembered with actual parts of my body. So that was at the end of my first year of grad school, and then over the summer I went to my friend's house—the trans man—his mom had a pool. So I took all my sculptures up to his house, and I just chilled in his pool underwater with my phone and had him throw the sculptures in, and I just videoed the sculptures moving in his pool. Then I went back to school in the fall and I decided that I wanted to make the sculptures huge. Before they were, like, this big, but I decided to make them the size of

an actual body. So I made the sculpture—I made plaster molds that were six feet tall by four feet wide, and I made just, like, giant casts of these silicone objects that were dildos and they were representing of the cyborgian other. So then I made an installation of the sculptures in a room, and I had a projected video of one of the sculptures floating through water. Then I made a super delicate piece of the same biological motif out of iridescent reflective paper, and so it was mixed in with the silicone objects, so when the light from the video was moving across it, there was just sparkles of light dancing across the wall. Then I just made an audio piece with it that was very gurgling and intestinal and sexual and [cough] very bodily and watery and sexy. Then for my thesis project, I took the giant sculptures that I made for the installation and I got a few of my friends to—I closed off a studio space—one second, I need more water. Um, and so I got J-Lube, which is lube for heavy fisting and it's super cheap, and I got this giant pile of sculptures—of these silicone sculptures—and I got three of my friends separately, covered the sculptures with lube, my friends got naked, and then I just videoed them rolling around in the sculptures and playing with it and picking up interesting moments. Then I compiled the video in Adobe and I made a three-channel video install with the pieces, and I haven't been able to install it yet. But I've been able to see mini installs in—while I was working on it, and it was a really great piece and, you know, my professors got really great feedback that it really got to my point, and I wrote a great thesis paper about it. So, yeah. But my work is online, I have a website, it's just “first name,” “last name, ”one word, dot com. [cough]

Dawson: [inaudible] really good. I've done my Googling it's—your stuff is, like, really cool.

Metier: Yeah! Um, I currently have—I'm gonna take it down soon—if you go to my Vimeo link, there's—the top three videos are my thesis project. Or, like, little snippets of my thesis project.

Dawson: Cool. Can you talk more about biohacking?

Metier: [laughter] So the thing is that, like—that's what I've been so hyper-focused on for the past two years in graduate school and making that my work, and I was—I'm kind of over it. But also at the same time, it was so important to me because I want to transition and now that I finally did the transition, I'm kind of over it and ready to move on. But, I don't know, biohacking is just this idea that there is no, like—you know, binary of truth, and biohacking is just hacking the codes of your body to make it the best version of whatever it can be. So when Paul Preciado, when he took testosterone, he wasn't trying to be a male, he was just experimenting with the code to this body, to change the experiences. Yeah.

Dawson: Cool! Post-biohacking phase, what does transness feel like to you or mean to you?

Metier: [pause] I don't know. It's still, like, a part of me, but I feel during—I was just so focused on it during grad school because I was going through transition, and I was making work about transitioning, and that was all I could think about. But now I feel like there's just other things that I can focus on and I'm not quite sure. I don't know. I feel like my transness isn't such a major point of my identity at this moment because I accomplished it and it's—I've done it, and it's still a part of me and it was a struggle to get to here and because of that—I've gone through that struggle, it doesn't have to be this major precedent in my life. Yeah, I don't know. Post-biohacking cyborg trans identity to me is just—I don't know. I'm the person I've wanted to be for a long time and I've finally done it, and I finally can look in the mirror and wake up in the morning and be happy about who I am and be excited about my life. I mean, not so much anymore, I'm just so overwhelmed by COVID and our federal government that I'm not so hopeful. But I guess personally I can just wake up in the morning and be the authentic—like, live authentically and that's fantastic, and to have friends who value me for being me, and not being so worried about what other people think about me and... Yeah, just being known as a valued person to myself and others and just being able to breath and live my life, and go on. And I never really—when I was younger—I never really thought that could ever happen. Yeah. You okay?

Dawson: Kinda touched. [laughter]

Metier: Oh really? [laughter] [inaudible] that touched you.

Dawson: We already talked about The Sims, but how else has your quarantine been?

Metier: Oh, my god. It's been awful. So I live in a two—[laughter] Oh, my god, I don't know. I live in a two bedroom apartment and my roommate is one of my classmates—former classmates now—and she has a boyfriend who lives right outside the city. So when quarantine happened, she went to her boyfriend's house, and so I was in my apartment with myself and my cat for two months. And, you know, I was too afraid to go see my friends. I felt like it was irresponsible to be with my friends, and I live in New York City, which was for the longest time the epicenter of Coronavirus. Which, two days ago there—I think it was yesterday or the day before—there was recorded zero deaths for the first time since early March, which is amazing. Um, I just remember the beginning of quarantine—alone, overwhelmed, hearing ambulance sirens nonstop, anxious. I had no human contact for, like, two months, and I feel like quarantine has

really changed me. Completely. I feel very emotionally withdrawn, and now I just feel very emotionally withdrawn and out of touch with everything and it's fucking weird. Yeah, I mean, honestly for your whole life to just be suddenly disrupted, like, I thought Coronavirus was hysteria. I remember three days before—I remember like a week before lockdown, I left the gym—because I was working out every day—and that's another thing about quarantine, is that I couldn't work out [laughter]. And that was my thing, was I would work out and I felt great. And then I couldn't work out. But I remember I left the gym, and this girl passes me in the street and she's on her phone, and she was like “yeah I heard it lingers on your clothes for two days,” and I was like “what are, people are—” I thought it was overblown. I thought it was out of proportion, and then I—So I think it was on a Tuesday, I was working at my job on campus. I was just working as a clerical assistant for one of the departments-, and I overheard these two students say—it was like the week before spring break—and these two students say “oh I heard that the new school in NYU, they're doing an extra week of spring break to figure things out, and Pratt's going to do that too,” and I was like “that's stupid,” and I told my supervisor, I'm like, “they're going to do an extra week of spring break? I don't want to miss classes that I paid for, I love going to class,” and she was like “we're figuring things out.” I was like “okay,” and then I remember that night I was at my studio and I was working, and I was on Twitter, and I was reading things about Coronavirus and I was like “oh shit, this is real, like, holy fuck.” I thought it was hysteria, and I was like “this is real shit,” and I just started panicking. I was texting my friends thinking the city was going to completely shut down, like they were going to close off, you know, Port Authority, and I started panicking. Then things happened and they tell us at school that they're going to do an extra week after spring break to figure things out and then we have the weekend. Then it's the Monday of spring break and I'm at my studio, and we all get an email that campus will be closed for the foreseeable future, but classes may resume in person at some point during the semester. I was kind of like “okay,” and also at the time we were getting ready for our thesis shows, and so our classmates and I, we were talking and we were like “what are we doing? We can't have thesis receptions, we need to pause stuff, we can't do this.” So we talked about it and then it just hits, and I'm in my apartment, alone for two months. Sirens all the time. Cut off from all my friends. Um, really fucked up in the head, and unable to—it's all just a blur to me, and traumatizing—it like—traumatizing. But I guess New York City is doing way better than the rest of the country now. I still feel very emotionally out of touch, but at the same time I'm able to go see my friends. I'm not as afraid to go outside anymore, I am going outside to exercise. I got on the trend, I started—okay, I started going on TikTok during quarantine. I used to be very anti-TikTok, I'm very pro-TikTok now, and I saw all those cute girls on roller skates having fun, and I was like “that looks fun,” and so I bought a pair of roller skates. So I've been roller skating every day, which has been awesome. So that's my new enjoyable thing with life in quarantine, is roller skating every day. But

yeah, quarantine has been awful and we're still trying to figure out what to do about our thesis because we never got to have our thesis shows. Our school told us that our thesis shows are indefinitely—or, permanently canceled, so we're going through drama, because originally our administration—department administration—told us that we could have our shows in the fall, and we were like “that’s great,” and then last Monday they told us “no you’re not having your shows at all.” So now we’re like “uh, that’s part of the curriculum, that’s part of the requirement to graduate.” They graduated us without having us fulfill our graduation requirements. Also, we paid a lot of money for this. Also, that’s a core part of going to an MFA program, is having your thesis show. Like, not even—if we can’t have a public reception and only us as students and our faculty members can see it, I don’t give a fuck. I just want my classmates and my faculty members to see my show, and I want to see each other’s, and I also want to take pictures of my show for my portfolio. Apparently we’re not supposed to do that, but I don’t know. Quarantine sucked, and I’m completely changed from it. [laughter] Yeah. Traumatizing. I did make a lot of bread, though. But I stopped making bread because I realized I gained some weight that I didn’t want to gain, and then I also was not able to keep the sourdough starter. It was too much work for me. [laughter]

Dawson: How do you feel about reopening?

Metier: Nervous. I feel like New York can do it in some way. Um, I feel like people can and should go back to work in ways that are healthy. I feel like people can and should see their friends, but I get really nervous seeing people at bars that are outdoor bars and restaurants. That makes me very nervous. But I participated—so the protest for Black Lives Matter and the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, like the first two weeks I was going almost everyday, and they were massive. One protest I went to was counted as 30,000 people, and that’s been going on for six weeks now, and there hasn’t been a spike in Coronavirus cases in New York City. So I do feel hopeful about reopening because I do have trust in New York City, and I do have trust in New Yorkers and I love New York, and I want the city to thrive. I have trust in the judgement and the ethics of New Yorkers. The rest of the country, no. I’m terrified seeing the graphs. But, I don’t know, I also kind of feel kind of excited, in a way, to see what Coronavirus—like, the fallout of this does to New York City, because I don’t know. I read a lot of history, gay history, and punk history of New York in the ’70s and ’80s, and maybe I romanticize it a little bit, but the fact that it was a—it was a cheap place and artists and punks and weirdos and queers could just live there was great. Maybe I over romanticize it, but I kind of have this dream that all these people are leaving New York City and aren’t coming back, and it’s going to be an affordable place again. And it’s going to reverse cycle gentrification, and it will be back to a thriving, diverse city instead of, you know, a

homogenous whole of capitalism and suburban—I don't know—upper middle class values. I don't know.

Dawson: Neoliberal ambitions?

Metier: Yeah. So, yeah.

Dawson: A long time ago, you talked about identifying as both butch and trans masc. Can you speak more to that?

Metier: Yeah. I mean, I feel like when I read things about queer history to place myself with, I definitely place myself within the butch identity historically. Like, reading anthologies and also reading Leslie Feinberg, it's something that I feel connected to that I also, you know, don't really see myself as a woman. And I feel like the butch identity has definitely shifted with like—as things change in culture, and I am able to take things to masculinize my body, but I don't identify myself with male masculinity. I still very much identify my masculinity within a queer construction, and so in that way I kind of intertwine my identity between transmasculine and butch because I have no desire to fit in in the world as a man. I just want to exist as being this gender nonconforming person, but saying gender nonconforming and still having a very masculine identity. But, I don't know. At the same time, I put on bright pink roller skates every day and dance around to Madonna in the park so maybe—[laughter] I don't know.

Dawson: What does Leslie Feinberg mean to you?

Metier: Um, so I remember when I was younger in college and having a very negative association with female masculinity that I internalized from the media when I was younger. I remember seeing Leslie Feinberg and feeling very disgusted and uncomfortable by it, by her. Because that was just what was coded in me when I was younger, was like, disgust for someone who was a bull dyke, and [laughter] I mean, I am a bull dyke now. And, you know, that disgust was because I knew that within myself. Just having someone to write about gender in a way that isn't so academic. Her writing is very accessible, and also just someone who had a very difficult life but made it very fulfilling and fruitful is a really special thing. I also have a like—also, even though it's not so much in terms of gender, in terms of queerness, a really special figure for me is David Wojnarowicz. You should read David Wojnarowicz. His memoir—I tell everybody to read his memoir "Close to the Knives." He was a very active artist and activist in the East Village in the 1980s, he was a member of ACT UP [AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power]. He was a writer and an artist, and he grew up in a very abusive home in New Jersey. Then he moved in with his mom in Hell's Kitchen, Manhattan when he was a

young—when he was a tween—and he wrote about being a childhood hustler in Times Square and having sex with older men and being homeless, and dealing with such a difficult childhood but then also—like, his difficulties with being homosexual as an adult and the adversity that he faced. And then when AIDS started happening, and his adversity became even more present and he was so angry, he was so rightfully angry. But he wrote about his anger in such a productive way—and such a powerful way—that I read his work and he was angry and I was like—I used to really suppress my anger, because I grew up in a very—there was a lot of violence. There was violence growing up, so I really told myself—I couldn't express anger and I couldn't feel anger. And reading his writing and knowing his work was, like, I can feel anger and the anger doesn't have to be destructive. Anger can be productive. So, yeah, David Wjonarowicz is this great figure for me of just being angry at the world, and that's okay. Actually he did this project called the Rimbaud series where he was really—the French poet Arthur Rimbaud, who—he died at a very young age. He lived during the turn of the century in France, but he was this kind of figure for David Wjonarowicz that he felt made space for him in the world as an artist, and a writer, and a queer person. So he did a series where he made a mask of Arthur Rimbaud and had his friends contextualize Rimbaud in their daily lives in New York City in the 1980s. It was, like, this project of rethinking queer kinship and lineage with people that you don't have a connection to, either through blood or through actual interaction. I'm kind of working on this project—I put it on the side—trying to tie myself to the lineage of David Wjonarowicz and Arthur Rimbaud by collecting objects to build a home with. Because I came to this point in my life where I was visiting my parents last Winter, and it was really upsetting and triggering. I was kind of homeless at the time in New York, I was living in a very unsafe housing situation. So I was moving into this apartment that I'm in now, and I had this really traumatic visit with my parents, and I was moving into this apartment, and I was like “I need to be really intentional about the space in this apartment and make it my home and my safety net.” So I was getting objects—I was buying used furniture online, and I got this microwave from this one woman who's a very—she's a famous punk musician, like a butch lesbian—I'm not going to name drop—but her friend, her ex-girlfriend at the time did a reappropriation series of the David Wjonarowicz Rimbaud project, where they printed off the mask, instead of Rimbaud, they printed off a face of David Wjonarowicz to wear as a mask. And they contextualized David Wjanorwicz into their lives in, like, early 2000s. That was a really special project. So I got a microwave from this artist's girlfriend at the time that they made the project, and so I was like “this is fucking cool.” So I'm doing a project where I'm collecting home objects—like objects for my home—from older queer artists, and asking them to tell me about when they felt settled in their lives and if there are figures that built that for them. So David Wjonarowicz is another big thing for me, yeah.

Dawson: Has that developed under quarantine situation any?

Metier: I mean, I was supposed to finish this project at the end of the semester because it was an actual school project. But I kept putting it off because my anxiety would take over it, and then I was so busy trying to finish my thesis paper and then quarantine—or my thesis work—and then quarantine happened and I couldn't fucking think. And I was like "I'm not going to work on a project about feeling belonging and feeling safe at home," because one of my first reactions to quarantine was "oh my god, I'm not going to be able to"—I always have a panic response, like "oh my god the economy is collapsing, I have this apartment, I'm not going to be able to stay here, I'm gonna lose my apartment, I'm not going to find a job"—I wasn't able to work on that project because of my just, like, anxiety and stress over COVID. But now I also am reluctant to work on that project at the moment, because right now making an art piece about being a sad, white, queer person just seems really irrelevant amongst the other political actions of, you know, Black violence. It seems like I don't need to talk about being sad, white, and gay right now. [laughter] It seems irrelevant.

Dawson: You talked about media depictions of butch women when you were growing up, do you have any examples?

Metier: I think Family Guy was one of them. I don't really have any major examples on top of my mind, and it probably isn't always things that are overt but on television, you know, in the early—in the '90s—and the early 2000s, butch women, gender nonconforming people were always just a punchline. And they were never taken seriously as dynamic characters, and they, you know, whenever they were depicted they were just kind of like "oh that's a gross, ugly, fat, lesbian" or "that's an effeminate man who's a little pussy," you know. Like, I don't know. How old are you?

Dawson: 20.

Metier: You're 20? I'm just amazed because we're only seven years apart, but I feel like Gen Z have much better—well maybe I'm making assumptions—but I feel like Gen Z have much better access of seeing queer people when they were younger, and having accessibility to queer spaces through social media when they're younger, and I think it's awesome. And I think it's so cool that that has changed so quickly. I also love Gen Z, I love TikTok, I love Gen Z's being radical on TikTok, I think it's amazing. [laughter] The fact that like...

Dawson: Who are your favorite TikToks?

Metier: Okay, did you see Claudia Conway?

Dawson: I'm...

Metier: Not on TikTok?

Dawson: Not so on TikTok.

Metier: Okay, I think Gen Z on TikTok is so cool that people like Claudia Conway—who happens to be Kellyanne Conway's daughter—who, you know, is on the administration, who was Trump's campaign manager and on his administration—the fact that her 15-year-old daughter is a radical, anti-Trump, pro-Black Lives Matter, socialist on TikTok, and is making TikTok videos, is amazing. The fact that radical politics is reaching the most unsuspecting people is just awesome, and it makes me excited for, you know, what's to come. Also it's just funny as hell, there's hilarious TikToks. I don't know, it's just absurd. I've got the right algorithm for TikTok now. [laughter]

Dawson: When did you first start seeing changes in media representation for queer people?

Metier: Um—I honestly, I don't—I guess I remember Glee when I was a teenager, I remember that was a thing, and that was positive representation of queer teens. I think a big part of it maybe isn't media representation, but more so me seeking that representation in other ways. So instead of looking at mass media, it's finding representation of queer people whose histories are erased and aren't on the forefront, and actually having access to people who have existed and looking for it and searching for it, instead of seeing what is in front of me. So that'd be reading books, like David Wjjanorwicz's "Close to the Knives," and "Stone Butch Blues" is more so seeking out the representation that I needed. Actively seeking it.

Dawson: How did you get into queer history?

Metier: When I was in New York—when I moved to New York—and I had no friends, and I—I was friends with someone who—I met this girl on Tinder and I was hanging out with her, and she was really into David Wjjanorwicz, and I was like "oh I need to start looking into him." So I started reading his books, and then I read this other book called "The Lonely City" by Olivia Laing, which was an awesome book for me to read because I was so lonely, and she wrote about moving to New York, intending to move in with her boyfriend, and he calls it off. But she moves anyways, and so she just is there alone. So to deal with it she just writes about loneliness and what it's like to be lonely when there's

people all around you. Then she just dives into the archives and records of artists who dealt with loneliness in an urban landscape. So one of the figures she wrote about was David Wjonarowicz and so—yeah, from there I just started thinking about—I realized that I live in a space where people like me have always existed and have always had to go through tribulations to come to triumphs, and that's a really amazing feeling. Knowing that there's people like me who had to go through shit to have fruitful lives, and they've existed in the city, and the city has given them the space to do that. And so from that, I just want to read about the history of people who are queer, and are artists, and had to deal with shit, and don't live assimilationist lives, and live fruitful alternative lives. And that's such a liberating thing to realize.

Dawson: What else is on your reading list?

Metier: [sigh] I have so many books, it's hard for me to—it's hard for me to focus on books and reading the past years, because I have ADHD. So I can never get my full attention focused on it because I'm so spread out. Um, I have a lot of books on the history of video art. I have a lot of, like, gender theory books, though I don't really know if I want to read gender theory books right now. I have a lot of science fiction to read. I have a lot of books about transgender representation, like I want to read "Trap Door" [Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility] by Tourmaline [Gossett], that's on my list.

Dawson: [inaudible] has an essay in there.

Metier: Oh, cool. Wait, who does?

Dawson: AJ.

Metier: Oh, awesome! Yeah. I have a bookshelf, which half of it are books that I have not read and I need to start. I just got a copy of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, because that's one of my favorite books. I read it when I was, like, 23, and I want to re-read it again because I also have been on my new wave spiritualist TikTok, and they talk about 5th dimension reality, and the Age of Aquarius being a conscious shift outside of the 3rd dimension. And it's very parallel to the topics and the theories brought up in the space odyssey theory—Space Odyssey series—so I need to re-read it and get back into science fiction. Yeah.

Dawson: What's new age TikTok like?

Metier: Uh, weird. [laughter] It's crazy. They all talk about, like, astral projecting into the astral realm with 10th dimensional figures—10th dimensional beings—and I'm like "what the fuck are you talking about?" But then also all over TikTok they're talking about the CIA hologram files. Have you heard about those?

Dawson: No.

Metier: Okay, the CIA hologram files are basically: we live in a hologram and our beings aren't actual—we are spiritual energies that exist in a different realm that decide to inhabit our body for experiences, and then we pass our life and we go back to the astral realm, and we reflect back on what we've learned from this bodily experience and tie it with our prior bodily experiences. Apparently there's CIA shit that says this. So, it's crazy, and I—Yeah. [laughter] I don't know what to think of all of it—it's a lot—I don't fully comprehend it, but it's interesting, and it makes me really want to read more about it.

Dawson: How did you get diagnosed with ADHD?

Metier: So I was, um—I had so much trouble in college, and I just—I don't know. So like, ADHD is very under-diagnosed in girls because they always thought ADHD was the hyperactive boy. But the way that girls are socialized is that girls are told that they're not supposed to act out, and they have to be calm and collected. So girls who have ADHD don't act out, and they feel like they have to really control themselves and keep themselves together. A lot of psychologists today are saying the figure, the like, model of ADHD is no longer the hyperactive little boy. It's the young woman who goes to college and her life falls apart because she doesn't have structure anymore. And that was completely me, and I had to go to the psych ward twice in college because I couldn't deal with it. It was so overwhelming, and I tried to go to Student Health Services to tell them that I have ADHD because my dad and both my brothers have ADHD, and I have all the signs of ADHD, and they'd tell me I don't have ADHD because I'm a girl, and I'm just depressed. So I'm like "okay fine," and so I finished college. I start going to therapy after college because I never did therapy during college, because it was one more thing that I had to put on my plate that I couldn't deal with. So I started going to therapy. I went to my first therapist, nothing happened, it wasn't helping. I went to my second therapist, my second session she says "I looked at your paperwork and you have all the signs of ADHD," so she had me go to a psychologist and they did, like, two hours of oral exam and written exam. Then they had to take it to a lab to get tested, and then the diagnosis came back two months later and it said that I had ADHD. And I was 23. Then I started taking Ritalin, and it felt like my life changed. And I don't take Ritalin every day, it's just great to know I have ADHD because I use other different

approaches of lifestyle management to deal with it, and it's awesome to have the proper diagnosis. So, yeah.

Dawson: What kind of lifestyle adaptations do you use to cope with ADHD?

Metier: [sigh] Okay, so when I focus, I put in ear plugs, and I put on my headphones, and I use bi-in, bi—okay, something “bi” beats [binaural]. But it just takes music that goes in and out of your right and left ear, just to kind of balance your left and right brain to get it to focus, is one thing for ADHD. Um—I don't know. I felt like I haven't managed ADHD all too well the past two years because I have been so hyper-focused on my graduate work. ADHD is like—when there's stuff that you want to do, you fucking do it, and that's all you do, and you focus on it. But when there's stuff you don't want to do, you just don't and you can't get to it. So I've been having an issue with my ADHD ever since quarantine—like not being productive—because now I don't have spaces to go to kind of compartmentalize productivity and relaxation. Like, my computer desk is right next to my bed. So I've started talking to someone who's an ADHD resourcer, and I spoke to her a few days ago for like an hour, and I paid her \$40, and she came up with a bunch of resources for me to go through and just to check in with her for more resources of how to do ADHD management. It's a constant process, but I don't know, a big thing about ADHD is just finally having the diagnosis to understand how your mind works, and reading about it.

Dawson: What feels most pressing or important in your life right now?

Metier: Finding a job. [laughter] That's all. Uh, finding a job and getting a way to document my thesis work the correct way. So yeah. Finding a job.

Dawson: What are you looking forward to?

Metier: What do I look forward to? Uh, that's so weird now to think, because I don't know what to look forward to. Um, one of my friends just moved out of the city and got a cabin upstate on a lake, and I'm going to visit him next week. That's something to look forward to, because I haven't left the city in a year. So I'm excited to see trees, and water, and go to sleep and hear cicadas. That's something to look forward to. Um, I don't know. It's hard to think of what to look forward to when the world is so uncertain, but I'm just happy to be alive now. So that's great.

Dawson: Do you, like, do you feel comfortable wrapping up? Is there anything else you want to talk about?

Metier: I don't really have anything else to think about. We've been talking for like two hours now. That's a long time. [laughter]

Dawson: That's a long time.

Metier: Cool. Well, thank you.

Dawson: Thank you so much!

Metier: Yeah, thank you!

Dawson: I'll stop the recording.