NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

MACKENZIE REYNOLDS

Interviewer: Ric Tennenbaum

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Ric Tennenbaum: Hello, my name is Ric Tennenbaum and I will be having a conversation with Mackenzie Reynolds for the New York City Trans Oral History Project in collaboration with the New York Public Library's Community Oral History Project. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans-identifying people. It is July 23rd, 2017 and this is being recorded at Mackenzie's home, in Brooklyn, New York. Hi Mackenzie.

Mackenzie Reynolds: Hi.

Tennenbaum: Could you please introduce yourself and then tell me about where you were born, and where you grew up, and what that was like.

Reynolds: Yeah. My name's Mackenzie Reynolds, I am 38, and identify as trans and gender variant, and as a trans person who has had multiple transitions. I use they and them as my pronouns. I was born in Spokane, Washington. Spokane is not a rural place itself, it is the largest city between Seattle and Chicago, but it’s not saying much because there’s not actually much between Seattle and Chicago. And so it was a very 1950’s style culturally, felt very McCarthy-ite in a lot of ways. I moved around a lot throughout Washington while I was growing up, but I was born in Spokane and I went to high school in Spokane. In between I went to Richland and Everett, and my dad has lived in Seattle since I was 9. So, though I grew up in Spokane, I have these other experiences in Washington, primarily in other working class, primarily white, working-class neighborhoods and towns. Spokane was pretty rough because, again culturally, very old school, and so it was very Christian normatively. So in schools, I went to a public high school and we prayed in high school pretty regularly. Everybody was—all the teachers were involved in a thing called Young Life, which was nondenominational Christian. And when after school days were over, I became Christian in the middle of that on my own accord. My family was not religious growing up but I needed parenting, because I wasn’t getting parented on my own. So I went to church as a way of getting people around me, and accessing love and care, and also accessing pretty material things, so I got food and clothes. I got leadership development, that was very important for me, it’s also where I met feminism and where I first started hearing about queer people in a way that wasn’t my high school or middle school friends calling you a faggot when they were trying to put you in your place. So I grew up not coming out—I didn’t come out until after I left Spokane. But I was called “-bian” short for lesbian for most of my high school time. Because I was vegetarian, because I spoke out for queers, and because I was feminist. So you could get very pigeon holed very easily and it would be used against you. Similarly, they called you like commie if you were—(laughter) it was a very weird place to grow up. I think I knew I was queer when I was in high school, but I was very afraid of it. So my earliest memories of dealing with my own sexuality and my own sense of something being up about my gender was I went to the public library and found whatever queer books and feminist books I could find but I would very anxiously and aggressively say to the librarian “You cannot tell my mother that I’m checking these things out.” So I would just read books. The one I remember most is called Am I Blue? which is an anthology, a short story anthology, and in the title story a person wakes up and all of the queer people are blue, their skin has turned blue, so there’s no option of being out anymore. It’s just everyone who was queer had to be out because their skin was blue. And I remember thinking that that would be so great, if everyone could just be like—if you couldn’t be closeted anymore, because everyone was sort of forced to be honest
about who they were and how much that would change the world. It would make it impossible to be sort of strategically closeted. I think a lot would have to change in relationship to that. Anyway, so I didn't come out until after I came to college because of all of those social dynamics and because also I was living in a very abusive environment and neglectful so I was very focused on getting out for most of my childhood.

**Tennenbaum:** You said that when you started going to church in high school, that's when you first started to hear about queer people in a more positive way? Did you have a sense of queer community at the church or was it something that was brought up.

**Reynolds:** Yeah, so my pastor then, she was part of a movement called the Reconciling Ministries Network—it was called Reconciling Congregations then and it became known as Reconciling Ministries Network, this was a United Methodist church. She was not queer and in the United Methodist church still the languages that stuff about practicing homosexuals shall not be ordained or appointed to serve in the United Methodist church, but my pastor was part of an organization and a network that was fighting against that polity, the church rules. And so I got sort of brought into that work there. And that's actually how I came out eventually, is that I had become very involved and started doing youth leadership for a while I was the national co-chair for an organization called Methodist Students for an All-Inclusive Church, I started doing church legislative work at both the local and jurisdictional levels. So there's like different layers of church governmental organization in the Methodist church. And I got involved in that in part as a strategy towards changing these rules because when I was 15 I started pursuing an ordination in the United Methodist church, I became what's called a candidate for ordination. So I had a sense in high school that it wasn't fair that people couldn't be ordained and at that time you couldn't even get married if you were queer in United Methodist churches. So I found that, it brought it up against everything I believed theologically that we can't say humans are good and say that some humans are bad because of who they love. It was how my early brain was thinking about it. And as, especially after I left home and went to college and began to have more space to think about things like, “Why do I feel so personally wounded, why do I feel so personally attacked about all of this stuff going on around me, why do I feel so personally invested in this ordination fight?” There's something more happening than I'm just trying to be somebody's ally, like there's something happening at the gut level that I'm really fighting for myself. So my coming out was very much in this sort of like organizing, sort of intellectual way, which makes a lot of sense because I was pretty separated from my own body and my sense of being in the world at that point. So it's totally reasonable that my head needed to get itself around an idea before my body could follow it.

**Tennenbaum:** Are you comfortable talking more about the separation of the body?

**Reynolds:** Sure. Do you have a question?

**Tennenbaum:** Yeah, what did that mean for you, how did it feel?

**Reynolds:** Yeah, I think like lots of survivors I had very strategically shut down my body in order to move through my world on the daily. So mostly it just felt like I was a head moving about the
world and then as I started to build a world for myself that was on my own terms, politically, certainly, I started to have inklings that perhaps it was okay to be in a body, in my body, and perhaps there were things that I could learn from doing that. So I think when I came out as queer, I didn't start having queer relationships for many years after that still because my sense of, what was safe to engage in sexually was not—I didn't think that sex was like a safe thing to do and I didn't want to lose track of myself or lose my sense of safety in the world. It was really by coming out as trans that I sort of unlocked some of those doors to sexuality because it helps me be less fragmented even. I think there's a really clear connection between—you know when the self is portioned out into different things it's hard to get a sense of complete self or complete self-worth or complete identity in any kind of way. I find that for myself, as I learn to name different parts of my identity, then I was able to integrate it and then I felt less at war with myself and more of a person who was in control of living on my own terms and capable of building a life that was mine. And those were the things that I needed to be able to engage in my body, just sort of like normally but also in terms of sexuality and everything else too.

Tennenbaum: Was there anything that helped you start to come to these realizations?

Reynolds: I think watching my friends playing in college was really educational for me. I didn't get to play a lot as a kid and so I remember watching them and being like you're really just like throwing your body around like its normal and fine. Even other friends who are survivors—they just dealt with their experience, their pasts, and traumas differently than I had. And had different abilities to move around in their body than I had. I dealt with mine by becoming very intellectual and heady and sort of like inner world-ish. So I probably have an ability to play in an imaginative way, but it feels like insular and I have a very hard time externalizing it. So watching my friends play—I was in college in the late ‘90s and early 2000s, and during that time, like Hedwig and the Angry Itch came out as a movie and that sort of like blew up my world in terms of thinking about gender in some particular ways and that helped too, just seeing new and different representations of gender. There's also this movie Ma Vie en Rose about a gender variant child that I watched pretty obsessively at that time. I think somewhere in there I started going to yoga and that helped and queer bars helped, queer bars and Pride helped. Putting my body physically in the way of other queers. Just being like, to have people.

Tennenbaum: And what college were you at?

Reynolds: I was at University of Washington for two years and then I transferred to Seattle University.

Tennenbaum: Can you tell me at all about some of your favorite bars to be at and what the scenes were like then?

Reynolds: Totally, the Wild Rose was a lesbian bar and it is still existing and–

Tennenbaum: What city?
Reynolds: Seattle. It is above Women's Bathhouse. I still love the Rose, it's very old-school dive-y dyke bar. Also in Seattle is the Cuff which is the leather bar but it's also where the queer two-stepping is and it's just like very friendly and nice and the best of leather bars, basically. My favorite gay bars all-together, currently, throughout time?

Tennenbaum: Yeah.

Reynolds: Great. I love gay bars. Twin Peaks in San Francisco, it's like a bear bar, it's the first gay bar with big windows in the front, in the country. So it's like very, when it was made it was very dangerous to do so because you could see in, and that's a particular kind of statement. The Lex—love/hate the Lex, but it's dead now, like so many dyke bars. I really loved the Hole when it was open here in New York. So the Hole closed in 2006 and it was a mixed queer bar—it was dirty and grungy and you could make out and do other things on these like nasty back corner couches. It always had a fun dance floor—we loved to complain about it because also it was a hot mess. It was the last real mixed queer bar you could go to—to be at a party, not just a party that was at somebody's house or one of those roaming queer parties or something like that. I really miss having a dedicated mixed queer place to go to. I love the Phoenix and Metropolitan and those bars and Ginger's—I love Ginger's a lot, like a lot (laughter.) I really love a dyke bar. For a while, I think it's changed or it's closed, it's in Nashville, so I think this is my first memory of being in a gay bar it's this gay bar called Changes that had a Country floor or a Country room and a RnB room and a Hip-hop room and then a gift shop where you buy like dazzled cowboy hats and I was like “What is this, this is amazing?!” In Seattle there used to be this bar called Timberline, which is where queer two-stepping used to be and here [NYC] queer two-stepping isn't in a bar it's usually at some like dance studio. In Philly queer two-stepping I think it moves around—oh no, it's at the Tavern on Camac—I love Tavern on Camac, it's like a gay piano bar like Murray's Crisis but neighborhood-y. And they have a pretty shitty small town bar dancefloor on the top. Oh and then Sweet on the Upper West Side, which is just like a neighborhood gay bar.

Tennenbaum: So, were the bars with the queer two-stepping, was that also engorged in the movement of bodies?

Reynolds: Yeah, I didn't find that until I moved to New York. So I moved to New York in 2003 for graduate school and I don't remember when I found two-stepping, it must have been like 2007, 2008 or something like that. Queer two-stepping happens in most of the large cities and I think it's amazing because it's like social dancing and but it's not like contra dancing where you change all the time. It's just like you have a partner for a dance and then you go on. There's also like line dancing that happens too. But it's like very multigenerational, it's one of the few places that I interact with older queers. It tends to be pretty gay men centric, but there's always some older dykes kicking around. It is one of the few places I've been able to access other people, other queers who grew up poor working class, which I find extraordinarily difficult to find especially in New York City. So that's very important. And also queers who love country music are very, very important to me. I grew up listening to country and the more I'm in New York City and the more it's clear to me I'm just staying here, this is where I feel at home and where I can be my best self, that also finding the things that make me me from my childhood.
and where I'm from and integrating that into my New York self is really important just for my own sense of wholeness, I guess. So queer two-stepping is one thing that does that. And also there's this party, Queer Country Monthly that my friend Karen puts on that is awesome in just a way for a lot of queers and trans people who grew up in country-loving places, to come together and be with music we love. The thing I love about two-stepping is that there's a social ethic that you don't say no to someone who's inviting you to dance unless there's a really good reason not to dance with them, you already said yes to someone else, you really need a break—something like that. But you don't say no just because you're like “No, I don't want to dance with you.” So there's like none of that scene-y-ness that happens in other kinds of queer places. And also no one will ever non-consensually like do anything with you as you're dancing. There are social norms about if you're leading and following, but you get to choose which one of those you do, because it's like queer, so not gendered in any kind of way. And it's beautiful, and it can be as sexy or not sexy as you want it to be. And I think that's really great to be able to engage in that kind of dancing, when so much of queer dancing gets so sexualized so quickly and that is fun, obviously, that is fun and awesome but sometimes it's nice to go out dancing and be like there is some scripted-ness about how much space is between you and another person. And that space is not about absence of connection, it's real productive space, like in music rests are not the absence of sound, rests are there sort like holders for making energy and sound go together. We can't make sense of anything if we don't have rests, if we don't have space between things.

**Tennenbaum:** So again today, where are the places to go queer two-stepping in New York?

**Reynolds:** Big Apple Ranch is where you go today but it is on hiatus because they just moved and I think they're figuring out where they're going to go again and I think they're going to start up in September. I always want the Queer Country Monthly stuff to have two-stepping lessons so that people could be learning more. Because I think that people are often just watching the bands but don't necessarily know how to dance to the music. There can always be more two-stepping.

**Tennenbaum:** Moving back to college, where you the first in your family to go to college?

**Reynolds:** I was, yeah.

**Tennenbaum:** Can you talk about what that was like, what kind of support did you have, and what support did you find or what community did you find at college?

**Reynolds:** So I was the first in my family to go to college. I think that my aunt went to college but I don't really have any memory of that and she was also the first of her nuclear family to go to college. I went to a pretty good public high school and so our guidance counselors were thinking about college with us when they were advising us. They would tell us very clearly when we were choosing courses that if you're planning on going to college you need to do XY and Z things so that you can meet the admissions requirements. So I'm very grateful to have been at a high school where that was true, where the guidance counselors were thinking about that. That said people in Spokane don't really leave Spokane, unless they join the military or become
missionaries. So there's not a lot of extravagant thinking about what college could mean. So I remember clearly I was a musician throughout high school, and played clarinet throughout concert band and youth orchestras in Spokane, and I really wanted to go to conservatory for a long time, so I wanted to go to Oberlin and become a concert clarinetist, and I told my guidance counselor this and he was like “Why would you want to go to college in the middle of Ohio, there's nothing there?” And I'm like, “It's Oberlin, I don't understand what you're saying.” I don't even know how I knew what Oberlin was, other than out of my own sort of desperation to get out of Spokane, I had been researching things madly, as far back as I can remember. I didn't even think about applying to Oberlin, really, because I felt very deterred by my guidance counselor. Then I ended up going to University of Washington because it was cheap and because I could imagine getting there, because I had a lot of support in applying to state based schools from my high school. My guidance counselor knew how the financial aid situation worked for state schools, because that was imperative—no one in my family knew what was going on in that world and how to make it work. My most immediate need was to get out of Spokane. I’m pretty glad that I went to University of Washington, although I needed to transfer, I’m glad also that I transferred. My family continues to not—I’m estranged from my mother and my dad and I loosely communicate. They don’t really understand what I’m doing with my life, at all or why. And that is partially related to going to college and then going to graduate school and then going to graduate school again. I'm much removed from my family's experience. moving to New York at all is a huge change. No one moves this far away from home in my family. Both on my mom's side and my dad's side. I didn't have much support at all. My aunt went to college but she didn’t talk to me about what that was like and she moved away, she was out of my picture basically. None of her parents, my grandparents, didn’t really understand anything about that system or anything either. When I decided to go to college my grandpa was like, “you should just for sure just join the army, because they'll pay for everything.” And we had fights for years because I was just like, “Grandpa, I'm not going to join the army, that’s just not going to happen.” So on my dad's side we support you and we love you and we want what's going to make you happy, but in terms of functioning of everything they don't understand what's going on. So I got through college mostly from support of scholarships from the United Methodist church and this organization called the Fund for Theological Education and the Third Wave Foundation because they were doing individual scholarships then. I didn't know, I think it's only now, many years, I graduated in 2003, so this far out, and having had a couple of jobs where i was doing like, so I was a case manager for many years I've had a few jobs of life skills education with adolescents and young adults around employment and education. In doing that, I’ve been able to see, “Oh, I really had very little support in terms of making systems work end of going through college. I really put together what I could put together and hoped for the best and hoped that everybody was just like being honest about everything. I remember very clearly when I got out of, so I moved to New York to go to Union Theological Seminary, which is where I got a masters of philosophy of religion. I was there from 2003 —2005. I was no longer Christian when I went there and I went there largely to see if I wanted to be an academic, and most importantly because I knew I wanted to move to New York. It gave me financial resources to be able to move to New York. I got a full scholarship for tuition there. It wasn't until I graduated from Union and was looking for jobs and all I could find were crappy secretary jobs, that I realized that most of what I was supposed to be doing in both college and graduate school was networking, that I had no way to tell that because the message
I had been getting since I was a child is that if you go to college you'll be able to get a good job. But what nobody every tells you is that the main thing you're supposed to be doing is building your networks, building your connections and utilizing those connections so that you can get a good job. It's not actually a college at all, nobody cares how much you know or how good your grades are, what your degrees are in, those are not important things. It's really all about your connections and how you make use of them. So I found it very hard to figure that out the hard way and I think it's the thing that I wished most, that I had somebody to tell me about. It's also the thing I tell people the most when I'm in these jobs doing life-skills education work because it is the most obscure thing about college.

**Tennenbaum:** When you have networked, have you found queer transness to play into your decisions of who you network, who you disclose—

**Reynolds:** Yeah, I find networking to be extremely hard because I think it is—all the class stuff comes out and I don't understand who I'm supposed to be talking to and how, and for what purpose. I feel very protective about who I talk to generally. Basically I only want to talk to other queer and trans people, ever. That's not particularly useful in networking because we're not usually the people in positions to be giving people jobs or making those kinds of connections. And I don't—being out is very important to me but I'm way more out about my queerness than I am about my transness since certainly professionally and my in my closest professional circle, so at the rabbinical school I go to, in my professional associations and training programs, I'm much more apt to be out in those environments, because I built relationships and its easier for me to do the relational building work that helps non-trans people who don't have any prior context for working with trans people and being in relationship with trans people to sort of get on board with me as a person. So that I can work with them to not be transphobic. Then when it comes to my professional life in terms of where I'm working and how I'm not that out at all. So people default to calling me she and her because I present as a femme person, and I'm comfortable in my body in the way that I'm presenting, but I basically, I'm not interested in rocking the boat professionally. And so I'm content to let however people gender me happen because it's not actualy live in a world where the kind of gender I have is recognizable to many people. I've found for sure that even in trans community my gender can be difficult for some trans people so how can I expect non-trans people who don't have much context at all are going to be very understanding of where I'm at. That causes me some worry and some stress because it is hard to not be totally yourself and also i think it allows me to be in a place where I can work with committees to learn more about gender and about the world in a way that's not necessarily pushing an agenda or is about me so I don't put myself in the middle of all of the questions about trans inclusion.

**Tennenbaum:** Are there any specific things you do while at work to deal with the constant misgendering?

**Reynolds:** No, I try not to pay attention to it mostly. It feels like—because I've chosen to have that be my strategy and because most of how I think about pronouns is that they are a strategy, like my pronouns don't indicate anything about how I identify and I don't look to sort of like reapply or project my identity, I think I look at them as a strategy for moving about the world
because we live in a very gendered world and its gendered in ways that I have little control over. So because I'm thinking about pronouns in that strategic way it's easier for me to see I'm engaging in my professional spheres in this way, because it is safer for me, because it helps me get jobs, because it helps me to be intelligible to other people with whom I work, and my job is that I'm a Rabbi or I'm a Chaplain and that's extremely relational and I don't want to be talking about my own personal identity so much because I want to be able to be in the actuality of the relationship. That just feels way more important to me, to be able to be in the immediacy of the relationships that exist. Sometimes it is exhausting because I want to be able to be my full self at the table, but I would rather not have the constant fights over what my pronouns are or have to—the disappointment that happens when I say my pronouns are they and them and then to have people not use them because they're not used to using them, or they disagree with the grammar or whatever else, it's far more upsetting to me to deal with that than it is to just have people pronoun me however they're going to pronounce me and then go on with my life. I would rather not have those fights.

**Tennenbaum**: You mentioned that when you moved to New York in 2003 to get your Masters in Philosophy of Religion, you were no longer a Christian. Can you talk about how that came about?

**Reynolds**: Yeah, I studied theology and religious studies and women's studies in college and in the midst of all of that—and I was in this ordination process in the United Methodist Church. In my ordination process in the church, I was doing two primary things: one is that I didn't so much believe in Jesus in the Jesus-is-my-savior way, so I was working a lot with my mentor about what I could and could not say theologically, that was keeping with the tradition and there's like an articulation of faith that you need to be able to say to be able to be ordained, so we were having a lot of conversations about different things that people mean about Jesus when they're answering these questions. At the same time, I was coming to grips with the reality that the Methodist Church might not ever change. That piece of polity, that self-avowed practicing homosexuals cannot be ordained or appointed to serve. So I had this very clear reckoning how do I—how am I going to justify doing all of these theological gymnastics to stay in a church that fundamentally doesn't want me. That maybe wants me as a person, but does not want me in the totality of who I am. Ultimately, I decided that it was not worth it to stay, that I was having to work too hard to stay for people who did not want me. What I articulated to my community was that it was mostly about the homophobia piece, that I was leaving because I didn't want to be fighting about who I am anymore. I don't need to justify who I am and there's nothing wrong with who I am. The background piece, theologically was that I was increasingly at odds with my ability to stay in Christianity all together because of the frizzling of my sort of theological ideas around Jesus—that I kept in the background a little bit more and then it was about a year after I left my ordination process that I left Christianity all together. I was in college then, and so I used my last year in college to start researching humanistic approaches to religion. So I could find other ways of sort of engaging theologically. That's part of what brought me to Union as well, I wanted to figure out if there was a way to reshape Christianity so that it was more humanistic so that it wasn't relying on this one figure to save humanity but that I could talk about ways that we save ourselves and each other. It's all of that research that led me to Judaism. In the midst of all of that early research that I was doing in
I found the writings of Mordecai Kaplan who's the guy now called *Reconstructionist Judaism*—he was a conservative Rabbi then. He was doing this work in the 50s—I guess he was not a conservative Rabbi, he's just a Rabbi, but working out of Jewish theological seminary. So I found these sort of seminal writings and Reconstructionist Judaism and then I put it all on hold for about ten years before I converted to Judaism. During that time, I both was building a lot of Jewish community and was having angry time at religion which makes sense giving the sort of like dealing with homophobia. It took me a long time to be able to be mad at United Methodism in particular, because Methodism was my church was what made my childhood livable so it felt extremely dangerous to let go of it because I didn't know what else would keep me afloat. I didn't really let myself question belief in God stuff until the last couple of years though. I think after I established myself in Judaism and started my—so I'm pursuing ordination as a Rabbi now in rabbinical school. In Judaism it doesn't so much matter if you believe in God or how and so it's much easier to establish yourself within religious community and within religious work. Then whatever happens about your own theology about your own spirituality it's up to you, your relationship with the Divine, however you want to call it.

**Tennenbaum:** When did you first transition and come out as trans?

**Reynolds:** So I started identifying as genderqueer when I was in college in 2002, 2003. That was like a pretty gender queerness in those years was pretty transphobic and militant in the you don't need to change your body you can be whatever you identify as without doing anything to your body. So I was in that camp for a while. When I moved to New York, I started to get involved in trans organizing through Silvia Rivera Law Project and building more trans community there. And in that time I was able—and through different things, other trans community that I was a part of, I was able to see the transphobia of my early gender queerness and what lie beneath that was real need for medical body modification. I didn't do that for a long time. I transitioned—I first identified myself as trans in 2004, I think, and then sometime after that I went on T—I was on T for over five years. I had top surgery; having top surgery, I think was the most important part of sort of like a medicalized transition that I had. Both because in Washington you can change your birth certificate if you have any gender confirming procedure, it doesn't matter what kind of gender confirming procedure. After I had top surgery, I was able to change my birth certificate and that helped me to know that I didn't want to do that, it was one of the first things that helped me think “Oh, my gender isn't actually stable” in the way that someone’s gender is stable. I can anticipate having multiple transitions and I don't want to do an administrative process that will make my life harder than it already is in terms of trans administrative life. So that was very interesting to me, to be like, “Oh I fought so hard for this surgery and I thought up until that time that I had a pretty stable gender identity as a transman as a trans fag and then to sort of be in the place of, “Oh, maybe it’s actually not where I’m at.” And then I started a second, third transitions? Whatever, how many I’ve been [inaudible]. I stopped being a transman in 2010. I identified as genderqueer for a while and sort of had a very androgynous presentation for a long time. Then at some point in there I started identifying as femme. I've gone on and off about femme identity through all my genders. I think that in one way there was like a very pragmatic thing, it was Summer in New York and I just couldn’t handle my pants anymore so I guess I'm going to be a skirt-person now? I don't know what that means about my gender, but I'm not wearing pants [laughter]. It just opened up a
whole new world of how I want to, like what I feel hot in. I think in this later approach to gender that I'm having now, it's much more focused in what do I feel hot in? What makes me feel good to be in and like what do I desire wearing, what makes me feel desirable when I wear it? And that's an approach to gender that I hadn't had ever in my life, but it feels very opening to me and fun and playful and I think honest, that the stuff about gender being gender, pronouns being strategy, like gender feels like a strategy all together. Only having it be in that sort of like sterile world of strategy—with bodies, we're not just even having bodies, we are bodies, we're not just like ideas with things, we suit up in different ways. We are bodies, we are embodied, our sexualities are embodied, our identities are embodied. I think as I do more of my own trauma healing and more of my own understanding of what makes me feel good and what helps me be in my body in new ways but I KNOW also equally that I'm only able to inhabit the body that I'm inhabiting in the way that I am right now, because I had top surgery. If I still had to deal with what I had before, I could not dress how I dress now. I think it would cause too much dysphoria for me.

**Tennenbaum:** When you stopped identifying as a transman, did you have any models to look to who had done similar things?

**Reynolds:** No. And I only know two other, three other people who have had similar kinds of experiences and we talk sometimes about it but not often. I find it to be very hard to find people who will talk openly about experiences of multiple transitions because it's really—you know there's that narrative that's kicking around about trans people, that we don't know what we're doing or it's just a phase, you'll grow out of it, whatever. In some very real way the experience of people like me, proves that transphobic narrative right. Like it shows that some of us do change, right? That is tricky because all of the standards of care about medicalized transitioning are about making sure you don't do something you're going to regret later. The reality is nobody knows what they're going to want throughout their lives and how much a person needs and wants a thing in a moment doesn't mean so very much about what they're going need and want twenty years from now and we are taught that we need to make up our mind about what our gender is and about what we want for our body and what we need for our body to look like and that it needs to be done in some sort of conformity to heteronormative and transphobic understanding of what our bodies are like and what we're supposed to want from our bodies. So it's hard to find people who are willing to talk about trans experience that flies in the face in that because it throws so much of those narratives off and so much of what we have to engage in order to get the kinds of medicalized transitions that we want, requires us to step into the narrative that's sort of demanded by us by sort of non-trans practitioners.

**Tennenbaum:** Have you gotten any blowback from trans community you’re in about multiple transitions? What's it like talking about it?

**Reynolds:** Yeah, I mean, I have people say flat out that I re-transitioned or that I went back to being a woman, I gave up on being trans. That's very hurtful. It's very hurtful. I also understand it, the stakes are really high in trans community always; I can have compassion for where it's coming from, but I just wish all the time that people could be as—we can talk a good game about what it means to be playful about gender. But I find the trans community is pretty
normative about who gets to play with gender and how and that's often about masculine-centered people being able to take up a lot of space about their gender play and it doesn't work out so well for trans femme people all the time. That same kind of space isn't allowed or it doesn't have the same cultural capital or cultural currency, it isn't understood in the same ways at all. For sure for people who have multiple transitions, it's just like there's so little language to talk about it. People are so touchy about asking questions about it, and it makes it hard to be intelligible. And so for a long time I didn't even—it was only with very close friends, often with close friends who are also trans identified that I would be very, "I'm still trans, I'm still trans." I think in the last few years it's become more and more important to me that I'm surrounding myself dominantly with trans people who also have no questions about my transness. That feels better. But it's hard.

**Tennenbaum:** Can you talk to me about what—you said that when you first went to undergrad college is where you identified with genderqueer for the first time. And the messaging was pretty transphobic, do you know where the ideas of genderqueer were coming from and how they were circulating?

**Reynolds:** Yeah, I think at that time they were primarily coming out of masculine-of-center communities interacting with lesbian separatist communities or like coming out of lesbian culture which is very separatist. So all the shit around Mich Fest [Michigan Women's Music Festival] was happening at that same time. That's where a lot of energy about genderqueerness was coming from, was people coming out of dyke culture. So it's not super surprising, it's very much like you don't need to cut off your boobs, that was the strain of it. In some real ways, it was like "you can still be a woman and do all of these other things, but really you're still a woman." [laughter]

**Tennenbaum:** With SRLP [Silvia Rivera Law Project] and finding trans community there, that liberated some of these ideas?

**Reynolds:** Absolutely, and that my trans world got bigger than just masculine-of-center people, that I could see lots of different ways of being trans. That there were people in my life suddenly who were doing medical conditions. And I was like, "Oh, you can control things. You can make your period stop, you can make your boobs go away. You can tuck, you can do all of these things to make your body conform more to the way you need it to. I mean the interesting thing for me on this side, I was on T for more than five years and facial hair growth is not reversible. So I'm having an experience of having to learn many things about how to alter my body in response to what secondary sex characteristics as a result of hormones. So like learning about laser, learning about how to access laser, learning about how to deal with your vocal pitch, because once your vocal chords thicken and your voice drops there's no going back. So anything you want to do with it is all about voice coaching. I'm in many ways very grateful to have those experiences, to be like what are the not passing strategies but what are the things that I want to do with my body to make my body do what I need it to do, to be in the world that feels like I can manage? Being in the world. Yeah.
Tennenbaum: Are you up to talking about what you experience has been accessing those types of medical services? And what has been the understanding around multiple transitions?

Reynolds: So I've gone to two queer specific clinics, both of which I've had a hard time at in terms of having my gender identity honored by the majority of medical staff. So I've definitely had the experience of being mis-pronounced and unnamed by medical providers and medical staff at queer clinics. That was not my favorite way to access healthcare, but I was also uninsured and a poor person so there's no other options, really. That's how I started T was by those clinics.

Tennenbaum: Are you comfortable naming those clinics?

Reynolds: No. And I also was able to go to a private doctor who provided trans care and was provided trans care for a long time, and he was the doctor I was seeing when I stopped taking T. I loved him, he was very smart and very good. Including that when I decided, he had a much more harm-reductionist approach to medical care all together, including trans specific care. And so when I talked about perhaps wanting to not be on T anymore, he's like, “Well have you thought about just using a little when you want to?” Which of course I had thought about but did not think I could talk about openly. Because when I started T, I wanted to be on a low dose and was very much talked into being on higher doses from my providers so I could achieve maximal results or whatever because of what I was supposed to be doing. Even though a lot of people were taking low doses at that time. And people still take low doses of their hormone of choice, because they want to try things or they only want some stuff, or whatever. Lots of reasons people take low doses. Yeah, so that is some of my experience. I found surgery pretty—I mean the primary way of accessing surgery was financial and I was really only able to access surgery because I got hit by a car and won a lawsuit, which provided about half of the income and then a friend very graciously helped me out with the rest of it. So that felt like a miracle, and I did not ever anticipate being able to access gender confirming surgery, ever, but it has made all of the difference for me. And now I don't have a doctor, I don't really have medical care, I find it hard to think about going to the doctor. I don't exactly know where I would go. It's true and untrue, I've worked in trans clinic and LGBT health services in New York, I have a pretty good sense of who is providing care and where. But the sort of emotional reality about accessing care for me just feels like a giant [inaudible] because it's hard to find providers you can really trust who actually understand your gender, it's hard to find trans-affirming providers much more trans-affirming providers who understand my kind of transness. That just feels like a one and a million kind of thing and really I would want to do is see a—I have friends who are providers now but I don't know how much I want to see a friend as my provider. But those are the ones who are most prepared to actually provide me the kind of care I need.

Tennenbaum: When you were going through grad school in New York City, how were you supporting yourself financially, as a poor student?

Reynolds: Now?

Tennenbaum: I guess when you first got here, until now.
**Reynolds:** Great. So I when I was in grad school before at Union, I luckily got a full tuition scholarship and I took out loans stupidly, to cover most of my living expenses but I worked at the library. That was the time of my life that I worked the least in, I only had one job, which I've never since only had one job and that was a part time job. After that I worked a string of crappy jobs. Then I got into direct services work and sort of professional—paraprofessional social work, so without a degree but still case management and things like that. So for a long time until I went to Rabbinical school. Now in Rabbinical school, I work multiple jobs, again and I do a mix of Rabbinic leadership in communities, I do some community organizing, some education, and some chaplaincy. So lots of hands in lots of pots.

**Tennenbaum:** Can you talk to me about your time as a case manager with Callen-Lorde?

**Reynolds:** Yeah, it was really—so I was the first person in that position and I worked there for four years as a transgender case manager and I loved it. I loved it a lot. I love being a trans person working only with trans people, the most. It was really both beautiful and heart breaking to be able to be part of people's—the things that people came to me for ranged from can you help me with these medical transition things, like working with insurance and things like that. Things were then in a much different place than they were now, so it was much harder to get things to go through insurance, it was like very early in that universe of things. So I didn't always get to feel very productive or useful and much more like a gatekeeper which was not the most exciting feeling. A whole stream of other things that amounted to be an advocate with people in the different city and state systems that they're working in. A lot of negotiating with HRA [Health Reimbursement Arrangement] with Medicaid and Social Security Administration and the different ways that transphobia props up a lot of legal referrals. And a lot also of pastoral care, about the emotional experience of being trans, of coming out, about isolation, about violence, the many ways violence comes out. About isolation, where do I meet people, it's so hard to meet people, especially if people are not wanting to meet other queer and trans communities through like bar culture which is so dominant. A lot of outright religious questions like how do I do I find a church that's going to welcome me, I just got kicked out for being trans, how do I talk to my grandma about x, y, z or my mom or my dad, so see if I cannot be homeless anymore? Lots of those kinds of things. I found it to be the best case management job I had in part because case management so often is—you're tasked to do this one thing with this one program, so you do the paperwork for this one program, you do the intervention for that in that way whatever is set, but there's no programs who are making up and so it was just very much about figuring out what people needed and what there was to help with it. Yeah.

**Tennenbaum:** Are there any specific moments you can remember where your relationship to multiple spiritualties and religions played a big role in case management?

**Reynolds:** Yeah. People would—this didn’t happen with all people, once people realize that I could talk about religion if that was a thing that they wanted to talk about, they would go in heart for it. And often ask me very direct questions about how is it that I knew all of these things that I knew about Christianity if I wasn't Christian, if I was Jewish. That was always very interesting to be in the middle of but because trans people also often, trans people understand
transitioning, not necessarily multiple transitions of gender, but for sure understand the principle of something is not right and I need to figure out how to make it right and so I'm going to figure out that's a portable life skill understand how to make a change towards something that is life giving. And so people would often just be very interested in how I got from point A to point B. I found it very exciting to get to talk about, I didn't often bring it up because it wasn't about me.

Tennenbaum: So, I imagine since when you first learned about genderqueer, to now in 2017 identifying as gender variant, what changes have you seen in gender variance gender queerness, understandings of it, nonbinary?

Reynolds: Yeah. I think the most notable is in the last—I guess I would say maybe 5 to 10 years, but it seems much more recent than that, that there's been a lot more transfeminine spectrum people both identifying themselves and on the flip being identified by other people as gender variant, as nonbinary and genderqueer. And that has been phenomenal to watch happen, exciting to get to be part of happening, because I think that part of what has made that shift happen, in addition to people self-identifying publicly and forcefully in that publicness, is people who are not transfeminine, gender variant identified people forcing the shift in culture by articulating the trans misogyny and how it plays out by naming out the privilege of masculine-of-center gender variant experience and how that's rooted in trans misogyny in so many ways. It's kind of exciting to get to be part of sort of like shaping the trans community that we need, that I certainly need, to have happen. And on the converse, I'm not a transfeminine spectrum person and my identity and experience and sort of like trans presentation is for sure more recognizable in trans community because of the proliferation of gender variant transfemme identities and experiences and people. Because if the only thing that exists in terms of what is understood as genderqueer and nonbinary and gender variant is this androgynous masculine-of-center thing, then there's no space really for femme presenting people to be understood as nonbinary.

Tennenbaum: Do you have any daily safety concerns or practices to deal with that, and how does that look across different gender presentations?

Reynolds: I would say in terms of my daily safety concerns related to my trans experience, that was most heightened when I was presenting as a trans man and as a transfag, so very fay and I passed as a man but very feminine. And so that was the time that I felt most dangerous to sort of be out and about in the world as a trans person. I did not have an experience of being targeted, just sort of like run of the mill harassment kinds of things, but not physical assaults. I would say that my day-to-day now is sort of like run of the mill harassment that anybody that's being identified worldly as a woman would experience, so cat calls, like leers, those kinds of things, again not much in the physical harassment, like physical violence kind of way. Thank God I've never experienced that. Yeah. I would say that I do live with it as a sort of persistent fear in my life, that sort of regardless of how I'm experiencing it on the day-to-day the potential that if somebody finds out that I'm trans that I could experience heightened violence because of that, that feels very real in my head.
Tennenbaum: Going back on a different path, do you have any goals I suppose, going through this ordination process in Rabbinical school?

Reynolds: Related to my transness or just sort of generally?

Tennenbaum: Not necessarily, just general goals.

Reynolds: Yeah, I want to be a chaplain, I want to work in hospitals specifically, I really love pastoral care. I really like being able to accompany people when they are facing I guess facing their mortality head on and more important the most basic job of a chaplain is to be a person with people and to lift up humanity. Often in the face of systems that are dehumanizing. Medical assistance can be dehumanizing, we find chaplains in other environments like in prisons and in colleges and all kinds of places. So being able to be a person whose job it is in the world to lift up humanity, so that it can be as divine as we are, feels like a real gift to be able to do. Chaplains also have a pretty unique role in that we can be advocates within systems, so as a chaplain I could advocate for trans patients for example and that feels for sure connected to why I want to be a chaplain, that I want to be in a place to utilize my place in a system to help people access what it is they need to access. That understanding the lifting up humanity is about an emotional process or spiritual process but it is also it's the same sort of like strategy embodiment, spiritual-emotional needs things that I was talking about my own self and self-conceptualization, like we can only do those things insofar of our actual life needs, our physical needs or being. So the strategy piece of something's going wrong, who can help me do it? Chaplains have a huge role to play there.

Tennenbaum: And that advocate role that's a legal standing within systems?

Reynolds: Not so much legal, it's just a role, yeah. So chaplains are part of care teams and so something is going wrong we can figure out who we should be working with best to address it. And if it's a systems issue in a hospital or clinic or something like that, we can take it on as a systems issue.

Tennenbaum: Are these, this attention to this kind of care and building support teams, are these lessons you learned from childhood in the church community you had there?

Reynolds: I think in the way that I used my church community. So in the way that's like—I did not know, so I went to church because a friend asked me if I wanted to go to church. And all my friends did that in sort of a relentless way and at some point I said yes and I think what I realized was that there were a lot of people there and that my friend was getting a lot of love from people who were not just her parents and that was extremely appealing to me. What I learned from the Methodist Church, was that there were systems to help me. So they have a board of education, they have—actually, I went to a food pantry that was housed in the church that I went to before I became a member of the church, so there were some real ways that the church community itself was providing for my needs, where they weren't being met otherwise. And so that made me think for a long time that I wanted to be a congregational leader and I do love congregational leadership, but I think I most feel powerful in roles like the chaplain role, I like
to have the healer role mixed. So I think there's a piece that's about much more the sort of advocate care team draw, that's a piece that I learned not from the church but from being in queer community. That we need to love and protect each other that we need to advocate for each other, that very often we're the ones who knows what we're actually facing and we have the principle that you never go to the doctor alone, you never go to hospital alone. Those are all things that draw me further into wanting to work in healthcare. That very often people do end up working in, accessing care in those systems alone and it is important to have people who know sort of the full extent of what could be faced by any given trans or queer patient.

**Tennenbaum:** One connection I've noticed that I imagine these support teams, they tend, I imagine there's some intergenerational spread and that kind of intergenerational connection you also flagged as being an important part of queer two-stepping. What's important to you about having those kinds of connections?

**Reynolds:** Right. Yeah. I think it can be very easy to feel like we're making everything up for the first time and often our language in queer community and trans community is that's exactly what's happening. But it's never before been like this, nothing like this, we're the first people to ask for this, to demand this, and it's both true and not true that there have always been queer and trans people kicking around and there have been different abilities and different generations to take on the systems that we're working in and the realities of the cultural life that is being lead. And we have much to learn from the generations that have come before us and what it means to live in our world, and our current world becomes more and more fascist we have very specific lessons to learn from trans and queer elders who have actually lived through fascism about what it is to move through a daily life. And on top of just general honor our elders, we're only able to have the robust queer an trans proliferation that we have now because of the intense of the generations that have come passed, like both Stonewall and before.

**Tennenbaum:** One of my last questions is a bit of a selfish ask on my part.

**Reynolds:** Cool.

**Tennenbaum:** Do you have any words for or any messages for any genderqueers who are feeling uneasy about or have been like constantly waffling between what kind of medical transitions to seek out and how to even talk about it with uncertainty but still desire?

**Reynolds:** I think that the narrative that you have to be certain about something is false and its constructed. So you can only be as certain as you are in a given time and I think forcing yourself to come to terms with what happens if I decide to do this and then I don't want it in the future, how am I going to deal with having done something to my body that might be reversible and might not be reversible. Deal with those questions head on, and very really much of what we're doing, especially as gender variant people when it comes to body modifications is a little bit like flinging ourselves off a cliff, like is this thing going to work? Is this a parachute? Maybe not. It's not as desperate as flinging ourselves off a cliff, obviously, but there's like a flinging into the unknown, that's the thing I'm trying to convey. That is real and everybody is
demanding of us, that we have certainty, that there is no unknown. But there's a huge unknown, like you don't know how you're going to feel in your body after x thing, no trans person knows how they're going to feel in their body after x thing. Right, there's a tremendous hope, there's a tremendous build up, there's a tremendous we put all of our eggs in one basket. Like I remember so clearly that “T is going to be the thing that fixes it.” It was not the thing that fixed it. There's no reason to think that T is going to be the thing that fixes it, it eased some things but didn't ease all things. I had no idea that top surgery was going to be as relieving as it was because I didn’t let myself imagine it for so long. Because it was just like so far out of reach. So I think there's a thing that's like dream big, really imagine every possible thing see what you keep on coming back to, what becomes sort of an obsession, not in a negative way necessarily, but what's repetitive, what do you fantasy about, what's the body of your dreams like. Is there any way to make your body now the body of your dreams? And to be directed by that, and I think to know really too that we have to engage in the systems as they are and all of those systems require certain kinds of games and that is true about medical care for trans people as much as it is about other medical care for non-trans people. It's the same thing for accessing jobs, for accessing school, for getting on the bus. We play games all the time and they are just games. So figure out how to play the games on your terms. Be the driver, right, that so much about our world tells us that we are not the drivers of our destiny of our own bodies, of the games we're playing, but you're the driver, you're the only one who can drive.

**Tennenbaum:** You mentioned that now you feel that a lot of your gender feels are around hotness and desirability both like for what you feel good in and where you feel sexy. How do you balance, if you do, beauty standards and gender?

**Reynolds:** Right, totally. This is like a perennial challenge. School is not a great environment for self-care or exercise so like I weigh more have in some time and I'm having some challenges about that that are entirely about being socialized as girl and what the beauty standards are for people who are read as women in the world. And because so much of queer culture, especially in Brooklyn, there's so much around thinness and it is so intense. I just have never been a very thin person, that's not a thing my body does. Sort of combating my own, I think there's a real thing about figuring out myself of what the body dysphoria I experience, what of that is about gender and what of it is about other kinds of body dysphoria, that are not necessarily rooted in gender, but are about size shit and other things about what our bodies are supposed to be like. Which obviously is gendered but the thinness thing is not just about gender—it's like a prevailing cultural ethos in this world that I'm living in. And today I was doing yoga for the first time in a long time and I was doing it on YogaGlo or something and the teacher just kept on being like, “We are very often doing yoga practices for the purpose of what it's going to get us to. So I'm going to do this pose right now in this way because it will help me to be better in this other pose later, right?” And he was sort of like saying just be in the body you're in right now, all you can do is be in the body you're in right now. And not in some aspirational body of what will your body be like if you exercise every day or you do yoga—like all you can do is be in the body you're in right now. I hear stuff like that pretty regularly and for whatever reason today it caught me and I was like, “Oh right, be in the body I'm in right now, that's literally all I can do.” And so like if I'm never able to exercise as much as I want to because my job demands are so high and I'm so tired at the end of the day but all I want to do is watch
television, that's the body I'm in right now and I'll have to deal with whatever the ramifications are. Harm-reduction is a really good tool. We make decisions and we have to understand what the array is and what the possible likings and losses are from our decisions. So I think there's a piece about it all that's about understanding the different pieces that make up where the separation is for me, like how is it that I don't feel hot and where are those messages coming from telling me that I'm not hot, is that like my 13-year-old-self shouting at me from some message I'm getting from middle school, right, probably. That happens constantly. [laughter] Is it my current 38-year-old-self telling myself repeating back bad messages at myself because I'm being self-hating in a moment, probably also. There's probably also some version of my 22-year-old self who was very active and had a different kind of body but also at that point I was a masculine spectrum trans person and I had a particular kind of social currency and that was a different part of my life. So just recognizing I guess the social and cultural pieces and my own history pieces that are part of feelings of hotness and then more and more I think it's more that be in the body you're at right now like whatever the noise is, it's just noise. And like we have we can just it's not as simple as this but in some ways I think it might be sometimes like we can just decide no today I'm going to feel hot, yes all of this noise exists and I can just put it away some where like pack it up in a box and choose to just feel hot. Choose clothes that help me feel that not let myself stay closed up because I feel down but make myself go out even if it feels bonkers to do that. I think that's a lot of how I'm approaching it now, I think really the best we can do is be our best selves and put ourselves out in the world and hope that it will land and it will work for ourselves at least.

**Tennenbaum:** Can you talk to me about if you have any history with mental health and what kinds of roles that has played both in finding support and the challenges that you faced?

**Reynolds:** So I have for a long time I thought it was just anxiety and over the last couple of years an increasing clarity that I have PTSD and specifically complex PTSD from my childhood. That is a challenge to deal with on the everyday and also because there's more of a body of knowledge. So, complex PTSD. I've only been able to get a sense of what it is, I mean diagnostic criteria I think they matter in some ways and don't matter in some ways and the thing that matters to be is a n ability to name a set of experiences that other people who are not me also have so I don't feel as isolated in the world and also to be able to provide me with things to read and other people's strategies to learn from about how to be in this world. One thing that I feel lucky about is because people in queer and trans communities often face more violence than—maybe not more violence—we articulate violence pretty—there's a way that dealing with trauma is very part of being in queer community. I wouldn't say that so far as its expecting that everyone is expected to have traumatic experiences but queer providers and trans providers often have trauma informed theory. SO if my criteria for finding providers is already restricted to only other queer and trans people, which it is because I don't really want to be working with people who aren't queer, especially in mental health settings then I have like a greater chance of finding people who understand more about my experience more about my history more about what trauma means to me. So I feel sort of lucky in that way not to have had the traumatic experiences but to be in a world today to have so many queer providers who get to be out in their status as providers so I have more people to choose from in terms of accessing competent care. I'm lucky in that I don't need to go to a psychiatrist I think that if I was a person who
needed to access regular psychiatric services that I would feel much more challenge by ability to access competent care. Yeah. And I would say too that the every year for the last as many years as I can remember right now, more murders of trans women this year than last year than ever before, and I think that part of that is about reporting and how things are being reported more now than they used to be and part is about increase in violence and the there's an absolutely negative impact on me from the violence that happens in the world against trans people even though I am not a transwoman of color I'm not a directly targeted person but to be in community with and some shared identity like matrix with people who are targeted for violence because of identity and experience has an absolute impact on my mental health on the daily. So I feel very aware of that, not in that it re-traumatizes me because it's not that close to me, it's like close in that my community is impacted and I feel that impact way and yeah I think it's in the like stop killing my people way. the continual death toll has an impact.

Tennenbaum: At any point have you used substances to help manage the anxiety and fears?

Reynolds: I for sure have had periods where I drink far more want or need to because I'm managing and self-medicating in that way. I rarely use other drugs, it's only in the last couple of years that I've started to use other drugs, in part because I don't like losing control and my mother's side of the family has some alcoholism on it so I've been pretty careful about keeping track of myself and keeping track of my usage and why. But I think I am aware that I use alcohol both recreationally and medicinally. It makes me sometimes it makes me nervous and sometimes I'm just like this is the world I'm in. We all self-medicate in lots of different ways.

Tennenbaum: Have you found alcohol to be effective for you?

Reynolds: Yeah. I wish that I had started smoking pot earlier in my life so I would know things like how to access it. Those are just things I don't know about because I put it at bay until very late in my life, like very recently. I think it might, alcohol I've found to be I don't like to I never get like black out drunk or anything like that its mostly like I don't want to think so much I want to have fun, playing is hard for me. So mostly its things like I want to stop feeling sad I want to feel happy and playful.

Tennenbaum: Is this mostly in gay bars, some of the ones you were talking about?

Reynolds: Sometimes gay bars, sometimes by myself, sometimes like I had a really shitty day and I don't want to think about my day and I need to like think about cooking dinner, like anything other than my day. So in that way. Sometimes with friends. The play thing is stressful, actually, like not knowing how to play people really anticipate that playing is easy and like fun for everyone but i find it very stressful and it's hard for me to know when people are playing and not playing. So if I'm like hanging out with friends for a longer period of time I often want to have drinks to prevent that because I find it easier to socially manage then.

Tennenbaum: When you say play, are there any specific activities you have in mind?
Reynolds: I think it really—some of it is just goofing around is play, and jokes-play, spontaneous creativity, all of the realm of games that's like charades and make believe are play also other kinds of games are play but it's easier for me to play board games that have scripted rules and ways of engaging. Dancing is play for sure, I think that's part of why I like two stepping so much because again there are scripted ways of engaging. Yoga feels like play to me and there's a lot that's just about the unscripted or the unplanned social interactions where people anticipate or expect a lot of playfulness that I generally don't know how to deal with those kinds of things. I think partially I'm a more serious person and partially as a result of my history or whatever I take everything at face value so a lot of play turns on the edge of things aren't exactly as it seems and that feels often very confusing to me. In a way that increasingly I'm like I want to engage that I really want to unlock what's happening there and how it is you know how to do that and what makes that fun or like how do you know to make that joke. But it feels very obscure and unsettling and quick sand-ish to me. And a little bit like a slippery slope of how do you know when something goes from play to serious or when something goes from fun to dangerous.

Tennenbaum: Can you talk to me more about you said you've recently started using substances other than alcohol? You mentioned weed. Are there specific times when you like to use it and what kinds of thoughts or feelings happen after consumption?

Reynolds: I think when out with friends and afterwards, just a lot of inquisitiveness mostly. I think because I'm older than most people are when they start using things, I have a real like what's it like to use that thing what's it like to use that thing and then a little bit of like yeah I don't think I need to do that again. Because I learned a thing or I had an experience, yeah. A lot of inquisitiveness. It's interesting—I think partially what's interesting is the ways that different substances can be used to like—well they're interesting because they alter your mindset, they can be used to make things like play be a lot easier because you're just like turned off the parts of your brain that are interrupting your ability to do like for me whatever it is I think I should be doing that's play or not. So it doesn't feel as much like work as it feels like a mediated experience. And that's an interesting thing to me I'd like to have more unmediated experiences. but I think because of the world we live in, because I'm a survivor, because I'm a trans person, everything gets filtered through many levels of mediation before I get any real understanding of it. I have so many protective barriers around me and so it's hard to just have an interaction.

Tennenbaum: So to make sure I'm understanding—it's like certain substances change the filter set?

Reynolds: I guess so, or make me less aware of the filter set. Yeah. Or actively turn off the filter set. I haven't had a bad experience where I wake up and feel like “What the fuck?” So I don't know what that would be like. [laughter]

Tennenbaum: One of my last questions is what scenes would you say you're apart of now?

Reynolds: That's a good question. I don't know that I'm very successful of being part of scenes, I tend to be a person who has a lot of friends in different pockets. And I think I'm growing into
an adulthood where that feels okay. So I'm in Brooklyn queer scene, and in Jewish radical scene, but not like fully, I guess. I'm like—not-not. I move in and out of scenes, yeah. I like to put together my friends, like I like to go places that are fun. To build community with people that I like, and those are not always people they're often not people who are part of the same scenes.

**Tennenbaum:** Is there a notable party or event that you've been to recently that felt really good?

**Reynolds:** Well, Pride, I love, always. Especially Pride at Riis Beach. And the Dyke March. And Karen's Queer Country Event, there's was just one at Littlefield, that was awesome. And... I think those have been the big ones recently, I'm trying to think if there's something else, I don't think so. Yeah. Queer stuff. [laughter]

**Tennenbaum:** Is there anything else you can think of right now that you'd like to touch on or anything that you think is really important to be remembered in this interview?

**Reynolds:** [Long pause] Just that, there's something about like my core identities that I'm working class, trans, Jewish, and queer and there's something like missing in a lot of queer and trans communities about class analysis about what people can access immediately and also about our histories and a sort of larger class based analysis. And I think that hurts us because it separates us off from other queers who were raised poor and working class both in the current and in their past and also for all of the existing working class queers and trans people who are ferocious and awesome and leading their lives in both big cities and other places, facing a lot of different—like things we’re faced living in cities and also other things that are different because of different contexts. I think it's that class stuff that can anchor us to queer histories and resistance and really powerful ways of thinking about anti-Klan organizing in the South with like [inaudible] and generation of people and the people who I know who are more keyed into that part of queer history are other working class people other people who grew up working class. So I think I’m just feeling very keenly I guess, the piece about class and classism and how that shapes queer and trans community in terms of our understandings about what's happening today and how that's anchored to what's happened in the past and how that anchors again to what's possible in the future. Part of I think personally that helps us to build robust and intersectional communities that are committed to combatting racism and colonialism and islamophobia and antisemitism as they pop up in our world today in old and new ways both and I think one of the challenges of being trans is sort of the psychic impact of being trans sometimes leaves me, I know, with limited resources of attending all of the other stuff that's going on also in the world. I’m not sure we can afford to be wrapped up in our own experiences and exhaustions but it's hard to live in a city like New York where so many of the queer and trans people here are middle class and rich people and live lives that take for granted the economic burdens of being trans and living in the city. I think I want to talk about that here because I think we need to talk about that more in our communities all together. There are a lot of working class people kicking around and we can't take class experience for granted as we’re building up our visions of liberation and what liberatedness is.
**Tennenbaum:** In the Brooklyn queer scene, the parts that you touch into to, where do you feel very comfortable, and celebrated and appreciated as a working class person and what parts feel alienating or worse?

**Reynolds:** I don’t know that there’s any one place that I actually feel full and celebrated as a working class person, I think part of what I value so much about Queer Country Monthly is that there I know there are other people who grew up working class and so I don’t feel as alien although I don’t think that it is a self-consciously building a multi class experience. I am part of some communities that are starting to do some strategizing and thinking and mobilizing around the experience who were raised poor and working class and I’m part of that work but it is still often in relation a social and political scene that is very wealthy and that assumes wealth. And so much of my New York life is made up of people who have middle class at least and that feels very challenging to be so isolated. I think that’s also the answer to the question about why elders are so important to me. When I’m interacting to elders I have far more access to people who grew up working class.

**Tennenbaum:** I think that’s it for my questions.

**Reynolds:** Great.

**Tennenbaum:** Do you have any final words I suppose?

**Reynolds:** Yeah, I’m so glad that this happened, thank you so much. It is a joy.

**Tennenbaum:** Thank you.