NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

https://www.nycransoralhistory.org/
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INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

ELSIE HUPP

Interviewer: Grace Ramsay

Date of Interview: February 21, 2017

Location of Interview: NYU Department of Sociology

Interview Recording URL:
http://oralhistory.nyu.org/interviews/elsie-hupp-yyyy8h

Transcript URL:

Transcribed by Ariana Henry (volunteer)

NYC TOHP Interview Transcript #070

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**Grace Ramsay:** Hello, My name is Grace Ramsay and I will be having a conversation with Elsie Hupp 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 February 21, 2017, and this is being recorded at 295 Lafayette Street. Cool, thank you for making it out and coming. So I noticed on your Facebook it says that you grew up in the Midwest?

**Elsie Hupp:** That's correct.

**Ramsay:** You want to speak about that a little?

**Hupp:** Well I grew up in north suburban Chicago in what was generally a rather wealthy rather liberal area. I grew up in what I would describe as a conservative Christian bubble. But I was fortunately sheltered from a lot of the toxic politics that the Christian right has become involved in. so and also this was because there were a lot of more liberal Christians in the community that I grew up in, so it was interesting, it was interesting. It was strange growing up in a community that in itself was not abusive but at the same time is invalidating. I didn't really have a sense of having to suppress being transgender I did have a sense of having to suppress being attracted to men and I remember as a small child my parents went away for a weekend and there was a parent from my school who was babysitting for me and my brother and I told her that maybe God made a mistake and should have made me a girl. And I don't remember what she said, but she never told my parents. And that was sort of my experience growing up is that transgender people just didn't exist. There wasn't any like acrimony towards them, they were just invisible. On the other hand, in regards to being gay it was very much a hate the sin not the sinners type thing and I only got glimpses into peoples' acrimoniousness towards gay people, like my eight grade teacher saying I know I'm not supposed to hate the gays and the lesbians but dot dot dot. So I sort of just drifted out of that culture in high school, because I went from being in an evangelical protestant bubble to being more ecumenical Christian bubble which was Jesuit catholic school and generally the Jesuits are very open about many things. And at Jesuit school, being a sexual minority was something that very don't ask don't tell. Like teachers weren't allowed to talk about it and there were several gay members of faculty and staff at the high school who were very much not out but everyone knew and so there weren't a lot of role models, adult gay role models in my life in high school. I remember when I was taking curricular dance class at school my dance professor after I came out she's like by the way I'm lesbian and it was just very very validating to know that there were other gay people out there. I actually reconnected with her, like a couple years ago and I'm Facebook friends with her and now she lives in like Mississippi of all places in a little liberal college town bubble. [laughs], and when I was in high school mainly my contacts with other gay people and my sort of validation with being gay which by the way I don't identify as being gay currently, I'm I think I'm bisexual. That's what I initially came out as when I was in high school but I sort of shifted but I got funneled into the gay male identity because its sort of part of hegemonic culture that its easy to identify with the gay male identity because it's so strongly established within um sort of like what has become mainstream gay culture. Which is this very like yuppy white gay man identity. So when I was in high school I went to this support group for LGBT kids and allies, and it was held at a health center in this small tiny suburb that I grew up in that was...
surrounded by larger suburbs. And there were kids from a variety of surrounding high schools and we just talked about like basically it was like, we had something that was called check in and it was like name, age, what school you go to and one good thing that happened to you during that week and one bad thing that happened to you during that week. We would just go around the room and do check in. And that was a really important part for me being in a validating environment with other gay people who were not going to judge me. I mean sure they were catty teenagers and some of them were really not nice people, but the important thing was that it was a safe space, not just a safe space in like the sense of not having harassment it's safe space in the sense of , the further sense of being like affirmatively validating. That actually interesting thing, interesting fact is in the past tow years or so, some point the group actually got disbanded because all the surrounding high schools are in such a liberal area that all the surrounding high schools have really good support structures within the schools for LGBT kids. So its not necessary anymore and really actually the basis for the group, the way that they got their funding was HIV prevention and I guess that in terms of there part that they played in that was determined no longer necessary. My last year in high school I actually went to a similar group at my high school and this being a very Jesuit high school where you're very don't ask don't tell, it was not your standard gay-straight alliance it was a confidential LGBT support group because that was the only way that the school could have it without pissing off donors. Its sort of under the flag of these kids are having problems and they need a supportive place for their problems. And I suppose somebody could interpret that as being saying well being gay is a problem. I mean it wasn't but it was sort of like the cover under which it was able to sail. So when I was in high school and actually I remember I had crushes on girls when I was in grade school, I had a crush on a girl classmate and I was also attracted to men and that was something that I suppressed and I ended up having a girlfriend for two and a half years in high school and she was two years older than me and it basically lasted for the two years that we overlapped at the school. You know that was sort of an interesting experience because I don't know later on, being a gay person, being in a relationship with someone who in many ways is a stereotypical angry lesbian [laughs], its just sort of interesting in retrospect. And this sort of bears mentioning it's not, I don't know how it ties into things but for sometime when I was in high school I had an eating disorder, so actually before I joined the LGBT support group at my school, I was in an eating disorder support group. And it really wasn’t a body image thing it was really just I, I had this really unsatisfying relationship with food that I had no appetite most of the time and I stopped growing and I sort of winder if having a eating disorder played a role in that I'm a short person because one of my parents is like a foot taller than me. Anyway, so that's my childhood and when I went off to college, actually more in high school the sort of validating liberal-ish but at the same time conservative-ish church that I was at in grade school imploded when I was in about 6th grade, in the sense that there was this huge fissure between two different factions within the church because the more liberal faction basically had what has become much more popular these days which is a more modern psychology based self help type of Christianity, versus the more conservative faction was a little more hellfire and temptation. I don't know, it was all like invisible to me until all of the more liberal faction who most of them were patients of or friends of prominent psychoanalysts at the church uh abruptly left the church and founded their own church, which a year or two later merged into a local mega church as a branched location. So I left that church and I started going sort of by default the church of some of my classmates uh at school, one of my classmates
was the daughter of the pastor at an Anglican church and this got really weird because they’re not Episcopal they’re Anglican. They’re actually, and I didn’t know about this for awhile, they were actually psmatic [sp?] Anglican church that was part of a group of churches that had left the abolstures [sp?] of the United States over—social justice issues that they didn’t like that the Episcopal church had uh appointed an openly gay bishop and these churches were sponsored by dioceses in well arch dioceses in what’s it called Rwanda and I believe Singapore. So it was these far flung places in the world that were much more socially conservative then the united states, uh that wanted to sort of reassert the social conservatism of their brand of Christianity and many years later, like about two years ago this really became a huge point of conflict in the Anglican communion which is the international sort of coordinating conference of the Episcopal and Anglican church and the rest of the Anglican communion actually centered the Episcopal of the united states and the Episcopal of America I think that’s the what the official name is for making a lot of unilateral decisions about how they would approach gender and sexuality. And this is very unfortunate at the same time not surprising because it is part of this somewhat hierarchal organization where there isn’t, it doesn’t have like a pope but it’s a conference of equals where there’s a national church organization in each country and the other national churches didn’t like the direction that the Episcopal church was going. So that was my time at that church, was definitely a don’t ask don’t tell sort of church. And, but everyone was very very very nice and the youth leader, I later came to learn was uh probably closeted something because he sort of had this mentorship role for my brother because my brother came out as gay before I did before I even knew about it he was out to my parents and he was out to the youth group leader. And the youth group leader gave him all of this like Christian masculine literature and some sort of weird rational type of ex gay literature because of course this youth group leader was you know closeted, he had apparently had some background of activity of some sort with men and he (pause) he was trying to show my brother the same path and my brother was like very involved with sort of the religiosity of the church that he went thru the confirmation process and got baptized in the church in high school where as I had gotten baptized at the church I went to in grade school because it was the sort of church where you could get baptized as a third grader, if you so choose. So I went to all of the confirmation classes but I didn’t actually go thru with the confirmation because it just wasn’t speaking to me, and so that’s sort of my relationship with Christianity and I have no hard feelings towards Christianity as a whole, but in general I have a really hard time connecting with church communities and I don’t have the sense that God speaks to me because sort of that voice of my sense of what the church is telling me. You know that I ought to feel or be or whatever, is very alien to me and it doesn’t feel like that’s God you know my inner conscientious is sort of out of synch with the church communities that I’ve belonged to. And its interesting though because when I was in college I visited Quaker church and I visited a Unitarian church which those are both so liberal to the point where they’re not even conveniently Christian. And I still felt that it like had this weird churchiness that made it really hard for me to connect to it but I’m not an angry atheist. I’m just a non practicing secular person with a Christian background. So its very strange looking back at my background in Christianity and how much it has formed a lot of my views today and (pause) there are some things where I recognize where I have certain bias and at the same time there are certain aspects of my religious background that are still important to me. And I think as I’ve gotten exposed to more religions peoples with different religions, that’s made it harder for me to identify with any particular religion because I really
respect a lot of the conscientious positions that people of other religions take, even for example I don't know, Islam a lot of the Muslim is extremely repressive and at the same time I really like Muslim feminists. So its really hard for me to see people who had an unfortunate time with their religious upbringing just shit on religion left and right because I don't think its really possible to, I mean people try but its not really possible to dismiss an entire religion based on the current cultural state of affairs. Because within each tradition, within each culture there are people who care about social justice who care about empathy and taking care of societally marginalized people. And in some societies these people seem to be more marginalized themselves though I'm really conscious of the fact that there's a degree of American cultural chauvinism where Americans and also other people from the west tend to have this sense that western society to a much greater extent then it actually does. And so as someone who's gotten some of the brunt of the wests cultural dysfunctions it really annoys me to see liberal people from the west shit on other countries for being more conservative when it's like you know get your own house in order! So I guess yea my talking about my childhood sort of turned into talking about my religious background among other things, I mean I don't have a lot of resentment for my childhood its you know my parents particularly my mother uh had a lot of psychological problems when I was growing up and that got passed on just the way it happens when parents have psychological problems and I don't have resentment towards them you know because my mother in particular has done a lot of work to process her own psychological problems particularly her trauma from her own childhood. So she is very supportive my process of coming to terms with you know my past trauma. And I don't remember what I was going to say next, I was talking about my childhood, I don't really have resentment towards Christianity as a whole because there are so many aspects of what I got from my upbringing because I grew up in a generally relentlessly positive Christian environment there's so many aspects that I see as being very good positive essentially humanistic things, caring and empathy and all of these wonderful things that make society better. I suppose it really hurts to see how uh Christianity has gotten so negatively politicized in the United States. In the past fifteen years in particular, I know that it really started well back in the early 90’s, I've read about it, thank goodness I was shielded from it but yea I very much identify with where I came from even if I'm not in the same place as I was when I was growing up. I don't know if you have another question, I sort of gave my summary , I'm mostly stopping from when I turned 18. [laughs]

Ramsay: Okay so that makes sense, I guess I had a follow up question in terms of how were your parents reacting to you and your brother coming out as opposed to the church. Did they have different perspectives from the messages you were receiving in church?

Hupp: Well my parents sort of kind of always knew. And parents do, and my parents were also sort of part of this you know relentlessly positive culture within Christianity so it was similar don't ask don't tell situation that you know being gay sort of was like having a terminal illness or something and later on my parents talked about how they were utterly terrified that me or my brother would get AIDS and die, and at the same time my parents really didn't know anything or understand anything about what it means to be gay, like at one point my father asked me if I was identifying as gay because my antidepressant I was on had a known side affect to produce libido and I was like... no [laughs], and also my brother really came out, didn't come out, my parents discovered gay porn on his computer like five years before my brother came
out to me. So this was something they knew and I was really in denial about myself and so when I came out they're like well, yea that makes sense and by the time I came out my parents had really processed their feelings about you know being gay. And when I came out to them as transgender, in the middle of 2015, and I initially came out as gender queer, I still sort of kind of identify as non binary. They're like okay, you know we love you, we support you. So I'm I guess really thankful that my parents have done their work to process things on their own. Sometimes they still can take their anxieties about things and put them on me or my brother but they're conscious about trying not to do that. So in general I would say my parents have been incredibly supportive. Especially judging by the fact that my mother in particular came from an even more conservative Christian background it was actually a rather abusive family culture that she grew up in. So perhaps you know how parents try to make the same mistake as their parents but they do, my parents kept on trying to do the right thing and when they made mistakes, like for example they sent my brother to an abusive boot camp boarding school in the Dominican Republic for 20 months and they didn't know how abusive it was beforehand, they discovered this when my brother started becoming involved with other alumni in high school, but they really I think put in effort to like atone by trying to remedy the negative consequences of their past mistakes. Which to me is like part of like atonement of course and reconciliation and you know penance these are all very Christian concepts-I'm sure there are similar concepts in other religions. At the same time the idea of restorative justice as a process of reconciliation, rather then punishment is a strong part of the modern social justice movements. So I'm really happy that those processes have unfolded in my family. I'm talking about society about my family and I think it's reflects that I have a lot of inner peace about my background.

Ramsay: Yea absolutely, so you've mentioned that the support group in high-school you were in and the other LGBT centered spaces you were in, were you involved with any other communities or places that you felt belonging?

Hupp: I was sort of part of an outcast geek community in my high school. I was in the Anime for all four years and it was just as otaku-weeaboo stereotype as you would expect for teenagers watching anime. I didn't really stay with that community, I didn't really stay connected to most of my friends in high school in that community and I didn't really stay into Anime. I still kinda sorta like some Anime, but it's nothing particularly special for me. And that was also the community that my girlfriend was in at another community in high school, which had a lot of overlap which was the French film society which was another club at my high school that basically we watched B movies and cult classics and some of the people from that group later became involved with a Star Trek club at the Unitarian universalist church in Evanston which is a couple towns over from my high school. So even though I didn't see them on a regular basis I still saw some of the same people from high school when I would go to these high school club events, particularly their marathons usually once or twice a year when I was visiting Chicago from where I went to college. So, I mean that was a community that I enjoyed being a part of but didn't really connect with a lot of people on a long term basis. And finally the other community that was probably the most prominent community for me in a lot of ways, was the youth group at church. Again, I really haven't stayed in touch with most of the people from that, I'm Facebook friends with the youth group leader and his wife and I'm Facebook friends
with some of the parents and more the parents then the people my age because the parents are my parents' friends and my parents stay in touch with them. And my parents don't stay in touch with the people my age. So a large part it was an extension of I mean the way that I've stayed in touch with that church community is an extension of my mothers' relationship with that church. Which she continued going to until very recently and she left after the censure that the Anglican communion issued on the Episcopal church of the united states because my brother in particular was not happy with her being part of a church that has made it's official position to oppose gay rights. So she switched to a different church she is now Lutheran well goes to a Lutheran church. I don't remember the different types of Lutherans, but she goes to the cool liberal Lutheran type church not the Missouri synod, which is crazy conservative and I think Lutheranism has much less of, even less of a top down power structure than the Episcopal church because well I mean there can be two different synods that are in the same country and have been for a very long time and that's just the way it is. It's not out of the ordinary, which I mean really allows the church that she goes to now to be very concerned with social justice, which is nice. Yea, so those are the three communities that I really I would say I identify with, that I was a part of when I was in high school and at the same time I didn't really feel strongly enough with my identification with those three communities to really continue with them after I moved away and for the most part individual people from those communities are not a part of my life anymore I mean I'm friends with people on Facebook, some people but I really don't keep in touch with them.

**Ramsay:** Yea, so I have one more question about this time period and then we can move on to college. It also encompasses college but you know for people who were coming of age in the 90s and the early 2000's we have had the internet and I was wondering if you could speak a little about the role that that had in your you know your social life and your development.

**Hupp:** Well I was very much of the Myspace generation and I don't know Myspace had more of an expressive quality than Facebook it was more of you made a decision to dig up these memes and then post them in a prominent and fixed place in your profile and so Myspace was a place where you could be somewhat expressive. I was also a part of an online community called Deviantart which I really engaged with it from the perspective of photography and architectural design because that was my passion and I went to Architectural school. I for several years, I really engaged with a lot of people in you know there was a group of people that I followed on Deviantart and I would try to comment most of the things that they posted. It was nice, at the same time there wasn't a lot of reciprocation so that I think that wasn't really rewarding in the long run. Another online community that I became involved with was SecondLife and mainly what I did there is I would build things, again architecture and I had a neighbor on SecondLife who ran an arts community in SecondLife and so we sort of built up compatible quasi urban stuff adjacent to each other. I eventually connected with that guy outside of SecondLife and now we're Friends on Facebook and he's someone that I interact with semi frequently on Facebook. So it's interesting that I got the most out of that and even nowadays the online community that I interact with the most is Twitch. I like games, I design games, I don't really play a lot of games because with my mental health my anxiety makes it so I get very very agitated while playing games. And this is something that sort of ebbs and flows sometimes more, sometimes I'm more able to play games and sometimes I'm not. Hopefully I'll
get more towards being able to play games soon. But anyways I like watching people play games and sort of chatting with them and making jokes about thing in the game, things like that and so the way that Twitch works is that there's a streaming video usually with a webcam of a person playing games and making commentary and then there's a chatroom alongside the chatroom that the streamer can watch and interact with. So usually a streamer will read aloud a thing from a chat and then reply to it and there are several streamers that I've watched quite a lot over the past year or so to the extent that I'm a known person to them and again I surprisingly connected with some of these people, unusually not the streamers themselves because they're relatively public figures so they're really concerned about their privacy but other people for the chat, other chat regulars, I've connected with on Facebook and I've never met them in person and I interact with them semi frequently on Facebook, some of them, in general I think Twitch people are more active on Twitch then they are on Facebook but its interacting that like for example, I am somewhat open about being trans on Twitch and whenever I talk about it a lot of the time I get some shithead being sexist and I usually am open about I'm very assertive about when someone is being sexist I call them out and when I've come out as trans on Twitch and other times when I've you know had this conflict on chat or even a streamer, people have sent me private messages on Twitch thanking me for being a visible trans person because I'm making them feel safer. You know people who are themselves trans who are in these chats that are generally safe spaces but not completely because most streamers are 19 or 20 year old and are not very well informed on issues and they avoid sensitive topics because they don't want flame wars in their chat so, I mean that has the tendency of causing people to suppress aspects of their identity in particular a lot of women on Twitch use gender neutral usernames to avoid getting harassed and you know whenever I come out as trans on Twitch, when I talk about it, like invariably some shithead says something and so this policy of not rocking the boat of trying to have harmony tends to cause people to suppress what might be considered controversial aspects of their identity. So it becomes very Cis-het male white 19 or 20 year old normative environment but I really like testing the waters in certain streams if there are safe place to be out as trans and the places that are generally safe to be out as trans are the places that I frequent the most and I've also found that I also since transitioning I've really connected with in particular women streamers because they're just so much more chill and they're not like low key sexist and no intending to be sexist but still sexist and defensive about it. They're like they get it, they get it that when you're a woman on the internet people are assholes to you. So I mean that's what I've found that I feel safest most often in streams, in chat rooms that are streams with women streamers. So yea, it's interesting that you know I've found Twitch to be much more rewarding then I've found the previous online communities I've been a part of and you know that's not something from my childhood or high school that's really like my life right now. I had a lot of issues when I went back- well after I graduated from college and even at college I was-when I was in college I didn't have a lot of friends. When I graduated from college I got married and making very socially isolated, and then I went to grad school and I started at DePaul University in Chicago as an online student and then I moved to New York and started at NYU and I had a lot of problems at NYU that I can get into later but you know while it was very stimulating to be around a lot of people I just got exhausted from having to deal with low level micro aggressions particularly you know in this cis-her early mid twenty something white male community and people who were generally nice people still like there was this block and so after I left NYU I left halfway thru the degree program and I went
back to DePaul, so that's what I'm doing right now. After I left NYU, I was just really exhausted of community and I mean I tried to connect with a local video game gallery community called Baby Castles and they were having some serious drama at that time and I was in the wrong place at the wrong time and just got shit on. Again, it really had a lot to with my mental problems at the time and so I just-that happened in late 2015 so for most of 2016 I was just sick of dealing with in person communities because the thing with dealing with in person communities is that you have to put up with people and online you can just block people. Like on Twitch you can block individual users and they just poof, you don't see them in chat, they're invisible and that's really nice because they can watch the screen they can interact with the the streamer they can interact with the other people in the chat I just don't have to deal with them. And I've particularly since transitioning it's gotten to the point where I semi regularly block people on both Facebook ad Twitch and on Facebook I've found that I- since transitioning on Facebook which for me was changing my name and my profile picture I've largely stopped interacting with strangers because again people when you're out as a woman on the internet people treat you like shit. So I think that's really my relationship with online communities as a trans person.

Ramsay: Do you feel comfortable talking about college and afterwards?

Hupp: Yea, I mean sure. Well when I was an undergraduate I was studying architecture and it was a very intense program.

Ramsay: Where were you?

Hupp: Oh sorry, when I went to college I sort of wanted to get away from everything and so I got a scholarship at University of Southern California in Los Angeles and I moved there and I lived in the city, which I was very happy about because I really hated living in the suburbs because of the social isolation and social isolation I think is more of an issue, even more of an issue if you are a marginalized person which is why the gay communities are always in cities because it's just easier for people to come together in cities. So I moved to Los Angeles and I was in architecture school for five years and when I was in architecture school, I spent- it's a very intense program, so I spent most of my time working on homework and I was quite a bit of a workaholic and I used it as a way of not having to deal with other people and I didn't really develop a lot of friendships as an undergraduate especially with classmates. The people I became friends were people that I randomly met in weird situations. Like my –two of my old roommates, one of them( they're both women) one of them I met at a bus stop when some drunk homeless person was talking about the boots I was wearing and then she and I both got on the bus together and started talking with that being the conversation starter and then a subsequent roommate- and both of these people I'm still in touch with. A subsequent roommate I met while I was sketching. I was sitting in front of a bicycle, sketching the bicycle wheel for a class and she walked up to me and asked what I was doing and so we started chatting and this is another person that I ended up living with her for six months and I'm still in touch with her. So it's really people that I meet in these really strange circumstances that I end up connecting with; but someone else I met on the bus when I was in High school, this gay guy, and he was friendly and I ended up having several lunch dates with him and he was really
charming and I had a crush on him and this is the difficult thing- actually I should step back a bit. When I was a sophomore and junior in college I was very lonely and very depressed and so I would have casual anonymous sex with people and this was extremely unrewarding because what I really wanted was a fulfilling relationship with someone and I think at that time I was much more socially awkward then I am now and I- so again turning to these online gay spaces to find people to hookup with and while some people seem to be perfectly fine with what is now Grindr culture, it was really toxic for me. I ended up having really low self esteem that I did not think I was attractive, I did not think I was worthwhile. So what ended up happening with this guy he sort of introduced me to his circle of friends and I went to his ex boyfriend (who was still sorta like his best friend), don't ask and I don't know what the story is with that, had hosted what was this guys birthday party at his apartment, so went to the apartment, had drinks, met people, chatted with people and went downstairs to club and that just happened to be around the coroner and then partied a whole bunch. I got really shit faced and ended up making out with somebody and then I ended up going back upstairs with some of the other people and a whole bunch of us, probably a dozen people, a dozen gay guys all crashed in the apartment like the guy had a foldout, had a futon type sofa and had another like older sofa and there were people like on both sofas and I ended up sleeping in the bed- on the edge of the bed next to the guy I had a crush on and his ex and I you know I was trying to sleep and what happened was the ex boyfriend put his hand inside my underwear and penetrated me and I didn't know what to do. So I just froze and the next morning –the next morning everyone was gone except for the guy that lived there and I don't remember had happened but he started making out with me and stuff we fooled around but did not have penetrative sex and I felt terrible because I hooked up with this person and I felt like it had ruined my chances of having a relationship with the guy that I had a crush on. Incidentally, like two days later I went to Long Beach Pride and met my husband whom I'm married to. I'm separated at the moment, but I'm still married to, and I still love him, but we're separated. My husband, I met him on the dance floor and I hooked up with him too and I was just like, you know sort of like what the fuck moment, what am I doing? The next weekend, the guy that I had the crush on had another birthday party and this one was in West Hollywood as opposed to downtown Los Angeles, cause he sort of had two groups of friends. So I went to the one in West Hollywood cause that was near where he lived and this was at a sort of club/ restaurant place that had a drag review, so we watched the drag review we had something to eat and I was like really freaking out so I got shitfaced again. I remember I was really upset so I ordered a Long Island Iced Tea and like I got really really drunk and I needed to go home at the end and the guy I had a crush on offered to- with his roommates, they had driven there, they offered to drop me off at the train station which was because of the strange arrangement of Los Angeles public transportation which was like several miles away and you know, you would need to drive there. He dropped me off and then I could take the train home or subway. So I got in the car with them and when we were in the car he's like actually I'm going to bring you home with me and I was like I don't want to go home with you and I actually was like I don't want to go home with you, I don't want to hook up with you because I think that this would ruin our friendship and he brought me home with him and I was so shitfaced that I couldn't do anything to resist and I don't remember what happened that night and the next morning we woke up in his bed and you know we fooled around and then he drove me to school and dropped me off cause I was going to run some errands in the school even though it was the weekend and he was very nice about like- very
sweet about it but after that he started making these excuses for why he couldn't see me and you know I immediately went out of town after that and was gone for three weeks and when I came back I had been planning on getting together with him for West Hollywood Pride because West Hollywood Pride is on Sunday and Long Beach Pride is in May in the middle of May. Presumably it would be because they don't want to conflict with West Hollywood Pride. So I went there and I didn't have, I had lost my phone. My phone had gotten stolen by a taxi driver, I had left it in the taxi and then the taxi was like oh you didn't leave it in the taxi and so I used a payphone and I called him like once every hour or something of the course of the day and was like hi can we meet up, I'm going to try calling you again in an hour and I did this for the entire day and he didn't pick up once and later he said oh I didn't have my phone on me, excuses excuses and then another time I asked him if he wanted to get together and this was like a month or two later and he's like I'm busy and then he posted on Facebook that he was going to a club and had an open invitation for people to join him and I texted him to confront him about this and he was like you're Facebook stalking me and I'm like no, no this showed up in my newsfeed. So my attitude at the time and I had started going out with my husband because you now he was very nice to me, my husband and I was not- I started seeing him but I wasn't like his boyfriend. At the time I felt like the guy I had a crush on previously had chewed me up and spit me out which is exactly what I felt like, you know exactly what I had worried about what would happen and you know my understanding of that incident, the two incidents actually, changed over time and I'll get to that. So I started going out with my husband who had a lot of issues of his own and he was very very needy and very controlling and I ended up suppressing a lot of these issues I was having because I became so focused on my husband and I studied abroad over a summer between my fourth and fifth years and when I came back I remember going to a gay bar with my husband, we went up to San Francisco for a weekend and I just I started freaking out I was freaking out so I went and took a barstool and put it in the corner of the room and sat on top of the barstool curled up in a ball sobbing and I was like what the fuck is happening to me and over the next six months I proceeded to have a massive psychological breakdown and you know I was border line suicidal I did not wan tot kill myself but I had a lot of suicidal ideations and it was terrifying and I felt like I was going to fail out of college in my last semester. Fortunately all of my professors were teaching students who had- for whom it was their last semester and their like we're just going to give you an easy time. So while I was unhappy with my work output, I got good grades and because I had been so out of it, it actually for the entire time I was an undergraduate I had not ever been able to get a job or internship over the summers and I never actually applied for an architecture internship and I applied for other types of internships and so I, when I graduated from college became this recluse in my apartment. I felt like shit about my my portfolio and so I just worked on my portfolio for six months and didn’t apply for jobs and then I got married and the thing was I don't know if I was really ready to get married but my husband who I loved and cared about a great deal you know he had come here on a marriage visa with a previous spouse and gotten divorced and he had lost his visa, lost his permission to be here and so he was sort of in this limbo in terms of he was still paying taxes he had a social security number all of that and yet and he didn't have a legal status and at that time gay marriage was-had been legalized but at the same time kind of overturned in California. What the California supreme court determined was that having any functional difference between gay marriage and an equivalent for- between opposite sex marriage and an equivalent for same sex marriage was unconstitutional under the California
state constitution. So for all intense purposes you could be gay married and have the same rights, however you could not get gay married in California so we flew to New York and eloped and we brought our New York marriage back and I moved in with my husband and you know it was not a healthy relationship and I had started seeing a therapist my last semester in college and as I was working with this therapist I you know came to the realization that what had really precipitated this psychological collapse was what had happened to me with that guy that both he and his ex boyfriend had sexually assaulted me and I just held onto that by myself for quite sometime. I got my life together enough that I finished- I got my portfolio to a point where I was happy with it. I sent out dozens of job applications, this was two, three years after I graduated and I couldn't get a job. I had several interviews and never got the job and so I decided to go to graduate school because you know a big part of what I had been dissatisfied with as an undergraduate was the lack of sort of computer design, sort of basis for my education so I decided to go to school for videogame design and that was when I started at DePaul and I got into NYU and right before I got into NYU, this was a year after The Defense Marriage Act had been overturned as well as Prop 8 and so my husband was able to get a green card which meant that he could get a different job because he had documentation that allowed him to get a different job instead of being stuck with the the job that he had when had his old visa. So we moved to New York and I started at NYU and my husband started at CUNY and things got really bad. My husband had been very jealous of my time and attention when we had lived in California but I had been sort of reclusive. So there wasn't a lot of competition where as when I went back to school I was you know leaving for school at nine in the morning and coming back at nine at night or later and he hated this and I developed a crush on one of my classmates and I was like I don't want to pursue this but it makes me feel like shit and I told my husband about this and in a crucial mistake I also asked him what he would think about an open relationship and I was like I'm not going to do anything that you're not okay with and basically my life was very- I would say not completely hell but really really stressful and I was miserable when I was at NYU and at the same time as you know all the shit going on with my husband this classmate that I had a crush on was behaving erratically and being this sort of passive aggressive jerk to me and I was just like freaking out. I was terrified of this classmate. I was also sort of terrified of my husband and it was like my husband never physically abused me but he was emotionally abusive to the extent that I began to develop a lot of symptoms of battered persons syndrome and I felt like I was losing my grip on reality, that I just had to keep on stating and telling people you know this is happening to me, I'm not crazy and at the same time I felt like I was crazy and you know my grades declined while I was at NYU and I had a B- average, for two semesters in a row, which you're not supposed to do. So I had to leave NYU and I can go back at some point but I- when I had to leave NYU because of my grade issues you know at least temporarily leave my initial was like this is such a relief, I'm so glad I have an excuse to leave this place where I am constantly afraid and I'm miserable and I hate it here and at the same time I really liked the material I was studying I really liked the work that I was doing, I just felt like I was so stressed out and my anxiety was so bad that I couldn't concentrate on my work and I would just sit there and do nothing, like waste time for hours in the evening at the apartment and you know it was exacerbated by the fact that certain people in the department that members of the faculty you know faculty and staff that I tried to reach out to for help you know there like this is your fault because you're attracted to this guy and it was like I was very careful not to sexually harass this classmate and at the same I was like terrified of him and I
tried to explain this and one of the people that I went to was like you need to stop talking to him and I was like but I see him every single day in all of my classes how do I do this and I was just like this makes me feel like a second class citizen that I have to be silent and I cant talk about the difficulties that I'm having because when I would tell this guy that I had a crush on that I'm stressed out and that it's not his fault, he'd be like (gasps) and not really literally like that but at one point I told him, I feel like I'm following you around like a puppy because I would ask him if I could sit next to him in class and I was like I don't know why I'm doing this and I hate it and he's like yea I don't get why you're following me around like a puppy. He's like – basically I came to the conclusion that this guy was gas lighting me, that he was just treating me like I was crazy and that was what I told the professor that I went to for help and that was the professor who was like you need to- you cant talk to this classmate anymore and you more recently I've come to realize that it was the same PTSD symptoms, the same PTSD that I had had cropped up earlier but I was experiencing much more intensely and it really wasn't something to do with the classmate, I was just freaking out because of the issues I was having with my husband and also because of the issue from my past. You know being sexually assaulted and just some of the emotional trauma from my childhood that had caused me to have a difficult time you know processing negative emotions because I had always been afraid to express them and so basically this classmate was treating me like I was crazy because I was freaking out and you know the members of the faculty and staff that I went to for help treated me like I was crazy because I was freaking out and I was seeing a university Psychiatrist and the university Psychiatrist when I had to leave NYU they're like wait what I didn't know this was happening, they were just so out of touch. Fortunately I had an outside therapist that was covered by NYU insurance because NYU has very limited resources inside of the university for counseling and the outside therapist was supportive but I had had ten sessions of couples counseling with an NYU therapist and they never like addressed the possibility that it could be an abusive relationship. So I really feel like NYU failed me and dropped the ball by not recognizing the problems that I was having and when I reached out for help, telling me it was my fault and in my opinion a big part of this is because I had not transitioned yet at that point but the university was gendering me as male and reading into my experience with a societal bias that a second wave feminist bias that men are responsible for these problems and how could I have these problems if I'm a man and that pushback that I got was a big part of what caused me to decide to come out as non-binary because I'm like your expectations of me because you see me as a man, don't fit with who I am and who I want to be and you know I reject that and so I have sort of a radical attitude towards gender in that sense that you know I do think a lot of what constitutes gender in our society is really oppressive. I mean the medically transitioning that happens later on was just sort of a natural extension of exploring my femininity and it felt right, wearing dresses and all of that and being feminine and being pretty and being sexy and I just- when I started on hormone therapy I felt more myself. You know the feeling of being on estrogen I felt more myself then the feeling of having testosterone and I completely disconnected from the NYU community not long after I left because I- the last time, one of the last times I visited NYU I saw this classmate, I had a panic attack and I tried to bring this up to a member of faculty and they're like you should just stop coming to events and I pushed this, I actually pursued a complaint against this faculty member with the university's department of office of equal opportunity is what I think they call it and low and behold, they did the exact same thing which was you know they listened to my story and were like all
reassuring and turned around and were like this is all your fault and so I got banned from coming to- going to any events or entering that building on campus because I filed a complaint. Anyway, so that's why I was nervous when I saw that this was an NYU building when I was coming in today and I was like I have to show this guy my Id and I wonder if he's going to run it into the computer and like dig up shit on me or something, fortunately that didn't happen. Fortunately it appears that it's really only an issue for me to get into the one building that I really don't want to go to, which is where my old department was and you that happened around the same time that I confronted someone at Baby Castles about talking about how people with mental illness should be excluded from their community and I was like this is not okay and I got banned from Baby Castles for the same reason and that was totally retaliation for standing up for myself because they didn't have-it's one of those things that can be very toxic with Baby Castles with other communities that are non-hierarchal is that there's no one to turn to if you have a problem and even hierarchal communities like NYU. I turned to people who I thought would be responsible for helping me and they just blame me for my problems and retaliated against me for reaching out to them and so that's why I've been a recluse for the past two years and I've been getting most of my social life from Facebook and Twitch and a big part of that is on Facebook in particular I really connect with my queer and trans friends and so I found this sort of supportive community in the sense of a very small circle of friends that I regularly interact with who are queer and trans and they get it. You know they understand the shit that I've gone thru, or they appreciate it, they respect it because they've gone thru similar shit and because I've been thru so much shit it's easier for me to have- to empathize with what a lot of other queer and trans people are going thru. This is like, even people who are really abusive I can empathize with, like my husband was emotionally abusive and you know this- it was not a healthy relationship for him either and this is why we separated, but we still love each other, it's just that when we get together it just is like really toxic. Like the last time that I saw him he visited me and stayed at my house for one night and I was like you know he initially wanted to have sex with me and was like no and he was like trying to kiss me and I sort of froze and I was freaking out and I was like if you're going to stay with me I need to be able to trust you that you're not going to pressure me to have sex and a big part of what happened in the past like two three months is I came to a further realization cause I had sort of started being acquaintances with this guy that I sort of kind of had a crush on, he was nice and I didn't push it with him, but I met up with him after not talking to him for a while and I went to a performance that he was at and then I went to a bar with him and his friends and I had already told him that I did not want to have sex with him and you know at the same time I said I would really like it you know if you could just put your arm around me so I could feel safe and he was like oh I'm not comfortable with that and at the bar he was really physically affectionate in the way that people who are drinking often are. He put his arm around me and I was holding his hand and it was really nice and then he started dancing with some other woman and I was like what the fuck is going on and I just felt like shit like this guy is just using me and the next day that evening when I went home the day I started having like crazy crazy flashbacks to what had happened with the friend who had abducted me when I was drinking with him at his birthday party and I told this guy about it and I came to the realization around that time was that I was reading about what definitions constitute different types of sexual assaults I realized that when that guys ex boyfriend was laying next to me in bed penetrated me without my permission, he had raped me and this was like simultaneously really upsetting and very empowering
realization that I was a rape survivor and just all of this PTSD started pouring out around the beginning of December and it kept on going through the middle of January and a lot of it was based around you know the fact that I was not spending Christmas with my husband and he was going to move to a different state and then he moved to a different state right before New Years and I just completely broke down. You know for the first time ever I was actually wanting to kill myself and it was just terrifying for the first couple weeks of January and you know at the same time this friend who I had freaked out about did the same sort of like similar thing to the sky at NYU which was he just locked up and was like what what what and he didn't know what to do and he was really uncomfortable and he's like, he pushed me away because he was freaking out that I was freaking out. So I don't know a lot of- and I finally got a new therapist, a lot of the sort of difficulties that I've gone thru have caused me to have this strange inner piece even when I'm really stressed out and when there's all of this shit happening and I don't know where I'm leading with this. I'm just giving you my life story and that's my life story up to this point I guess, you can ask any other questions you want.

Ramsay: Sure, yea, yea that's an incredible life history. It's great that you have a narrative you know. I guess one thing, you know if there's anything else you want to add, go for it. Anything that you're thinking of.

Hupp: Well something that I had remembered that I had forgotten, it was sort of a weird experience when I was a child was that I was a boy scout and I stopped going to the boy scouts, stopped being involved with them when my brother came back from the boarding school and this was because my parents knew that he was gay and they were suspecting that I was gay and I didn't understand this at the time, I didn't know why we had stopped doing boy scouts. But my parents pulled me out of boy scouts because at that time the boy scouts was a strongly anti gay organization and I talked to my dad like more recently like within the past year and he was like I don't remember this and I was like yea, yea this is what happened and it was just the boy scouts was I guess another community that I engaged with even though in a lot of ways it was toxic in the way that you would expect teenage boys to be toxic and parents being also kind of toxic, some of them, particularly because it was a very affluent community where the boy scouts was located. We lived in the small suburb next to the very affluent community and it was much more down to earth where we lived and so my parents in particular just like hated my dad hated a lot of the other parents for they were like lawyers and bankers and they were really really concerned about showing off how wealthy they were and this was a huge turn off for both of my parents that they got the house that I grew up in they paid for with inheritance and it was in a substantially more affluent area than either of them have lived in before and so, that was part of the reason why I was in a cultural bubble with church because they just felt so alienated from the local community being so superficial and concerned with wealth, but with the boy scouts my father was an eagle scout and my father like continues to this day collects boy scout badges, it's one of his big hobbies and so I feel like that was a connected that I missed out with not being to work on being an eagle scout and I felt like I could have within a year or two and I know that my brother hated all the outdoorsiness but I really enjoyed it and I don't know I still feel like a lot of that culture of the outdoorsiness and the crafts and that sense of, that type of thing is just I have been very disconnected with it since then and that probably been more than half, no not more than half my life- but half my life and so I do have a sense of
loss and I also have a sense of loss with you know leaving the church, you know these were communities that I belonged to these were culture that were my own and I had to leave because I didn't fit in. I had to leave because the church or the boy scouts were anti-gay. I also felt like I had to leave because especially with the church I just didn't believe in the actual like theology of the religion. So there was this sense of my teenage years and going to college that I lost a lot of who I was growing up and I think that might be part of why I became so isolated and depressed when I was in college and part of why I sort of started on this cycle of self destructive behavior which sort of lead to my being raped and at the same time I don't really have hard feelings about it. I mean the one thing that's really too close for me is my experience at NYU, like I could hypothetically go back, I'm just not ready too because I don't feel like I have the strength to take care of myself in an environment where everyone has a strong bias against me because I'm having these problems and I'm not a cis-het white male and I've been having some difficulty with having my coursework at DePaul and one of professors has a little bit of a toxic attitude towards life problem and health problems interfering with course work. He's sort of like if you're having these problems you should drop out and I was like really really really I should drop out if I'm having these problems. So at the same time I'm a half time student and I don't have to deal with people and leaving NYU and also separating from my husband I've really had a lot more space to become more comfortable with my self, so in the past six months or so it's just been this huge awakening process. It's been very painful at times but I feel like things have been and are continuing to get a lot better in my life and, I mean I've always had that sense, I've always been this cynical optimist. But I just feel surprisingly good right now, and I guess that's where I find myself right now.

Ramsay: Awesome.

Hupp: Do you have any other questions?

Ramsay: You know that's seems like a really good ending place [laughs] unless you're up for one more question?

Hupp: You can ask me whatever you'd like to ask me. If you have a particular type of question that you know you are interested in for the purpose of this sort of oral history project, I'd be happy to weigh in on anything you'd like to ask me. What time is it?

Ramsay: Let's see, it's 6:40.

Hupp: Okay, one more question.

Ramsay: Okay one more question. Okay, I'm interested in the language you've used throughout the interview. You've used a lot of social justice keywords, you know micro aggression, transformative justice, identifying with survivor hood and judging from your academic background it doesn't sound like you would have come across those vocabulary terms. So I'm wondering how you kind of had your social justice awakening, and that's my final question.
Hupp: Well I was, I went through a period of being very Marxist in college as an undergraduate but I became very cynical about the world as I saw that I couldn’t get a job and those things and my life was falling apart. So I was like yes, things are shitty but there’s nothing I can do about it and when I was at NYU you know that was right after what’s called, what’s his name- that teenager got killed by the police in Missouri. I forget what his name is, Mike Brown in- I forget what the name of the town is in, anyways yes, that happened and I was initially like well yea this happened, this world is a terrible place, the United States is manifestly a horrible place for African Americans even if it’s better in a lot of ways then any other alternative, it’s you know, we live in a country with a lot of injustice at the same time like what am I going to do about it, it’s just like I was do I was very detached and there were some very woke people at NYU and as I was experiencing a lot of this sexism that was pretty low level but persistent, I started reading about things and also on paper the program at NYU is very pro social justice so my studies and my projects put me in contact with a lot of materials that I dug deeper and found them really empowering. I remember coming across the Geek Feminine Wiki and it’s like Feminism but within the context of geek society, geek culture which is like the gamers and people who go to comic conventions things like that and I came across all these resources talking about how- actually another thing that happened that I forgot to mention was gamer gate and a lot of people in the program were really upset about gamer gate and so I heard a lot about peoples responses to gamer gate and that was another thing that put me in touch with a lot of resources about understanding and pushing back against the toxicity of the community that I found myself in and one of the difficulties with NYU is the community was incredibly self righteous and like we are are very woke here and I’m like no no you’re not, and they’re like how dare you. So yea, I would say that it came down to probably the biggest factor was gamer gate and the discussions that people in video game design school had about it and my growing realization that a lot of these toxic elements of culture still existed even in extensively progressive environment that I was in. Which is I think a big part of what empowered me, recognizing these types of structural abuse and oppression, empowered me to embrace, empowered me to dig down and see who am I outside of what this culture wants me to be. So that was, that social justice awakening is a big part of what empowered me to transition and come out as first as a gender queer person and then as a woman. You know reading-becoming very in tune with and connected with the feminist narrative in particular, I can identify with so many of them and it’s not that I’m like anti man, it’s just that in particular I’m not a second wave feminist, I’m not an oppositional feminist, I’m as a transgender person who is somewhat non binary I really identify with the sort of multifaceted intersectional feminism that is third wave feminism, that patriarchy hurts men just as much as it hurts woman. It’s just connecting to it has been a really empowering experience, very validating experience and so that’s how I woke.

Ramsay: Awesome [laughs].

Hupp: I mean I’m assuming that because you’re involved with a transgender oral history project, that you’re probably very woke as well, so you know all of the jargon.

Ramsay: [laughs] Yes.
Hupp: All of the jargon [laughs]

Ramsay: There's know so much [laughs]

Hupp: Oh yes so much, it's difficult on the internet when you come across people who are nineteen and have not read all of this stuff and they're like what do these words mean you are a attacking me, I'm like no I'm not, you just don't understand what I'm saying, I'm sorry. [laughs]

Ramsay: [laughs] Well thank you!