

JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

Taylor

Interviewed by Danae Baxter and Caroline Reynolds

April 10th, 2022

Interviewee: Taylor (T)  
Interviewer 1: Caroline Reynolds (CR)  
Interviewer 2: Danae Baxter (DB)  
Subject: Being Black and Queer in Baltimore City  
Date: April 10th, 2022

CR: Interesting. Okay, just for posterity can you just continue to tell us about your drag mother and drag son.

T: Oh sure. I'm saying like, "Let's hope we didn't lose anything!"

CR: I know. We'll see it then, but it'll be okay.

T: It's fine. So my drag mother, her name is Tara Newhole. *[Laughs]* And I remember like posting on Facebook, I was like, "Oh, this is who I want to" – I remember looking at it like, "Oh, this is what I want to do. This is who I want to – this is who I want to like – I want to do drag and everything." And I remember like I think she found me on Facebook 'cause I think I friended her that same night. And she's like, "I knew it from the minute I saw you that you were going to do great, you were going to do drag. Please know if there's anything you need, just call me. Just call me or just" – I'm like, "Okay. It's fine." Just I'm like, "This crazy woman is not going to find me."

And I remember like literally like three days later she like DMs, she's like, "Hey. How are you?" I'm like, "I'm okay. I'm getting ready to go to work." She's like, "Okay. Where do you work?" and I'm like, "I work at XYZ." She's like, "Okay. Let me come pick you up." I was like, "Whoa." I'm over here, "Am I about to get snatched?" Like I was like this is a lot.

And she come and picked me up and she took me to her house and we like talked before she dropped me off at work. And it was just like, "Oh, I could see you doing this. And if you want a makeup lesson just call me." And what I didn't know, again, was that would become one of the most meaningful relationships in my queer experience. Like from that day, even forward from like her putting me up in drag for the first time, her doing my makeup, her helping me, her giving me advice. She's someone I call regularly. She's someone to this day who I'm like, "Hey, like I'm not feeling good" or like, "Hey" – like I've been over at her house, I've stayed the night. Like she has been literally a mother to me.

So the person I call my gay son, we met when I was in college. And it was very much like young, fresh-faced, but he – it was very much rough around the edges. And it was like, "Oh, you're cute. You're adorable." And I was like, "No, this isn't supposed to be a sexual thing." Like that's why it clicked, I was like, "No, I need to like tell – this kid needs to know." And it was just like, yeah – just like it was a similar situation to what happened with me and Tara. I was like, "Hey, call me if you need to talk, if you need any advice, xyz, tell me what you." And so it got to a point where we would talk and yes, we'd go to the club together, but also like anytime he needed like dating advice – mind you at this point I had never been in a relationship myself, but like dating advice. Advice about life, advice about stuff like I was someone they could like talk to.

Recently they wanted to start doing drag, and while Madeline is a developed character and a developed – like I still think that Madeline's still very much rough around certain edges. And I live in the reality of like I don't want to put anything of my bad-looking self onto nobody else. *[Laughs]* So I'm very much like, "Hey, there are other people in our community who I think are better versed to be your drag parent. Like as a queer person I will still always be here for you to do that, but I feel like with my bearings of what I know about drag and myself, I don't personally feel comfortable doing that to you."

But yeah, we still talk; they still like ask questions, they still – we still talk and see each other frequently enough that like they still like are like a son to me. *[Sighs]* Yeah.

CR: And did you meet them at UB or CCBC?

T: CCBC. Yeah.

CR: And so how long were you at UB? I guess that was more recently, right?

T: Yeah. So I was at UB from literally –

*[Skip in audio]*

*[Conversation about recorder with third party]*

DB: So you can continue as normal.

T: Okay. Okay, now I'm just making sure it was picking up too. I was like, "Can it – can it hear me?"

CR: Yeah. Absolutely.

T: So what happens at UB is that it's because the way their business programs are set up. So like you can be a business administration major with a specialization in accounting, real estate, general business administration, marketing, entrepreneurship. There's a bunch of them that like subsets that would be separate degrees at other colleges, but to streamline the process they do your first year – what's considered your freshman and sophomore year and like the first half of your junior year is like just general study classes that all the business class have to take. But then that second half of your junior year was considered your junior year, and your senior year is nothing but your major electives.

So I was a marketing major, so I wanted to do that. Was going to do communications; I thought I was going to be Olivia Pope. I didn't have those classes available because we graduated during COVID. *[Laughs]*

CR: Yeah. And then how do you use, I guess the skills from UB and CCBC now?

T: Well, I can write a darn good business e-mail.

Because I don't work in my field as of currently, mainly because I don't have a lot of experience, and also because of the way I present has always been very much a hindrance to like how I – to how like getting in – if I'm lucky enough to get an interview I know most places take one look at me and they're like, "Oh. Oh, you have to do that." And like I always say – and like don't know if I can say slurs, even though I'm the one who's saying it. It's very much like I realize that people don't want a faggot at their front desk. And I hate that I have to say it like that, but that's the reality of it.

But I also realize that I'm not willing to give up on my identity that I fought so hard and my presentation that I fought so hard to live in and feel comfortable in to basically be told, "Yeah, we can't hire you 'cause you look like this."

CR: Yeah. It's a horrible unfortunate reality of everything. Like I'm fortunate to be able to present, like I can look like a straight woman when I want to, and a straight white woman at that. And that's definitely a privilege, and I can't imagine your experience

like going in for an interview and then having just that let-down because of the company and where their values stand.

T: Very that.

CR: Brutal. Okay. Can you talk more about at CCBC you mentioned that you were involved with like GSA? So was that something you got involved in like immediately, that you knew you wanted to be a part of? Or how did that come to be?

T: So it was a club that happened in the past, and then it faded off because there weren't as many people there. And then it got brought back. And I was basically one of the many people who fought for like to keep it like afloat, to keep it leveraged and everything. Because it was so hard to keep it up, because so many people were like, "We don't know when to come. We don't know if we want to support. We don't know what it's going to look like on our résumés." And while, yes, we did have like the seven people who supported it weekly who were able to, it was very much still very hard to do that.

I wanted to get involved because I wanted a sense of community. I wanted to create and garner a safe space at CCBC for other queer kids who didn't know where they placed. And while we did have a lot of not pushback, but a lot of like adversity, because we were still trying to figure out how to rebrand it. Because when you hear "gay straight" it's not as inclusive, as the lovely LGBTQQIA2SP full acronym that we have now. I think that's everything. Yeah, I think. Are those all the letters? Yes. So it gets very hard very quickly to figure out how we're going to attack those things.

So ultimately, funny enough, after I graduated they did rebrand it fully and now – if they still have it now it's called PRISM, Proudly Representing Intersectional and Sexual Minorities. Yep. I didn't know if that's what it was. So once they rebranded that it like – but at the time it was just creating a safe space, 'cause I wanted other queer kids who came on campus to know that like, hey, there's a space for you. Please don't feel pushed out. We're here. If there's something wrong we'll talk about it. If there's something the campus needs to be held accountable for, we will do it.

CR: Mm-hmm. That's awesome that you were able to like create those spaces yourself. Do you feel that's like a common theme, I guess, throughout your life? Or like you maybe necessarily didn't feel like there was a space available, so you made it yourself?

T: Yes. I feel like even prior to coming out as nonbinary, like seeing a very hyper-feminine queer man in spaces was very hard, because being seen – you're never seen as masculine and have to be associated with the men, but because you're not under the perception of the guise of a woman they also disrespect you as well. And what happens is that like I feel like have to push my way through the door and be like, "Hey," like there needs to be a specialized section for people who are like me, or people who do not fit within this binary. And it gets very uncomfortable when I have to like go up against adversity. Because it's like, "What are we supposed to do with you?" It's like, "Carry the space. Do you want help carrying the space?" 'Cause I can do that, but also my time costs, but I can do that. Also there are way too many resources for me to feel like we still have to have these conversations.

I feel like I have to fight to be included in those spaces as well. And as much as I hate that, like I feel like it's my due diligence, 'cause my whole thing is I don't want people who come in afterwards, the generation after me, to feel like no one created a path for them or that they didn't have a path to be created for them. Because I know a lot of people who feel like, "Oh, the old generation, they paved the way." And it's like, "Yes, and I want to be able to pave the way for someone to build on top of that." Because if what I paved wasn't enough I want them to be able to expand on it, but to have a basis that they can expand on.

Is it going to be perfect? No. But please let it be something. And please let it be able to be refined to make it as inclusive as it can be.

CR: Definitely. Not to like change gears too much, but how was your experience like in terms of first presenting as like a hyper-feminine queer man and then like adjusting your thinking and like looking more your gender identity? So I don't know if you envision that like very closely related to one another, like your sexual identity and your gender identity, or just like how do you feel right now?

T: Okay. Ooh, that's when I feel like I think about, but like I never really get a good curated answer for. What I feel like happened is that like while presenting as hyper-feminine queer man it was very simple to be like, "Yeah, I'm feminine, but I'm still a guy. I'm still like a guy" and I was able to rebuff a lot of stuff off of like, "Well, I'm still a man." And then funny enough, as I started dating my partner, who is a nonbinary person, and I realized I was like – I really sat down and was like, "Yeah, the concept of gender is very

ghetto, very trash. Zero out of ten, do not recommend." [Laughs]  
For me personally.

And I had to explain that like, "No, this isn't – no, I'm not a man. And that's okay." However, because I'm not a man, but I do not consider myself a transfemme or a trans woman, it also gets very hard because now people look at me and now they think they can hyper-critique how I identify, or hyper-critique how my intersections of like – like when I say like, "Oh" like I feel like, "If you're going to wear hair you should do this so you can pass." I'm like, "My goal isn't to pass as a woman." My goal isn't to – like, yes, I want to look feminine. Yes, I'm going to wear a face full of makeup some days. Yes, I'm going to curl my hair. Yes, I may wear a dress or a skirt." The objective is not to look womanly.

CR: Just express yourself.

T: Express yourself and seek comfort in that. And that can be very hard in general, but like that's just what it is. Also realizing the fact that I'm – dating was always hard beforehand, and it's still hard right now. So I can't really sit here and say that like I've experienced that well. I feel like gender as opposed to sexuality, because like – yeah, like sexuality. I always knew that like my queerness was – like my queer – there's a running joke where it's like, "Yes, I finally figured out my sexuality. I put it in this nice little box and I understand it now." And then it's like gender comes from behind.

It's like, no, that's very much what happened. It was like I realized I was like not necessarily just gay, but like a queer person. And then literally right after it was like, "Okay, that's great that you understand your sexual fluidity \_\_\_\_\_. So what are we doing about this gender thing, honey? 'Cause this is – you think you're a man and that's not what it's giving." [Laughs]

And that's kind of like how I honed in on it. Do I see them in adjacency to each other? Yes. So I feel like that I hold community – do I feel like I still hold community with cis men who still present hyper-feminine? Absolutely. Do I acknowledge the fact that their – I feel like their gender identity and mine are very much different? Yes.

CR: How has your experience been, I guess, within the larger LGBTQ+ community in terms of like them wanting to put you in a box?

T: So funny and – oh, the funny \_\_\_\_\_. I had to make a video. So I also do like this thing on my Facebook page called Queers Curling Hair, where I, a queer person, curl and/or style my hair while talking about hot topics, social justice issues, and whatever the F else I feel like. Did one before I came here. *[Laughs]*

But I had to make one because when I – like there was a meme where it was like, "Oh, explaining your gender identity." "Me after explaining my gender identity for the 15th time. People just aren't getting it." And I was like, no, me literally explaining my gender identity at any given time. And then someone who I'd already the nonbinary identity and pronouns to, and kind of was like, "Well, you're just like a man in a wig, right?" And I was like, "No. No, honey. No." And I was like, "I've explained this to you before. No." So I was like, "We're doing this?"

And so I had to make a video because a lot of queer men – a lot of queer men who even knew me prior to coming out still don't get the realization that like I don't see myself within the binary. And I don't – as a nonbinary person I recognize that like my experiences are now shifted and changed based on me being a nonbinary person. I don't exist in cis – I never existed even in cis queer spaces the same way.

When someone said – like one of my friends also asked like how does – how has my sense of identity changed – or sorry, have I noticed there was a change since coming out as nonbinary and the way I am, etcetera. I'm like, "No." But it's now just I feel like I don't have the need to rebuff the fact that I'm a man presenting the way I do now. It's like you're either going to get it or you don't. The girls that get it, get it, and the girls that don't, don't. And if you don't get it you're not that kind of girl, got it? *[Laughs]*

That's very much what it gave. And I had to realize that like I'm never – there are always going to be people who aren't going to understand it. There are always going to be people who don't get it. And I can only do but so much to do that, and if they don't want to get it and they want to be woefully ignorant, I can go. Or they can go, 'cause they don't need to be in my space. *[Laughs]*

CR: And then also how does your race and identity as like a Black person intersect, I guess, with your experience in the queer community of Baltimore and at CCBC? I know, big question.

T: No, 'cause actually I did this one before too. On my TikTok. Someone said like "Why is femininity not afforded to Black queer

men or AMAB people?" I'm like because femininity wasn't designed for us. Hate – hate to be that person: femininity is a white supremacist construct and *[laughs]* bringing down like – there have been plenty of time's where like I've had people look at me, me completely presenting femme, and they're like, "You're not femme; you're just wearing hair. You're not femme; you're just wearing makeup. You're not femme; you're just wearing nails. You're not femme; you're just in a skirt." And it's like, "Okay, what do you think femme looks like? What do you think femme is?"

And then I explain to them. Femme is thin, white or light, and very much like the opposite of me. And I've had to realize that as a darker skinned Black femme person I'm not afforded – plus-size femme, I'm not afforded that luxury. And so intersecting like my gender identity, my sexuality, and my race is very much a double-edged sword – is very much a triple-edged or multi-edged sword, because I can't go anywhere.

It's hard, because in the Black community I'm too femme. In the queer community as a large I'm Black. And then it's like I'm literally the opposite of what a queer beauty standard for an AMAB person who isn't transfemme looks like. And so having to critique the structure when you're not a part of the structure very much hurts. But it's how I engage in spaces.

I recognize that like even something as simple as going to the club, or like going to queer spaces that are supposed to be deemed sexual, or fun-loving or anything like that, I know going to the club that I'm not going to go home with anyone. *[Laughs]* Because I'm not looked at as a sexual being. I'm not looked at as someone who is deemed worthy of like – and when I say that I mean most like I'm fetishized, but I'm not in a general like, oh, attractiveness sense. Like I recognize going to the club that like people aren't looking at me.

*CR:* Are there any like – I know you've created spaces at like multiple points in your life. But as far as right now are there any like specific organizations, whether it's – yeah, just any specific organizations or places that you enjoy and like feel safe going to in terms of like all aspects of your identity, if that's possible.

*T:* I'd have to dig for that. Ooh. I feel like I've curated a lot of my spaces in social media to be very accepting. Like I set up very strict boundaries about it. I feel like I hate to say it, Twitter; Twitter has become a very – the sector of Twitter I exist and live in and the people who I follow and curate my spaces around have

been very much the people who I want to hold community and space with in my identity.

As far as like physical places or organizations, I wouldn't know. I would say that the one that I think of currently, even though I don't frequent there, but I do support a lot of their stuff, Safe Haven. Baltimore Safe Haven, ran by Iya. Amazing organization specializing in trans issues. And every time I see her it's nothing but love. Every time I see her it's always like "What are you doing? What can I help? How can I curate?" things like that. I saw y'all have the Black Trans Pride flyer up. Yay. I was like, "Yay."

But yeah, that's really what the space that I curate. Well, sorry, not that I curate, but the space that I feel safest in. Especially ones ran by trans people. Because sadly, like trusting cis gays *[laughs]*. That's not been the greatest of decisions in a while.

CR: How did you meet your partner?

T: Twitter. *[Laughs]* Twitter. So I – ooh, this funny. I love telling this story, 'cause it's hilarious. So in – again, I feel like I have to like backtrack. In September of 2020 – ooh, now I've forgotten the day. Yeah, September in 2020 I had weight loss surgery. I had bariatric – gastric bypass. So I have that and then I'm being on Twitter more, like just being more comfortable in my body, etcetera, etcetera.

So one of my Twitter mutuals reposted one of my pictures 'cause I had like a – I did my makeup, I curled my hair, I did my makeup, I curled my hair, I think I put on a dress; I forget what happened. But I went somewhere and I remember that picture got retweeted. And this person retweeted my picture – or reposted my picture and then followed me. I was like, "Okay." And then literally from there – I didn't realize it because they were liking everything I tweeted. They turned on their notifications for me and they liked everything I posted, everything I've like – and like looking back it was like was it creepy? It should've been, but it was endearing. They weren't weird, so like I didn't think too much of it. Worked out in the end, so doesn't really matter. *[laughs]*

And I remember like we were going back and forth for – we were like flirty; they would post something, I would post something, they would post something, I would post. I would comment something, they would comment something, I would comment. It was a very much like phone – it was very much Twitter tag, just like going back and forth.

And I will never forget, February I was filming one of my weight loss updates, 'cause I also do YouTube. I was filming a weight loss update about my gastric bypass and everything. I remember I did my makeup, I curled my hair, I had a really good lash. And I was feeling confident; I was feeling myself. So I'm like, "Know what, I'm gonna bite. I'm gonna do it."

And I remember waking up, 'cause they had liked something and it got reposted. And I DMed them. And I was like, "Hey," – I think I said, "Hey, gorgeous" or something. I was like, "How are you?" They're like, "I'm good" and they're like, "Oh, what are you doing?" and I was like, "Oh, just doing my makeup for \_\_\_\_." He was like, "Oh, let me see." And I was like, "Okay. Okay. Okay."

So like from that point they was like, "Oh, I love your" – they were like, "Oh my god, you're so beautiful." And I was so quick to be like, "Oh, I'm about to get sister friended," like that "Yes, girl, go off" and kind of push to the friend zone, 'cause that's just what I accepted for a long time. And then I was like, "You know what? They seem interested in me. They've seen me in my full femme. Let's lean into this."

And I did, and I remember we were like talking back and forth. We were like – there was like building like tension – like tension or like interest in each other. And then I found out they lived in New York and I'm like, "I live in Baltimore." And I was like, I remember I came into some money and I was like, "Know what, we're going to" – also this is back when the pandemic was still good and the prices were cheap and I was getting unemployment and I could stay home and didn't have to work. It was very much a lovely thing. *[Laughs]*

And I was like, "Okay." So I – and I remember, I'll never forget, it was the week of the George Floyd, the police officer, his trial. I remember they said we're going to get the verdict, and I remember calling them – or texting them. I'm like, "Hey, like they said the verdict is going to be done around this time. Like please" – 'cause they're also like activism work sometimes. So I'm like, "We don't know what the verdict is going to be. We know that if it's not guilty it's probably going to be a riot, so I need you to be in the house."

And they're like, "Okay." And I was like – and also me, I was like, "Okay, if it's guilty" – also 'cause I was going to plan on going up that week. And I was like, "If it's guilty we can plan it, 'cause you

won't be safe. If it's not guilty it's like, 'Baby, you're not going to New York on a week of a not-guilty verdict. That's going to be a four-day – no.'" And it came back guilty and I was like, "Okay. I'll go up."

And so I planned a whole weekend trip. I'm like, "You're just" – I had things to do just in case they ended up being crazy, a catfish. You know, I was prepared. All my friends had my location. *[Laughs]* And I went up there and I remember going to the hotel and like checking in. I was like, "Okay, I'm here." And I remember coming and they're like, "Oh, I'm downstairs. I'm waiting." I remember coming downstairs and they looked like their picture and they looked like the person who was on the Twitter. I was like, "Oh my god." And I remember I hugged them and I felt safe and I was like, "Okay, this could be a cute little date or whatever."

But it really clicked, because again, presenting femme and not being able to be loved out loud, I feel like I get a lot of weird fetishists, I get a lot of DL men, I get a lot of married men who would never – who are okay with me in secret, but aren't okay with me in public.

And I'll never forget, we were walking in the hotel, 'cause I was like "I don't want to do tourist – like we can do one day of touristy things, but we're not doing touristy things." I was like, "We can go to Times Square once. Not doing it again. We can say, "I saw the lights." Then I'm going home. No, no.

I'm like, "What do true Yorkers do?" So I remember we were walking in Times Square and they grabbed my hand. And mind you, I'm presenting full femme; I have a good crop top, I had my curled, had a nice soft brow and a wing. And I remember them, like they grabbed my hand, they held my hand without fear, without caring who was there or who saw us. It was me realizing that I deserve to be appreciated in public. And that's when it really clicked.

And at that point we had been courting each other for at least a clean two months. And they definitely came back to my hotel with me that night. *[Laughs]* And the next day I think – and then I think also their – it was very much like I woke up the next day and they were like next to me in bed. I was like, "Oh, this is real. Oh, this happened. Oh, this isn't a dream." And I asked them to be my partner and they said yes.

And yeah. And it'll be a year in three weeks. So in two weeks. So yay.

DB: Congratulations. That's awesome.

CR: Yeah, that was a really beautiful story.

T: Thank you.

*[Conversation about recorder with third party]*

DB: Sorry about this, Taylor.

T: No, you're fine.

*[Conversation about recorder with third party]*

CR: Okay, so we're going to ask a couple things that we talked about right at the beginning, just so that we make sure that we have the recording of. But yeah, go ahead.

DB: So if you don't mind just telling us again like how your – what your identities are and what that meant for you again. I remember you had like a really beautiful explanation in the beginning, so I don't want to miss that.

T: No, absolutely. You're fine. So I am a gender queer non-binary person. My pronouns are he/they. What gender queer means to me is living in a facet of high androgyny to the point where – so nonbinary basically means that I don't identify within the gender binary as either a man or a woman. Gender queer means queer with a sense of gender, which is like queer in meaning weird, but like also realizing that like how I present existing in a realm of what I consider high androgyny. Like there's something very gender euphoric or validating about people looking at me and not understanding how I'm supposed to present or what they perceive of my presentation. And that's very much a comfort to me.

Like that quizzical look where people are like – but it's like you don't know – like I said before, I think of *Steven Universe*, when Steven and Connie did a gem fusion being Stevonnie. And they're like "Who am I?" They're like "I'm an experience." And I'm like, "No, I'm an experience" and I love that.

DB: Beautiful. And also if you could tell us again your name and your drag name and what got you into drag.

T: So my name is Taylor Foster, but my drag name is Madeline Madison McPherson. I'm Baltimore's Black K-Pop Princess. [Laughs] And my – what got me into drag was I grew – as someone who considers themselves of the *RuPaul's Drag Race* generation, watching since season one, I realized that it's something I wanted to do. I had a medical emergency in 2019 that basically like – like I said, week in a coma over some wisdom teeth. People are still in awe about how that happened. Trust me, I am too. And I remember first coming out of the – when I was able to go back to living by myself after rehab and everything. The person who I consider my gay son, one of his friends was in a drag show and won a – and I remember going with them, 'cause we just went to go see the new Captain Marvel movie, 'cause the first one had just came out. And I remember us going to the show. Afterwards I remember locking eyes with this tall, darkly dressed figure, and she was just like so warm and like endearing to me. I was like, "Oh my god, I need to know about her. I need to know about her."

I remember watching the show and I was enthralled and I was like, "No, I want to do this. I want to be a part of this." And I remember saying it on Facebook. I friended her on Facebook and like she took me under her wing and Madeline was born. And I realized like, no, this is something I want to do.

CR: Awesome. Thank you for going back and now we are—well, we know you already said it.

DB: So to move on to just a new question, how has your experience growing up and living in Baltimore City been different, do you think, from other generations?

T: Hmm... I would say just in here – generations as in like of queer people, or just of people in general?

DB: Yeah. like how has like your queer Black experience in Baltimore City differed maybe from people who are from older generations or maybe those coming after you?

T: I think I am able to be more of myself. And while growing up is suggestive, because I feel like a lot of my identity has – a lot of my very much refined identity has happened within the last four years of me moving back into the city, I feel like if I didn't grow up of this generation – in this generation, I wouldn't be able to look the way I look or present the way I present. Or if I did it would be

much harder. Like it's hard now, but I understand it would be much harder.

I recognize like the fear of me getting hate crimed is very – is it still there? Yes. Is it as high as I think it would be if it was like the early 2000s or late '90s? Absolutely not. I think that like there's a comfort of me being able to look at this and like getting here, catching the bus, getting on the bus to come here looking like this. Now I still have my reservations about wearing a dress or wearing a full face of makeup looking like this to come here. It's like, you know, to even just look like *this* is still very much a safety thing that I feel like I would not have had if I grown up in an earlier generation.

I think that we are – while I do think that we have our qualms, and I think that we have a lot of growth to do. I feel like I've accepted that there is a certain level of growth – not maturity. What's the word I'm looking for? Not safety – I feel like safety – there's a certain level of acceptance or at least tolerance that considers me as safe enough to be in the space that I'm.

CR: Has there been a time where you didn't feel safe?

T: Yes. I will say that there was one time I can think of explicitly. Where I was coming home from – I went out for the day, took myself out, like having a fun day, had my hair curled, I had my hair – yeah, I got my hair done and then I went out. 'Cause I was like, "Oh, my hair's done. I need to go somewhere." You know, you get your hair done, you're like, "Everyone has to see me."  
[Laughs]

And I was coming home and I remember I was on the subway and I basically like – a guy came through the subway doors, he looked at me, he looked forward, and he kept going. And I was like, "Okay." So then he literally turns on his heels once he passes the trashcan at the subway entrance and comes back. And I'm like I do not have the time to be assaulted for being a queer person right now.

And he was like, "I have a question to ask you, but you know I'm going to ask you, right?" I'm like, "No. I don't know you." He's like, "Why does your face and clothes – why does your face and hair look like a woman, but your clothes look like a man?" I'm like it's broad daylight out, this man is asking – what? You don't – I was like, "What?" I'm like this part of me coming out, I was like,

"I'm a man. Is there a problem?" and he like walks up, he's like, "Oh, that's fucking disgusting" da da da da da.

So then mind you at this point I'm still living in Owings Mills, so like there's a Burger King around the corner and the employees were leaving for their shift were coming, and like this man is pointing to them or like going to them, "Hey, do you know what *that* is back there?" pointing back to me. They're like, "Yeah, it's a guy in a wig, I guess. Or it's a gay person, like I don't know, I don't-" Like, "No, that's a fucking disgrace" and da da. I was like, "Wow."

There was another time I was on the bus, when I lived – actually if I remember I was living closer to 25th Street and I got on the bus and one time a guy literally, like he was drunk and I think he – he just decides like to pet my hair. And I just like pulled – I was like, "What is going on?"

Then I had another guy when I was leaving one of my therapy appointments, and I'm really fighting to put my headphones in 'cause I can already see the stupid questions were loading and I was like, "I don't have time for this." I just put my headphones in. And he's – and the guy keeps looking and he's like, "Oh, um yeah, why are you wearing your hair like that?" And then he goes, "I understand you being gay, but all that extra shit isn't necessary." And I'm like, "We're still doing this?"

So there are like those situations that I've never been like – outside of being petted I haven't been physically assaulted. *[Laughs]* Knock on plenty of real wood or whatever. But like it was very much – like I've had those situations, but I also recognize that like I hate having to be in fight or flight, but it's a necessity of looking the way I look. And I hate that I have to say that, but it's the truth.

*CR:* Do you feel that that's a part of being in Baltimore? Like do you feel if you went to New York, for example, would that experience feel slightly different? Do you think you'd feel the same?

*T:* There's always a sense of safe – of uncertainty and unsafety everywhere. Do I feel like there are places where it's going to be a little bit more accepting? Yes. Like even me moving from this area, like the 25th Street moving a little bit further west, I was a little bit more like, okay, I'm still going to present this way, but I have to be more of my Ps and Qs; we're not in the gayborhood anymore. Like you're not – these four corners of Hopkins and Mica aren't going to save you anymore.

But I also realize that there's a large influx of like Black Trans women where I live too, so I was like, "Okay, maybe." But also recognizing that I know that even if I were to move to New York there are some people who get hate crimed there too. Like nowhere is 100-percent safe. And I can't – and like even in like LGBTQ hotspots, like the people who actually want to hurt us will go there to look to hurt people. So it's like are you ever fully safe? That's the question.

*DB:* That kind of leads well into my next question. So were there any spaces or like people or experiences, anything really that existed when you were growing up or now that you are like "This is a safe space for Black queer individuals here"?

*T:* [*Sigh*]. Do I know they exist? Yes. Have I experienced them? No. And I hate that I say – like I wish I was one of the people who existed or who came up in like the ballroom scene. I wish I had more Black queer friends in my youth. But I can't say that there were, because I felt like I was an outsider for so long in so much of my youth I didn't have. I was also very sheltered, so like I recognize I wasn't able to flourish the way I wanted to. And I had to deal with that accordingly.

It sucks and it hurt, but it was just kind of the reality of it. And I think that's kind of why I fight for like inclusion and safe spaces now, because I don't want a kid who is sheltered to find – like to not have those spaces either.

*CR:* Not to like super pivot it, but I'm interested, if you could tell us more about your presence on social media. So you've talked about Twitter and you've offhandedly mentioned TikTok. And I'm wondering like is it Madeline? Is it you?

*T:* So I do – so social media varies. I feel like that's the one time I was able to put my marketing degree to good use. The one part. [*Laughs*] I feel like I've pivoted within social media under the moniker as The Problematic Princess. Because I challenge a lot of peoples' social standards and ways of thinking that are considered very much normal and inherent. And once you challenge them or you go against the status quo they're very much like "You're shaking the table." Especially about desirability politics.

So on Facebook it's like Queers Curling Hair, where I talk about hot topics, social justice issues, stuff like that. I talk a lot about desirability politics. And when you have to bring up colorism and

internalized racism and how dating preferences are not really preferences, a lot of y'all are just biased, people get upset. Because they– and I always say that like as someone who did a lot of unlearning of my own internal biases, I think I expect everyone to do that too, and it's like "You can't expect yourself from everybody, but I will give you the resources to do that." 'Cause like let's think about what you said, honey, and why that's a problem.

I used to do that on Facebook like really heavily. And then I realized that Facebook, A, isn't the space for it, 'cause people are not trying to have curated long-form conversations like that. And so I've pivoted more for that into Twitter, and that's where I kind of hone in on that.

I was trying to be a beauty YouTuber. That pivoted very quickly when I realized I don't have the time, energy, or affect – like sitting down to film and then edit, I'm like "oh god...". Have editing software on my iPad; I'm still like, "I don't want to do this." But I've learned that like there's a market for it, and when I get back into it fully I know I'm going to lean into it heavily.

TikTok. I feel like TikTok is probably where I sit the best, but I don't – I engage when I want. I'm one of the people that's like, okay, I'll forget about it for two days, but then when I'm on there I'm on there for an hour and a half. I'm the one who's scrolling; I'm that person.

I also like rebuttling peoples' opinions on certain things. Like the answer, the TikToks are like, "What's your so and so and so and so and so?" or like "What's your" – like the ones where it's like, "What's your one opinion if you said out loud that people would be upset?" and I'm like, "Oh, this is me every day." *[Laughs]* So that fits.

TikTok, some of it is Madeline, it's performance clips. Funny enough, like I think the last one I posted was a performance clip – or not even a performance clip; it was just I was at a show that I had and had just finished and the new song with Megan the Stallion, Dua Lipa "Sweet as Pie" came on. And that's on my top repeat on Spotify and I was having my moment. Wasn't getting tipped anymore, but I was living my fantasy. And that's kind of what it was.

But between that – I don't know if I want to pivot back into like more beauty or truthfully or KPOP dance covers. Either/or works. *[Laughs]*

But yeah, like different things have different aspects, but I feel like I bridge the Problematic Princess into all of them. And they all are separate facets, but I am still trying to curate that space.

CR: That's super-cool. If you don't mind me asking, like do you – I guess how many followers do you have? Like what audience are you hoping to reach?

Interviewee: Okay, so on Twitter I think I'm 1,400 right now.

CR: Wow.

T: Yeah. Not 14 – 1,400, that's one-thousand four-hundred. I was like that's fourteen, four - fourteen hundred. You're like, "Oh, that's not a side hustle now." Once a k comes behind it we can have a conversation. But no, it's 1,400. That's only two zeroes. *[Laughs]*

But so there that's that on TikTok, because I'm not as active. Like if I was a person who posted every day or at least every other day I feel like I would have more. Most of the time it's where people are doing fun transitions and different colors – I'd be the one who's like in their bed on the phone, like, "Hey, girl, this is stupid, so yeah." Or this might be on XYZ, which also does well, but also I feel like I do well on TikTok because it's short form content. Because outside of this interview anytime some – I'm the person who like, especially in college, respect to y'all, 'cause the minute a teacher is like "I need a 15-page essay of just content before, cite sources" I'm like, "Honey, you're lucky if you get four. Bring it back. I'm not expanding on this. The sources are there. Don't do it."

Like made it through college writing less than ten pages, so it worked. *[Laughs]* But also I wasn't a research major, so y'all have fun with that. *[Laughs]*

So I was always the person where it's like the path of least tension but the most effectiveness is what I'm going to do. So I feel like doing short form work works for me, because it's short enough where I'm able to get my point across, and if I do need to expand I can make another short form space about it, rather than doing a long form statement and then having to hone it in, edit it out, and reel it back. And while yes, there are times where I do over explain a lot of things, it still isn't going to be a ten-page paper. *[Laughs]*

CR: Do you view social media more as like fun for yourself or more as like, I don't know a platform for activism?

T: Platform for activism and fun. I thought you were going to say business. I'm like ain't nobody paying me; I have rent due. Well, let me be clear, ain't no sponsorships have come through yet. Well, technically that's a lie, 'cause I have had two paid opportunities, so I can't – well, three. Three. I mean I've had like three. But I remember I did do – I remember Queers Curling Hair got national recognition for – well, not national, but like it got recognition for the Baltimore Pride, like the one summer 2020, you know, COVID. *[Laughs]* During COVID. And they did a virtual pride, so I did one with like the head coordinator at the time and we talked about like being fat, femme, and Black.

I also did a fat, femme, and Black panel for another organization in the city, and then I did a drag paint and talk, where it's like you do your makeup, or you do your drag makeup, and while talking about it, answering questions and promoting the organization. And I was like, "Okay." It was paid, so. *[Laughs]*

And I feel like activism is something I'm stepping into. And I find it hard to call myself an activist truly too, because I feel like I'm the activist who's doing it behind the screen, and while that is a form of activism, there are some times when I don't know how to curate a full activism space. And then also I'm the person who is like, well, I'll talk about a lot of issues that I experience and certain issues about other things. Like I'm very much of – like I'm very much going to tell someone they don't have the range to talk about certain things, but I'm also someone who's quick to say that I don't have the range to talk about certain things.

Like anytime people are talking to me about like, "Oh" – like even though I'm a Trans person technically because I am nonbinary, like really – so how do you feel about a Trans woman who does – I'm like, "That's not my business." It's like there are plenty of Trans women who I trust. Like I'll give you the resources, talk to them. Or not talk – also don't talk to them because you're ask – don't ask for bandwidth from people you don't know. Or don't ask for activism from people who you are not paying for their time for or their resources. Like if there are free resources out there and people have already done the work and it's available I'll send it to you. But I'm very much a person where it's like don't – I will send you the resources. Don't ask for bandwidth from them, because if they cut you out it will not be on my accord. I can't help you on that one. *[Laughs]*

DB: So imagine we're like five years from now – you are social media famous, activist. Yes?

T: Yes.

DB: What is something that you would change here? What would you want to do with that platform?

T: Oooo... So much. My Beyonce voice: to be happy! No, just GaGa – let me not do that. Ooh, that's a good one.

I would love it if it – what change would I like to see? Or what – better hiring processes. More inclusive spaces. More inclusive spaces, more hiring diversity. I want queer people – and not just the ones who don't look– I want visibly queer people to feel safe in their workplaces. I want visibly queer people to be able to exist and flourish. I want them to have access to the resources they need: better housing, hormone therapy for those people who are on that. What is it? Resources, outlets, ooh, there's so many things.  
[Laughs]

Like I just want queer people, specifically Trans people, specifically Black Trans people to flourish and not feel like they're just living or surviving or sustaining; they're flourishing. Because we deserve that as well as anyone else who's stealth.

I would want – god. Just so much. [Laughs] I want so much for like the queer – the Black queer community. Safe spaces. I want queer people in roles of leadership and empowerment. Better diversity and inclusion. Corporate workspaces. Doing what they need to do in order to make their queer workers feel safe. Us having the hard discussions, but also realizing what discussions need to be had.

Just so much. Just so much. Just so much. [Laughs] I want it all.

DB: Yeah.

CR: Absolutely.

DB: Move to the end?

CR: Yeah. So it's time for our like ending questions. And so the first thing is is there anything that we didn't ask or any experience or story related to any of your identities or just being in Baltimore that you want to share and make sure is recorded or documented?

*T:* I would just say there aren't a lot of people – while the number is growing, there aren't a lot of people who look like or identify like me in Baltimore. And I want to not be an anomaly. I want to be more commonplace with people who do feel secure enough to present and look the way I look and exist in these spaces safely.

I think Baltimore is becoming a hotspot and very much a booming queer society, but I do think that there are things that we need to hone in and do better on, specifically queer representation, specifically with queer representation in corporate workplaces. Yeah. I think that's about it.

*DB:* All right. And is there anyone that you would recommend to be part of this project, doing something similar, recording an interview?

*T:* I think the best person would probably be for something of this caliber and like this would be Iya Dammons, the person who runs Safe Haven. I feel like she is – her, Jabari Lyles.

*CR:* Yes.

*DB:* We know Jabari.

*T:* As I get – like - the top tier people. Jibari Lyles, Iya. Ooh, I'm trying to think. Who else? Who else? Who else? Queer Black leadership. That's something – those were the first who come to mind. I know they're the power players; I know they're always busy, but those are the two who I would love. I feel like have the experiences, have the activism, as people who grew up in Baltimore City to talk about those things.

*DB:* Yeah.

*T:* I know it's hard to get your hands on them, but if you can it's a magical thing.

*DB:* Yeah. I actually volunteered with Jabari in Thread, so that's how I met Jabari.

*T:* No, when I said I did a virtual – Queers Curling Hair virtual, he's the one who co-hosted it.

*DB:* Oh, awesome.

- T:* Yeah, he's the one, he was like, "We would love to have you for the part." I'm like, "Global." *[Laughs]*
- CR:* Yeah, what is your experience with like Baltimore Pride or also just like Black Pride in Baltimore?
- T:* I have not done anything with Black Pride yet. I would love to; I just haven't asked to. I know Iya is still looking for performances for a Black Trans Pride. Madeline may be signing up. *[Laughs]* We'll look into that.
- But yeah, so Pride of Baltimore – regular Baltimore Pride I have only walked. I've walked four times; three times at CCDC, one time at UB. Yeah.
- CR:* All right. And then our last ending question is what would you think the best use for – well, not the best use, but like – how should this like project live on? So we are just like two interviewers of many sitting down with so many different Baltimore natives, Baltimore queer people who are sharing their stories and what kind of, I guess – what should be our end goal in terms of sharing these stories? 'Cause we don't want them to just live archived in the Hopkins Archive because we think there's a lot of beauty and a lot of purpose that comes with sharing these stories.
- So would you like to see like an in-person event? Like a podcast? What are you envisioning?
- T:* Podcast. In-person event. This actually being archived digitally somewhere in like the library space. Like not just pushed away for Pride or Black Pride, but also like being readily available for queer voices would be beautiful. Nationwide coverage. Like I would love to see something like this on a nationwide caliber. I would love to have it accessible, because I know that if not my story, any of the stories that are being told is going to resonate with someone. And I want that to be able to be accessed.
- CR:* Absolutely. I think right now what we've been brainstorming – and I say we, I mean like our professor, Dr. Plaster, and then also the other students taking the course and conducting interviews. We decided on kind of like a hybrid approach. So I think we're going to make a website that will have either like – I think I don't know what length of clip we've decided on it; I don't think it will be the full oral history interviews, but it will just be like audio portraits they're called. Like 10, 15 minute clips of peoples' stories edited together. Maybe with our voices, maybe not.

*DB:* Yeah, and it'll be like linked – it'll take whoever is interested to the full-length interviews if they want to hear the whole thing. And then we're also planning in conjunction with that doing like a celebration barbecue type of thing in person.

*T:* Yes.

*DB:* Probably at the park right here, like just something for all of the narrators, all of us in the class, and like your friends and family to come, and just sort of like have fun, celebrate, reflect on the experience, just to thank y'all for putting in the time. We're also planning this, so if you have specific things, like ideas for that event or anything really, we'd love to hear about it

*T:* Absolutely. That sounds great. No, that sounds amazing. And I think that the audio portraits and the website would probably be the best curator space for these types of things. I think that's great.

*DB:* Awesome.

*CR:* Okay. All right.

*DB:* Thank you so much, Taylor.

*T:* Thank you so much for having me.

*CR:* Here, I'll Give Danae back her phone.

*CR:* Thanks. Sorry for all the technical – technical difficulties

*T:* No, you're fine!

*[End of Audio]*