

Interviewee: Derrick Bracey (DB)

Interviewer: Tripti Pillai (TP)

Date: 10/2018

Location:

Transcribed by Valerie McLaurin 1/2019

TP: In terms of protocol, when in the project we refer to you what would like to be referred to as in terms of your name? How you spell it? And what gender pronouns would you like to have attached to you.

DB: Okay, Derrick Bracey. D-e-r-r-i-c-k Bracey B-r-a-c-e-y. And “he.”

TP: Okay, thank you. So the project is still in its very early stages in that we’ve done all the research in terms of theoretical understanding and such about trans individuals. By all the research, I mean just initial scholarly research. And what we’re doing now, is we’re in our interview stage. So, what will the eventual shape of this project be is more or less determined by the shape of the interviews which is why how you and other people who are being interviewed direct the project – that would pretty much lead to what the shape of the project will be. So, first and foremost thank you. Because I know you’re taking time. I know it is a very awkward genre and especially as a friend it is I’m sure not entirely comfortable to speak as I was saying earlier almost like you’re behind their back. And yet, because Keri explicitly referred to you as being one of her closest friends I thought it would be a really educational experience for me but also for the people who eventually learn from the project to have your insights.

DB: (02:21) Well great, great. Thank you for having me.

TP: So tell me a little bit about yourself. Is Myrtle Beach home from birth? How did you come to Myrtle Beach and Coastal and how did you come to meet Keri?

DB: North Carolina originally. I was moved around a lot but North Carolina I consider home. Robeson County, North Carolina – very small, poor county in North Carolina. I moved around a lot, I moved here eventually in ‘91, senior in high school. I moved with my brothers, also from North Carolina, and spent a lot of time I’m going to say finding myself. Trying to discover who I was. I took time after high school. I was always a writer, I always loved to write, and thought maybe communications and journalism were the best for me, and English. So, I actually went to the College of Charleston first, transferred to the University of South Carolina, transferred again to the University of South Carolina upstate to work with specific journalists there. Got my degree. Papers died unfortunately, newspapers died. So, cobbled together a career in hospitality and freelance work. I eventually came back here to the Masters in Writing in 2012, and then I first met Keri right around that time. Of course, Keri wasn’t “Keri” at that time. So, we became friends, that whole group of graduate students were very close during that time. We talked a lot we spent a lot of time outside of classes eating at restaurants and drinking. Keri does not drink so we drank around her a lot. In that time we got very close, several of us got very close. She’s come to know my family and they’ve come to know

her to a lesser degree, she is very shy. So, she declines a lot of offers that have to do with a lot of people a lot of the time. But when she's there, you always know she's there. Usually because one of us is sitting in the corner talking to her. So, if that answers your question?

TP: Yes, it certainly does. It brings up a lot of questions in my head because in my interview with Keri she had talked about how she spent a lot of time trying to find herself after she finished school. You know she was considering whether or not she wants to go to school, what she wants to pursue, right? And then she too transferred schools before coming to Coastal. So, as you were talking about your own life it seemed that there is this sort of shared history—

DB: Yes.

TP: – of self-discovery which is interesting. What would you say are your biggest milestones in terms of personal victories and accomplishments, but also personal challenges that you may or may not have yet—

DB: (05:52) Usually in these situations people always say children. I never say children in this case (laughing). Because they simply happen, children are a joyous thing to be and around and to be part of parenting. It's great, but it's not an accomplishment as much as it is a duty to create decent adults. So, I'm okay at that (laughing). That part, I'm okay at. But I think again you know I've written a couple of novels that went absolutely nowhere so there's that kind of Sisyphean movement of writing that you do a lot of that work and nothing comes of it. I am very proud of pushing the rock up the hill and then letting it roll and pushing it again. I am very proud that I continue to walk to the bottom of the hill and push it back up. So there's that. But I think I found a certain amount of pride in teaching and I think I found a certain amount of pride in friendships. With the teaching, it kind of works out the same way. You become these fast friends for four and a half months and they go about their lives and you go about yours. And you have these peers that are around you at the same time and you learn from them. I think the sense of you're never going to stop learning, the Socratic method that go on where you feel like I'm constantly these why questions or how are you doing this or why are you doing this? And see if they make sense. So, I think if you were to ask me what I were most proud of, would be the fact that I know nothing (laughing). And I can accept that. When I was in my twenties and in my forties I absolutely knew nothing and that I learned from the people that I'm around, just sponge-like.

TP: So, which of course leads to what do you think are the biggest milestones, say in your friendship with Keri and what do you think you've learned from her and what do you think she might learn from you?

DB: (08:18) You know relationships are funny to think of in that way and in those terms – reciprocal terms. Because metaphysically speaking we could say, yes, we learn this from that relationship. But I think more than anything else there is this certain sense of osmosis that occurs. And if you were to say to me ten years ago, “one of your great

friends will be trans.” and I would say, “really?” (laughing). But at the same time I think I'd be excited about that simply because you don't get into friendships to learn about them, you get into friendships because there's an essence, a central truth that you feel with them or some kind of kinship. And I think you're right what you said earlier. You don't put together friends groups like, “Let me check this diversity box.” I think you do it simply because, especially when you've lived your life in this “outsider” mode, that you tend to look for other people that share that with you, this feeling of always being on the outside. I think I've learned to navigate being on the outside better because of my relationship with Keri., if that makes sense.

TP: Yeah.

DB: (09:48) And also, I think this is presumption at the highest, but I think there's a sense that I've helped her getting along better in groups or communicating better in a larger context of friendships, right? Keri thinks sometimes “I could take it or leave it” with everything. Food for that day (laughing), or friendships or writing. I get very passionate about all of these things and sometimes you feel like she's just – but, there's also this sense of if you've haven't heard from her in four or five days she's going to reach out to you if you don't reach out to her. So there's that feeling there that she has this whole shrug about it. But there's also this reaching at the same time, there's a reach in the shrug I guess.

TP: Yeah. Do you think that is a special intimacy that the two of you have that she reaches out to you? Or is it that her few friends that she holds very dear? What do you think?

DB: (11:03) Yeah, I think that there are a few of us that I know of. She keeps a very tight circle. She's around a lot of people a lot of the time but as far as actually divulging any actual information there is a very tight group. I don't know what made me part of that group besides just a kinship and a feeling of being an “outsider” a lot of our lives. And we can share that, there's also this idea of depression. Like I suffer depression, she suffers depression as well, that may be giving too much there. But I think that we both share that and we've both had long conversations about that. It's the conversation you have about any shy friend whenever you have a big mouth friend (laughing) that comes with this kind of Mutt and Jeff relationship. I think that was the idea that one does all the talking, Laurel and Hardy and Penn and Teller, however you want to put it. There's the whispering in the ear so I can make the joke part of the relationship too that kind of, the cohesiveness of it I think. And I know she has relationships and other aspects that kind of serve different needs that she has. But I think a lot of the times she needs to laugh (laughing). She would say as much, that she needs to laugh. And I think I'm always good for a laugh, you know, there's that as well.

TP: That's a great thing to be good for (laughing).

DB: Sometimes, sometimes not. If you were to ask my wife she'd say that's enough laughs. We've had enough.

TP: Aww. So can you talk about 2012 when you first met Keri and she hadn't yet transitioned. Can you talk a little bit about your perception of who she was and maybe think about what in her might have changed? Your sense of who Keri is, has it changed, and how? And how has her transitioning played a role in that?

DB: (13:40) It almost makes you think like I wish would've known Keri at eighteen, right? I think there are certain, like if you go back into her timeline I think there's those moments of like this has always been this thing. But culturally it made it hard, or space or freedoms within family, have made it I wouldn't say her family were [accepting] all the time but I would say it gave her enough space to make that move or say these things. But I don't think, and I'm not presuming this in the least, but I don't know if there was ever a different – we say “transitioning” but I think that's just physically, right? I don't think she was ever anything but what she is. That sounds terrible the way I just put that.

TP: No I was going to actually say the opposite. That's something very astute.

DB: (14:42) Yeah, because in her writing and in our conversations when I wanted a female perspective and I was in a room of four or five females, she was the one I would pull aside to ask that female perspective. And I don't know why, early on, and I think that's one of those things that kind of connected. I ask advice about my wife to her, and I have a lot of female friends. So, (laughing) that's been her since early on. Since probably right before we actually had the conversation. Whenever you're writing these pieces and she's writing a novel at the time or a screenplay, and pronouns become the conversation. Not in the work, but because of the work, pronouns become this conversation. And the idea of sexuality and outward sexuality and inward sexuality, this idea is very much present in her work. And I think because of this, to borrow your word, this astuteness, of presenting it on the page, this outward angst and inward yearning, made me want to ask advice on how to deal with these things in my own life. Both in my writing and in my personal life. If that makes sense.

TP: Yeah. It's really interesting that you identified Keri's ability to understand femininity more insightfully than, say, normative conventionally cis-gendered women. Do you think that you identifying that in her made her more comfortable and at ease with telling you about her transition and identity or was it something you guessed at or felt intuitively?

DB: (17:22) Yeah, with the talking about advice I think if I were to say, you know, “what makes you feel this way?” If you were to ask me, “as a cis-gendered male, what makes you feel this way?” I wouldn't be able to articulate that. And I think that's the same. Where someone who is outwardly, not inwardly so much, inwardly I think she always knew exactly who she was. But outwardly, because when you're put in a situation you're made to articulate it and you yourself are trying to articulate and find a way to tell people who you are. I think it does get you more in touch with both the perception of you and the way you view yourself through the perception of someone else. And I think that's why it seemed like this is the person I should be asking this of, because she's thinking the most of these things. These are cognizant thoughts she's having on a day-to-day basis. I myself

am not thinking of how people see me as a man, it never occurs to me. But to think that you'd have to navigate the world in that way. Not the way you feel about yourself but the way you perceive other people are thinking about you. To me, seems one, as a writer, and let me just say this we're dirty sons of bitches all the way around in the fact that we just want to pick brains and figure things out all the time. And I mean that in a non-gendered way, sons of bitches (laughing), that you constantly try to pull out the thing that's behind the thing. The thought that makes the action occur. You're always trying to pull that out. So I think that occurs when you see someone, but more than that when you become friends with someone too, one you want to put them at ease constantly. And two, like I said she's very reserved so there's this "it's okay just to be you." You do want to say that. All the time. I want to say it all the time, where you can feel the tension. Especially in the beginning, not so much now. I think the first thing I said was, "what next?" Because we all kind of knew that. All of this group of friends, this little community, we all knew already before it was ever vocalized. So I know my response was like, "well, what's next? What are you doing next?" and I can remember there was a moment we were at a function where there was a lot of people that we had known for years. Some people were just meeting. And I can remember this anxiety building; this was maybe two, three days after she told me. And she had just changed her name. And we were at this function and I was physically clenching my fists, like digging nails into my palms, worried how she was going to react if someone said or did the wrong thing. And there was such a graceful graciousness about these situations where she just goes with it there's not much perception given. Because it's just introducing her to someone else, but they were introducing her with her male name, her given name, and I felt like I was going to melt out of my skin. And she just shook hands and moved on. And you've gotta think, that's what she's been doing this whole life. She's probably pretty used to it by now. But because this idea of transition got put into my head all of a sudden I've become this anxiety ball.

TP: Yeah. What were you anxious about?

DB: (22:00) I think when I look back, I think I was anxious for all the wrong reasons. She'd been doing this, navigating these waters, her whole life. But now I was in it with her and I did not know how to react. Whenever you come up and you're used to even your parents or siblings or cousins or friends, there's an acceptance there. Whether parents want to admit it or not, there's a certain amount of acceptance that comes along with who we are. So you get used to that. Then, whenever they one day come to you and they come out, or they say I like this thing instead of the thing you thought I liked, they already knew, right? And I think when you I think when you talk about friends becoming like these extended members of your family, you just want to scream into a room, "she's transitioning! Look away!" That would just damage your relationship, your relationship in the room of people, how you see yourself in handling things. So I think that's it, there's this idea of I wanted to put everything on the table, let's lay all this out, and her wanting to transition in a quiet, not a big deal sort of way. I think that was more than anything else, this wanting to fight for my friend. I spent a lifetime fighting for my friends or fighting for my siblings. I've gotten really good at it, verbally, and when I was a kid, physically. Fighting for these things I believe in, if I believe in this person I want to

fight for them. So there's also this idea that maybe they don't want you fighting for them. Maybe this is their transition, this is their moment and their life, that they just need you to shut up and back off and to just sit back and watch. And not, from someone who has control issues with never being able to not say what's on my mind, I think that caused anxiety more for myself than for her. Because of that situation, it doesn't ever put you in an awkward position, it just puts you in a position where you learn how to deal with it with the person, if that makes sense.

TP: Absolutely, that's so beautifully said. When you were talking it occurred to me that what made you anxious in some ways is the love you felt, right? The desire to protect Keri from perceived antagonism or perceived mystification, or just people's inability to comprehend. (inaudible) assumptions (inaudible) what do you feel (inaudible) transitioning, that sense of (inaudible)?

DB: (25:50) This is wild assumptions, but I would say maybe I talked to a couple of people afterwards after she told me initially. Almost in like a protective way, to say, (inaudible) come out to you in this way. Almost to say, how are you handling don't hurt her feelings in any way? But they were like oh yeah we've already talked about it, what would I have to say about it was most of the reactions. It was very nice of her to like present this to all of us but you felt like what business is it of ours? I know that is not the case with her family. I think because it's not the case with her family and then she has this group of people that are here that are open armed about it and that say, "yes, whatever we can do for you or do with you or help you with, just let us know." Because of that I'm very proud of this community that we're in, because of that. And when I look at it, I'm very proud to say I'm a part of it. It gets me a little choked (clears throat). To say that these people that were teachers, who were once our teachers, our friends, our peers and gone on to different parts of the world, that remain here teaching, that we all share this feeling of – it's not for us to accept or not accept, but this feeling of kinship. And I think most people feel that way. Most of us I think, not to be flippant about it, but I think most of us were like, "oh we knew that already. We already knew that!" So I think if I were to assume that would be the reaction of most. What breaks my heart is this is not the reaction of all. And we've had a fair amount of those conversations where we talked about families and I've always pushed against my family and for no reason whatsoever besides like the ability to push I guess. I came out to my father once, and I am not gay, because I just wanted to see his reaction (laughing). Which enraged him at the time, but then at the same time I was married with children so it was a funny thing to do at the time but then I talked to Keri, and it's not a funny thing to do in that situation because it may seem that I was making light of something that she struggles with on a day to day basis. At the same time I can't stop that part of who I am and that pushing and I also can't stop prying and asking her like, once a month or once every three months, like how's your mom doing? How's your dad doing? Just to see if anything's improved there. And it saddens me, especially somebody who not only I'm close with and I'm just as close with [my own family] and no matter how much I push they always pull me back in. And so to see her not have that relationship or not be able to be pulled back into the fold as who she is bothers me. I don't know if that was the question at all.

TP: That is absolutely the question. So you brought up the local community and you said that you're very proud of this immediate family, right? That is the friends circle, the community of former teachers, current teachers, you know? Beyond Coastal, one of the things that both you and Keri share is identity as being Southerners. You're from the South. Do you think being of the South makes gender and whatever your ideas are about say, masculinity, about femininity, about being trans, does something about being from the South complicate that or change it? Do you think your relationship with Keri would be different if you were, say, in the Northeast?

DB: (30:52) Right, you know, that's a great question. That is a great question. And in my own writing I deal a lot with it, with gender and the South. And I think that has more to do with it than the geographical South or Northeast. I think the relationship would be a lot different, and we've discussed this, it would be a lot different if we were both from Southern California. You know, along the same line geographically but really different places. And I think it really would've been different if we'd met in San Diego. I honestly don't think there would be quite as much veiled feelings as she has here, that you kind of have to pry at at times to get to. Not so much anymore, we're kind of shorthand with each other at this point. But there was a time, and it was not long ago probably two years ago, where she was very, very guarded with her responses. I don't think you would've had that in the South but then our relationship was kind of built off of me prying. I think that comes from a journalistic background of wanting to know. I remember the bathroom issue was happening in North Carolina and my first question, it never even occurred to me before, my first question is "Where are you going to the bathroom here?" This is not a common question that you're gonna ask your friends. But she also had very forthright answers and there were only certain bathrooms she would go to and to put that into the perspective of your own existence in this community that I've just described as open armed and loving in a lot of ways, to know that she's scuttling from one building to another, is disconcerting. So I lost my train there—

TP: We were talking about the South, and—

DB: (34:22) —oh, the South, right. So yeah I don't think that would be an issue and that conversation might never happen. At the same time, I get to know someone better because of this. The unfortunate part of that is I'm getting to know someone for the obstacles they face instead of the experience that they're just having. And I think it is magnified, and I think there's a certain amount of guardedness you have to have, living in the South and living under this intense religion mentality that you have here that you wouldn't have if you were living in certain other parts of the country. But I think we're closer because of it. But I don't think her existence is easier because of it.

TP: Again, you're so articulate, I'm very grateful for that. What can the community do? I'm thinking of the LGBT community at Coastal and in the area, but what can we do in the local community to make some sort of a change so that someone like Keri's existence, as you put it, is not difficult? I know it'll have to be very extended and elaborate, but what comes to you mind? Simple things that might be done?

DB: (35:54) How do you put this. So we went to a close restaurant once, right down here, several teaching associates, and we were just decompressing from the semester and all having lunch. I think we had just given finals and were three cis white males at the table and Keri. And the waiter of those, you were assured, that this was not a male sitting at the table insisted on saying “sir.” “Can I get you something, sir?” To the point that this was like this wave of a hand to tell me to stand down.

TP: From Keri?

DB: From Keri, from saying something. Because it was going to upset her more than it was going to upset him – this calling attention. I don’t know how to fix personal snags and I don’t know how to fix the way we perceive a population of people that are scared to be themselves because of the way that they’re viewed. I don’t know how to fix that. That neuro-net. I don’t know how we can get in there and change the way people are thinking. I can say that it’s contagious. So the more that you open arms and use words you give the words power and at the same time you normalize the words. And I think after a while we even stop thinking about the way we did once think about it. I think that’s what has to occur more than anything else, that we normalize. So the very thing that I’ve prided myself on this whole time on being on this outside and looking in, it’s made me a better writer, at the same time I’ve had the convenience of being able to walk in and out of any room anywhere and never felt like I needed to guard myself against the people that ran those rooms. I think more open arms need to happen. We say this, and I don’t know how you put this in a Southern way, but I think if we just feel more neighborly. It was a thing that I remember living in North Carolina when I was a kid; it was always this idea from attending church. It was a Baptist church and then it was a First Baptist church. Of course the First Baptist church was full of white families. And then the Baptist church was probably about a block away and it was full of Native Americans, which we referred to as Lumbee Indians, that lived in the area and the black community would have this Baptist church. And I remember I had a minister when I was fourteen years old, his name was Ken Singley, I will sing his name, because the best thing that ever happened to me in a church environment was we walked over to this Baptist church one day when none of us knew about it and met with the Baptist preacher that was there. And the next thing that you know on that Sunday, because they almost shared this backyard on this plot, the next Sunday after they met the next thing you know we’re playing volleyball with these other people that we go to school with all the time but we for some reason segregated ourselves to worship. And we were playing volleyball and playing basketball in these church leagues and all these things that were set up and we’re sharing barbeque and we’re eating. And he always said it was the neighborly thing to do., it was his thing. Any time we went in anywhere it was the neighborly thing to do. And I think the confines that religion put on us can open us up in opposite ways. If you go the other way on the spectrum of what religion was intended for in the first place, it was to take commune with those who aren’t like you. The very idea with the Jesuits were to discover new things and to bring into the church these ideas of science and different communities and how do we encapsulate all this into one idea or one goal. So, with that being said, I think a lot more of that, these open doors. And let’s not be scared of the words, let’s not be scared of any of these



words. If I've learned nothing else from Keri over these years, it's that we can stumble over our words, we can say the wrong thing, and we can still be friends. Because we know where we stand, we know where we are in our hearts, right? I can't tell you through the transition how many times the pronouns got wrong in my mouth and never did she storm out of a room and say "we can't do this anymore." There's all acceptance on that side of the issue and there seems to be very limited acceptance on this side. It's the same thing especially in the Southeast when you're dealing with immigrants coming into the country. It's like speak the language, and all I want to do is like I wish I could learn every language in five minutes. How beautifully could I say something in this language as opposed to this dirty thing I've been speaking my whole life, right? The idea of this cross learning and learning through osmosis I think needs to be more easily accepted. Sometimes fences don't make the best neighbors.

TP: Very often they don't. You brought up your family very early in our conversation, how does your family feel about Keri? Did you need to help them understand your relationship with Keri and who Keri is and her transitioning? You have children I assume?

DB: (43:20) Keri's never met my mother but I've talked about Keri to my mother. She refers to it as I used to not believe in dinosaurs, that's her philosophy on everything. When I was a child I thought dinosaurs were a myth. Everyday she tries to learn something new and be more, as she puts it, "I want to be more culturally relevant." I've had that discussion and there's a certain amount of fear I think that was there before. Fear of the unknown. I have a son who's twenty-four who's very open in all communities and he has a very diverse friend group and he's getting ready to join the navy so he can see more of the world and he wants to learn how to be a rescue diver. Every time we have a conversation or he says he wants to talk to me, he always says, I'm not gay so I'm not coming out. I don't know why you want one of your children to be gay but I'm not the one. Because every time we have a conversation it's never that I wanted or pushed or anything like that I just have gone too far I think to feel like I'm the accepting parent, come to me and we can talk about anything, I think I've taken it too far at times. Whereas my twelve year old son is a twelve year old boy and he says insensitive things and gets called insensitive things, and gets disciplined for saying insensitive things all the time because twelve year olds are a cruel, cruel species. At the same time he's willing to walk anyone across the road, no matter gender, no matter age, so there is this sense of discovery with him too where he wants to know about people and all people. With that being said, I remember when we graduated and we had this cookout and it was several of us and Keri's family came into town and we didn't see her so we were texting and calling and thinking they were going to come. And I think she just worried that there was a dynamic there that she didn't want to get involved with. Like she's this with us and this with them and she didn't want to include that. We were driving home and my son at the time, he was probably eight, she had just come as far as transitioning was concerned and I was talking to my wife about it and there's no conversation that's not privy to everyone's ears and usually I'm loud not meaning to be loud it's just I project. My son said, "I wanted to meet your trans friend." And hearing it from my eight year old say it like that was almost like it made it sound at the time because it was coming from an eight year old

like "I want to meet your friend that's in the circus." And it really bothered me. I think it was from that point on where I was like, "that will no longer be my trans friend in the way I discuss this with my family. This is just my friend Keri." But then like I said many times things have just fumbled out of my mouth and trying to wrap your brain around the way you think of things, and with someone who talks much more than Keri, I'm not as deliberate always in the way I say things. From that I didn't make it a direct point, I would just say, "Keri."

TP: We were talking about how you have discussed your friendship with Keri.

DB: (48:46) Right, I think that that's probably the best example of it. My wife, this is gonna sound terrible, this probably should be off the record, but my wife is a gossip hound and she makes me a gossip hound. So she always wants to know how's Keri. Keri's very private so she won't open up to a lot of people so I like to just have dinner with me and like one other person. And if we have a friend that comes in that was in the graduate program with us, she'll come into town and I like to go out to dinner and we always just find out what's going on in our lives. And it's one of these very honest spaces where we can just kind of lay it out. My wife always wants to know who Keri's dating. "Is Keri dating?" And she knows several people from high school because she's 40 years old, my wife's 40, and she knows several people that she went to high school [with] here. She's from California, but she's lived here since her senior year in high school. So she knows several people who have transitioned since that point. She always says, "they date terribly. They just date terribly." It's just the idea of like finding someone that accepts you for who you are and it's all these conversations that have to do with dating that make me both, so thankful, and it's one of those situations like you just don't know how good you have it, you know? Until you see situations where your friends are struggling constantly. Because when you can't be yourself around the person that you're dating or you have to be too much of yourself, they like a certain thing. If I felt like they were dating me because I was chubby, you know, because I'm bearded and chubby, I would probably shave and lose weight right away, right? Because anybody that wants me for those attributes and not because I make them smile or because the other parts of me that make me who I am. And to know that there are people that are marketing themselves honestly to attract someone who's transitioning. When you hear of dating as a meat market, it feels that way. And my wife is always super concerned about that. And she doesn't know Keri that well at all but she's very concerned I think, as well as I. I it's because I'm so concerned too that you're going to date somebody who wants you for who they perceive who you are instead of who you really are. Because who she is a deep thinking, careful and considerate person and someone who is capable of extreme amounts of love. And to think that someone wants them because she's transitioning. It feels like a sense of, do you want me to stop? I don't believe there is such a thing as sexual perversion but it feels like a sense of perverting something that someone naturally is. Does that make sense? I think I am stunned.

TP: Yeah. It's taking advantage in some ways of--

DB: (53:01) Right. Yeah.

TP: -- without putting words in your mouth.

DB: (53:03) That is absolutely what I'm saying. And it feels again with the defense of someone who didn't want to be defended. There's this sense where I want to say like, "are you aware in any way of what she does on a day to day basis?" The fact that she goes [inaudible], she's very self conscious, who she is and has been probably her whole life and her family are not not to blame for that at times. Who goes in front of 20 students at a time, four times a day, and has to think about what they think. Then she has to like call her family from time to time and she has to think about what they think. And then she has to come in contact with peers and people that aren't as accustomed to being around her and think about what they think. And now you're telling me in order for her to simply go out and have a social life or personal life or date or feel some connection with somebody, then now she has to overthink what they think as well? Without putting in perspective what she goes through on a day to day basis, offends me in a way.

TP: Does it offend you because you worry that your wife was right? In other words, do you think Keri can find love and community on her own terms in a place like Myrtle Beach?

DB: (54:50) Yeah. I worry, no. I hope, yes. And I think that's the easiest way to say that. I worry that someone will, not that they haven't already, not that there hasn't been issues with this in the past, not to get too much into her personal life at all, to try to manipulate something to be with someone for what they want you to represent. You know? So with that being said I know that she struggled with it. So yes, I do worry. You know I met this group that was writing several articles back when I was a journalist almost full time and a student full time and I just wrote this article on same sex marriages and I met this group and they do these mingles for trans business professionals on Tuesday nights. But at the same time there is a sense of community. So I'm telling her about that and she's like, you know, you act like I haven't heard of the, there is a sense of sardonic sarcasm that comes with being her friend that I would never, any amount of money pay for her to stop doing. There's a certain look to it and the way she says things that are just iconically her. I think it's because she's so reserved and the amount of words she uses that when she uses those quick a biting ones, they should just be framed. So, I'm always constantly [saying] "Oh, you should try this. And there's moral likeminded people, and there's this sense of community there." And this is from someone who, again, as an outsider, is always looking into different things. And so she's been there. She's done that. And then she didn't find what she was looking for and she continues to try, which is more than commendable. It's more brave than I think I would ever be. I mean, I would have just locked myself away and wrote a manifesto at this point about how hard life as, but she continues to go out and continues to try to find something more. With that being said, I hope. But then I also know this place that we're from.

TP: I'll make this my last question for you so you have time to yourself in the evening. If, for whatever reason, you were to be able to speak with somebody who is either, one of the people that you worry she would be taken advantage of with or someone who for any

other reason does not respect and understand Keri for who she is and makes assumptions about her based on her transitioning, her gender, her identity and sexuality, what would you say to them if you could? So those are I suppose two different questions.

DB: (58:34) To put some tonality on this, to kind of return to it, I think I would treat it in the same way in the same scenarios as I would when we were talking earlier. I would simply asked them, "can you tell me from your perspective why are you doing this? Because I am again a 45 year old idiot who does not know. So I would love to know why you're doing this." That being said, there are a lot of kind people, I think we take for granted what we see or what politics trend this way or that way. And I think we take for granted the fact that there are loving and kind people all the way across the spectrum. I may just be too protective. So this is going to sound terrible, are you ready?

TP: I'm ready.

DB: (59:38) Being from the south and raised in a southern Baptist and Presbyterian home, I would say, "what are your intentions?"

TP: And this is for the people--

DB: (59:53) --the people who potentially are dating or seeing her in some way, but it's not my place either. So being over protective is natural to me, but it's something that I push back against. So more than anything else, I think it's just if you could play superhero for a day and just project a thought into their head without saying it and making Keri shrink and making the room awkward, which for some reason I do constantly. But if I could just project the thought, I think more than anything else, she's been hurt enough. She doesn't need any more of it. So if this just a curiosity or if you're just trying out type, maybe you should move on.

TP: What would you say to somebody, say people like her family or like the waiter you mentioned at the restaurant who simply would not accept or understand Keri the way she wants to be understood, what would you say to them?

DB: (01:01:10) Again with the with the magical projection tool? I think more than anything I want to say this to anyone who looks at any one in this way, and I grew up in a very racially divided, bigoted area of the world. We can say whatever we want to say about progression and the way things are and the way things have moved. But I'm also from a place where I've walked into rooms and because I look a certain way, people have said things to me that they wouldn't say to someone who was standing out there outside of that room. I've been privy to a lot of that. And I don't think there was ever a time when it didn't anger me. I come from inquisitive people my whole life who've lived like sharecroppers with with a diverse set around them. So I don't think it's ever not offended me when it's been said. So I think more than anything else, I would just say, just strip all that away. If you could just strip all that away and you'd just be naked in it for a minute. Where do you stand now? Right? You're not a male waiter at a restaurant. You're not a Baptist priest, a Catholic priest or a Baptist minister or you're not the parents of someone

who's struggling to come out of the closet. You're just naked in the sun. You're just naked in the sun. Now what do you think? If we could just strip it all down, like everything that we're raised with, or that's hung around us like ropes and chains and we can just strip all that away and just be naked for a minute with each other. Everyone. What do you really think? Are we petitioning in some way for a conversation that we're going to have later on when you put that person in their place, or how do you feel about doing it? What does that feel like? Because this is all we have left when we're stripped, is just our conscious and our subconscious. We're digging down into our identity of who we are and I think this is what she does constantly, digs down until her fingers bleed into identity. So with that being said, shouldn't we do that before we start casting aspersions?

TP: She I would assume agree with me when I say she has a great friend in you.

DB: (01:04:02) I hope.

TP: I think so. Thank you for your time, for your honesty, your insights and I'm sure for what would have been very painful articulations of your feelings about some of the people you've talked about, some of the experiences you've shared with Keri or just on your own. If you have anything else you think I should ask you, but I haven't, if you have any suggestions for me, will you tell me?

DB: (01:04:33) Yes, absolutely.

TP: You can tell me now or you can tell me via e-mail.

DB: (01:04:38) I don't know now.

TP: You've given me so much of your time and energy and thoughts. If I have other questions, may I set up follow up?

DB: (01:04:49) Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. Thank you for doing this.

TP: I hope it hasn't been awfully awkward.

DB: (01:04:56) No, you know, it was so much so like walking down the hallway before this. Not since I've been in here, I mean it has faded within seconds.

TP: I'm relieved.