

Interviewee: Tyra McNeil (TM)

Interviewer: Joshua Parsons (JP)

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Transcribed by Joshua Parsons 10/2018, edited by Shonte Clement 08/2019

[00:02] JP: Okay so, this is the Trans project that we are working on, and I want to start with the name you identify with.

TM: Tyra.

[00:15] JP: Okay, and what pronouns do you prefer?

TM: She/her/hers.

[00:22] JP: Gotcha. Okay. Can you tell me about yourself?

[00:30] TM: Well, I am 21 years old. I'll be 22 by the end of this month. I would say I am in the beginning stages of transition pre-op. No hormones just,, you know,, trying to figure out exactly where I want to go with it because there is a lot in the trans community and there is a lot as far as transitioning and how far you can go and when do you want to start. And everyone,, you know,, transitions in their own way. So, yeah, that's where I am now. And I would some of my hobbies are,, you know,, tennis, hanging out, just having fun [laughs].

[00:01:19] JP: Would you mind telling me where you grew up and what....just, yeah, where you grew up.

[00:01:26] TM: I grew up in a small town called Pamplico, South Carolina. It is located like right outside of Florence. Not one trans person in my town. Like, I am the first. And actually there is a kid who goes to my school now who is a trans male, so that's also new too. But yeah, that's where I grew up.

[00:01:51] JP: What about the people in your life that you grew up with? Are they still part of it?

[00:02:04] TM: Mmmm, I would say not really. Not really. I think coming here, and being around more open minded people, I think I have a lot more support here than back home because this transitioning is so new. Back home and being transgender is so new that most people can't really accept it or they're so close minded they won't accept it. So I would say being here and being around more open minded people I have a lot more support here than back at home.

[00:02:33] JP: Gotcha gotcha. OK. What does The South mean to you, and do you feel like a Southerner?

[00:02:48] TM: To me The South—I mean it's home. It's where I grew up. I grew up on Southern traditions. The yes ma'am, no ma'am that,, you know,, most Northerners don't say, and they get offended when you say. So,, you know, I think The South,, you know,, I'm very rooted

in their traditions in a way. Besides being openly trans and being able to,, you know,, be different. Would I say I'm a Southerner? I would say I'm a Southerner. I would [laughs]. Not so much the accent,, you know,, I lost it when I got to Coastal. But I would definitely say I'm a Southerner, and like the traditions and,, you know,, the way Southerners live.

[00:03:34] JP: How do you understand your identity.

TM: Mmmm, I don't think I understand the question.

JP: Like, I guess how...when you think of Tyra what do you think of? Like uh...

[03:54] TM: When I think of Tyra, I think of just this positive ball of energy. And, like, just open and accepting, because that's how I want to be viewed as like open and accepting. So, I would say I view my identity as just positive and just open.

[00:04:17] JP: Okay, okay gotcha. So, what are your like—what are your experiences with this identity as Tyra. Are they negative? Are they positive?

[00:04:26] TM: I've had both positive and negative. I would definitely say that I get more negative [experiences] when I venture away from the college atmosphere, and I get more positive [experiences] when I'm closer to the college atmosphere. And I think that only comes with the fact that everyone here is from different places. So you have different mindsets,, you know,, different thoughts different ideas about certain things as far as being transgender. Most people are more open here near the college than when I venture out. As, you know, Southerners, or people from The South, who view it as a negative or something that's just not even existent. Even though we're here [laughs]. So, I would say it's both negative and positive, but definitely more negative outside.

[00:05:17] JP: Do you mean outside as in just simply Myrtle Beach?

[00:05:20] TM: Yes, Myrtle Beach as in—Mmmm, I would say approximately like,, you know,, like Broadway, like near the areas places like that. I get more negative feedback than positive than when I'm like here.

[00:05:34] JP: So you feel more comfortable around this campus.

[00:05:36] TM: Yes, a lot more comfortable, because I'm around like minded people around people my age and,, you know,, people who are in school, who are studying, who are doing research, who want to know things,, you know,. Rather than people who are stuck in a mindset outside,, you know,, not really doing anything.

[00:05:53] JP: Do you feel—Have you ever gone to any other campuses, like USC or College of Charleston or anything like that? And if so did you have the same experience as you do at Coastal?

[00:06:08] TM: Mmmm, I haven't been to another campus, but I've been—I mean I can answer the question as far as out of town.

JP: Sure.

TM: I would say when I ventured further north I got more positive feedback than when I went farther south like Florida and, you know,, Georgia. Places like that where they are southerners. I would say that definitely up north they have more of an open mindedness and I feel like it's more because of their way of living. Like, their mindset. It's like they live so fast that I mean it doesn't matter. You do you, basically [laughs].

[00:07:00] JP: Do you feel your online status has helped with your transition?

[00:07:04] TM: Yes. Definitely. I feel like being online has helped a lot because it allowed me to see that I'm not alone, and that there are people who started off,, you know,, like where I am now. And to see like where they are now,, you know,, you can be in a whole different mindset and a whole different place in like, you know, six months,, you know,, as far as transitioning. And it's just nice to know that you're not alone. And that's why I try to share my stories online because it helped me a lot so I know it can help someone else. And like I said like the trans guy back in my hometown in my high school he's reached out to me and,, you know,, we've talked and it's just nice to know that there's someone out there that,, you know,, from my hometown and I can help them out.

[00:07:47] JP: Definitely. So I guess my next was do you feel supported so I'm guessing that's a yes.

[00:07:52] TM: Yes. I definitely support it. Especially from you.

[00:07:56] JP: Okay, yeah! Awesome! Thank you! How do you think the future will look for the trans community.

[00:08:03] TM: I think now the future is very bright and I give it—I give it to the Internet. People sharing their stories. You can actually see different sides of stories. You can see the negative. You can see the good. You can see the bad and you can understand it because I feel like without the Internet people really wouldn't understand because they don't have that quick access to just google 'transgender' and understand what it is instead of just trying to figure out, you know, what is that.

[00:08:31] JP: Okay. And how do you feel about it for The South specifically.

[00:08:38] TM: Mmmm, I feel like The South has a little more...a little more progress to be made as far as accepting and understanding trans rights and the whole trans process.

JP: Yeah definitely.

TM: But like I said, it's just tradition. The southern tradition, like it's just their way of living.

[00:09:01] Yeah. Is your identity before Tyra something you still share on social media?

TM: On Facebook I still have like, you know, pictures before transitioning, and I think it's just good to see and like good to let other people see that, you know, this is where I started. And this is where I am and this is where you can start and this is where you can be, you know. And it's always good to see a picture of, you know, you before because, you know, it's still a part if you like this is where you started. This is who you were born, you know, and...

[00:09:35] JP Yeah. So, overall you would say that social media has had a positive role for you?

TM: Yes.

JP: Like, they've been positive for you?

TM: Yeah.

[00:09:52] JP: Is there anything you would like for us to focus on in this project?

[00:10:04] TM: I think the outline you read me sounded—everything was like spot on. Yeah, the trans rights and understanding and really trying to get to know, you know, the whole transgender process.

[00:10:17] JP: Yeah okay. Is there anything that you want the non-trans community to know?

TM: We love you [laughs]. We do. Even if you don't love us, we still love you because that's just who we are. We're positive and we're used to, you know, having a fight and taking a fight. But I mean you knock us down, we'll be right back smiling and all, you know. And it's no kind of hate, it's just lack of knowledge. That's why we're still loving, you know. Yeah.

JP: Yeah.

TM: It's just lack of knowledge and we're here to help you understand if you want to understand.

[00:10:50] JP: Do you feel that the LGBTQ+ community—Do you feel like you belong in that, or do you think that trans is its own thing? And if you do feel like you belong in it, do you feel more support from LGBTQ people than straight people?

[00:11:12] TM: I would say we definitely fit in with the LGBT community, but only because—I mean what you're doing is different and it's a struggle. The whole LGBTQ+ community struggles with identity, struggles with being accepted. So, I definitely feel like we do belong. So, we are all in it together, like, we all struggle together and we're all going to come out stronger together. I definitely like I get more support from the LGBT plus community rather than straight people. But I do get a lot of love from the straight community as well, like my best friend and all that. I would definitely say I get more love from girls than guys.

JP: I get that.

TM: I get, you know, a handful of guys who are okay with it, but some are just, you know, stuck in their ways and this is that, black or white, no in between, you know. But I definitely feel like I definitely do belong in the LGBTQ community.

[00:12:13] JP: Is there anything that you want to say to the trans community.

TM: You are not alone and do not stop and do not let anyone tell you that what you're doing is wrong, or you're not living the right life because it is your life. It is if it makes you happy, do it. Being that is right.

[00:12:37] JP: I guess one of my... Do you—do you work?

TM: Yes.

JP: Where do you work?

TM: Lulu's in North Myrtle Beach. It's like a new restaurant, seafood, in Barefoot Landing.

JP: Okay. What do you do there?

TM: I'm a server.

JP: Okay. Do you—How do you feel at work?

[00:13:02] TM: I feel great. My coworkers and the staff they all, you know, she/her/hers, they know my identity. They know I'm transgender. Oftentimes I get asked questions and they get like so flustered or embarrassed. I'm like, "No like I'm here to answer your question. That's the point," you know, "I'm here to answer your questions." At work I get a lot of positive. I would say with the guests I get some negative where they have a tendency to not go by what I like to be called, you know, but that is easily dealt with with a whole new server or either they'll be asked to leave the restaurant if it gets to that point. Most co-workers are really great. I would just say—like I said, from the straight males at work I don't get much positive feedback, you know. They go "it is what it is," "this is what you are." Like, no but that's not what I am, you know. But my, the girls, the co-workers they really defend me even when I'm not there, you know, they let me know like "Hey, this is what happened when you were gone. This is what was said, and this is how we defended you," you know.

JP: OK.

TM: So I definitely get a lot of positive love from most co-workers.

[00:14:16] JP: So you feel that your management is out to protect you?

[00:14:21] TM: Yes. I definitely do. Me and my superiors, we have a great relationship. And if anything—I can talk to them about anything and then, you know, they'll deal with it accordingly and they're very nice and positive and I love them.

JP: Good good. How about school?

TM: School, I would say, I definitely had a lot of a lot of positive from school. I had one—I would say one negative incident with a guy. I was actually hanging out with my cheer friend Lizzie, and this is when I like first started wearing makeup and it was, like, early stages of transition. And I remember walking out of the room, and he was sitting on the floor, and I'm assuming he was drunk or whatever because he was—he could barely talk. And she's like, "Alright, I'll see you guys later," and he said, "Alright, I'll talk to you later, but not you," and pointed at me. And Lizzie was like, "What do you mean not her," and he was like, "What do you mean 'her'?" She was like, "Yeah, Tyja, let's go. It's time to leave," and I was like, "It's definitely time to leave." Because, you know, when a situation happens like that all you can do is remove yourself. That's all you can do. Like, there was no point in arguing, no point in trying to make a point with someone who obviously made a decision in how they perceived me instead of getting to know me. So, I would say definitely school is a lot more positive. Yeah.

[00:15:57] Okay. Do you feel like as far as administration and professors and things like that, like, are—Do they use the pronouns you prefer? Is there ever like discrepancies with that such as like maybe they see your born gender?

TM: Mm hmm.

JP: When you sign up for the classes it says your name and your preferred—or your born gender and not your preferred. When they ask how, like what you like to go by, do you tell them Tyra?

[00:16:36] TM: Now I will. Before, I was still going by my birth name, because it's—My birth name is Tyja very, I mean it's very unisex. Male or female.

JP: Right.

TM: But now that I have really gotten in to my identity, and done, like, a lot more research and have like more support I'm more so using my preferred name. With administration and Coastal, I would say they do a great job as far as, you know, understanding and trying to understand. Because, at first, my, you know, my birth gender I was placed in UP with males, like all males. I had to go sit down with—I forgot the department, but it was basically like a counselor and I was telling her, you know, I prefer to live with females. And it's not because I'm uncomfortable, because I can live with males or females. I just didn't want them to be uncomfortable, like my roommates to be uncomfortable. And living with males in University Place, and when I first start wearing makeup, I could see, you know, the distance from when I first met them without makeup from when they first saw me with makeup. And I sat down with her and we had a talk and she was just, you know, asking, you know, "Well, why do you want to be placed," you know, "how do you feel," "what's your identity?" You know, just wanting to get to know, you know, what was up.

JP: Yeah.

TM: And surely enough I was taken out of male housing and put in with females.

JP: Okay, and it was a much better—

TM: Yeah, a much better fit, and I was much more comfortable. But like I said it wasn't my uncomfotability. I just didn't want living with all males for them to be uncomfortable, you know?

[00:18:35] JP: Yeah definitely. How do you feel about where you are right now?

TM: I feel great. I have great friends, like you. Yeah, I just feel great. I can't just summon all inside—I just feel great and positive. I'm smiling right now [laughs].

[00:18:56] Okay, this is gonna be my last question: is there anything that you wish you could say to yourself before about what—Like, I guess what I'm trying to say is: is there any advice you wish you could have given to your former self, to the person you were assigned, born, to be more comfortable with who you are now? Or do you feel like your transition was okay?

[00:19:26] TM: I would tell my past self: don't beat yourself up and stop crying. Toughen up. Toughen up. People are going to talk. People are going to stare and, I mean not even—not even just the LGBT community but straight people get that. So you just need to understand, past Tyja, that you are not alone, you know. You just have to keep fighting and don't give up and don't let what other people say affect you. Like, only listen to the positive. Only listen to the uplifting, and surround yourself with people who you feel are really making an impact, and, you know, supporting you and looking out for you.

JP: Okay.

TM: That's how I really tell my younger self, because I used to beat myself up because I felt like I was doing something wrong or disappointing certain people because of my transition. But now, I definitely feel like I am comfortable. I am confident and I just love myself now.

JP: As you should. Awesome. Okay.