

LGBTQ Oral History Project

Detroit, MI

Alexandra Gibson

Interviewed by

Shannon O'Leary

6 December 2016

Detroit Michigan

As part of the Oral History Class in the School of Library and Information Science

Kim Schroeder, Instructor

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Brief Biography: Alexandra Xiamara Calliope Gibson was born January 29, 1995. She was born in Detroit, MI and raised in New Jersey. She is a member of the Michigan LGBTQ community and is an activist for LGBTQ rights. She currently works for the Trans Sistās of Color Project and Affirmations, a Lesbian, Gay community center in Southeast Detroit.

Interviewer: Shannon O’Leary is a current student at Wayne State University, studying to get her Masters in Library and Information Science. She also is working part-time at two public libraries.

Abstract: This Oral History is about the LGBTQ community and its history, both nationally and in Detroit. It also discusses the 2016 political climate and its effect on the LGBTQ community as well as Ms. Gibson’s experience as a member of the LGBTQ community.

Restrictions: none

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LGBTQ Oral History Project

Walter P. Reuther Library

Wayne State University

Detroit, MI

Transcript of interview conducted 6 December 2016 with:

Alexandra Gibson (Detroit, MI)

By: Shannon O'Leary

Transcription:

Shannon O'Leary: My name is Shannon O'Leary, I am interviewing Alexandra Gibson at Wayne State's Purdy Kresge Library, today is December 5, 2016. Why don't we start with where you were born and where you grew up.

Alexandra Gibson: I was born in Detroit, and as I understand it, I was born in hospital that is actually closed now and I can't remember the name of it. For the initial years of my birth my mother [Kelly] and I were homeless...yeah, fun times. Until we moved in with my mother's younger sister. So I grew up in Detroit and then I moved- we, I can't even say I remember this- it was just my mother taking me along. My mother managed to secure a job doing tech support. Before this she was an entrepreneur she told me, but you know, I just kind of looked at her like...um that sounds really vague and ambiguous [*laughs*], that can be a lot of things mom, but okay.

I was about 4 or 5 when we moved out and we moved into this apartment in Westland. I also went to kindergarten. I was a horrible, evil child, you know that one evil child that adults love? Everyone's like, "Oh they're so sweet" but the other children hate? Yeah, that was me. Around this time my mother got herself a boyfriend, Treymale, who I naturally kinda, sorta hated, unless he was giving me sweets. Around this time we start traveling, going on vacations and stuff. Our first vacation was to Disneyland in Florida [*Disneyworld*], yeah that's nice. And then after, when she was still having Trey as her boyfriend and stuff, we moved after a year to Farmington Hills, where I went there for first grade. Then for second to fourth grade, I lived back in Detroit, on the West Side, and went to a school called...I think Carver? Carver Elementary School. I knew my mother lived on Pembroke Street and then when I was in fifth grade I moved to New Jersey.

O'Leary: That's quite a stretch, why did you move to New Jersey?

Gibson: So the original company my mother was working for got a bunch of people, so they said, "You know what Kelly? You're really good at your job, you want to go to

New Jersey?” I remember Mom pitched it to me, I was really little. She pitched it like “Yeah, so a bunch of people are getting laid off, they offered me this job in Jersey, it pays a lot more money. Should I get it?” I was like, *duh*. I was only in fourth grade but my response was “Mom, who do you know that actually *loves* living in Michigan that lives out here?” So, she was just like “Good point son!” I was like, *so there, I always have good points Mother*.

I think, I’m trying to remember in Jersey, for fifth grade it was Audabon. Yeah, Audabon [Middle School], I think. I don’t remember where I went for sixth grade, I remember for seventh and eighth grade I lived in Voorhees [New Jersey] and I was really coming into my queerness, more so than when I was a kid. So, fun fact, it turns out that the majority of people who have green eyes are basically women, right? So before I had green eyes, I had grey eyes. It wasn’t until I was super femme as a kid, that my eyes turned green. Just a funny coincidence- got to brush my shoulders off for that- but this is when I started becoming really queer, really femme.

O’Leary: For those of us who don’t know what the term queer is, could you explain it?

Gibson: Queer is an umbrella term for LGBT, for someone who may not necessarily identify with the Gay or Lesbian label because those to a lot of people of color are constructed around a very White base culture. It’s also partially used as a youth reclamation, kind of like the same way Black people say the n-word or transwomen use the t-word. It’s also partially wrapped up in that some of the older generations have a huge problem with it saying, “This is a slur, don’t you know!” and the younger generation saying “but this is a really good umbrella term so we’re going to use this.” I started to become super femme, super queer more so than I already was, and I was trying to explain it to my mother and she was just like, “I think this is a phase, it’s a choice”. She needed (undecipherable) stat. Sorry.

O’Leary: You talked a little bit about when you first recognized you were part of the LGBT community, but I’m wondering when you first “came out”, I think is the term. What happened? What was the effect on your life? Did everything change very vividly, did things just stay the same?

Gibson: Yes, everything changed a lot. So, how to put this- trigger warnings for people listening to this for rape and childhood abuse- my mother has this thing, she say “oh you always were really into girls all the time” and I was just like, “Mom, I wanted to be their friend.” I remember I was unsure of my gender identity, a lot of transwomen subscribe to the notion that they were always born women and that’s fine. But I don’t believe I was born a woman at all. For most of my life, I have pretty much identified as gender neutral, I just went with boy pronouns, because there was nothing better. So I brought these concerns to family members and that started the grooming process for my molestation. That I think, really changed my life.

Then I was still trying to grapple with the fact that my mother didn’t really get it and the combination of those two things told me that this really isn’t a thing adults can be trusted with. But I still came across as really femme, really queer. So it was just like okay I can’t really do much about this except keep going with it. I wasn’t really “out”, out until I was fourteen years old. At this point my mother was a bit better about it. She still kind of thought it was a choice, she didn’t know about the molestation or anything that happened. I was going to Cass Tech, Cass Technical High School and this was when I started to become a wild child. I was skipping school, having fun, and then I’d have to go back and live with my **aunt** until 3-4pm. My window of fun usually happened during school hours, because she would have me on lockdown, and that was not okay! My mother eventually realized that my aunt wasn’t taking care of me, and she was like “You’re coming back with me.” She had no idea the train wreck that she had on her hands. Mind you, she was tired so she was like, “I’m going to Mexico” and I was like “Sure, I’ll go with my dad’s people”, because I had this whole mastermind plan to do stuff.

O’Leary: Did you have any kind of support growing up? Did you feel like you needed more support than you got?

Gibson: I, yes. As far as the needing more support than I got...my mother tried to be accommodating about it in the best way she knew how to be and to be fair, she is a cis-gender heterosexual woman. She doesn’t have a large frame of reference for -oh there’s more than three genders. I mean more than two, but there are more than three, by the way just so you all know. She was doing the best with what she had. I

also think that when you're a queer child or a gender nonconforming child, part of the relationship with your parents is parenting them on how to parent you. Teaching them how to take care of your needs that they don't know how to meet. Some parents are just out and out incapable of this. Mine wasn't. Most of the things she didn't or doesn't know how to do stem from her own abuse at the hands of her parents. It's like she's stunted, I'm stunted, what are we working with here.

O'Leary: What kind of support do you feel the LGBTQ community has today, and what kind of support would you like to see in the long run, eventually down the road?

Gibson: I'm trying to figure out how I can pose this answer...so, we know Trump is in office right? Somehow...okay not somehow, we know why. But how to put this...when activists- and I as an activist talk about our framework for revolution- where do transwomen of color come into this, where do people of color come into this who are queer, disabled people. There's a whole frame of network and people tend to have intersecting identities when they're queer of color, etc. So I feel like most of the support that -Can I borrow this pen? Perfect just so I can think-

When we talk about the structures of the LGBT community, support structures they're very much for White queers, specifically White cis-gender queers and lesbians. If we must conceive of LGBT as an acronym, never-and for this actually I'm going to go with the whole thing- LGBTQIA. I think that's the full thing. L, G are capitalized and due to the way Bi or racial work with the community B doesn't really exist. Bisexual people don't really exist, bisexual people, bisexuals are not really acknowledged as having a real sexual orientation. The assumption is usually "Oh you're attracted to a man" if you're a bisexual male it's just a phase, you're gay. Same thing with women. In a similar way "Oh it's just a phase, you're just into it", which is so gross. Then T would be lowercase letter, despite the transwomen of color having started the LGBT rights movement. I'm going to do a full breakdown of this. So the Stonewall Riots happened in 1968, 1969? [1969] Somewhere in there.

And it was Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera and a third woman-who I can't remember- these are transwomen of color who started the movement. The initial people who were part of the real movement were sex workers or homeless

people, these were the outcasts of society and at the time they were the outcasts of the LGBT community. Then you have cis-White gays and lesbians who would later join on who would co-opt the movement with their privilege and power that they had. I feel like this is an accurate analogy for what happens now and what has generally happened in the past.

When HIV became a “thing” in the ‘80s we had a lot of these orgs [organizations] popping up. Basically, what we had was White lesbians founding orgs and sizing foundations in order to get through this. Then White gays would be supporting this and joining in on it. Solidarity there, this fight, the sexism gay White men exhibit and then we see that transwomen of color, queer women of color, aren’t really a part of this. What you have is, instead the ballroom scene happening, with transwomen of color taking in gay, bi, and queer men of color during this HIV crisis movement. What I’m trying to say is while historically speaking there are structures with the LGBT community, most orgs don’t really know...most LGBT centers and orgs don’t really know how to fill the needs of transgender people. Let alone transgender people of color, so it’s up to us to create those structures in the first place.

15:00

O’Leary: You’ve talked a little bit about the 2016 Presidential Election, I’d like to go back to it, more specifically how do you feel the 2016 Presidential Election has affected the LGBT community?

Gibson: ...I think some of us are more scared than others because Trump used a very...he didn’t even use something very specific he used what was outright already there. Which was, I don’t really want to say hatred or bigotry because I feel like those romanticize the notion of what’s happening. There’s specific words for what it is, so let’s call it what it is. Racism. Sexism. Transphobia. Homophobia. He used what was already there to make a platform for his campaign and in doing so he created a lot of backlash. I don’t really even want to say backlash- but more like he created and instigated something that was there already- even more so. It’s really weird because the platform of his campaign was racism, but you also notice that he did things like say he was going to turn over gay marriage. What I’m trying to say is that due to the

way our systems work it doesn't just mean the symptoms of oppression compound one another, it also means that the bigotries we had, the prejudices we have are built into each other.

So what this means is that in having a racist campaign, he tended to tie this to sexism, to capitalism, etc. This means for LGBT people, we're all pretty fucked. This isn't just a thing [*cart rolls by*] for queer people of color but also White-cis queer people. I would say trans-women of color, I think are being affected to, but it's like if you have cancer and you have a shit ton of radiation- Wait, am I allowed to cuss or no?

O'Leary: It's your interview. Do whatever you feel you need to do to express yourself.

Gibson: Ok. Got it. If you have a shit ton of cancer, well actually that's a really bad analogy. Let me rephrase. If you're in the middle of a shitstorm and it get messier you're still in the middle of a shitstorm. I feel like transwomen of color have persevered- and were going to- but at the same time the issue with that sort of thinking is it similar to (indecipherable) *Oh we made it through Reagan, we made it through Bush*. But the issue with that is a lot of us didn't. There are real fears, I think within some members of the community that that could lead to a Nazi Germany. And what that means is for us is things like internment camps and such. I'm not sure if I believe that could happen but at the same time, I'm kind of...

O'Leary: ...scared that it might?

Gibson: Not necessarily scared...because as weird as it is to say the idea of being in an internment camp doesn't really scare me because of a lot of the childhood grief that happened. It's like *ok, more that, got it*. But more like a deep cynicism and hatred of my fellow man to some extent. I just remember this thing where I either hate humans or I love humans. There's no in-between with me, I'm either one or the other in that moment. What I think of, when I'm in my I hate humans mode is, they [humankind] could totally do something like this, even though I'm one of them. Am I making any sense here at all?

O'Leary: You're making plenty of sense, don't worry.

Gibson: Ok.

O'Leary: What was your first contact with the Michigan LGBT community and what was the nature of that contact? Did you attend an organizational event, private party...

Gibson: Oh my God. We are going to go back to my party days. So, I was seventeen the first time I went to Affirmations [nonprofit LGBTQ support center] and I went to their Youth Drop in Center. Mind you I heard of two drop in centers: Affirmations and Ruth Ellis [nonprofit LGBTQ support center]. So Affirmations was pitched to me as a suburban White queer's hangout. But at the same time their youth program still serves queer youth of color and then there's Ruth Ellis which was pitched to me as that's the 'hood. My reaction to Ruth Ellis was *that sounds really cool, I'll go there later*. Then I went to Aff [Affirmations] first and met Kenny, Dave, Jae'lyn and a lot of other friends I still have now. This is where my socialization drastically took a change. I think this is also where I learned a good deal of how to make friends and be a friend. That's my first contact with the Michigan LGBT community.

O'Leary: When you first got involved in the community, what was life like? Did it become better, did it not change very much.

Gibson: It became better. I think, up to that point I was very stunted in the way of socialization and I had a lot of warped ideas of what humanity was like, due to my experiences up to that point. Moreover, at this point I still didn't have working understanding of what it meant to be transgender, let alone the language to accurately describe my being. But it did get better, a lot better. At this point I was actually going to parties with friends and hung out and had late-nighters. These were things I hadn't had or done before with people my own age, I should say. It was really fun.

O'Leary: What kinds of things did you do to interact with the LGBTQ community? Did you guys go to different events together, specific bars, or designated hangout places?

Gibson: So, at seventeen I was a harlot and exposing myself to the LGBT community, I got swept up into...I got pulled into the gay lifestyle. It just sucked me in. I said "You

know what? Screw all this. I'm going to live a normal life." I would sneak into bars. There are certain amounts of predatory...let me rephrase this. Gay groups can be pretty predatory toward kids, even when you're seventeen, and I knew this. I was not afraid to use this for my advantage to get to bars. I'd look really cute and basically suck up to an older, queer man. I generally would go for older, White queer men because they were...I don't want to say easier to use or fool but yeah. I could play into their racism; they didn't expect that of themselves or they excused it. Harriet Tubman still haunts me for that. I would be sneaking into these bars occasionally, sleeping with the people there, hanging out with my friends more. Also we would go to house parties and there'd be even more people there, drugs, alcohol, sex all the fun stuff. It was lit.

O'Leary: What challenges do we still have and things that need to be done with respect to the LGBTQ civil rights in this area?

Gibson: Let me whip out my activist card, just like pwick. Got it. We have these orgs that do things, right? We have Affirmations which has a good youth program [*door opening and closing*] that serves queer youth of color or just youth of color outright. But when we come down to it as an organization, it's not very good for emergency services work. Thinking about long term infrastructure. When you're homeless, and a sex worker, and trans you're not going to go to Aff, you're going to go to Ruth Ellis, because it's like, we have food, we have clothes, we have this. So while Affirmations can lay down long term infrastructure for your life, Ruth Ellis is for your right now. In some extend that makes sense when some of your orgs...to some extend that makes sense but it's still not enough.

I feel like when we talk about organizations and LGBT Detroit area it's still not enough. Not enough civil rights, not enough of anything. Part of this is because I'm really fastidious, something I get from my mother, I'm sure. But part of this is, when we get down to the meet of it, what are you doing? Where is intersectionality and the work that you bring? Where is the ethicacy of your work? Even in Michigan there aren't a lot of orgs that serve transwomen and can serve them well. What groups there are that do serve transwomen tend to serve White transwomen. Usually late lifers who have a vast amount of power and privilege. I say

this, not to come across as unnecessarily critical or harsh but as simply what's- I feel like a lot of the time, I do have some measure of feedback for those who transitioned so late in life. But to some extent I'm like *but so what?* I'm explaining why I'm doing it. Yes, times were harder back then but you still have White privilege. So it's like *okay...* There were still transwomen of color back then who were transitioning. So to some extent, it's like you knew you were trans, you knew you were this. So...

28:56

...I'm still not done, I've got to break this down even further. A lot of orgs- May I write on this? [*motions to the notebook near her, I nod*]. Perfect. Okay. Historically speaking there have been racially tensions in the LGBT community. In Michigan what this looks like is...okay let me break this down on a national scale, then break it down to here, because I'm a big thinker and that's so much easier for me. So we know with Stonewall, what happened was very, very early on it was very divisive. You had cis-White gays versus cis-White lesbians, basically both of these groups still fighting even as the movement was happening, even as they co-opted it. It's very interesting the way queer men are sexist, but get a free pass on it because they're gay. As if *Oh my gosh I'm queer/gay I can't be sexist! What?! Or perpetuate a system of oppression against women. Uh! No! No, Boo, it don't work that way. You're still trash-deal with it. So there's that happening. And then there are these White lesbians who were being told "Go back in the kitchen and bake your cookies" and they were here for that. A lot was happening.*

This has influenced what's happening in Michigan. The cis-White gays, cis-White lesbians, and we have bisexuals that are kind of being erased/drowned out in all this. Then we have transpeople and transwomen of color, we know where they are but at the same time a lot of influence like the sexual revolution happened and that altered not just the queer community but also the way straight people have sex. Then we had the 70s and the 80s happened with HIV and the solidarity that was born of that between cis-White gays and lesbians became a thing. While the rest of us were still floundering.

However, in Detroit, HIV didn't come here, didn't really hit here until the 90s. While these are things that are happening on national scale, a lot of it didn't hit

Detroit until different times. In the 90s we get to have also the ballroom scene in Detroit and this meant that transwomen of color and queer men of color and by queer and transwomen of color I mean, the 'hood rats. The dope ass 'hood rats. Who, don't give a fuck about whatever prissy academic language you may or may not use. Who had their own terms for transwomen: femme queen, butch queen. That's what I mean. We had this- they didn't – they didn't have access because their play of people- well let me rephrase that. There are people that I know who are and were involved in the ballroom scene who went to academia. But it's more like it's just what people of color have done. We create language to describe our realities. I think language is beautiful no matter what happens.

I feel like that was also putting an impact on the Civil Rights movement. The LGBT Rights movement in Michigan. Because we had this thing, we had community. We were able to create community amongst ourselves, where the sex workers would go, where the homeless would go and I feel like this, in turn meant that...No I'm just thinking is all...but prior to that it was like you had the world that you had to live in and a part of this were this queer scene that White queers and cis-White queers created. With advents of the ballroom scene, transferring to Detroit, to the Detroit area, in that we had our own thing, our own little bubble. The issue with this is, when you get to the ballroom scene- it's not real. By meaning it's not real I mean that in the sense that... in the same way a federal bank is real or the US Government is real, I mean that it's not real in the sense of having viable, leverage able, institutional power. You can leverage it with nonprofits, but by itself? Not really. So we have this ballroom scene, but this also means because it's not real we have to participate in these rights that don't respect all of our identities.

Oh! Here's a common one. Let's look at the founding of Affirmations as an example of racism in the LGBT community and what this looks like as far as racial tensions go. Affirmations in its founding was supposed to be founded, was supposed to be placed in Detroit for accessibility. Because let's be real, just because Ferndale is supposedly known for all of those fairy magical queers, it really doesn't. The majority of the queer population lives in Detroit. Point blank. It was supposed to be found in Detroit. However, it was founded north of 8 Mile [Rd] and its really funny because I think that as someone who grew up in Detroit, I take it for granted that I live in one

of the most racially segregated areas of whole United States. It doesn't really occur to me that it's racially segregated, I'm just like *oh, yeah that's 8 Mile*. I think that for me, being a transwoman of color, 8 Mile doesn't really occur as a racial segregator because I have so many more things to worry about than just race, I also have the trans thing.

It's more like to me 8 Mile is a divider between a land where I'm more likely to be killed by my own people. Actually are they even my own people? Do I? No. Let me rephrase that because I don't really claim cis-Black men as my people in any capacity. Well, let me say cis-Black-het men, since I do sort of claim cis-gay-queer men of color. But it's more like south of 8 Mile, to me, marks the land where a cis-het-Black man or a cis-het-man of color will kill me. To me, once we get to the north of 8 Mile this becomes an area where a police officer is more likely to kill me. That's just what's so. (undecipherable) used to be that way. My point is Affirmations should have been founded in Detroit, but it was founded north of 8 Mile. It was found there because White queers were too scared to be "in the 'hood". Even though I don't really think White people get insulted like that because we know better. Duh. I don't think any of us really wants to go to jail for that because we remember Emmett Till, still. Just saying.

O'Leary: You've mentioned a few terms which I'd like to go over, you've mentioned cis-White gays and cis-White lesbians. What does cis-mean?

Gibson: Cis is short for cis-gender and that is someone who identifies with their assigned sex at birth. So let me break this down, because this also kind of includes intersex people. When we come out of the womb, doctor slaps us on our ass and then says it's a boy or a girl based on the genitalia that may or may not be there.

However, gender is not binary, gender does not align with sex. There are more than two genders and gender is well, I could say gender is a social contract. It is, but moreover gender is, I think, a stage of evolution of self. What this means is that a lot of us don't really agree with the parts we get. In the case of intersex people however, what this looks like is the doctor may cut something off to alter the appearance of the genitalia or shift the appearance toward being something closer to "male" or "female". Even though this could be wrong later. This also means in

creating this atmosphere it means that transgender people and intersex people often face numerous medical barriers. It means we have doctors who aren't trained fully on how to deal with intersex individuals.

So what this looks like is, let's say your intersex and you have testicles. But you have ovaries and their rupturing and the doctor doesn't know how to figure that out because it never occurred to them in their training, *oh, intersex, duh*. Even though it should be occurring. To be fair, doctors do have specialties, and I don't expect the doctors to know everything about everything. That's ridiculous. I mean anatomy, biology, is so complex but there are things that should be basic and fundamental to every doctor as just a matter of human inclusiveness. To say nothing of the fares between health insurance, etc.

O'Leary: Can you tell me a little but about your work with the Trans Sistas of color project?

Gibson: Sure. I'm...an intern/researcher/executive assistant to Bré but it's more like... So there's Bré Anne Campbell, who's the executive assistant and then there's John Trimble. I mean not the executive assistant but executive director. With John Trimble as the deputy director. Then there's also our other two members Tamisha and Sierra who are more or less, to me where they occur in the community-esque are our outreach persons. Then I'm whatever they need me to be. Which is to say I can do a lot of things that are community outreach because I, even though I'm a transwoman of color, I am very disconnected from my own culture and from socializing with my own group and that's just what's so. So often, I would be the best person for outreach. So I'm your administrative girl: grant writing, research, doing stuff for Bré, reminding Bré "Oh you had this meeting you need to go to. You have this phone call, don't forget." Checking in with John about "Did this grant get written? What's happening with that?" or if someone says "I don't know much about this. Could you find this information for me?" I'm just like "Yeah, sure." I also had to teach myself a lot of skills. It's really weird doing some of it without a laptop because some of it is, sometimes I have to go data mine without using data mine software and that is really exhausting. So to clarify for the audience...wait these are Library Information students right?

O'Leary: It's [this oral history] going in the Reuther so there will be people who won't necessarily be Library and Information students, so whatever you want to explain is fine.

Gibson: Okay, for the people who aren't an Information Specialists of some sort. Data mining is when you go through a database and you scroll through the data there to create more data. You're basically drawing more information from the implications in the information that the system is already making. I have no idea how much of that explanation was accessible to any of you, but that's the best I can do at this moment. So usually data mining is best done, to me, with a good data mining program or software of some sort and the computer can do that and generate connections. When I do it, because I don't have any of that, I usually just get a notebook and write down things that might be coincidences then I just scroll through again and it's really tedious, really time consuming and I love it.

O'Leary: Do you have someone who inspires you? Someone you look up to?

Gibson: My parents. I, oh. I can say I have 3 of them. So there's my birth mother. She laid the groundwork for a lot of the womanism I use today. She taught me a lot about being a woman and when I say I was...well let me think how to put this. When I came to the conclusion that my gender identity was no longer fluctuating between gender neutral and woman, but was firmly stuck at woman, I was just like, yeah I need a new name. She was like oh, okay. And she gave me Xandra and I was just like yeah Alexandra, but Xandra for short. My point is she gave me a lot of the tools that my use.

I think that Black women, there's this feminist myth that Black women aren't "feminist". Or that they're expected to choose between their race and their gender. Despite that it is their homegrown womanism that show us how to engage in society. How to juggle a career, a job, and being a single black mother. That's what mom showed me. So she does inspire me, that's my mother. Then there's Bré. Bré is kind of, sort of, yeah she's my gay mother basically. Now it's- she's my boss, but she's also my gay mother. It's funny because I already have experience navigating dual relationships.

Another person who inspires me is my sister, Tevin Giles. He is the youth program coordinator at Affirmations. Tevin Giles. He is the one who taught me pretty much most of what I know about activism, about systems of power and oppression, and he is a cis-gender bisexual male. Which is funny because that- It funny how I don't really like cis-men like that but it was a cis-man who taught me what I know. And then there is my dad, Beck. Beck is Bré's...boyfriend? Boyfriend/fiancé. He's studying to be a lawyer but he has this really interesting- I don't want to say attachment, because that's not the word I'm looking for, but... passion? He has this really interesting attachment/passion- still not the words I'm looking for but close enough at the moment- to morals and ethics. And morals- not really morals and ethics I should say more like integrity which is not what I would conceive of from a lawyer. Because I still kind of have that *excuse you but aren't lawyers and bakers the devil? I mean, hello?* And that's just like um, no. I'm just like no this one. I'm going to despair when this man, if this man ever goes Dark Phoenix.

Yeah and those are the four people who inspire me. I think the transwomen who I have seen who are really successful: Lilianna Reyes, she kind of inspires me. I have- It's really weird. She was my first introduction to what, my first serious introduction, I guess to me what a transwoman of color was. She was a Latina transwoman, but she was successful and she has a masters and it was just like *oh you can be that and trans? Okay!* Look, back in the day I was really simple, for lack of a better term and then I found out that it could be (undecipherable). I think the transwoman of color who I admire most besides Bré, because I am just going to say Bré all the time are- Where's my phone so I can [looks through her purse for her phone] ...So we have Laverne Cox, who is an amazing actress and an amazing artist. I really like Janet Mock, I like her writings. I feel like-because I self-identify- I identify with her as a writer, albeit a bad one. Probably because of all the fanfiction I read, trashing up my writing style.

But if I had to honest, there a transwoman in particular who does inspire me, her name is Lourdes Ashely Hunter and she has a master's in Public Health Administration. She's also the head of-oh fuck- Transwomen of Color Collective. She's their executive director. It's just-I don't really want to say she's everything that I aspire to be but she's definitely up there, because what I want to do is become a

librarian. Technically speaking I- Oh, wait I forgot another one. Lance. Lance Hicks is also bomb as hell. And Oh my God if I could even approach the beginnings of his greatness I could die happy. Point blank. He's so, you know how you meet those good people who are really compassionate and nice? I kind of aspire to be that, because underneath my bitchy, hateful exterior I am really soft and gooey on the inside. I don't know how that happened. I swore when I transitioned I was going to be a stone cold heartless bitch and I became this gooey, fluffy human, and now I want cuddles all the time and for my hair to be played with. Even for my friends I'm just like "You're going to cuddle me 'ho, ok? because that's what I want right now." So yeah.

O'Leary: What have been the greatest changes you've seen or experienced in this area, more specifically in Detroit?

Gibson: You know I'm trying to figure that out because I spent a lot of time living in New Jersey. So it's just like eh, and when I lived up here I didn't do a lot of socialization. So I'm trying to...the gentrification of Detroit residents, of the Detroit area, I think. I also am including that bullshit-ass landline, road thingy, whatever transit thing [M-1 Rail Streetcar] that's being built along Woodward [Ave]- as part of the gentrification process. It's really interesting to see these- so like there's this Make America Great Signs but I also see these Make Detroit Great Again signs. Or there's this glorification gentrification making Detroit better, but what that really means is- *kick out all those dangerous, savage Negroes before they do something*. Or actually, that still inaccurate so let me rephrase- kick them out because their lives aren't considered valuable enough.

It's funny because you have these poor White hipsters who are moving in, to Detroit because it's supposed to be cheaper. But as they're moving in the prices are rising which defeats the purpose, which means they're going to have to find somewhere else to gentrify. It's a very interesting process how capitalism fucks over White lower class people, but they still vote Republican anyway, because hey why not cling to your privilege. Heaven forbid you do something with yourselves. So when I talk a lot about the gentrification of Detroit, I don't mean just that. We have the East Side, we do have the West Side of Detroit but as we see this gentrification

happening, it's just...It's very interesting to see the ways in which poor people, myself included, navigate living in a capitalist society and the privilege we try to toss around, even at the expense of others.

I identify as anticapitalistic because capitalism is not cool; where do I even start...So we have this bullshit ass line [M-1 Rail Street Car] being constructed for a shit ton of money basically. But at the same time what's happening is Detroit Public Schools are in the middle of a fucking crisis. And that's exactly what that is when you have roaches, rats in your ceilings broken piping when the conditions are that terrible and you ain't paying your teacher shit. That's an issue. So I find it very interesting that gentrification that and this line is being built simultaneously and that's not really a huge coincidence at all. Because things are interconnected, nothing exists in a vacuum. Unless, you know your actually in the vacuum of space but that doesn't really count because *hello* light still travels in space, there's still time. So again, nothing exists in a vacuum.

So amongst all of this we have Black people- you know what? Why am I saying Black people here like there the only people who exist? I mean people of color in Detroit. Middle Eastern people, Latina, Latinx-I'm still trying to figure out how to pronounce that or if it's respectful to the community to do so. But, yeah that ethnic group. We have these various ethnic groups who do live in Detroit, who have historically lived in Detroit who are being booted out from their homes as these prices rise. But at the same time, we have Trump in Office and what put Trump in Office were pretty much White women and White whore people. I feel like I got to break that down because some they're in that same lane, that same vein as cis-het Black men. Because cis-het men like to be on some really trashy bullshit of really clinging to whatever privilege they have and being really sexist. Like, *hello* there's a reason I don't claim home as my own. They're just as likely to shoot me as police officers. So now you don't get any rights or margin from me for you and I don't want to stand with you either.

So when we discuss that it's- there's this Republican narrative that somehow it's our [LGBT community] fault. That it's these immigrant's fault for coming in and taking these jobs and spreading this disease and Oh whoa, blame

them and you fall for it. The same way black men fall for it and always say “Oh, well...”- cis-het Black men say “Oh, yeah homosexuality is an invention of White men. That’s something that they colonized us with” even though queerness has been a thing in Africa for long before it was colonized. There are many societies there that have more than two genders, more than three genders, more than four gender identities existing within them. Which is a very interesting parallel to see that happening at the same time.

O’Leary: Do you feel like there is anything we missed or anything you want to add before we end this interview?

Gibson: Hm...Not really. I don’t think so. I think I tried to cover everything, but I spread myself really thin in my explanations. So my explanations could have come across as very airy or light or not really focused on the question at hand as I tried to grasp or make as many connections that were relevant to the question.

O’Leary: Well, thank you so much for your time.