

Bearing

2024

EXCERPT FROM INTERVIEW:

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What it looks like when colonialism affected South America versus what it looks like when it's affecting North America is different. In South America, we actually kicked the Spanish regime out. We're liberated, but we still have a lot of that white-washing effect from the colonialism, right? So, that affected trans identities, too, and now that indigenous people are speaking more in South America, trans identities are kind of coming back and, like, two-spirit kind of things. So, in some regards, it's like being seen from South America. You see what colonialism does and its aftermath. It still has a major effect, so growing up and being trans in this world, or in this community, it's kind of hard for me. At least that's how I feel.

Age 30

Assigned Sex Male

Gender identity Trans Female

Pronouns: She/Her, They/Them

Race/Ethnicity: Ecuadorian Spaniard

Could you tell me a little bit more about your gender identity?

Oh my gosh. It's tough, because I'm having to transition through the American government's idea of what it means to transition. And for me, [transitioning] means reaching a wider spectrum of my gender, which is my femininity, or my feminine side. The way I perceive that is different than what the American government perceives that path to be. It's kind of designed in America that you go from male to female and

there's no in-between, and that space - or negotiation - America did *for* me in a way, because my body starts to participate in that conversation just by way of being transgender.

So it's like, if I'm too masculine, I don't fit in or something, because I feel like I am a very masculine trans girl. I transitioned a little later in life, so it's been a little tough having to cope with the reality that my transition wasn't as early as it could have been, or that I could have been more stealth in a sense. I don't know. I'm already perceived as someone who is feminine, but then in that I have to negotiate my masculinity, in a way. Which is weird, because the trans experience is that you're male first, or a different gender in the beginning. It's this weird space where it's like transphobic within the trans community. For some reason, the main goal is to be fully female at the other end, and if you're not that, then you're some kind of weird, they/them/it person. But when I do my research on trans history and trans indigenous cultures, it's always been a thing - third gender and spaces to occupy both masculine and feminine qualities in your gender. And what does that look like and how does that have to represent itself?

So, I think I'm negotiating that space more fully now coming into two years of a transition. And yeah, hormone therapy was actually a little rough for me, because I'm re-shifting all my hormones. But it's tough, because I also really love what hormone therapy has given me, like my softer features and all of that. So, it's a give and take and I think it's very different for everybody.

Could you talk about the challenges physically and mentally of that transition and the hormone therapy?

I think you don't realize what you're getting into at the beginning, because you don't think about it like - at least for me - I wasn't thinking like, 'I'm gonna be taking hormones every day for the rest of my life.' Which is fine, but it is another thing that I have to make sure I'm staying on top of. I feel like that maybe added more stress into my life when I weigh the pros and cons of it. Like, it's still really rough having to keep up with that. And then there's the standard of beauty that women have. It is really high and it's not fair.

You mentioned being in-between having its own challenges. Even with people within the community that you feel maybe most aligned with, there's certain judgment and prejudice?

Yeah, I feel bad that I don't want to be fully female. I don't know if before I transitioned I even thought that far ahead. You have to be in a different headspace of transition or have experienced that to know what you feel like to move more forward down the line. There's no way for you to perceive what it's going to feel like five years out, there's just no way. So the only way is if I made the decision to start hormone therapy, then I could navigate it and have the opportunity to even see how I feel. And right now, I don't know. I like it that I am gaining the feminine physique that I've been wanting, but I still feel so far out of the feminine landscape that it's hard to feel included. I don't know, I think that's my own thing that I'm having to deal with and have to work through. But I don't know, I'm sure a lot of women feel this way too.

I think for a lot of people in general, your self-perception is fluid over time and who you want to be and how you want to be perceived and your identity is always going to be sort of in flux if you're at all self-aware. But if you're transitioning, it becomes much more public.

Yeah, and everyone has their idea of what that means or what that represents.

And it's not as simple as changing your style or aging.

Yeah, and everyone has their own opinion about it, and then interacts with it while they're projecting onto you that interaction with the concept of trans identity. So some people will be like, 'Oh, she's empowered'. I'm like, 'I'm struggling to live my life, actually'. Or they're like, 'Yeah, you own it!', And I'm just like, 'I'm just a person'. It's very difficult sometimes to come out and be in front of everybody.

And somehow become almost a representative of this group, right?

Yeah, and I don't want to! Like, I do in a certain sense, because I want to use my art to speak against things, or at least share my side of the story, but not be a representative in the sense of, like, the whole trans experience feels the same way I do. I think I'm very unique. Not very unique, but like, I'm intersectional with being an immigrant, being born outside of the US, having family that is from a different country.

What it looks like when colonialism affected South America versus what it looks like when it's affecting North America is different. In South America, we actually kicked the Spanish regime out. We're liberated, but we still have a lot of that white-washing effect from the colonialism, right? So, that affected trans identities, too, and now that indigenous people are speaking more in South America, trans identities are kind of coming back and, like, two-spirit kind of things. So, in some regards, it's like being seen from South America. You see what colonialism does and its aftermath. It still has a major effect, so growing up and being trans in this world, or in this community, it's kind of hard for me. At least that's how I feel. I'm sure other trans people might feel differently.

Do you mind talking about your family and people from your culture on that side? How they've reacted to you throughout your life and through this transition?

I lost - like, most of my family doesn't talk to me anymore. My big sister [REDACTED], she's still with me by my side and my mom and my dad, but I lost my older siblings who are half-siblings on my mother's side. They totally just stopped contact. It was like I died.

Was there a conversation around that? Or they just found out and were no longer involved? Do they live here or do they live in Ecuador?

No, they were just kind of no longer involved. They live here. So, that was kind of tough, but now I have room for a lot of other friends who are actually supportive of me, and that's been really nice.

It's gonna be two years out in March [3 months from the time of the interview], so it's like, I love my transition, and I love where I'm going and where I'm headed, but it's not easy. I thought I would have more support from my family. Like, it's nice to have support from friends, but it's different when your family is supportive. It makes things a lot easier.

[During transition] your whole brain chemistry changes, everything changes. So, I don't know, it is almost like a death. That old side of myself has transformed or it's going through transition and that's a weird feeling. It's kind of weird having that old self - like, my website's different now. That's so dumb to think about, but it's all those little things that make up an identity.

Changing your email, reintroducing yourself with people. It's all part of it.

It's so annoying, but that's so true, it is such a big part of it.

Would you mind talking more about what femininity and masculinity mean to you and how that affects your self-perception? How you present yourself, etc?

I guess, femininity to me is more of this energy that is tied to nature and cycles and seasons and internalized clocks. This kind of internalized, cyclical feeling is what I would characterize femininity, or this kind of inner knowing, intuition. And then also mothering, nurturing, loving. But then, there's also different aspects of femininity, and there's the darker aspects of it as well. So, I don't know, for me femininity always felt like a space that was more dynamic. But, masculinity felt more like, you know, 'It's a man'.

Men don't think half the time. Like, I hate to say it, and that's such a generalization, but it's so true. The way some of them talk to me, it's just like, no regard for the other person. And it's hard, because you see people that obviously don't regard themselves, either. I feel bad for men a lot of the time, because that's a hard life. I lived that life. I'm not trying to simp for men, by any means, because men are whack for the most part, but the pressures or societal pressures on manhood and masculinity - I couldn't do it. I mean, that's why I transitioned, because it was just like,

that's not me. I can't pretend to be that. After a certain amount of time, I was just like, 'Am I gonna age as a man?' and I was like, 'No'.

So, trying to picture aging in a man's body, that seemed so foreign to you and maybe was part of the motivation for making a transition?

Yeah, a little bit. That was one of the signs where it was like, 'oh, you might be trans'. But the transition, going through [taking] hormones, has definitely been tough. So much of your personality and your own perceptions about yourself are hormonally charged.

It's crazy, isn't it? It's something that you really don't have that much control over, but has so much control over your thoughts.

Yeah. And I think that's why I have trouble sleeping, too. You think you're not going to change, but you do change. Like, my face looks a little bit different, but doesn't look super different. But like, I still feel like there's a difference, you know? It's gonna take a couple more years, like I'm halfway through right now, so it's like another two more years to really settle into my more feminine self. It's hard, because I don't know what that future looks like. It's hard to know how my skin is going to change, and my body shape is going to change, because I just have to get there. I think just occupying that space where you don't know is a little hard. I think before, I could kind of get an idea of what it would look like if I aged masculine, but now it's different. It's weird. I feel like I don't know how to feel about that stuff.

Do you feel like you're becoming more yourself through this transition? Or is it still so in flux that it doesn't quite feel that way yet?

I feel like I'm becoming more myself, because when I've tried to think of what it would feel like to go back to my old self, I feel really sad. I think things would be normal again in the sense of maybe my relationships with my family could probably sprout back up, which would be nice, but I would have given up everything. So, I don't know. But, it also feels selfish sometimes. But, I guess that's just how you feel when you've been in a weird situation where you're not accepting yourself.

What is your racial or ethnic identity?

I would say I'm Ecuadorian, and then also Spanish. Like, European Spaniard. I don't know from where exactly.

And you were born in Ecuador?

Yeah, I was born in Ecuador, I came to this country when I was, like, four years old.

Do you remember it at all?

Yeah, a little bit. I remember when I came to New York City and we were on this escalator going down, and to see the twin towers or something, it was crazy. New York City was so beautiful. It was really gray and dusty, too, but I thought it was so cool. I had never seen this many people, ever.

And you told me before that there was a bit of a language barrier for your family which made it tough to make friends and get settled here?

Yeah, that's true. It wasn't really possible for me to make too many friends at an early age, because my parents didn't speak the language. So we would kind of have to become the adults a bit. I would be talking to other kid's parents about my schedule and they wouldn't be talking to my parents. It's a little weird.

That must have been tough, taking on that role at such an early age.

Yeah, I think it was. I didn't know any better, but I guess looking back at it... My parents did everything they could, there were just some parts where it was just language barriers you can't get around. So it was a little hard, because you see your parents as, like, flawed a little bit for the first time in your life. You see them as unstoppable as a kid, you just see them as Gods at the beginning, but then to see them at that age like that, it was weird. I didn't know how to take it, I guess.

Do you feel like your race or ethnicity has affected the way that people have treated you or approached you?

Yeah, people would like call me beaner and stuff. Yeah, people are so rude.

Are we talking classmates or random people?

Yeah, random people, classmates. It was weird. Just knowing that like, just because I'm Hispanic that I have all of these tags tied to me or whatever.

Yeah, all these assumptions about who you are as a person.

Yeah. Which some are kind of accurate. Like, it's true. I mean, Hispanic people do eat rice and beans a lot. But it was, um, it was just kind of annoying, I guess.

Do you still feel like you are treated differently as an adult?

Yeah. Like, if I'm stopped by the police. It's different. They look at me as an 'other', especially now with the transition, because you can see what I'm like kind of in the middle [of transitioning]. My body is kind of starting to take a different shape, slightly. Like, just someone who's halfway through transition, it's like going through puberty, it takes time. People are not gracious about someone's puberty, they can be really mean. I guess that's what makes me really anxious is understanding that people ultimately just see me as 'other', and that kind of sucks. I feel like there's a lot of cool people too, who could have been friends or something, but we kind of missed each other.

And you even mentioned in a prior conversation about being hesitant to get a gym membership, because of having to navigate using the locker room. These are things that you have to take into account that I think a lot of people just take for granted. Do you mind talking a little bit about that?

Yeah, I'm realizing now that that kind of space, people take it for granted. Like, not having to think about whether the people in the locker room will feel safe with them

in there. I'm just a person. I really just want to work out and do my own thing and be in my more feminine self. I'm not really safe in a man's locker room, either. It's a weird space to be in, cause why am I thinking about bathrooms so much?

It's been so much a conversation in the media and in politics, how could you not be affected?

No, exactly. So, it's weird. There are some women who are really supportive, but then sometimes you do get looks. It's like, sorry, I'm just trying to function in society.

Yeah, while your body's being deeply politicized.

Yeah. I'm just trying to use the restroom and move on with my life. It's just annoying. I guess you don't see that when you're thinking about going through transition. That's not part of the problem, or that's not really in your consciousness at the moment. You're just like, 'I'm gonna be myself'. But no, there's medical stuff, name change... I still haven't [legally] changed my name. I need to do that. So yeah, it's a lot of upkeep. For me, it's been a little bit hard, but I hope it gets better. I think it will. It's just the first two years are really tough, they say.

Have you felt pressured to change your appearance throughout your life by family or friends?

Yeah, I've always been told to be less feminine, or I was made fun of for being feminine. There's this huge misogynistic side of South American culture, that has ties to hatred for the trans individual, too, which is colonist behavior. I'm reading a book called *Transgender Warrior*. In it, there's an etching of the Spanish letting wild dogs attack and murder trans women. That's how they set the precedent for, like, 'you're not being trans, you're not cross-dressing, there's none of this'. Someone made an etching of it, they were like, I'm gonna do a whole art project of this, to depict the European colonists destroying the wild man or woman, so that's the undercurrent of all of the politics asking, 'Do you believe a trans woman should be in the bathroom?' That's the undercurrent.

I think it's just a matter of restructuring my own faith and my own belief system now and figuring out what my psychology is going to be moving forward to create a safe mental landscape for myself to deal and cope with the unfortunate circumstances of being part of the American culture.

Have you felt pressured to change your appearance by people you know mostly just casually, or business acquaintances?

Yeah, a little bit. I mean, I always feel pressure to have my makeup on, and I usually do, but recently I've been kind of slowing down with trying to let my skin take a break. But, I always find myself wanting to have worn makeup, just to add an extra layer or get more close to how I feel about myself within myself. You know, like an inner representation of myself that can be expressed through makeup, which is fun to do for oneself. But yeah, it is a chore sometimes. It's 20 minutes, a good chunk of your time. I really don't want to do it some days.

Does it seem like people treat you differently depending on how much you're adhering to a more 'feminine ideal' look?

Some people are kinder to me. But it's hard, because my body's not that feminine. I feel like it's not that curvaceous, and I wish it was. I guess that's the hard part is just being flat.

Have there been times in your life where you felt insecure about your appearance?

I think now more than ever, yeah. I wish people understood that my beauty wasn't on the scale of male or female, but something in between. There's this queer beauty that I wish people knew about or could see, and I feel like sometimes men see it, and they see that feminine energy and they can see beyond my body that there's a femininity and that's really beautiful. I wish people had access to that kind of visionary experience, or were open to that visionary space to see me, to have the opportunity to see me as I want to be seen. It's hard to do that when you were a very masculine looking guy.

So, it's hard. I feel really insecure, because I'm in transition. I just don't know what I'm supposed to look like. I'm like, 'What am I?'. I want to be more feminine, but it's hard to advocate for space for oneself when there's not really that many people like me. Even the trans people in my community have a more European, Eurocentric viewpoint of womanhood. Like, she/her. And then for me, that's not the case. She/her/them, there's still a bit of me that is more ambiguous or androgynous.

Do you find that in that community it's very all or nothing? For example, you have to have the surgery, you have to go the full way or you're not seen as having a spot in space?

No, I think you have a spot in the space, I just think that everyone has opinions about what spot you're standing on. That all depends on the kind of person they are, too. I feel like there is space for your own self-identity in the trans community, but at the same time, it can be kind of confining, because, I'm going through transition under the American, you know, DSM-5 and, like, however those people were educated on and what values structures their science practices had on how they treated transgender people. That's affecting the legislation, or the lens in which they view transitioning. So, there were a bunch of old white men sitting around saying what being trans probably means and why, but they never asked any trans people.

No, they just asked each other.

Exactly, and then wrote the book.

Yeah, so that it's a little outdated and not up to par.

Exactly. So, it is weird.

Have you felt pressured to change your appearance by the media, like social or commercial media? And has that affected your self-perception?

Oh my god. On social media, everyone is so pretty. I don't know how to deal with it, it's too much.

I mean, I used to like to do my makeup a lot more. But now, I don't know. I think it's just because I need to get more sleep. There's so much pressure from the media. Everyone looks so good.

Do you do anything to alter your natural appearance such as tattoos, piercings, hair, dyeing, makeup, etc? And if so, why?

Makeup, and it's just an extension of my expression, or an extension of myself. When I feel done up a little bit, I feel more myself.

What makes you feel beautiful and empowered?

I guess being creative. Just having time to create and make something that brings you joy, or it's just something you can get lost in. Having time for that space is really nice. I think that's what makes me feel really good. Being a creative person.

And then also lots of great friends. Doing all that good stuff, like hanging out. Those are the two things that I'm currently living for.

Have you had family and close friends be supportive of your appearance and your self-perception?

Yeah, my sister's very supportive. I'm lucky my sister has been very supportive.

Have you had positive experiences with casual acquaintances or business associates that impacted your self-perception in a positive way?

Yeah, I have. Like, there's actually a lot of us here in [REDACTED] who are really sweet and supportive and kind. So like, yeah, anytime I'm out and about, there's always a few friends out and about, too. So it's nice.

And yeah, one of my most recent friends right now, [REDACTED] she's been really, really supportive. So it's been nice to have her around. Because like, yeah, I don't have my

mom right now. She's in Ecuador. So it's like, I wish I could go through my transition with my mom there a little bit. But, yeah, she's in Ecuador. So having [REDACTED] there to like, kind of guide me has been really nice. And she's very sweet and supportive no matter what.

Are there any other things that you want to share or that you want people to think about while they're looking at this painting of you?

Oh, I guess, yeah. Maybe that people should think about in what ways they feel like they're transforming and rediscovering themselves in a new way. Or in what ways they feel like maybe their gender has limited them, or maybe helped expand their horizons on a new concept or idea, which I'm sure everyone has had an experience of. I guess that would be it.