

TRANSCRIPT—MARCIE FISHER- BORNE

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Interviewees: MARCIE FISHER- BORNE
Interviewer: Greta Deerson
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File 1. 10:18- 13:13

Marcie Fisher- Borne: My personality was always a little bit of a challenge for them. Way before-- I was a feminist way before I fell in love with a woman, and I mean I was a vegetarian at sixteen in Mississippi. I might as well have been a Satan worshipper.

I mean they really thought-- my stepmother--. I remember in junior high, I used my allowance to buy these peace sign earrings. I have no idea where I came from because I certainly was not--. At least in that house, it was just like I was an alien. And, she sat me down, and she was like "You know, these peace sign earrings, you know what these mean?" And I said "Well, they mean, they mean, peace." [laughter]. She's like, "No, no, that's not what they mean. They mean I will sleep with you as much as you want and let's go do drugs." [laughter]

Greta Deerson: Wow.

MF: And she grounded me, for like two weeks, and it was just like, yeah there was so much hostility to difference of any kind.

For example, our earlier conversation, I dated-- there was one main Jewish family in our town and I dated both of the cousins. And, I remember my grandfather, Papa, who I love, who is a great man, called Adam, who I dated the most through high school, "Jewboy." "Hey Jewboy, come over here." I mean, and to his face, you know. Or for Shabbat, if I would go over to their house for Shabbat, it was that any difference was incredibly problematic, and I somehow didn't let that change.

GD: Did you feel like you were sort of rebelling against what was going on by, buying those terrible peace sign earrings, or were you just sort of drawn to that, those differences?

MF: I think that, you know, ultimately, high school and that time, adolescence is a time where you try things on. But, I think I also knew for me, that I wasn't just trying something on. Like for me, it felt like, for whatever reasons, starting in junior high, there were these little seeds of something that felt really true to me. And you know, I don't know, I felt like I was getting the information through the black market or something [laughter] you know, like, anywhere. I remember reading Herman Hess in high school and Carl Jung, wow there's this existentialism and this collective consciousness, I felt like all of this was contraband material that somehow the universe was providing for me. So, yeah, I think some of it was trying stuff on but I think ultimately it was a gift kind of from the universe saying "you're not a completely alien creature in the world," you know, so--.

File 2. 00:05- 06:44

MF: So, basically when I came on as co-chair, I went to the dean of students to talk about the possibility of a women's center. I had heard that there had been a conversation the year before and that he wasn't very receptive. And, he still wasn't very receptive and basically said, "you know, there's no-- you will not find any interest on this campus, no one cares." And, so--

GD: In terms of faculty support, or student involvement, or anything?

MF: Anything. Students don't care, faculty don't care, staff don't care, I mean obviously you know, campuses are huge bureaucracies and getting space is an act of God, essentially on any campus, and it was there so it was just like, and funding for more services, he was like no it's not going to happen.

So I left that meeting and basically went back to the group and said "you know, we're going to have to really show that we have a lot of support for this." And my strategy and our strategy was to create a petition-- which one of my mentors, a woman in gender studies helped me with-- and circulated it very widely. Also, put up signs around campus [laughs] that had the dean of student's personal office number, and said, "call him and tell him we need a women's center."

So he started getting flooded with phone calls, we had this petition and so he called me and was like "ok, let's you and I sit down and talk again." But instead of just myself coming I basically realized that he needed to see that the university was, that there was wide support so I got like, the president of Pan-Hellenic, the head of the African American cultural center, the head of career services. Like I went to anyone that I thought, okay let's cast a wide net, student health, everyone.

GD: Was it mostly women who you were targeting or everyone?

MF: No, no, it was important to me that there were men in that meeting, that there were staff, that there were faculty, that there were students that were non traditional students. I didn't want him to think "oh it's just the feminist women's organization." So from Pan-Hellenic to—well, Pan-Hellenic was the biggest example, and the African American cultural center, trying to get everyone at the table. So, when I came to my next meeting with him, it was really funny because I walked in with twenty people, which he wasn't expecting and he was like "Oh, I guess, I guess we'll need a bigger space, huh?" and I was like, "yeah I guess we will."

And I remember there was this graduate student, who when we went in to this really long fancy conference room, put all our stuff at the heads of the table, like you know, we put all our purses and everything so that no one sat at the head. He was like, he was just shocked, he was totally shocked, like, "clearly we're going to have to move forward on this."

And so that was the beginning. And there were just a lot of really sweet things. There was like-- at the time in Baton Rouge there was an urban arts collective who came in and painted this amazing mural on this huge walkway, about the size of this, walking into the women's center space and painted all these women throughout history all over the walls and made this great mosaic in pieces of glass that said "the women's center" and I mean everyone just really came together. There was an arts faculty who brought these amazing sculptures. Someone in human ecology made slip covers for all the old furniture so it looked gorgeous. We were able to get work- study students to staff it, so pretty soon we like had, within a year.

And there was some controversy, you know along the way. And there was some harassment of certain people. But, my approach even though there was a lot of conservatism on campus was to not meet their expectations of a feminist leader on campus. And that strategy seemed to work really well. And the dean of students eventually became an incredible ally, incredibly supportive and again, women and gender studies, the faculty were really concerned with the practice element of what the center would provide so that was, huge, really ().

GD: And what did the center provide? Once it sort of got up?

MF: We provided mentoring services for women, we provided a lot of referrals, we provided, counseling space for counselors to come, we provided support groups, workshops, a lot of what actually, the women's center provides now. We provided a lot of support to off-campus non-profits that were doing work with women.

GD: In terms of space? Or volunteers?

MF: Both. So, we were involved—there was a very active women's business association—they did workshops with us, they had scholarships that were funneled through our office. We had a huge library. In fact now, the entire—any book related to women and gender is now in that library, housed within the women's center. So, if someone were to go to the main library, it's indexed to our building. We did a lot in terms of take back the night, sexual assault, were really involved with the rape crisis group, the battered women's program in the area, and the YWCA. So really just a campus bridge to the community for women's issues and a space for women on campus regardless—with whatever issues came up from body image, sexual assault, health, whatever.

GD: What was the response to these programs? Like, were people banging down the doors to get in, was it hard to fill up support groups? What did that sort of look like?

MF: Yeah, no, there was never a shortage of things to do. I mean here, there's like women's week or something during March, we had the whole month. We had a, you know, a month of events. It was actually fairly well attended. I was just looking—I just got a referral from someone in Baton Rouge who wanted some resource, so I called the women's center to find a reference for them and one of the big events they do in the spring is called "Women in the arts" which is a huge arts event celebrating different women and their medium whatever that might be—whether it's performance or visual arts and its in its twelfth year. So, when that started, that was pretty amazing to think that stuff's still going on.

Part 2. 19:10- 26:12

MF: When I got back, actually while on the bike ride in New Orleans I had an interview with Planned Parenthood. At the time, the main Planned Parenthood office was in New Orleans and there was an office in Baton Rouge but only a nurse practitioner and like an office assistant. They wanted to hire a health educator. So, I interviewed for that, and my boss was in New Orleans, she's great and we actually still keep in touch but I took that job, it was only a half time job, took that job and took another job with the state, the Louisiana Association for non-profits which is kinda an umbrella organization to help support non-profits throughout the state. And so the other job I took was a job there as their conference organizer. They were working with the Louisiana's Promise, Colin Powell at the time was the head of the America's Promise initiative working to try to

create a better infrastructure for youth programming and so the Louisiana initiative, I came on to work on the Louisiana Initiative and to organize a statewide conference. So, kinda multi-sector groups, so how do we get the private sector, the public sector and the non-profit sector together around youth issues in the state? And I did that for about a year.

GD: And you're with Chantelle at this point?

MF: Yeah.

GD: And were you out—

MF: Oh yeah.

GD: At work and—

MF: Everywhere.

GD: Was it ever—did you encounter issues—

MF: Oh yeah.

GD: At work, or socially or everything?

MF: Yeah, but the funny thing is-- and we were just talking about this yesterday because this is the end of ten years for us, we have our ten year anniversary in March—that, and I think it's probably because before Chantelle was so heterosexually identified that I guess, and I, my identity is bisexual, it doesn't matter really because my orientation really and my marriage is not heterosexual but going into my relationship with Chantelle I didn't feel shame, I didn't feel—I just felt like, you know, that when you find someone you want to spend the rest of your life with your world becomes bigger, not smaller and that was kind of my point of reference and I never thought that I would have any reason to be ashamed or to hide. And the world does not feel the same as I do. And that's been a,

it's been a continual lesson because, yeah, I mean when I started the job at the girl scouts I was—I filled her out as my, for my life insurance or whatever. And my boss said “You know we’ve never had a lesbian work at the girl scouts.” Which is hilarious, by the way-

GD: [laughter]-

MF: Because she was such a dyke-

GD: [laughter]-

MF: And so was our executive director, and so was like our camp manager-

GD: [laughter]

MF: Anyway, everyone was gay, but no one was out, except for me. And, I was also, you know, driving around in my car in rural, rural Louisiana, working with women that were home schooling and African American church groups, and you know, there were probably reasons to be a little afraid.

But, I just made a decision early on that I would never be closeted-- Ever. Because that just wasn't how I wanted to live my life. So yes, there have definitely been issues and I mean I would have come back to the girl scouts after the bike ride and the national girl scout office supported and endorsed the ride, but they didn't let me come back.

And a number of the staff that I was very close to said “You know it's because you're gay, and because you're out.” And I actually went to my boss and said “Is this because I'm gay?” and she said “I would never answer that question.” So-

GD: And how did you sort of deal with that at the time? Was it an obstacle or was it kind of, you know, “Screw the girl scouts.”

MF: No it was "well this is completely unfair and I don't want to work in a place that operates like this." I mean this is not the world that I choose to operate in. And so that's kind of just been my point of reference, that they're wrong, this is wrong, and you know, I'm not going to support—I don't want to work—

I mean I know even when I applied for Ph.D. programs, even here, at this school, I was told "Don't include you're LGBT research, it will be hard for you, don't do it," by someone who cared about me. And you know, my response was "I'm never gonna—No. Cause if, so, just play that out so I get in here and then I'm like "oh hey, this is what I want to do." Like, no, that doesn't make sense.

Yeah, it's been hard, and there were times, like especially with our wedding where I was really disappointed. I was really disappointed that people thought they could behave in the way that they did and think that they were okay people. I don't think it's okay.

GD: When did you get married?

MF: In 2003

GD: What made you stay in the South? You know, what made you stay in Louisiana after what happened with the girl scouts—

MF: Right, right—

GD: I mean I guess with girl scouts that could happen anywhere but certainly as you move to bigger cities or farther north or west you would think that this becomes less of an issue.

MF: Well, and I think being here, in North Carolina has certainly been better than Louisiana but I think for both Chantelle and I, leaving the south is not an option. Like,

this is where we want to do our activism and this is where we want to work. It's where we want to live, and raise children and it's never—You know there are many things that are so complicated about this place. Also, so many wonderful things, and when I think about my, people that inspired me, many of them are southern activists. You know, many agitated regardless of the environment, despite incredible odds. So for me, it's just like, this is where the work needs to be done.

GD: And do you still identify strongly as a southerner?

MF: Oh, absolutely. Yeah, absolutely. I think it's a huge part of my identity. It's really interesting being in environments outside of the south, where people will be like "uggh--"

GD: [laughter]

MF: I mean especially gay, lesbian, bi, trans, "Ugggh. Why would you want to do that? Like why?" To me, it's just like, why wouldn't I want to do it?

I remember having an interview for the fellowship that's paying for my Ph.D. and this one board member said "Why would you want to go back to the south? Why Marcie? Why?"—

GD: [laughter]

MF: And he had his hand up like "ugh," He was from Louisiana like "why?" And I said, "You know, I never left the south. I never left and I never plan to leave." And that's a little scary sometimes to think that, but you know, I feel really like my identity is definitely rooted, less in Mississippi. If we had to move back to Louisiana I would be okay.