

Queer Newark Oral History Project  
Interviewee: Steven Malick  
Interviewed by: Harris Laufer and Casey Azcona  
Date: May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017  
Location: LGBTQ Center, Newark

*Harris Laufer:* 2017, May 4<sup>th</sup>, interview of Steve Malick by Harris Laufer 00:08 and Casey—

*Casey Azcona:* Azcona 00:10.

*Harris Laufer:* - Azcona. First, my partner Casey's gonna start with introductory stuff.

*Casey Azcona:* Introductory questions like, where are you from exactly?

*Steve Malick:* I grew up in Puget Sound region of Washington State. I spent my young childhood years in a town called Tukwila, Washington, and then my parents migrated to Graham, Washington, which is about an hour, hour and a half southeast of Seattle. Mount Rainier was really in my backyard, it felt like, growing up.

*Casey Azcona:* A small town, you said, right?

*Steve Malick:* Tukwila was a suburb of Seattle. It was a mixed-income community. Then Graham wasn't even a city. It was unincorporated Pierce County. You don't have that here in New Jersey, but in Washington State, there are parts where you just—you don't have a city. You don't have a mayor. You don't have a sewer. You don't have a police department. You don't have a fire department. Everything's administered by the county.

*Casey Azcona:* Oh, wow. Yeah, that sounds weird. Never heard of that one before.

*Steve Malick:* It's better than boroughs and townships and towns and cities and villages. The way things are administered out here doesn't make sense to me.

*Casey Azcona:* I guess I'm not entirely sure, are you LGBTQ or—

*Steve Malick:* Yeah, I'm gay.

*Casey Azcona:* Just making sure. What was it like, growing up gay? When did you come out? Did you come out to your parents? How was it like? That sort of thing.

*Steve Malick:* That's about five or six different questions there.

*Casey Azcona:* Sorry. I'm a bit nervous.

*Steve Malick:* Don't apologize. Gosh. What was it like growing up gay? I guess it really depends on what phase of my life. When I was a little kid, I think, like a lot of gay folk out there, I was keenly aware that I was different than a lot of my peers. I didn't really ascribe that to who I was attracted to. I did have this implicit recognition that I was supposed to be attracted to girls, and I wasn't. There was a whole host of things that made me weird and different, like I was super nerdy, and I was super sensitive, and I didn't like hunting. I didn't like sports and stuff like that. It wasn't like everything about me was as everyone else, except for this one thing.

I didn't quite know I was gay until—I didn't know that I had sexual attraction to other men until I was in fifth grade when I happened upon my father's pornography. My dad, a very straight man, had lots of Playboy magazines, which did nothing for me, but that wasn't the clue. The clue was when I was looking through

pornography, and I came across an erect penis, and for the first time in my memory, having an erection and being like, oh, fuck.

What is this?

I still remember the flood of hormones that you get when you get turned on that very first time. I was like, what is this? I had this moment of, this is great. Then seconds later, I was like, "I'm not gay." Shut the pornography, put it back in its hiding space where my dad—my dad frankly did a very good job of hiding this, but I was a very resourceful child—and went running into my room on my bed, clutching myself in the fetal position going, "I'm not gay. This isn't it."

I was bullied a lot in elementary and middle school a lot. I remember one time getting pushed down a flight of stairs and not telling my parents about it. They were like, "How'd you sprain your wrist?" I was like, "Oh, I don't know. I fell." My parents were like, "Oh." I'm sure it was—if I were to ask them about it now, they'd probably be like, "Yeah, [explanation didn't make sense to us]. We were wondering." I spent my middle school years really studying the manliest guys, the most socially adept—cuz I was really socially awkward. My grandmother would joke—and I'm very close with my grandmother—she would be like, "Steven, you're socially retarded." I was like, "Thanks, Grandma."

*[Laughter]*

I just didn't get how people interacted. I didn't get how friendships were formed. I didn't get a lot of stuff. Though I had some friends come and go in my life, I just didn't really have really—I had to learn those behaviors. I learned from the guys who I assume are straight—I have no idea actually cuz I haven't seen them in 20-some-odd years—but how I thought straight men acted. This was literally everything to how I cross my legs. How I'm crossing my legs right now, [00:05:00] for the video recording, my legs are

nice and tight. My foot's flowing around. I saw the guys, they had their legs open, like they call it manspreading or whatever. They didn't have that term when I was in sixth grade. Actually, to the point that I noticed that my dominant way of doing that with my right leg was not how I saw the other guys doing it. They did it with their left leg, and so I actually changed how I crossed my legs when I was sitting in the classroom so that way, I could—not to say that, oh my God, crossing my legs, but that's how fixated I was on presenting myself and policing my presentation.

Then in eighth grade, my parents and I moved to Graham from Tukwila,—I was able to take my lessons that I had learned cuz I was just always outcast, and I could just never get in with people to make friendships. I was able to take those lessons learned and have a fresh start. I went to junior high for a year, and then three years of high school. I generally had a great time. I didn't think of myself as gay. I didn't think about my same-sex attraction. That's not 100 percent true. At one point, I became an evangelical Christian. I dated the pastor's daughter. I remember praying about the feelings I had. At one point, even almost approached the pastor of my church about that, which probably would have meant that I would have gone to some sort of reparative therapy.

I'm straight-laced. There are terms and connotations with that, but I was super like, this is my path. This is what I'm doing. I'm a great student. I worked really hard for my grades. When rebelling came around in adolescence, I was like, I'm not messing with my grades. I'm going to college. I'm not doing this. I'm not living the life of my dad and my mom. I was like, I'm not fucking with my grades, but I will rebel by doing the thing that they hate even more, which were Christian conservatives. *[Laughter]*

*Harris Laufer:* Were you bullied in high school?

*Steve Malick:* No. No. No.

*Harris Laufer:* Was there any—maybe more our time than anything else, some kind of gay alliance in high school?

*Steve Malick:* Oh, yeah, but that's weird kids were in that.

*Harris Laufer:* Weird kids?

*Steve Malick:* Kids that were okay being gay or saying they were okay being around gay people because it was the rebellious thing to do, or it was the social outcast thing. It reaffirmed their status of being a social outcast, and I was want having any of that. I wasn't going anywhere near that. Yeah. I wasn't touching that with a ten-foot pole. The people who were doing that are great people. Don't get me wrong. I still talk with one of those folks. Thank God for her. Thank God for those people cuz Graham, Washington, and where I went to high school in Spanaway, Washington, it was no joke.

*Casey Azcona:* Who's her exactly?

*Steve Malick:* Oh, just someone who I'm only really—I don't really talk to her much anymore. I haven't [physically] talked to her since probably college, but we're Facebook friends, and we—

*Casey Azcona:* Communicate with each other?

*Steve Malick:* Yeah. She's the person that's left of the left. It's refreshing sometimes. *[Laughter]* This is the person I think was a member of the gay-straight alliance.

*Harris Laufer:* Let's talk a little more recently. Where'd you go to college?

*Steve Malick:* I went to college in Oregon at a university called Willamette University in Salem, the state capital.

*Harris Laufer:* Did you live a Christian fundamentalist life as you did in high school?

*Steve Malick:* Maybe the first year. There was always cognitive dissonance for me with the evangelical lifestyle, especially through the political realm. I'm very politically aware and responsive. For instance, today, the House passed a Trumpcare bill 217 to 213. Those four people are gonna get screwed over.

*Harris Laufer:* Yeah. That's gonna happen.

*Casey Azcona:* We're not supposed to give opinions in interviews.

*Steve Malick:* You shouldn't shake your head so vigorously. *[Laughter]* Oh, yeah. There was this cognitive dissonance that's happening, but then there was also the fact that I was like—oh, man. When I got to college and didn't have dial-up anymore—y'all might be too young to remember dialup, but dialup was a pain in the ass, and it was really hard to stream pornography on that. When I got to college, **[00:10:00]** suddenly I had broadband, and I could just find porn whenever I wanted it, and I would always accidentally find my way to the gay site. I always went this route so that way, I could have this deniability like, oh, yeah.

*Casey Azcona:* How did I end up here?

*Steve Malick:* Exactly.

*Casey Azcona:* Might as well just explore while we're at it.

*Steve Malick:* I did that at home even though my technological skills were so much better than my parents'. I knew how to clear history and clear the cache. At that point, they wouldn't even know where to find it. Yeah. Sorry.

*Casey Azcona:* Don't worry. There's nothing to be sorry about.

*Harris Laufer:* What do you do for a living?

*Steve Malick:* We're gonna skip over four years of college. You're gonna skip over my coming of awakening of my gay identity.

*Harris Laufer:* *[cross talk, 00:10:42]* You know what? That's great.

*Steve Malick:* No, that's fine. You're the interviewer.

*Harris Laufer:* Talk about your gay identity. I think that's great.

*Steve Malick:* This is what I do. I give people a hard time.

*Harris Laufer:* I'm a government employee. I'm used to it. *[Laughter]*

*Steve Malick:* Eventually, I abandoned my faith system probably my sophomore year of college. I started coming out my sophomore year of college, but then I quickly came back in, started dating women again. Then—

*Casey Azcona:* I have a question. Sorry to interrupt you. Did these women, did they know? Did they have an idea or something like that, or no?

*Steve Malick:* I'm sure they did. I never had sex with them. With my most close girlfriend, it got pretty intimate, but no sex, however you define it. That's where your faith system becomes a convenient excuse for not having sex like, "Jesus cries every time you orgasm," which is not what they believe, but the whole idea of marriage and that it's important. I think marriage is important. Yeah. Finally, I came out, came out. Actually, I came out to my dad and my mother my sophomore year. My dad's response was—my parents were divorced at this point. My dad's response was, "Okay. Don't get AIDS." I'm like, "Oh, thanks, Dad. That's really uplifting." That wasn't positive.

My mother's response was like—I had been super angsty. I struggled with mental health issues my entire life. I was particularly in a depressed mode. I told my mom. My mom's a high school dropout [and struggled with] herself. She thought that I was getting into drugs and alcohol, and she was like, "Oh, you're gay. Thank God." [Laughter] It was this weird opposite reactions. Then I came out to them, but then I went right back in the closet shortly thereafter and dated. I finally came out, came out officially finally, "I'm here, I'm queer, get used to it," when I was studying abroad in France. That distance was really helpful to come out to a lot of people, [and since I couldn't tell people in person or on the phone, I wrote people letters as a way to come out]. People still talk about those letters.

My aunt just visited me two years ago. When I wrote her a letter, I told her my feelings. I remember just finding out—the impact of that, coming back literally 10 years later, maybe 11 years, and she



broke down crying because she thought she was different. [...] My aunt would do anything for you. If you're like, "I need a T-shirt," she'll give you her T-shirt. That, to me, is—anyways, I came out. I dabbled with gay lifestyle. We didn't have smartphones or cell—I had an analog cell phone, I guess you could say. I was on gay.com a lot. That's where I had my first hookup was in my senior year of college. First time I hooked up with a guy. I just remember being like, this is so much better than I thought it was gonna be. It was weird all around. It was so much better than I thought it was gonna be. Then at some point, I got involved with—I was big into debate. I was actually a competitive debater, had a college scholarship to debate.

One of the things that I did was my senior year organized—gay marriage was an issue when I was in college. It feels almost silly to even be like, yeah, there was these state referendums across the country that were used as wedge issues to try and get George W. Bush reelected and other Republicans reelected. [00:15:00] I remember organizing a gay marriage debate on the steps of the capitol building of Salem in Oregon. I remember the opposition didn't show up. [Laughter]

*Casey Azcona:* Wow. Didn't even bother to show up?

*Steve Malick:* Didn't bother to show up. Yeah. It made the—

*Casey Azcona:* Did they know there was gonna be a debate?

*Steve Malick:* Yeah. I did a lot of research. I researched. I reached out to tons of organizations. Who showed up? The LGBTQ-affirming churches showed up like no one's fucking business. I couldn't believe it. They showed up. Yeah. It made the front page of the local section,

I think, or the front page of the politics section. I remember being like, yeah. The headline was, "Gay Rights Debate. Opposition Doesn't Show Up."

*Harris Laufer:* [Laughter] You guys win by default.

*Steve Malick:* I didn't debate. I was just having—

*Harris Laufer:* Did organizing a debate lead you into public service, or did you choose another career path?

*Steve Malick:* The debate had nothing to do with my choice of profession. I was involved in a variety of extracurricular activities that involved education and mentoring and tutoring of at-risk youth. In Oregon, there was two main venues through which that I had did that. One was a local elementary school that served—I think it was a Title I school—it served primarily Latino youth. It was K-five. I was mentoring a young kid there who's now a grown-ass man probably. I mentored him. He was in second grade. We'd hang out on the playground.

That eventually turned into, there were these budget cuts in Oregon, and so Salem-Keizer Schools lost a lot of money. Then before I know it, the volunteer coordinator who was bringing all these young folk in to mentor and work with kids and tutor and just hang out and be cool cousins, that person lost their job. Me and a classmate of mine organized a volunteer program and formalized this process of bringing volunteers in and setting them up with kids and having us mentor, like a cool college friend. It's called Tiger Club. Actually, it's still around. I was really shocked.

Then the other thing that I was doing was volunteering—and this was actually for a class. My advisor taught this class. It was a

half-credit kind of thing. We went to the—one of the nation's last Indian boarding schools, Chemawa Indian School, where a lot of at-risk kids, Native youth, Indian youth from much of the Midwest over to the west coast—it became a school of last resort, I guess is what I'm saying. We worked with their high school kids, and we did a lot of math tutoring, and I liked it. I applied to Teach for America as a senior in college, and I was accepted. I ended up here in Newark, which is another story in and of itself.

*Casey Azcona:* That's how you ended up in Newark, through your job?

*Harris Laufer:* That's the perfect segue.

*Casey Azcona:* Yeah. I was thinking about that.

*Harris Laufer:* How did you end up in Newark? [*crosstalk, 00:18:23*]

*Steve Malick:* There's a lot that happened. That's why when you skipped straight to what do you do for work, I was like, [*laughter*] you're taking out a good ten years of my—actually, that's 14 years of my life right now.

*Casey Azcona:* If there's anything you'd like to talk about, we won't stop you. Go right ahead.

*Steve Malick:* Do you hear me having any problem talking? [*Laughter*]

*Casey Azcona:* No. Just making sure.

*Steve Malick:* What was the question again?

*Harris Laufer:* How'd you end up in Newark?

*Casey Azcona:* Was it through your job, or did you choose to?

*Steve Malick:* Yeah. Yeah. Sort of. Teach for America, if you're not familiar with it, is an organization that recruits fresh college grads and career professionals who are interested in changing their careers to teach in schools in low-income communities. There are probably somewhere around 45 regions across the United States. At the time, my best friend and still one of my best friends, Dan, his now-wife was accepted to a theological school in New York City. He'd gotten accepted before I did. His preferences were New York City and Newark. He was a high school science teacher. There's a high demand anywhere, but particularly in Newark, and so he was placed in Newark. I thought, if I'm gonna do this Teach for America thing, I should preference a place where I'll have a friend.

*Harris Laufer:* Yeah. That would be good, to have someone do it along with you.

*Steve Malick:* Cuz it's gonna be really hard. I hear teaching's really hard, and I hear Teach for America's really hard. I was concerned about my social network more than, oh, shit. What am I getting myself into? I preferenced Newark, and I was accepted. I ended up here. Best kind of not thinking about it [00:20:00] too deeply decision I've ever made in my life.

*Casey Azcona:* What school?

*Steve Malick:* I taught at Peshine Avenue School right down the street.

*Harris Laufer:* Now that you were in Newark, what made you stay in Newark?

*Steve Malick:* Oh, boy. I didn't, actually. Yes and no. I taught in Newark for two years, but I lived in Jersey City. Then I met my now-husband during my second year out here, and then we moved into—I moved to New York. I got a job in New York at a charter school, and then we moved in with each other shortly thereafter. I was there for two years. Then I applied for a job directly—so when I was doing Teach for America as a teacher, I worked for Newark Public Schools, but then I applied for a job with Teach for America, the nonprofit, to coach new teachers. That, I was accepted to, and I did that here in Newark.

I did that for three years. I was commuting for two of those years from New York, driving down every day, and I'm just like, this is so stupid. I had these ideas of what it meant to live in New York City and da-da-da-da-da, and none of it was right. None of it was true. In Newark, I felt so much more part of a community. I felt part of an educational community. I felt like I could walk down the street, and I would recognize people, and they recognize me, and they'd be like, "Hi." There would be that thing that happens. I never got that in New York City. I've left New York now for years now, and I've never had that feeling of, man, I wish I was back. I always had that feeling of, man, I wish I was back in Newark.

*Harris Laufer:* Living in Newark now?

*Steve Malick:* Mm-hmm. I'm a homeowner in Newark. I'm invested.

*Harris Laufer:* Have you taken part in local politics at all or anything like that?

*Steve Malick:* A bit. How I first started getting—got involved with local LGBTQ stuff was with the mayor's commission on—the LGBTQ concerns advisory commission.

*Harris Laufer:* This was Mayor Booker?

*Steve Malick:* Mayor Booker at the time. Yeah. I had a friend, Sauce Leon, who was also a Teach for America corps member who lived in Newark and taught here for eight years maybe. He's a gay man. He was like, "Steve, we need folks to just dig in and do stuff." I started coming to meetings, and I volunteered. We did a variety of things. One of the things that we did was we organized probably the first-ever debate—it wasn't a debate. It was a town hall between Ras Baraka, Mayor Baraka, and Shavar Jeffries on issues of LGBTQ inclusion and stuff like that. The turnout was pretty great, actually. We did that at—God, what is that room? It's on the second or third floor of Robeson.

*Harris Laufer:* Essex Room?

*Steve Malick:* No. It's the room that—it's three separate rooms that you can make into one room. Doesn't matter. We had this town hall there. It was pretty well attended. That was fun. There, I met a lot of—I met Reverend Janyce Jackson. I met Gary Paul Wright. I met James Credle. I met Perris Straughter. . I met Marge Woods. I met a lot of these folks who are just pillars of the community. I particularly developed a relationship with Rev Janyce Jackson, now Jackson-Jones. She's married now.

*Casey Azcona:* Sorry. A quick question. What exactly was debated during the town hall meeting?

*Steve Malick:* It wasn't a debate because at this point, they weren't even on speaking terms. They couldn't even look at each other. I couldn't remember. I don't remember all the specifics of it. [...] Kimberlee Williams was the moderator, another prominent LGBTQ person in the city. She wrote the questions. We talked about a little—I think it was in the middle of a heated campaign, and I don't think either of them really wanted to—

*Casey Azcona:* Acknowledge each other?

*Steve Malick:* No. Commit themselves to stuff. They didn't want to say in a public forum, "This is what we're gonna do for the 'mos." We are politically more organized than we've been in the past, but it's not like it's—people in Newark aren't voting on gay issues or LGBTQ issues. [00:25:00] There are other “more pressing” issues. That's one of my takeaways of the work here is, when you look at the work that needs to happen in the community, the communities of Newark, you can't approach it just with single-minded focus of LGBT stuff.

Those are all important and meaningful things, but you also have to look at, what is its implication on the economic vitality of the city and its residents, or what is its implications on racial and ethnic justice, criminal justice and policing? It's a tapestry, and you can't just pull out one thread. You have to do it all. You have to think about all those dimensions.

*Casey Azcona:* We've read about an article like that that says—they were comparing Maplewood.

*Harris Laufer:* What made you choose Newark instead of Montclair, Maplewood, where there were larger established LGBTQ populations?

*Steve Malick:* I didn't even consider them. I had no interest in living in the suburbs. A, they're unaffordable. B, the gay men that I've met out there, some of them are really wonderful people. A lot of them, I just want to punch in the face. Doing volunteer work becomes a status symbol as opposed to really doing the work for the sake of doing the work, however you define the work.

Also, I grew up in a family of limited economic means. We were not poor, but if not for my dad's union job as a machinist for Boeing, the airline company, I would not have gone to college. I would still be in Tukwila or Graham, and my life would be fundamentally different. That being said, we lived paycheck to paycheck. I wore Payless shoes. Not that there's anything wrong with that, but I remember shoes were such a big deal in middle school, and I wore the shitty-looking shoes. I tried my best to get those knockoff ones, but I wore the shitty shoes. I was an only child, and so I had a lot more than my parents probably could have provided for if they had more than one child.

*Harris Laufer:* How is it, being a homeowner in Newark?

*Steve Malick:* I don't know. I can't tell you—I don't know what it's like to be a homeowner anywhere else. I pay my taxes. I pay my mortgage. Technically, actually, my husband is the mortgage and deed holder. I'm not. He's a veteran. He served in Afghanistan. At the time, when we applied for a home loan, we wanted the VA loan, which provides tons of benefits. Because the federal government was not recognizing gay relationships at that point, even though we were legally married, they could not include my income in the



calculations. Therefore, I could not be on the deed cuz it would be problematic.

*Harris Laufer:* How did you find or how did you get involved with the LGBTQ Community Center here in Newark?

*Steve Malick:* The commission, I met Rev, I met Gary Paul, and everyone. Rev was the executive director of the center. Rev is just a fantastic woman. I learned so much from her. There was very few people in the world when you talk with them, you feel like they really just stop and they hear you. You walk away, no matter how difficult a conversation you had, you feel better. I wish I could be one of those people. When Mayor Baraka took over, the entire—all the people who were actually commissioners on the commission got just summarily axed. Nope. Too bad. Too damn bad. Sucks to be you. You're out.

Everyone I knew and been working with was off the commission. I'd been applying to get on the commission, but it wasn't gonna happen. It wasn't happening under Booker cuz Booker just peaced out and wasn't here, and then I was not in the appropriate camp of Baraka's circles to get noticed for that. Rev asked me to consider applying or to be on the board, so I met with the then-president of the board, Alicia. We met and chatted about my qualifications and all that good jazz. Now I've been on the board for two years.

**[00:30:00]**

*Casey Azcona:* I have a question. What years were you teaching exactly in Newark?

*Steve Malick:* 2007 to 2009, and then I taught for another two years in the Bronx.

*Harris Laufer:* Coming back to the center, how is it, keeping a center like this open, frankly? As a board member, I'm sure that's got to be on your mind.

*Steve Malick:* Yeah. It's on my mind every day. It keeps me up at night. The first thing is, we would not have a center without our volunteers. We wouldn't. They open the doors. They respond to people, day in, day out. They have a physical presence that some of us on the board don't and can't have. I volunteer here every Friday night for a couple hours for young adult night. You asked the question, how do you keep the doors open, or how do you—

*Harris Laufer:* Actually, yeah. That was gonna be my next question. How do you keep the doors open? I have a couple follow-ups.

*Steve Malick:* There are so many different meanings of what it means to be open. The most obvious is that we have a physical space that has opening hours that people can come and go as they need to. That's the most physical literal definition, I suppose. Then there's the, we're open and affirming, that we are a space that people feel comfortable in, that they feel safe in, that is a refuge from all the stuff that's happening in the world. Then there's this meaning of open that we are of service—that we are in service to the community in a meaningful way.

*Harris Laufer:* Does the center provide any services?

*Steve Malick:* Yeah. We provide services. Are we where we want to be? No. Where we need to be? No. I've been thinking about this question a lot lately of—we have programming, but who does the programming serve? I've been thinking about that a lot lately.

We're in the middle of our largest fundraiser, the Dance-A-Thon. It is probably the major, and dare I say sole, source of any large amount of money that the center receives over the course of the year.

*Harris Laufer:* You don't receive any government money, local, state, federal?

*Steve Malick:* None. That's not true. We once received a city community development block grant. I think we received two of those, but that money is highly earmarked. It was for physical infrastructure or something like that. That was before my time. Yeah.

*Harris Laufer:* During your tenure on the board, have—has the center tried to find other sources of revenue?

*Steve Malick:* I've tried, done everything but sell myself on the street corner. Jesus. *[Laughter]* There are so many factors at play here about the question of, how do we pay for shit? A, everyone from the executive director down to the board and volunteers, everyone is a volunteer. Not a single person is getting a paycheck, right? We easily have probably five or six full-time jobs that we need, at least. Even our executive director is only half-time, 20 hours a week.

Let's talk about funding landscape. You have an economy or a funding landscape such that the federal government is providing less and less financial support to states and other institutions. This trickles down towards really hard cuts at the local level. Because people have to have their low federal tax rate, which it is low—and any person who says it's not low, you can take them out back and hit them upside the head—that diffuses down. We're not getting the federal, state, or local financial support in any meaningful,

long-lasting way. There's that. At the same time, nonprofit organizations, [00:35:00] the primary source of funding that they receive are from individual donors, and in particular, monthly sustainers.

Then we have to ask the question of, who do we turn to to ask for money, and who can provide monthly, and how do we build a critical mass of people to be able to do that? We are a center that was founded by Newarkers, with all its positives and negatives. The folks who founded this center, wonderful people. Some of them had—all of us have our own networks. Some of those networks are less financially viable as permanent funding sources for the center. There's this funding landscape where you have organizations that the majority of their funding needs to be individuals. We don't necessarily have that strong giving base in Newark in the same way.

Then you compound that. We're in Newark. What I mean by that is, we have New York City at one end of us, and we got Philadelphia at the other end of us, and then we got the suburbs, right? Where do all the bougie white gay men go? They all fucking go to Maplewood, South Orange, Hoboken, Highland Park—Highland Park not so much. Jersey City increasingly. Being in Newark –This is just my opinion. For white people in New Jersey, being in Newark is synonymous with being black, and white people do not want to support black people. You see that play out in all sorts of ways. Welfare queen, coded racist language, right? Those people who don't deserve health insurance.

There's this whole thing about the health bill that they wanted people on Medicaid to have to show a work requirement because why? Because it's perceived that people on Medicaid are black, and black people are lazy. None of that is founded in any statistical reality, but it's—but it is racism at play. You now have the

situation where the bougie white folk don't want to support Newark because they associate with black people, and it's coded veiled racism. That's not true for everyone, but I think—so we also have that kind of thing. Then if you have money or affluence, and you want to get gay support, you go to Philadelphia, or you go to New York City. That leaves everyone else here.

*Casey Azcona:* Where do they go to?

*Steve Malick:* Where do they go to? Then the third or another—I don't even know how many I said—there's a fairly fractured landscape of LGBTQ organizations in the city. Because we are not put together in any coherent structure, it may—except for informally, it makes it really difficult to get city hall to respond to us because we're fractious. Then for the money that is available, we're all fighting for it amongst ourselves. There are well-funded LGBT organizations in the city of Newark that do great stuff, but don't mess with their funding sources. They will tell you how they feel. *[Laughter]* Fantastic people, people I respect and admire deeply. If I were in their position, I'd be like, don't fuck with my money either. That is probably one of the biggest factors.

*Harris Laufer:* How has the current political dynamic impacted LGBT in Newark?

*Steve Malick:* Current political dynamic?

*Harris Laufer:* Trying to be as diplomatic as possible.

*Steve Malick:* I don't like diplomatic language cuz—so just tell me what you mean.

*Casey Azcona:* Trump.

*Harris Laufer:* How has the election of Trump and Chris Christie being governor impacted—

*Steve Malick:* Chris Christie's irrelevant. He's irrelevant now. He was irrelevant then for the LGBTQ community. His constituency was never LGBTQ folks, so why bother? He's never had to do anything. Except for every now and then, there's a favored gay person, but that's not Christie favoring a gay person. It's some sort of government agency bestowing its gifts onto a particular gay person or LGBT person in their organization. Trump is yet to be seen. I guess today, he was signing some religious exemption thing, but I haven't looked into that. To me, the Trump administration is just so bureaucratically incompetent that they don't know how to use the real levers of their power to actually impact change. This religious exemption executive order, I think there's probably really easy grounds to contest that in court. Much to my surprise when elected, Trump seems to be respecting the will of the court. We saw that with the travel ban [00:40:00] stuff. That's probably the biggest surprise for me. I wasn't expecting him to actually respect the will of the court. That's yet to be seen. When you propose massive cuts to the government and welfare agencies and social services and stuff like that, that's gonna impact gay people. It's gonna impact low-income LGBTQ folk.

*Harris Laufer:* I want to come back to you. What do you do for a living currently?

*Steve Malick:* I do education research for a large public policy firm.

*Harris Laufer:* In your capacity doing that research, have you seen a correlation between LGBT education and success?

*Steve Malick:* I don't know what LGBT education is.

*Harris Laufer:* Sex-ed, providing resources, et cetera.

*Steve Malick:* I don't know about a correlation. Those are really important parts of my field. When I say correlation, I have a particular idea of what that means and the statistical nomenclature that goes around it. Do I have opinions about sex-ed? Yes, I do. *[Laughter]* Opinions about sex. Tell me more. I guess I don't know where to go with this. *[Laughter]*

*Harris Laufer:* In your research capacity, have you researched sex-ed and practices of sex-ed?

*Steve Malick:* My company does. I've dabbled a bit. I'm not terribly interested in sex-ed as a research topic because inevitably, the outcomes we're measuring just make me personally feel icky inside. You're measuring, how many 14-year-olds didn't get chlamydia this year? That just makes me feel gross. Just me as me. How many 15-year-olds didn't get pregnant? Those are the sorts of things that you measure. For me, that becomes icky for me, for lack of a better word, and I just am not as interested in it. You look at the federal landscape for some of these—the sex-ed programs, and now there's this new initiative—initiative is too strong—impulse that they need to include how—the federal government through its various agencies will spend money to test the efficacy of certain interventions to see if they're better than what we're doing already. There are grants that go out to support

certain sex-ed programs, and they have to meet certain criteria. They apply for it, and then the government will give money, and then da-da-da-da-da.

One of the things that it was looking at in administering some grant money previous and a few year ago was just, to what degree is it inclusive of LGBTQ students, which is great, but there's abstinence-only education in that. Last time I checked, it's only been two years that gay marriage has been around. There ain't no fucking abstinence-only education out there that is inclusive of LGBTQ kids. Why? Because as long as you don't have gay marriage as not just a legal right but as a social right for LGBTQ folks, that means you're telling gay people that their sex is immoral, and it is wrong, and it is unnatural. That is unacceptable because when you say abstinence-only that means the only acceptable form of sex is within a marriage.

All these fucking hypocrites out there having sex, and then they have their come to Jesus moment literally at some point in life, then they're like like, oh, no, no, no. You should not have sex. What the hell is that about? Do I want 14-year-olds out there having sex? Absolutely not. At 14, you barely know yourself, but there are 14-year-olds out there having sex. There are 14-year-olds out there who are being sexually assaulted and raped. We need to do shit for those kids. [Yes, we need to remove the stigma around talking about sex]. Does that mean handing out condoms and birth control? I guess it does.

*Harris Laufer:*

Does the community center provide resources such as condoms and stuff like that?

*Steve Malick:*

Yeah. We provide condoms. Here's the other implication of being a board member. When you become a board member and you start



to represent an institution, the role that risk plays in your decision factors goes through the roof. When you're a kid and your parent gives you 20 bucks and you're like, I could blow it on this, you blow it, and you don't think about it because don't really have fiduciary responsibility for your parents' budget. When you have fiduciary responsibility for the center, [00:45:00] and you know that every decision you make could potentially end up leading to the closure of the center, right, things like sex-ed, while important, you start thinking about liability waivers.

You start thinking about, do we have a trained health professional? What happens if someone attends our sex-ed class and they—what happens if someone attends a class and then ends up contracting an STI or something like that? They come back, and they say, "You told me this". That leaves us vulnerable, and so we have to make sure we do things right. We can't just do it for the sake of doing it. We have to do it right. There's no sex-ed happening in Newark public schools.

*Harris Laufer:* None?

*Steve Malick:* Not that I'm aware of. When I taught, I asked the counselor to come in and talk to my kids because my boys were poking at the girls. I was like, this isn't good. Poking leads to sex. I remember she came in, and she did this whole thing about, "Your body's a temple, and who's gonna want you after you have sex?" I'm like, I've had sex, and people wanted me after I had sex the first time. Then, "Boys are just boys, and they're just driven to have sex." I'm like, look, I've also been in a situation where I'm super, super horny, and I chose not to have sex too. Talk about dissonance. That was the only time my kids ever got sex-ed. Only time my kids got sex-ed. That could be different now. I taught in 2007 and 2008 in

Newark [in middle school]. It could be very different now, but I would be surprised if there was formal sex-ed in schools.

*Harris Laufer:* I'm gonna wrap up.

*Steve Malick:* I'm gonna have to revise this so badly. Has it been two hours already that I've talked to you?

*Harris Laufer:* It hasn't been two hours at all. It's only been 46 minutes.

*Steve Malick:* It's been almost 90 minutes. It's been an hour. Yeah.

*Harris Laufer:* We're gonna start wrapping up. Aside from the community center, in your experience, where are places for LGBT people to hang out in Newark?

*Steve Malick:* There's a few DL bars. There's families that are—that have safe spaces for their kids and their friends. There's HMI. There's a AAOGC. There's not a lot. Rutgers, I assume, is safe, but you have to be a Rutgers student. You could venture over to Jersey City. There's the pride center there. There's something in Highland Park. There's something in Asbury Park. That's not accessible [to Newarkers]. There's just not a lot, which is why this space is so sacred.

When Orlando happened, that shook us to our bones. It shook us to our bones because that could happen here. It could happen anywhere. When I first started acknowledging to myself that I was gay, and I wanted to be in spaces with other men who were gay, and I went to my first gay bar in Salem, Oregon, the Salem Speakeasy. I don't know your guys' sexual orientation or other identity backgrounds, but I cannot underline—I can't tell you that

feeling of walking into a gay bar the first time I had been in a predominantly gay space. The first time. I'm 21. It's the first time I walk into a predominantly gay space and just feeling like I'm home. I was so uncomfortable. I was so uncomfortable the entire time. Some guy and told me I was cute, and I'm like, I don't know who you are. I don't talk to strangers.

I can't tell you just that feeling of just, I'm home and I'm comfortable. I don't have to act a certain way, and I don't have to present. I don't have to police. I just can be me. For me, when Pulse happened, that shook me to the core cuz I still go to gay bars because of that feeling that I get. I come to the center here because of the feeling that I get. I do work for the center because this is sacred. It's not religious. It's not spiritual, but the space is sacred. The viability of that must continue.

*Harris Laufer:* Casey, do you have any more questions?

*Casey Azcona:* I don't have any good questions, but I was maybe thinking, where do you wish to take the center in the future?

*Steve Malick:* Let me pull out my 20-page plan. [00:50:00] I think one of the most important lessons I ever learned in life is to be vision-driven or mission-driven. I think for me, that means the center is an organization that is part of the fabric of the city of Newark, is a part of the vibrant fabric of the city of Newark, and is a place that is explicitly doing work connected to improving the health and wellness and well-being of LGBTQ folks in the city. Now, how that looks, I think, is dependent on the needs of the community. We have no needs assessment right now. There's no good data nationally, especially locally, about—that's not true. There's some good data.

When I mean good data, I mean in a rigorous sort of fashion from a statistical perspective. There's very limited data, especially here in Newark. What I think to be true, what I believe is true, is HIV and AIDS is still a predominant issue here. Jobs and economic empowerment is still an issue for LGBTQ folks in the city. Healthy relationships is an issue. We are approaching the retirement age of a generation of elderly LGBTQ folks who were out for the first time, and because of that, did not have gainful employment steadily through their life. We're gonna have a lot of homeless elders out here on the streets here before we know it. We already do.

*Casey Azcona:* Yeah. We already do.

*Steve Malick:* If you went to Penn Station at 5:00AM, it's pretty crowded, and that's because there's a lot of folks who that's where they're staying for the night. I'm willing to bet a good chunk of them are LGBTQ, a disproportionate number of them are LGBTQ. Certainly true of LGBT youth that are homeless. We got to get people into homes. We got to get them jobs. We got to get them financial resources. We got to get them to healthy relationships, however someone defines a relationship. We have to provide for education and resources to make sure that the most intimate decisions that people make in their life are safe, that they're not coerced, and that they become empowering for folks.

*Casey Azcona:* Which relates to the whole needs of the LGBT community in Newark more about survival than anything else.

*Steve Malick:* Say that again? I'm sorry.

*Casey Azcona:* It's more about survival than anything else, like besides LGBTQ issues, like income and all that stuff.

*Steve Malick:* Yeah. That's what I mean by the fabric. Newark is a predominantly—a city of predominantly African-American and Latino folk, so you cannot disentangle being black and being brown in this city from being gay, right? Those things are related. Some ridiculous number of people live below the poverty line. You cannot take that low-income identity away from the identity of being gay. They come together in ways that sometimes will expand someone's options. For me, being a six-foot-one white guy who can pass as straight has expanded my options in life, but being gay has constricted some of my options. When you have those social forces and institutions of racism and classism and homophobia and transphobia coming together, they collude in ways that sometimes are unexpected. Yeah. I don't know if that really answers your question.

*Casey Azcona:* That's good. That's good. Thank you, Steven.

*Harris Laufer:* Thanks very much for your time.

*Steve Malick:* No problem.

*Harris Laufer:* I wish continued success to the center.

*Steve Malick:* Thank you.

*Casey Azcona:* Thank you.

*Steve Malick:* Good luck on your reflection paper. I hope this was helpful.

*[End of Audio, 00:54:14]*