

Zeam Porter  
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins  
Interviewer

The Transgender Oral History Project  
Tretter Collection in GLBT Studies  
University of Minnesota

December 28, 2016



The Transgender Oral History Project of the Upper Midwest will empower individuals to tell their story, while providing students, historians, and the public with a more rich foundation of primary source material about the transgender community. The project is part of the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota. The archive provides a record of GLBT thought, knowledge and culture for current and future generations and is available to students, researchers and members of the public.

The Transgender Oral History Project will collect up to 400 hours of oral histories involving 200 to 300 individuals over the next three years. Major efforts will be the recruitment of individuals of all ages and experiences, and documenting the work of The Program in Human Sexuality. This project will be led by

Andrea Jenkins, poet, writer, and trans-activist. Andrea brings years of experience working in government, non-profits and LGBT organizations. If you are interested in being involved in this exciting project, please contact Andrea.

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1     Andrea Jenkins             -AJ  
2     Zeam Porter             -ZP  
3

4     AJ:     So, hello.

5     ZP:     Hello.

6     AJ:     My name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian for the Transgender Oral History Project  
7             at the University of Minnesota, the Tretter Collection in LGBT Studies. Today is December 28,  
8             2016. I am here at the home of Zeam Porter. How you doing, Zeam?

9     ZP:     Good, I'm great. I'm so glad that you get to be in my home too, just because it's where I grew  
10            up.

11    AJ:     Yeah, and it's so warm and just culturally and aesthetically welcoming.

12    ZP:     Thank you.

13    AJ:     So, thank you for having me in your home. I really appreciate the opportunity.

14    ZP:     Thanks for coming.

15    AJ:     Hey Zeam, can you introduce yourself, spell your name so we make sure that our transcriptionist  
16            spells it correctly, and pronounces it correctly. Also, tell me what is your gender identity, how  
17            you define it today; what was your gender assigned at birth, and then what pronouns do you  
18            use?

19    ZP:     Yeah, sure. My name is Zeam Porter, Z-e-a-m P-o-r-t-e-r. As far as gender identity goes, today I  
20            really identify with demiboy, specifically trans masculine gender queer, but demiboy just kind of  
21            gets to that fluidity, but also strong grounding in what I think it is.

22    AJ:     So, d-m-i . . .

23    ZP:     D-e-m-i . . .

24    AJ:     D-e-m-i . . .

25    ZP:     b-o-y.

26    AJ:     b-o-y. Demiboy. Wow, that's a new identity that I don't think I've heard in the context of doing  
27            these interviews.

28    ZP:     Oh, interesting. That's so funny.

29    AJ:     So, say it again, what it sort of denotes for you.

30    ZP:     Yeah, for me it really gets at how I perceive my gender to be very fluid but also grounded in  
31            being trans masculine and what does it mean to be a guy, I'm not sure, so that's why part of  
32            how I feel is undefined. So, it's that demiboy – half of who I am, I feel like . . . or half of how my  
33            gender presentation shows up is really undefined and really fluid even though I can't wait to get  
34            top surgery and I still want to have a beard and everything else.

- 1 AJ: Wow.
- 2 ZP: It's just like I don't need to be tied.
- 3 AJ: That is so incredible to me, thank you. Wow. So, what pronouns do you use then?
- 4 ZP: Right now, I prefer they/them or he/him/his, but like Z, just my name. When I introduce myself  
5 now, I say, "Hey, my name is Zeam," just like in an everyday conversation, "or you can call me Z  
6 and feel free to use Z instead of pronouns as well."
- 7 AJ: Wow, that's so smart. Ze is actually sort of the gender-neutral pronoun that Leslie Feinberg sort  
8 of tried to really institute, it has had a hard time catching on.
- 9 ZP: Yes.
- 10 AJ: So, you're sort of reaching back to some cultural trans history there.
- 11 ZP: Sort of, yeah. I'm still learning all my trans history too. It's kind of fun to play with it and learn  
12 about gender nihilism as well as how some folks are for the gender binary and some folks aren't  
13 and trying to be like, "Well, let's not get ourselves into a whole new binary, yah or nay." So, the  
14 binary . . . I don't know, I just feel kind of like ze as a pronoun in and of itself just encapsulates  
15 kind of my history as well. I don't identify as a Christian but having Christian roots, one thing I  
16 really loved and try to live by is first shall be last. They say that's supposed to be in heaven, but  
17 we can make that on earth. A lot of the people who are seen as last are kind of the yellow  
18 canary to how our government actually runs to all our fears and the hatred in our world. I just  
19 really like the term ze, so I could go on and on about it.
- 20 AJ: No, that's incredible. I love that. And then, what was your gender assigned at birth?
- 21 ZP: At birth, they thought I was a girl or that they designated as female.
- 22 AJ: OK, cool. Zeam, tell me your earliest memory in life – like what's the first thing you remember?
- 23 ZP: I have a terrible memory and it's really funny, because my dad tells me about these little things  
24 in life, but my memory is less of a here's what happened and more of just an opening shot to a  
25 movie. I remember going out onto the playground and seeing the slide being, what I thought,  
26 was 200 feet – really, it's just like 20, maybe. But, I remember looking at it up and thinking it  
27 was 200 feet and being like, "This is the slide I must conquer."
- 28 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 29 ZP: I just remember that – like, "This is life." Like, this is the entire world – my goal in life is to get  
30 on top of this slide.
- 31 AJ: This is my Mt. Everest, huh?
- 32 ZP: Basically. That's my earliest memory.
- 33 AJ: Wow, that's awesome. How old do you think you were at that point?
- 34 ZP: I had to be four or five.

- 1 AJ: Four or five, yeah – awesome. Where did you grow up? You said in this house.
- 2 ZP: Yeah, I did.
- 3 AJ: So, born and raised in Minneapolis.
- 4 ZP: Well, I was born in Rochester, Minnesota – Mayo Clinic. I'm not a test tube baby, but my  
5 parents needed a lot of help getting me. So, at the Mayo Clinic, they were working there and so  
6 they kind of got a lot of fertility for free or half off. I'm the only Black baby born that day too,  
7 apparently.
- 8 AJ: Really?
- 9 ZP: Yeah, but my family got me out of Rochester, and when I was two we moved here and this is the  
10 house I've been in since then.
- 11 AJ: What day? You said you were the only Black baby born that day, what day?
- 12 ZP: November 10, 1997.
- 13 AJ: OK.
- 14 ZP: Yeah, so in the entire Mayo Clinic. That scares me. I'm so glad to get away from so much snow,  
15 if you catch my drift.
- 16 AJ: Drift caught, OK. But, you're a Scorpio.
- 17 ZP: I am a Scorpio.
- 18 AJ: That's awesome.
- 19 ZP: A lot of my friends love it and hate it. I just love a good plan, I love a good scheme. I can be very  
20 emotional but also very vigorous, I guess.
- 21 AJ: OK. And, you guys moved here when you were two, so where did you go to elementary school?
- 22 ZP: I actually went to Hall Elementary School.
- 23 AJ: OK.
- 24 ZP: I don't know if you know, right by Cub.
- 25 AJ: Yeah, it's on Penn Avenue, I believe.
- 26 ZP: Yup.
- 27 AJ: Like, right before you get to Plymouth. Sure.
- 28 ZP: Yes. It's kind of kiddy-corner, I think, to the mosque that's in Minneapolis too.
- 29 AJ: Yeah. What was that experience like?
- 30 ZP: You know, it's really interesting because what I remember about elementary school is that that  
31 was the . . . 5<sup>th</sup> grade, specifically, was the last time I felt like school was for me. It was the last

- 1 time where it was like we were meant to learn and school was always right and my teacher is  
2 here for my education. Even though I didn't say that in those words, I remember always getting  
3 on the radio as a kid, because Hall would have . . . you know, people from MPR would come and  
4 just do little segments with us. Local artists would come and it was international bacculaureate,  
5 so it had that fancy title still, but it was for the people.
- 6 AJ: Wow.
- 7 ZP: I remember I signed up for this poetry contest, didn't get in it, but they still put my poem in the  
8 school newsletter – just cuz. They did that with a whole bunch of kids – whatever avenue.
- 9 AJ: Really? Well, it must have been a good poem.
- 10 ZP: I don't even remember it. I think so, but I just remember how small that school was, but also . . .  
11 I don't know, it was the last time too that I saw a lot of people who looked like me, as far as skin  
12 tone, too.
- 13 AJ: Wow – in a school environment.
- 14 ZP: Yeah.
- 15 AJ: Where did you go after that?
- 16 ZP: Sixth grade I went to Anwatin, so there was . . . it seems like the diversity . . . there was more  
17 white kids in the class, let me just say that. It went from being one or two to being 10 out of 30.  
18 And then, I went to Blake after that for 7<sup>th</sup> grade and then it became I was the one or two and  
19 everyone else was . . . a lot of snow.
- 20 AJ: Let me just say Blake is a really highly respected private school that is predominantly white.
- 21 ZP: Yeah, upper middle class.
- 22 AJ: Upper middle class – lots of dignitaries and honoraries and politicians. I think Governor Dayton  
23 went to . . .
- 24 ZP: I believe so. I know Al Franken did.
- 25 AJ: Senator Al Franken. So, many, many luminaries have graduated from Blake School. I believe  
26 you have to have some pretty good smarts to be . . .
- 27 ZP: They do have an entrance exam that's a part of it, but yeah. I did all right.
- 28 AJ: Yeah.
- 29 ZP: Yeah.
- 30 AJ: When was the first time you realized, Zeam, that you were not the gender you were assigned at  
31 birth?
- 32 ZP: So, it was actually pretty late – or late, as in terms of not to the master narrative creator of  
33 being trans.

- 1 AJ: Yeah, which is why we're doing this project – to really explode that master narrative and try to  
2 create some broader understanding around who this community is and how we operate and  
3 exist and how we live in this world.
- 4 ZP: I remember it was sophomore year, I was super exhausted because of finals and all this stuff and  
5 I was just battling with mental illness, depression and paranoia, and I just couldn't do the bare  
6 minimum. It was hard to walk up steps just because I was dealing with a lot of nightmares,  
7 thinking I was going to go to hell for my sexuality – I was dealing with a lot.
- 8 AJ: Wow.
- 9 ZP: I was just like . . . I walked in and saw one of my teachers, JJ, who runs the GSA, as well as a  
10 social justice group called The Justice League at the school, and I was like, "Why can I not  
11 remember . . . why am I so fed up and can't remember which bathroom I'm supposed to go to?  
12 Out of everything that's going on right now, I just can't . . . it's really hard to remember these  
13 things."
- 14 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 15 ZP: They were just like, "Um, do you know a lot about gender identity and stuff?" I was like, "No, I  
16 just know that I'm frustrated because it's hard to remember that I'm supposed to be in the girl's  
17 bathroom and it's even harder to make myself enter that. Out of all the things that are going on  
18 right now and how exhausted I am, this is just one of the biggest things I'm frustrated with."  
19 And, from there I learned about what being trans was, like in GSA. I did a lot of research on my  
20 own, thank God for Tumblr. I just started reaching out more to the community and being with  
21 my people. Through activism, as well, I feel like I was, "OK, here we go," and going to a program  
22 called, "An Evening Out," which Billy used to run.
- 23 AJ: Evening Out.
- 24 ZP: Yeah.
- 25 AJ: Billy Navarro, Jr.
- 26 ZP: Yes. He used to run this program through Minneapolis and St. Paul Public Schools, kind of right  
27 by Hamline, actually – Hancock Rec Center, every Friday night from 7-11pm. Kids from the  
28 neighborhood and just from greater Minnesota would get together and it was a safe space,  
29 brave space, for queer and trans kids to just make dinner together, play basketball, do crafts and  
30 all those things. That was when I really changed my world too. It went from questioning and  
31 inquiring and kind of doing like, "OK, something's wrong structurally – like, I'm physically and  
32 structurally tired, as well as I see this system in place too, but let me understand it and see  
33 where I can get some grounding, but also be with my people or be with people who aren't just  
34 grasping with these identities but wear them on their shoulders bravely." That was the first  
35 time I was with kids my age, teens my age, like that. And, it wasn't just like the obscure Tumblr  
36 or stars that I saw.
- 37 AJ: Right, and they looked like you as well, right?

- 1 ZP: Exactly – looked like me, was going through the same problems, had to take the same trains. So  
2 ...
- 3 AJ: Yeah, wow. So, that wasn't too long ago, your sophomore year in high school, because you're a  
4 freshman in college right now.
- 5 ZP: Exactly.
- 6 AJ: It may seem like a very long time to you, but ...
- 7 ZP: Right, but in the grand scheme of things ...
- 8 AJ: In the grand scheme of things, it's a relatively short period of time. And, in that short period of  
9 time, Zeam, you have made a tremendous impact on what is loosely called a transgender  
10 movement. I use that phrase loosely because there really isn't a sort of leader, but there is a  
11 movement, right.
- 12 ZP: Yeah, there is so many. I feel like it's more just like a river with a lot of streams than just one ...
- 13 AJ: That's a great analogy. I think that's very true. But, you have been able to really make a  
14 significant impact in these movements from a young person's perspective, from a person of  
15 color's perspective, from a "trans masculine" perspective. Tell me about some of the sort of  
16 advocacy and political battles you've been in and then we'll talk about the intersections of Black  
17 Lives Matter and sort of neurodiversity things in a little bit, but I really want to just hear from  
18 you, what has been your experience in being engaged in sort of these political struggles with the  
19 state high school league and other struggles that you've been engaged in?
- 20 ZP: Yeah. So, what I've come to realize is that I think I can be very good at having a loud mouth and  
21 crying and being very vulnerable, and just being in the moment saying what I've got to say and  
22 not really putting burdens or blockers on my emotion. I can do that publicly. I don't know how,  
23 it sometimes just comes out of me, but it happens.
- 24 AJ: A lot of people censure themselves or really are sort of blocked by fear and not able to do those  
25 kinds of things.
- 26 ZP: Basketball, for me – for a long time, was the only way that I could really connect with the  
27 greater aspects of my family. Being the queer, kind of goofy, really clumsy child in the family,  
28 doesn't win you brownie points with your uncle, you know what I'm saying. But, when I got into  
29 basketball was when my uncle started training me and it was how we connected.
- 30 AJ: So, you're an athlete.
- 31 ZP: I was an athlete. I still do it here and there, but I'm not as dedicated as I once was. But, at one  
32 point, basketball helped ground me not only physically but also gave me a place within my  
33 family, outside of my immediate one.
- 34 AJ: Sure.
- 35 ZP: After I came out to myself, and really started coming out to more folks, there was this question  
36 of what team would I play on or what will I be doing – how do I come out and still have a ...



1 like, how do I hold my identities and my relationships as well; how I relate to the world, how I  
 2 relate to my school, how I relate to my family. So, when OutFront and the national GSA  
 3 Network, who I was working with, reached out to me and was like, "Do you want to testify in  
 4 front of the high school league on Prop 9, basically where should transgender athletes play?" I  
 5 was like, "Of course, I need to." It was kind of a last minute, on that day decision – like on the  
 6 day of the hearing. I remember the room being jam packed with so many opposing folks and I  
 7 was just like - yeah, not only is this a battle that I was once just following and really behind the  
 8 scenes doing the volunteer work, just getting it out there, and then testifying. But, it was one of  
 9 the movements where I felt directly tied to it and I really just wanted to voice, for a lot of trans  
 10 folks – specifically, young trans folks, sports is a way that we can connect to people. Do you  
 11 know what I mean? Don't make us . . . we're already worried about being second-class citizens  
 12 and even just staying alive. Don't make us second-class citizens within the school system, within  
 13 our classroom, within everything. The world already does that, can we have one place where it  
 14 doesn't?

15 AJ: Yeah, in our extra-curricular activity, you know – yeah.

16 ZP: So, yeah, I testified and basically was just like . . . I don't know. I just remember being in shock  
 17 by how much people were opposed and being like, "I don't think you really understand how  
 18 important this is, that my gender identity as well as my identity as an athlete can exist together  
 19 and not battle and not fight." Internal battles that represent extra battles should not be placed  
 20 upon the backs of youth, but it is often times. But, this was one instance where I was like, "It  
 21 doesn't have to be and there's this hearing for it, so let's go."

22 AJ: Yeah, and this was a Minnesota State Senate hearing committee, right?

23 ZP: Yes. Now, I will tell you I didn't know that until after – or how many cameras or how other  
 24 people were tracking, other folks were following . . . like how the State had a stake in this. I  
 25 knew there was news articles about it, there was ads taken out in the paper about it – in  
 26 opposition to it. I saw that, but I couldn't get past the pain or just like, "Oh, my gosh, how could  
 27 they do this to us to realize the magna . . . or the maxtitude or . . .

28 AJ: Magnitude, yeah.

29 ZP: There you go, thank you. Of what it was, so that was one of the first political battles I was in.  
 30 And then, the next one really happened with Minnesota's anti-bullying bill, which was 34 words  
 31 beforehand and we were really working hard to . . . when I say we, I was working with OutFront  
 32 at the time.

33 AJ: OK, yes. OutFront Minnesota, statewide LGBT advocacy organization.

34 ZP: Exactly – thank you. And, I would go after school all the time and just do the phone banking at  
 35 first and also just be at the huge days when they would . . . like the youth summits, when they  
 36 would get kids out of school and come together and actually go to the councils and meet with  
 37 our lobbyists and stuff. I would always be working kind of in conjunction with that – behind the  
 38 scenes. I might put on a workshop here and there, but then after the bill got passed was when I  
 39 was asked to be on the Governor's Task Force and so I was doing that for the first rendition of it,  
 40 and now there's a second one too. I'm not on that one because . . . being in a little rectangle

- 1 with principals from all over, police officers from all over, doctors, parents, and at first there was  
2 only three youth on the thing, it wasn't just intimidating . . . some of the things they said, that's  
3 when I realized that government work and adults, it's very guilty. A lot of people say a lot of  
4 stupid things in government – and good, well-intentioned people do too. I remember just  
5 working with OutFront and then also being on this task force and feeling like I had a voice, but  
6 also being like, "Oh, my gosh, bureaucracy really is not for me." We would be arguing about  
7 whether or not the next survey that all Minnesota students legally have to take, should have  
8 gender markers that aren't just male and female on them. We would have hour-long battles  
9 about that and I'm like, "We're supposed to . . ."
- 10 AJ: Hours and hours.
- 11 ZP: Yes, hours and hours about that – about what does it mean . . . OK, if we have it for the high  
12 schoolers, should we have it for the middle schoolers, should we have it for this? Are kids too  
13 young to understand what gender identity is? I'm like, "If we're getting bullied for it, I think we  
14 need to also have curriculum about it."
- 15 AJ: Right . . . duh.
- 16 ZP: Right. So, that was also for the last two years, something that I politically have been doing.  
17 Doing work on that task force really made me realize that I like to be hands-on in the community  
18 and just with my people and doing art.
- 19 AJ: Do you still write poetry?
- 20 ZP: I do.
- 21 AJ: Wonderful.
- 22 ZP: Last year I worked on creating full poetry books. Now, I'm just sitting on this poetry book.
- 23 AJ: Wow, that's incredible. Let me know how I can be of assistance in getting this book into the  
24 world.
- 25 ZP: Thank you, yes.
- 26 AJ: I would love to be able to help with that.
- 27 ZP: Yeah, that's a little bit of my trajectory politically.
- 28 AJ: Right. So, you actually won an award from OutFront Minnesota.
- 29 ZP: Yes, I did.
- 30 AJ: As the sort of Youth Advocate of the Year, I think it was called.
- 31 ZP: And the Courage Award as well.
- 32 AJ: The Courage Award – yeah, yeah, yeah. It was the same year that I won an award from  
33 OutFront Minnesota, which I was extremely proud of, and even prouder that you and I were  
34 being honored at the same celebration on the same night.

- 1 ZP: Yeah.
- 2 AJ: How did that make you feel?
- 3 ZP: I actually will tell you, in this house my dad was like, “Do you know you’re sharing the stage with  
4 Andrea.” I remember that beforehand.
- 5 AJ: Oh, my God.
- 6 ZP: We were standing right over there and I was like, “I know, I can’t believe it.” Sometimes,  
7 especially with awards, I feel like the world has been duped – I don’t deserve this.
- 8 AJ: True confession, I feel the same way too, Zeam.
- 9 ZP: Really?
- 10 AJ: Absolutely . . . absolutely.
- 11 ZP: I don’t believe you. Really?
- 12 AJ: There’s a real thing called imposter syndrome and . . . I mean, I deal with that. Yeah, I think I do  
13 do some good, positive things in the world and I make some people inspired, but at the end of  
14 the day, I’m probably my hardest critic and always wondering when am I going to be exposed  
15 for the fraud that I am.
- 16 ZP: That’s interesting to me, because when I decided to write a poetry book, it was because so  
17 many people told me about how you self-published all your poems. I remember always seeing  
18 you perform, especially at Intermedia Arts, and other things and just really being inspired by  
19 your work and specifically how . . . sometimes I read authors who are also trans or also Black,  
20 and I feel like . . . not like it’s a grounding step or a footing stone and I think that’s a bad thing,  
21 but I feel like a lot of people read their poems just because they’re Black writers, just because  
22 they’re trans writers, and I feel like your work is . . . people don’t read your work just because  
23 you’re a Black trans woman. I think they read it for the words.
- 24 AJ: Yeah . . . well, I hope so. But, yes.
- 25 ZP: I don’t know how to say that, I hope that’s not too . . .
- 26 AJ: No, I hope that people read it because it’s good poetry and its meaningful and it’s inspirational,  
27 but if they only read it because I’m Black or because I’m trans, I don’t care either – just read it.  
28 Just read it. If that’s what brought you to this work, that’s fine, but I’m more than that. But, I  
29 don’t want to make this about me – this is about you, this is your interview.
- 30 ZP: Yes. But, yeah, winning that Courage Award and speaking for the youth, I guess, I don’t know . .  
31 . it felt really strange. I remember feeling a lot like a big weight on my shoulders when it came  
32 to the speech. How do I say thank you? How do I do this? At that time, I thought non-profits  
33 that were getting government funding were like the be all/end all way to do this work.
- 34 AJ: Sure.

- 1 ZP: So, I was like being honored by a place like that means that I'm in, I'm doing something right, I'm  
2 on the true path. And, obviously, I think differently now.
- 3 AJ: Yeah, you think differently now?
- 4 ZP: Yeah, I do.
- 5 AJ: Talk to me about that.
- 6 ZP: Especially with reading a lot more works too and getting in college, which is such a huge  
7 privilege.
- 8 AJ: And, you're a student at Macalester College.
- 9 ZP: Yes, Macalester College in St. Paul.
- 10 AJ: In St. Paul, Minnesota, which is a very highly acclaimed college and so I just want to say  
11 congratulations on that.
- 12 ZP: Thank you so much.
- 13 AJ: But yeah, you have learned more. Do you have some analysis around the non-profit industrial  
14 complex?
- 15 ZP: Industrial complex – I do. Yeah. To use that phrase and to use that term, but it's true – it is like  
16 an industry. I think one of the things I was talking about with my dad once and he was like,  
17 "Yeah, don't you realize the goal should always be to work yourself out of a job, but that's not  
18 what non-profits are set up to do." I was like, "What?" And then putting that analysis – like just  
19 reading words by . . . Audre Lord is God to me, Angela Davis and hearing about different  
20 organizations and stuff, you're really limited. I remember going through grant writing just this  
21 past summer with Gender Revolution 8 under MTHC, Minnesota Transgender Health Coalition.  
22 Experiencing what it was like trying to write a grant and being like, "Oh, my gosh, OutFront  
23 might go for the same grant." And feeling like I was put in a cage with OutFront – like my team  
24 versus theirs.
- 25 AJ: Like a cage match or something?
- 26 ZP: Exactly – for this money. And then reading about analysis or just different people's essays or  
27 even poems, because sometimes I think essays can be really poetic, about how government  
28 agencies act like there is this much money to do this much work to gain this many rights.
- 29 AJ: Right.
- 30 ZP: And, I'm like, "That is a model that is not good for anyone."
- 31 AJ: No, not at all. A scarcity model.
- 32 ZP: Yeah, exactly. Not only is it not good for anyone, it literally puts me against myself again with  
33 different identities that I hold. Oppression Olympics is not going to help anyone. I think grant  
34 money does not want coalitions to be built and doesn't help coalitions to be built, so now I'm  
35 just . . . still applying for grants, but also kind of being like, "OK, how do we create platforms for .

- 1 . . how do I create platforms for other youth so that another youth never feels either guilty for  
2 being praised for doing work or later feels like, 'Oh my gosh, why do I feel like I was so blinded  
3 and thinking that this was the end all/be all and then realizing that it wasn't even scratching the  
4 surface'."
- 5 AJ: Wow. Let's turn this a little bit more personal, Zeam, if you don't mind.
- 6 ZP: Yeah, I don't.
- 7 AJ: So, you describe yourself as a demiboy.
- 8 ZP: Yes.
- 9 AJ: I can't imagine that was the first identity that you sort of identified with. So, how has your  
10 identity changed over time and what have been some of the identities that you have claimed in  
11 this process?
- 12 ZP: So, I was bullied a lot in 6<sup>th</sup> grade because everyone knew that I was a dyke before I did.
- 13 AJ: Oh, wow – OK.
- 14 ZP: Yeah, there was this one girl who would always take the back of her pencil and just stick it in my  
15 neck and go, "Dyke, dyke, dyke," in class.
- 16 AJ: Oh, my gosh.
- 17 ZP: We were supposed to be reading Shakespeare, which I think is funny, but instead that was  
18 happening.
- 19 AJ: And this was at Anwatin?
- 20 ZP: Yes, in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. And then I thought I was big and bag, but I was like, "What is a dyke?" So, I  
21 had to look that up too because I didn't know anything.
- 22 AJ: Oh, my goodness.
- 23 ZP: All of the slang terms . . . I was really sheltered, I felt like. I didn't know all the slurs or any slang,  
24 I didn't even know what gay was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade.
- 25 AJ: OK.
- 26 ZP: I feel like that's a shocker now, especially because I know 6<sup>th</sup> graders who are like, "You were my  
27 age once and didn't know what gay was." I'm like, "Believe it or not, yes."
- 28 AJ: Yeah, well, I don't know if that's that uncommon but, yes, I think there's a lot more kids –  
29 because of the internet, because of social media. Information has just blossomed over the  
30 years.
- 31 ZP: Yeah, but after being bullied a lot and realizing, "Yeah, I guess they do have a point, I am  
32 attracted to girls and femininity." This is true. So, I first came out as bisexual. I thought I was  
33 big and bad dating an 8<sup>th</sup> grader at the time and it wasn't all that. I didn't realize that there's  
34 different subgroups within that, so then for a while I identified as a stud and then as a stem

- 1           because . . . I learned that studs weren't supposed to date other studs, or butch lesbians weren't  
2           supposed to date other butch lesbians, from a very young age. As soon as I came out, I realized  
3           that that wasn't a thing. So, I thought if I identified as a stem then it would be OK to be  
4           attracted to both . . .
- 5   AJ:     So, now, what's a stem?
- 6   ZP:     Oh, stem is like . . . you know, you have your lipstick femmes and you have your studs, well  
7           there was people – just different folks who identified . . .
- 8   AJ:     Who combined that?
- 9   ZP:     So, I would be in my basketball shorts and then wear lip gloss and a pony tail.
- 10  AJ:     Sweet, I love it.
- 11  ZP:     Or, wear really oversized stuff so you can't see that I have a chest, but then bright pink shoes. I  
12           don't know, different stuff like that – just so . . . I don't know, I was just attracted to . . . when I  
13           came out as bisexual and then a lesbian, I was just attracted to studs and femmes and everyone  
14           in-between. So, yeah. Then, in high school I came out just as queer because that was a lot  
15           easier than just dealing with all these things and all these politics within different communities. I  
16           realized I don't even know my gender. And, lo and behold, at first, I just identified as a trans guy  
17           because I was like, "Yeah."
- 18  AJ:     That makes sense.
- 19  ZP:     That made sense at the time. I remember telling my mom based off of this dream I had, which I  
20           definitely think says that I'm . . . it's much more true now how I see myself as a demiboy, but I  
21           had this dream that I was really unhappy and then I magically was floating in space and had no  
22           chest, and grew a penis. And then, somehow the penis got chopped off and then I had nothing  
23           – nothing at all and I was just chillin. At that moment was when I felt my most happy because it  
24           was just blank – a blank slate, blank everything. I told my mom that instead of saying, "Mom,  
25           I'm trans," I had to tell her this long elaborate dream I had. But, she got it. I came out to my  
26           dad first both times . . . bisexual, lesbian, queer, then trans guy and then demiboy.
- 27  AJ:     Really?
- 28  ZP:     Yeah, it was always my dad first.
- 29  AJ:     Wow.
- 30  ZP:     That's a lot.
- 31  AJ:     Because people are so . . . sort of apprehensive about coming out to their parents in general, but  
32           usually the dad is like the last . . . they ask mom to tell dad. That's kind of the narrative. And,  
33           you came out to your dad first?
- 34  ZP:     Yeah, well me and my dad look a lot alike and act a lot alike and just deal with a lot of the same  
35           feelings and thoughts. I really think my dad just spit me out. My mom used to say she was  
36           nothing but an incubator – which is not true, but . . .

- 1 AJ: Yeah, there is a very, very, very strong resemblance between you and your father, who I know  
2 well.
- 3 ZP: Exactly, exactly. He actually gave . . . I can't remember what poem it was, but I think it might  
4 have been *Coal* by Audre Lorde, like a week before I came out to him. Even just as a lesbian he  
5 gave me a poem and was like, "I came by this poem and I just want to give it to you."
- 6 AJ: *Coal*, C-o-a-l. Yeah.
- 7 ZP: Yes. Yeah, so my dad just spiritually too. I didn't know Audre Lord was the amazing person that  
8 she was, my dad didn't know I was going to come out to him a week later. I didn't know.
- 9 AJ: Wow, man. So, I got stud, stem, bisexual, queer, trans man.
- 10 ZP: Yeah, basically.
- 11 AJ: And now, you're sort of identifying with this phrase demiboy.
- 12 ZP: Yes.
- 13 AJ: Wow, that's incredible. Have you experienced any challenges, Zeam, since you have begun to  
14 express your true gender identity?
- 15 ZP: Yes. As far as challenges go, I think it's just that sense of struggle that a lot of family and friends  
16 have. I feel like they go down . . . even if they don't realize it, they always go down the pronoun  
17 grocery list, I feel like.
- 18 AJ: Right.
- 19 ZP: They'll use she/her – oh, they/them, he/his. Granted, because of how fluid I am, I can  
20 understand going through the grocery list, I know it happens with my friends as well – but,  
21 always that mismatch. That can be a challenge, but I think . . . I'll tell a story, even though I tell a  
22 lot of stories. I remember I was hanging out in this apartment complex with my friend, in a  
23 place where I shouldn't have been because of some of the businesses that go on there.
- 24 AJ: Sure.
- 25 ZP: But, I was there and I thought I was looking good, like I had on my binder and then this button  
26 down and these really flashy pants. I was like, "I look good." I'm just chillin with one of my  
27 friends.
- 28 AJ: You chillin, right.
- 29 ZP: And this guy comes up to me and he's like, "Are you a nigger?" It looks like we were ready to  
30 fight and I'm just like, "What do you mean?" He's like, "Are you a nigger?" I was like, "I think  
31 he's asking me if I was born a guy." So, I was like . . . I'm like, "No." And he's like, "Whew, good  
32 – because you're the prettiest thing I've ever seen and I just needed to know you weren't  
33 actually a nigger." I was just like . . .
- 34 AJ: Oh, man.

- 1 ZP: He looked like he was about to beat my butt, just because . . . if I was born male. I think that  
2 describes race, gender and how it collides a lot.
- 3 AJ: Wow.
- 4 ZP: That story is . . .
- 5 AJ: That is a powerful story.
- 6 ZP: That kind of encapsulates how I feel.
- 7 AJ: So, then did he hit on you?
- 8 ZP: I just left after that. I was just like, "I'm going to go."
- 9 AJ: Deuces, I'm out.
- 10 ZP: I can't deal with this one . . . I thought I was going to lose my life. Well, not really, I just know  
11 when it comes to fighting, I'm like my mom in the sense that I fight dirty and one of us ain't  
12 going to be able to stand up afterwards. We've got to fight to that point. If we're going to fight,  
13 you've got to do it right. I was just like, "I don't know if I'm prepared to fight."
- 14 AJ: Wow. What other kinds of challenges because of your sort of true gender identity? And wow,  
15 you bring up this whole thing around the intersection of race and class and gender, so let . . .  
16 instead of what other challenges, I have to believe that this young man is not the only person  
17 who perceives you as a young Black man in this culture and society. And, what does that feel  
18 like in your experience and how is it different from when people really did identify you as Black  
19 female?
- 20 ZP: You know, I've had a lot of talks with a lot of my mentors. I didn't realize I used to do this thing  
21 where I would . . . I don't know how I got it in my head, but I used to be super aggressive,  
22 especially with folks who are femme identified. I always stand a little too close and be very in  
23 charge – like, I need to protect. I would always embrace my mother a lot and be a little bit  
24 suffocating and I didn't realize that. One of the reasons it is a lot more noticeable was just  
25 because I started presenting more masculine, so the things that I was doing – just embracing  
26 and being some of the ways I was, became a lot more apparent – or I felt like I had to do it even  
27 more. When men hit on my mother, which happens a lot, I would definitely feel like I needed to  
28 square up a lot more, even though my mom could definitely square up for herself and say things  
29 for herself. So, that's one way – and I know too, just getting stopped in stores or by authority  
30 figures was a lot different. I remember being perceived as a Black female, I feel like teachers,  
31 police officers, people in stores would be a lot more hands-on and would feel like they could  
32 touch me sooner. Whereas, when I started presenting more masculine, it was a lot more  
33 threatening . . . it seemed like they were . . .
- 34 AJ: Like a guard.
- 35 ZP: Yeah, like a height difference rather than just, "I can grab you around and throw you."
- 36 AJ: Right.



- 1 ZP: Also, just people who, I think, a lot more scared of me when I started cussing in public and stuff.  
2 I almost feel like the more masculine I present, especially the days where I present more  
3 masculine, I can definitely tell there is a lot more . . . I feel like there's a lot more negative charge  
4 to the energy that I have or at least how people pick it up and perceive it.
- 5 AJ: Sure, wow. Yeah, I mean I think that might be a challenge that you will continually have to deal  
6 with and overcome over time.
- 7 ZP: Being sensitive too is a lot harder. I remember one time talking to this guy who is also trans and  
8 we were talking just about different partners we had and different sex and stuff, and he literally  
9 turned to me and said, "Wait . . ." In certain situations, is it OK if I cuss.
- 10 AJ: Yeah.
- 11 ZP: OK, I was like, "I don't know." But he was like, "If you want to get fucked like a bitch, why not  
12 stay a bitch." And this is another trans guy and he's like, "Are you really a dude?" Just because  
13 we were talking about being intimate in certain ways in the bedroom and being sensitive and  
14 stuff. That was new to me because I was like . . . I never thought that some of the acts that I do  
15 would then go against my gender identity – some of the more sensitive or femme or intimate  
16 acts that are celebrated, or just like whatever, would now be used against me and my gender  
17 identity in ways that I didn't know before.
- 18 AJ: Yeah, there's many, many ways to be trans identified, right.
- 19 ZP: Yeah. I hope that wasn't too . . .
- 20 AJ: No, that was incredible. Zeam, that was amazing.
- 21 ZP: OK, good. I was like, "Ooo, that might have been . . ."
- 22 AJ: I'm trying to figure out how to prod you to get deeper. I'm kidding, I'm kidding. But, not really,  
23 because my next question is . . . and please, only answer this to the extent that you feel  
24 comfortable.
- 25 ZP: Yeah, for sure.
- 26 AJ: And, please provide some analysis around this question if you so choose to. Have you done . . .  
27 or what medical procedures have you undergone related to your gender identity? And, if you  
28 haven't done any, do you have plans or thoughts or goals around medical transitions?
- 29 ZP: Yeah, I like the way you said that question too because it's not . . . you set it up like you have to  
30 in order to be trans. I know sometimes when we talk about trans identity surgeries, that's the  
31 first question or the second question that is seen as inevitable, so I don't feel like that here, so  
32 that's great. But, it is so fun to talk about because I haven't had anything yet and I don't want to  
33 go on T, just because being dependent on T . . .
- 34 AJ: T meaning testosterone.
- 35 ZP: Testosterone, yeah, and then just the way that testosterone . . . especially the shots and I can  
36 tell how it affects my different friends and stuff, and just the different way that my mania and

- 1 depression work and my gender identity, I just don't want to go on T right now, but I'm so  
2 excited. My dad actually told me that he's putting me on his insurance so that this summer,  
3 instead of him getting his knee replacement he's actually going to try to finesse it so I get my top  
4 surgery.
- 5 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 6 ZP: Which I'm really excited about, because my anxiety makes it so that I can't wear a binder all the  
7 time but then it . . . it becomes my only safety net and then I'll over wear it, to a point where . . .
- 8 AJ: Yeah, and then it just makes it hard to breathe, right.
- 9 ZP: Exactly. So, I'm really excited about getting top surgery. And then, when I'm older . . . I want a  
10 lot of plastic surgery, just because I think that would be fun, and as an artist . . . I just think it  
11 would be fun.
- 12 AJ: Our bodies, as trans people, become our canvas in some ways.
- 13 ZP: Exactly. But, I really want to do this thing – like, a beard transplant, and then I hope one day to  
14 even be able to get out of . . . I know they can remove Adam's apples, I know you shouldn't put  
15 anything there, but even just getting the plastics or pectoral muscles they give you.
- 16 AJ: Yeah – yeah, yeah.
- 17 ZP: I'm going to work out so I can get pectorals, but if that don't work – I'm definitely getting that  
18 implant. So, muscle implants – like in the shoulders. I even know some people who shave their  
19 hips, so their hips become a little bit more narrow.
- 20 AJ: Oh, wow. I haven't heard of that.
- 21 ZP: Yeah.
- 22 AJ: That's interesting.
- 23 ZP: I really can't wait for top surgery though.
- 24 AJ: I love the way you talk about this though . . . in this sort of creative way of . . . you know, our  
25 bodies can be an artistic canvas, if you will. And, I mean, let's be real, transgender identity,  
26 while it's not necessarily about always having to do surgical interventions, or medical or  
27 hormonal interventions, it is about body dysmorphia.
- 28 ZP: Yeah.
- 29 AJ: That is a part of it. I mean, this body is not quite correlating with what's happening in my head  
30 and my psyche, in my emotional space that is my soul. And so, the body does play a major role  
31 in that. So, that's why sometimes I do get a little concerned when some people just  
32 automatically dismiss the question of sort of medical and write it off as, "It's none of your  
33 business," which yeah . . . no, it is not, but let's keep it real that the body and the transformation  
34 is a part of this journey. Otherwise, you know, why are we even having this conversation?
- 35 ZP: Exactly.

- 1 AJ: But, all of that being said, I love your answer, I love your approach to how you are doing with  
2 your own gender journey. I think it's healthy, I think it's a smart approach.
- 3 ZP: I just know, too, just feeling like there is an imbalance, which drives me nuts – especially when I  
4 get mis-gendered. I just don't see it, I just don't see myself, or recognize my body as other folks  
5 do. So, having any sort of imbalance between mind and body, I know, can be very personal but  
6 also just very painful. I know some people when we talk about things that even point at that  
7 pain, they automatically just shut it out and say that it's personal; whereas, I just like to say . . . if  
8 it's causing me distress anyway, I might as well talk about it – or about my dreams and stuff,  
9 about how can we . . . for my body and my mind to be aligned.
- 10 AJ: Sure.
- 11 ZP: I think it can be very healing.
- 12 AJ: Well, good luck. I hope that all works out this summer. I wish it could work out where you  
13 could get your medical attention and your dad could get his medical attention as well.
- 14 ZP: I know, right.
- 15 AJ: I do know that most of these colleges and universities also offer health insurance too. So, you  
16 might want to think about that. So, your relationship with your family is clearly going well, I  
17 mean particularly your immediate family. What about the broader context of your family?
- 18 ZP: So, my dad is the only one . . . well, other than my aunt/cousin, who is in Minnesota, and for my  
19 mom, she has no immediate other family out here.
- 20 AJ: OK.
- 21 ZP: At least not by blood. So, it's been really interesting. There's been a lot of video calls and video  
22 chats, which can be personal but . . . it's hard to have very personal conversations through just a  
23 medium. I can tell that a lot of my folks don't quite understand that my parents have had to  
24 make sacrifices, certain cousins and stuff just . . .
- 25 AJ: Just don't get it.
- 26 ZP: They just don't get it. They just think I'm heathen, which is true but not because I'm trans.
- 27 AJ: At least you own it.
- 28 ZP: But then, other folks in my family, like my nana was just like, "I just love Zeam, I just love my  
29 grandchild." I think that that's the same sentiment with my parents too and the cousins that I  
30 do have here. "We just love you, so if that means we call you Zeam and we fumble around with  
31 pronouns a lot, then we're going to have to call you Zeam and fumble around with pronouns a  
32 lot and try and get it right."
- 33 AJ: Wow, that's awesome. Your family, in 2016, won an award from the Transgender Law Center.
- 34 ZP: Yeah.
- 35 AJ: Can you talk about that a little?

- 1 ZP: Yeah, at the event SPARK!, which happens every year.
- 2 AJ: And, what's the importance of family support for trans and gender non-conforming folks?
- 3 ZP: Well, I forget which study proves it but . . .
- 4 AJ: The National Discrimination . . . ND . . .
- 5 ZP: It's the longest acronym . . .
- 6 AJ: The national non-discrimination . . . I don't know, the less formal name is Injustice at Every Turn.
- 7 ZP: Exactly, yes. It talks about how just having family support decreases the chances of suicidal  
8 thoughts and stuff or raises the expectation of life by 50%. So, having family support means a  
9 world of difference. I know that that is so true for me, just because . . . I tell my parents a lot, a  
10 lot more than I feel like other kids do, and I've always kind of been close to my parents, even  
11 when we've been arguing and fighting, it's always at the end of the day we still cuddle together,  
12 we still cry together, we're still a very emotional and very lovey-dovey family. And, I do think a  
13 lot of my depression and anxiety are wrapped up around how being trans means I'm treated in  
14 this world. And so, without my parents support, I don't know what my mental health would  
15 look like.
- 16 AJ: Wow, that's so beautiful. Tell me about this award that they won.
- 17 ZP: Yeah, oh, this award. It's really just for all the hard work that we do as a family, being awarded  
18 as a family for the activism and political work that we do. I think I was just honored . . . not  
19 because of my work being recognized so much as my parent's work and my parents being willing  
20 to be interviewed by Truth Project with the Transgender Law Center and my dad writing . . .
- 21 AJ: Yeah, they made an amazing video, yeah.
- 22 ZP: Thank you. I know I thought media advocacy was cool stuff, something cool to do – cool in the  
23 sense of if you have the privilege to be out and have the privilege to talk about it and can be a  
24 target, so to speak, then it's OK, then you should be. So, my parents feeling like, "OK, I guess we  
25 do have enough privilege, we're not going to lose our jobs just because our child is trans, we're  
26 not going to lose the love and support of our friends and family." And, even though we've  
27 struggled, we've battled through our own things as a family, as a unit, we can be strong in this  
28 together.
- 29 AJ: Sure.
- 30 ZP: And so, I think that is what I really liked about SPARK! and the Transgender Law Center.
- 31 AJ: Yeah, and you guys popped out to San Francisco to pick up the award too, right?
- 32 ZP: We did.
- 33 AJ: How was that? Cali!
- 34 ZP: Oh, yeah . . . it was amazing just because I don't think my parents have been around that many  
35 queer and trans folks, especially trans folks of color, at once.

- 1 AJ: Right.
- 2 ZP: And seeing my family with my other family in that sense, it's just cool. They relaxed and were  
3 open and I know that . . . I just know, I keep describing being around queer and trans folks to my  
4 parents and being like, "It's like heaven – heaven on earth." And, I don't think they understood  
5 that until they won that award and got to be around so many. But, I also know my mom got a  
6 lot of teary eyed because she was like, "Never in my life have I had so many people ranging from  
7 14 to 40 telling me they wished they had a mother like me." I think that really got to her.
- 8 AJ: Wow, that's incredible.
- 9 ZP: But, they finally understood what I meant when I was like, "It's like heaven on earth."
- 10 AJ: Yeah, I know. I am thrilled to say that I don't have to say that because I have an incredible  
11 mother too who is extremely supportive and it means the world. I agree with you. It's like I  
12 don't know where I would be if I didn't have the love and support of my family.
- 13 ZP: Yeah.
- 14 AJ: And they don't understand all the time, but that's OK. They love me and they stand by me and  
15 they defend me even when I tell them, "Look, you don't have to do that. I got this."
- 16 ZP: Exactly.
- 17 AJ: That's what family does though, right. Wow. Romance, love, relationships. And you've alluded  
18 to and you've talked about this a little bit, but who do you date? Are you in a relationship?  
19 What's your sexual orientation?
- 20 ZP: I just broke up with one of my exes. I identify as polyamorous, so I always got something on the  
21 table.
- 22 AJ: OK, nice.
- 23 ZP: There's always a relationship going on somewhere.
- 24 AJ: I need to get more advice from you, Zeam.
- 25 ZP: But, as far as . . . yeah, so I just broke up with one of my ex-boyfriends, but we're still really  
26 close. He, I think . . . I really try to just date other trans folks now, especially trans folks of color  
27 – which is a new development because before now, my friends would make fun of me for dating  
28 a lot of white girls, and my family too. I've been accused of being a snow bunny, which happens  
29 in Minnesota.
- 30 AJ: White girls are fun.
- 31 ZP: Yeah.
- 32 AJ: I've dated a white girl or two in my life.
- 33 ZP: Yes.
- 34 AJ: It is certainly a fun thing to do.

- 1 ZP: Yeah. Who do I date? I don't know. That changes so often, just because . . . that's why I like the  
2 term queer because I've dated folks and loved folks across the gender and race spectrum just  
3 because . . . I don't know. Why? Because people are attractive and it's fun to date.
- 4 AJ: I mean, love is love, right. I mean, that's the marriage campaign that sucked up all the money  
5 out of the broader LGBT movement, but it's a true thing. I don't have any hatred against that  
6 campaign because love is love and so we should be able to . . . and we are entitled to love who  
7 we love.
- 8 ZP: I will say though that I realize . . . I had a lot of, and I still have a lot of internalized trans and  
9 queer phobia. When I first came out, I was like, "No way I would ever date anyone else who  
10 identified as masculine." Why? I thought you could not be . . . for a while I thought you could  
11 not be trans and queer. I knew it and I would say it to other folks, but inside I was like, "I don't  
12 know if you can be." But, in the past couple of months/year, just really engaging and interacting  
13 in loving and intimate situations with other Black trans folks, has been really healing for me  
14 because there's a communication that is non-verbal that I haven't had with other partners  
15 before in a really nice way.
- 16 AJ: Yeah.
- 17 ZP: Or, even when we do talk about past relationships or tensions from this relationship, I notice  
18 there's a lot more understanding of what it means to love people with internalized racism, with  
19 internalized queer phobia and transphobia, so that's been nice.
- 20 AJ: Nice. Wow. This interview is just so off the charts blowing my mind, Zeam.
- 21 ZP: Really? I feel like I'm just talking to you, so it's good – you're a really good interviewer.
- 22 AJ: Oh, thank you, dear. I appreciate that. But listen, what do you think the agenda for the trans  
23 community is and/or should be?
- 24 ZP: Ohh.
- 25 AJ: Or, even if it is one. I don't know. In your mind.
- 26 ZP: I feel like trans folks who have more privilege than me, less privilege than me, I think that a  
27 common thing of understanding is because even if you see us transforming the binary or just  
28 hopping and jumping over it, having such a large social, political structure against you, or  
29 attacking you, makes it so you have, I think . . . trans people, we have this ability, this trans eye,  
30 to see structural as well as personal injustice, just because it's always impacting our bodies. So, I  
31 feel like if there was an agenda it would be to see . . . to personally heal, but also see what  
32 structure changes - like cultural, political and social changes, need to happen to better ourselves  
33 but also others. Because, if we're honest, gender roles, the binary, isn't just hurting trans folks,  
34 it's hurting queer folks, it's hurting cis folks. I can't tell you how many conversations about what  
35 does it mean to be a man I've had with my father, where we're both kind of just angry and  
36 frustrated.
- 37 AJ: You better preach . . . are you the Martin Luther King of gender. Come on.

- 1 ZP: I just feel like we have this eye because we're always . . . it's attacking us so greatly and so  
2 personally, that we should be leading a lot of movements, especially when it comes to being on  
3 councils for women, being on councils for other racial . . . like Black or other minority groups.  
4 When you're trans, you just know it. I don't know . . . you just see it and embody radical  
5 existence in such a way that we need to be in all movements.
- 6 AJ: Yeah. So, you've been on the front lines of the Black Lives Matter movement, Zeam.
- 7 ZP: Yeah, I give a lot of credit . . .
- 8 AJ: You've been standing on the freeways, you've been at the courthouse, you have been getting in  
9 the face of city council members and state representatives.
- 10 ZP: Yes.
- 11 AJ: Why? Why is it important, with all the issues that are going on for trans people, why do you feel  
12 it's important to be involved with the BLM movement and other movements for social justice. I  
13 know you were deeply engaged in the Standing Rock campaign as well.
- 14 ZP: I just learned a lot about multi-vocal issues in school. And, I think one thing that . . .
- 15 AJ: Multi-vocal, what does that mean?
- 16 ZP: Multi-vocal meaning that it's not just one voice and one master narrative, so it's not just like,  
17 "Oh, this is a civil rights campaign just for this minority group, just for folks who are trying to get  
18 environmental justice, just for folks who are trying to get racial justice." Those are just one  
19 voices, but in everyday conversations, we're holding multiple voices all the time.
- 20 AJ: Right.
- 21 ZP: And so, I wish I could say too that I just came to the understanding that as a person with many  
22 intersecting identities, I also need to be intersectional in my work. But, really, my brother Jobi  
23 Adams, who is another Black trans guy, he started the young Black lives, or Black Liberation  
24 Movement, which was specifically for young Black activists who happen to be queer and trans  
25 and just youth.
- 26 AJ: Right.
- 27 ZP: He just runs a lot and is always on the front lines. I remember seeing him as a man who really  
28 walks, or who embodies Jesus. I remember one time I got into an argument with my dad about  
29 Christianity. I was like, "Dad, Jobi is walking the life of Jesus, if I know anyone who does it." You  
30 know, we were arguing about church politics and why I don't go to church, but the reason I'm  
31 on the frontlines, or that I try to give myself, my money, my energy to BLM, Standing Rock, as  
32 well as trans issues, is because when they're poisoning the water, they're not just being like, "I  
33 hope this just affects Native folks."
- 34 AJ: Right.
- 35 ZP: The government is just like, "We're only doing this injustice for these folks." Like Martin Luther  
36 King, when injustice happens anywhere, it's happening everywhere. I think that is very much

1 true in our lives, in Minneapolis. I couldn't not be dealing with Black Lives Matter and just focus  
2 on trans work because I am both Black and trans, I can't separate the two.

3 AJ: Right, yeah.

4 ZP: It's physically impossible.

5 AJ: Yeah, absolutely. One of my questions is have you ever volunteered for trans or LGBT  
6 organizations, but you've already answered that.

7 ZP: Oh, yeah.

8 AJ: You have been deeply engaged in that work and now have come up with a very solid and, I think  
9 it will continue to shift and grow and change over time, but analysis of the non-profit industrial  
10 complex. When is the first time you ever met a trans-identified or gender-queer person? What  
11 was that impact on you? And, do you remember who it is?

12 ZP: Hmmm . . . I'm trying to think about this. I don't think I was ever consciously . . . I don't know. I  
13 don't know, to be honest.

14 AJ: OK. I mean, you've just been sort of . . . in this day and age, it's like there's so many out people  
15 and the internet and celebrities. I think Chaz Bono was already a superstar trans person when  
16 you were probably just coming to a realization of your own sort of gender identity.

17 ZP: But, as far as the first person, I know that as far as online goes, like the first person I was really  
18 obsessed with . . . obsessed in the sense of they inspired me greatly, this activist who lives in  
19 New York, and artist, Lee Jimenez.

20 AJ: Who?

21 ZP: Lee Jimenez.

22 AJ: Lee Jimenez. OK. J-e . . .

23 ZP: J-i-m-e-n-e-z.

24 AJ: OK, OK.

25 ZP: Yeah, they were one of the first people I met who are also . . .

26 AJ: Some people pronounce that Jimenez.

27 ZP: Oh, well that makes more sense. Sorry, I don't know Spanish. That makes more sense. That's  
28 awkward.

29 AJ: No, that's fine.

30 ZP: Thank you. They were one of the first people I met who was like . . . or, the first person of color  
31 who I knew was trans, as far as obsessing over their work and being like, "Oh, this exists – being  
32 trans masculine as well as Black and Black Afro-Latino."

33 AJ: Where do you see the community, the movement – and just to put this into context, on the  
34 cover of the *National Geographic* this month is an article, and I think the whole issue is

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- 1 dedicated, I haven't picked it up yet but I plan to, but I think the whole issue is dedicated to  
2 what they are calling The Gender Revolution.
- 3 ZP: Yeah.
- 4 AJ: If the *National Geographic* is reporting on this, there is more than just something in the air.
- 5 ZP: Oh, yes.
- 6 AJ: Shit is shifting.
- 7 ZP: Yeah, really.
- 8 AJ: Where do you think this binary notion of gender is going to be 50 years from now?
- 9 ZP: If I had to make a prediction, I think 50 years from now it's going to . . . like realistically, the  
10 gender binary is no longer going to be second nature, it's going to be always questioned. But,  
11 it's going to be one of those things kind of like . . . kind of like how I see sexuality now. You see a  
12 lot of queer representation but in a very questioning way and kind of like pushing back on it.  
13 But, it's still in a way where there's some resistance. I don't know. I think that's the realistic  
14 answer, but I think there's going to be a lot more pockets of gender utopias that I see.
- 15 AJ: Wow.
- 16 ZP: Do you know what I mean? Where in schools, there's going to be . . . I know there's schools in  
17 Minneapolis, and charter schools too, where a lot of trans folks go where being trans is a norm –  
18 or it's not seen as deviant. Or, places where . . . I know a Black activist who not only tries to  
19 reclaim the word nigger as far as Black politics, but says nigger is a gender-neutral term that is  
20 one of endearment and specifically uses it in that way. I think there's going to be a lot more in  
21 50 years, just people doing this work and knowing, believing and embodying gender in a non-  
22 binary way, and it's not going to be resisted so much in community as it is now.
- 23 AJ: What's your favorite transgender movie? Transgender-themed movie?
- 24 ZP: That's a really good question.
- 25 AJ: I've never asked this question before but it just came to my mind because you are such a  
26 brilliant mind.
- 27 ZP: Oh, thank you. Well, OK, so *Boys Don't Cry* is a guilty pleasure but it's very problematic.
- 28 AJ: Sure.
- 29 ZP: But, I also like *Tangerine*. It's not only revolutionary because the film itself was about our  
30 people, but the way it was filmed on an iPhone. I know there's so many essays about it, but I  
31 think it does need to be talked about.
- 32 AJ: Sure.
- 33 ZP: Because film becoming accessible to our people is the reason why that film could have been  
34 made.

- 1 AJ: Yes. I have no disagreement with you whatsoever. It was one of the most fascinating things  
2 about that incredible film, with the most amazing acting and really used real trans-identified  
3 people, not just cis gender actors who were trying to be . . . and it was as great story. I laughed,  
4 I cried.
- 5 ZP: Exactly. And, I'm . . . as far as film, I love this film question just because the way . . . kind of the  
6 vibrant colors and the saturation of colors a lot that was going on in *Tangerine*, was so . . . the  
7 color schemes and the color story alone was so impeccable and I don't think it gets enough  
8 credit or talked about enough. Just because you tell the stories in films with just color and  
9 *Tangerine* is one of the films where, not only do I feel like so many shots seemed like they were  
10 painted, or a painter's eyes were applied to them, but it told to the story too. I don't know –  
11 just . . .
- 12 AJ: Well, the title itself connotes a color.
- 13 ZP: Exactly.
- 14 AJ: And it really had nothing to do with . . . I don't think they ever even said the word tangerine in  
15 the movie. But, that's what they decided to call it, which paints this image in your head right  
16 away. So, wow – great answer. Zeam, is there anything that you want to share that I didn't ask?
- 17 ZP: I know . . . OK. Coming out so young and realizing that that wasn't possible for a lot of folks, just  
18 learning about trans history. I think that one of the things that is either going to hurt or harm us  
19 in the next 50 years is that trans communities being able to come together across age  
20 difference. I feel like that's one of the biggest barriers that could be a great bridge. I don't  
21 know. I just . . . I feel like there's a lot of talk, especially at Creating Change – like the term  
22 transsexual . . . transgender versus transsexual, like, "Oh, these younger kids now are not  
23 actually trans." Or, "These older folks now have too much internalized this . . ." Just the little  
24 political battles I hear all the time, I'm just . . . I think how we're going to come out of that is  
25 either going to divide us and we're going to see a whole bunch of different movements grow, or  
26 it's going to bridge us and help us even more.
- 27 AJ: Yeah. And, you know, now that you bring that up, and you've alluded to it, but there are  
28 children who, at a very early age, come out as transgender. Hormone blockers, hormone  
29 therapy, maybe even surgery. They're coming out – name change, all of that, in 1<sup>st</sup> grade, so by  
30 the time . . . that is a different trans person, a different experience. They are not . . . they won't  
31 deal with the social sort of stigma of being trans. There will certainly be other challenges that  
32 they have, like every human on the planet, but it will be a different way of being a "trans  
33 identified" person. Do you have any thoughts on that? And again, you sort of alluded to it in  
34 this divide because . . . I mean, there are young people that are going to look at me as a  
35 dinosaur.
- 36 ZP: I think . . . OK, so at family dinner, Christmas, I don't mean to allude to this story but I'll get to  
37 the point. I'm at that age now where I'm at the adult table, but I'm not so far behind from  
38 sitting at the kid's table.
- 39 AJ: Got it.

- 1 ZP: So, I spent the entire night kind of just jumping back and forth.
- 2 AJ: Oh, cool.
- 3 ZP: I liked it, even though it was stressful and there was family drama and it was like blah, blah,  
4 blah. I think in going back and forth, I just learned more about how my baby cousins are  
5 growing up, but I learned more about my dad and his play sisters and cousin – their relationship  
6 and how they were growing up. Having that back and forth, I learned a lot just about - wow, my  
7 family is so strong and my family has these weird idiosyncrasies that run throughout, and it's  
8 just beautiful to see. I think my biggest worry is that because trans is going to show up  
9 differently, not only individually for us, but generationally. We're just going to miss out on  
10 learning a lot of the cultural idiosyncrasies of our identity. We're just going to miss those and it's  
11 going to be such a tragic loss. I know if I had to talk to folks who are like, "We came out as  
12 gender fuck in the 1970s, you think you know what gender queer is?" Having that in my face  
13 and then having new kids being younger than me being like, "Demiboy is so old now."
- 14 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 15 ZP: In internet years, it's 50. And having both of those conversations, it's so important. What can  
16 we learn about the difference between the 1970s gender fuck and the new gender queer? How  
17 are they similar? How are they different? If we spend too much time seeing those differences  
18 but not loving and experiencing those differences together, then it's just going to be very . . .  
19 kind of worrisome. It's going to be very solemn and I think it's going to be gloom. I don't think  
20 being trans, yes we deal with a lot of oppression but never once do I feel like my life has this  
21 gloom lens over it because I'm trans. Do you know what I mean?
- 22 AJ: Yeah.
- 23 ZP: So, I would hate to see us . . . I think that's what I think about it – just feeling that tension where  
24 there doesn't necessarily need to be. Yes, there's going to be disagreements, but can we at  
25 least have these disagreements in the same room.
- 26 AJ: Wow. So beautiful.
- 27 ZP: I just want that Christmas dinner on a larger scale.
- 28 AJ: And the young kids table and the old people table and just kind of bridge that gap.
- 29 ZP: Yeah.
- 30 AJ: Wow. Zeam, thank you so much for sharing your heart, your soul, your brilliance. It's been a  
31 pleasure.
- 32 ZP: Thank you, this is a really great talk. I needed this.
- 33 AJ: Yeah, until we meet again.
- 34 ZP: Yes.
- 35 AJ: All right. Peace.

1    ZP:    Peace.