

Ameirah Neal
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

December 10, 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 Ameirah Neal -AN
3

4 AJ: So, hello.
5

6 AN: Hi.

7 AJ: My name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian for the Transgender Oral History Project
8 at the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota. Today is December 10, 2016. I am in
9 the nation's capital, Washington, DC, and I am here today with Ameirah Neal.

10 AN: Ameirah Neal, yes.

11 AJ: How are you doing?

12 AN: I'm great, how are you?

13 AJ: Really good, Ameirah. I'm so glad that you are taking this time out to speak with me today.
14 We're just going to talk about your life, there's no need to wonder what should I know, what
15 should I do because it's your life so only you know this story.

16 AN: Right.

17 AJ: I have some questions but we'll just start out with state your name – how you pronounce it
18 because I may have messed that up, spell it so we make sure we have the correct spelling. Tell
19 me what is your gender identity today, as you define yourself, and what was the gender that
20 other people defined for you when you were born.

21 AN: My name is Ameirah, it's Arabic descent so . . .

22 AJ: Oh, wow.

23 AN: Yes, Arabic descent, spelled A-m-e-i-r-a-h.

24 AJ: Oh, wow, I love that.

25 AN: Thank you. I am 27-years-old, I have a birthday coming up in January – Capricorn. I identify as a
26 transgender woman of color, so there's a couple pronouns in there. All female pronouns.

27 AJ: She/her/hers.

28 AN: She/her/hers. Mrs., Miss, all those things.

29 AJ: OK. Ms.

30 AN: Ms., hopefully one day. What was the other question that you asked me?

31 AJ: What was your gender assigned at birth?

32 AN: My gender assigned at birth was male, and that's what a lot of people know about me was male.
33 Can I go into . . . can I just dive into . . .?

- 1 AJ: Dive in, you don't even have to wait for me to ask you questions – just go.
- 2 AN: I'm a talker, so that's good. Let's see. So, I knew at a very young age that I was different.
- 3 AJ: Really?
- 4 AN: Yes.
- 5 AJ: Like how young?
- 6 AN: I was probably like five. I was very young.
- 7 AJ: Yeah.
- 8 AN: I didn't know what sexuality was, I didn't know what those terms were, I just knew that I was
9 attracted to the same sex and I knew . . . I remember that very young and very . . . I would
10 always gravitate toward the male sex – just like the presence, the dominance of a man. I've
11 always felt very submissive, feminine-like, thanks of that nature. So, like I said, when I was
12 around five or six and little girls and little boys thought to notice little things about themselves,
13 that can tell the difference of a little girl versus a little boy, they start to notice these little
14 things. When I started to notice that I was a little boy, I was just . . . it wasn't what was going on
15 up in here. For me, the concept of me being a little boy was just like, "This doesn't feel right,
16 this isn't . . . I don't know what this is, this doesn't feel like who I am." I was always hanging with
17 the girls, always played with the girls – jump roped, Double Dutch, braiding hair, dancing to
18 music, things of that nature. So fast forward to 13, at that age I just knew . . . I knew that I was
19 sexually attracted to men. I didn't quite know what my sexuality identity was at that particular
20 point in my life . . . let's rewind, probably 2003, I was 13 . . . 2002, around that time. So, LGBTQ
21 rights weren't at the forefront back then.
- 22 AJ: Right.
- 23 AN: There was none of all the great movements that are going on now back then. So, for me, I had
24 no one to go to, I had no one to talk to, I just knew that I had happened to be born male and
25 that I was attracted to other men but I, myself, didn't feel like I was male. It confused me and it
26 really scared me because, again, this is 2013, I'm 13-years-old, I know nothing about what . . .
- 27 AJ: 2002, not 2013, right?
- 28 AN: Yes, not 2013 – I was 13 and this was 2002.
- 29 AJ: Right, got it.
- 30 AN: But, for me, it was just very scary because, like I said, I don't know what a transsexual is – what
31 is a transsexual, at the age of 13? The only thing that I know is that I'm different.
- 32 AJ: Where did you grow up?
- 33 AN: I'm originally from Washington, DC – the southeast side of Washington, DC.
- 34 AJ: Talk to me about southeast DC. What is that? I don't know.
- 35 AN: Southeast DC is across the river, like in Anacostia – I'm originally from Good Hope Anacostia.

- 1 AJ: From where?
- 2 AN: Good Hoke and Anacostia, which is off of 21st and 22nd Avenue.
- 3 AJ: Spell Good Hoke . . .
- 4 AN: Good Hoke.
- 5 AJ: Oh, Good Hoke – OK.
- 6 AN: So, I was really young, my mother had a drug habit, so I remember a lot of different things. I
7 remember sometimes her getting high, I remember going around with her to different places to
8 go get high. So, that part of my childhood was very dark for me, only because I knew my mother
9 loved me but she was somewhere else with the drug – the drug had her completely gone. For
10 me, I was the only child – I am the only child. My dad has other adopted children, but they
11 didn't come into my life until I was 23 or 24. By that time, I'm already grown, I was already
12 raised as a single child, I don't know . . . it would be great to build relationships with these
13 individuals but if we don't build a relationship, I'm all right – I'm not going to force it. So,
14 growing up and being the only child with my mother and seeing her with these different drug
15 habits and things of that nature, it really kind of just stamped me to not follow in my mom's
16 footsteps. So, when it came to drugs, as far as crack or anything like that – hard drugs, heroin,
17 anything like that, like seeing my mother go through that and seeing what it did to her, I just was
18 like, "That's not the road that I want to go down."
- 19 AJ: Right, right.
- 20 AN: Now, I know I'm kind of jumping around, but since we're on my mother and being raised, my
21 mother was very supportive of my decision to transition.
- 22 AJ: Yay!
- 23 AN: Yes, yay! But nay in some senses. So, let's go back. Like I said, 13-years-old was when I came
24 out. It wasn't until . . . I want to say four years later, I was 18-years-old . . . well, five years later,
25 I was 18-years-old, and I was in Baltimore. I was at a ball in Baltimore, the ballroom scene.
- 26 AJ: The ballroom scene.
- 27 AN: The ballroom scene, honey – it will do it.
- 28 AJ: So, what house are you a part of?
- 29 AN: At that time I was a Dior, House of Dior. Right now, I'm currently not in any house.
- 30 AJ: OK, OK.
- 31 AN: That was years, years ago – years ago. But at that time, I was a Dior and I saw my first
32 transsexual at a ball. I was just taken away, it was just like . . . I was just taken away, I was taken
33 aback, I couldn't believe that this red-boned . . .
- 34 AJ: That is was possible.

- 1 AN: Yes, that this beautiful red-boned, tall, modelesque was . . . it didn't register to me that she was
2 born physically male. I was just like, "What?" And then at that instant, that's when a light bulb
3 went off in my head. It was just like, "OK, there's a way to do this. I get it now, this is . . ." And
4 it wasn't so much of me following the leader, it was affirmation for myself that this is the road
5 that I need to take – there is a way to make my inside match my outside.
- 6 AJ: Yeah.
- 7 AN: I remember there was a feeling of joy that came over me when I . . . even to this day, she's still
8 beautiful.
- 9 AJ: You still know her?
- 10 AN: I still know her, she's my gay mother – she's my gay mother, yes.
- 11 AJ: What's her name?
- 12 AN: Misty, her name is Misty – so shout out to Misty if you're watching this.
- 13 AJ: What up, Misty?
- 14 AN: We are actually still in contact to this day and I tell her this story all the time. "It's because of
15 you, I knew the road that I needed to take." So, that happened, like three months from there I
16 was up in drags – that's the phase that I say when you're not quite there, yet, as far as living
17 24/7 and getting the hormones and things of that nature, but I was . . . but I was just like . . .
- 18 AJ: Did you perform in a club? Well, in the ball scene – did you compete? Did you walk?
- 19 AN: I did compete very briefly in the ballroom scene – very, very briefly.
- 20 AJ: OK.
- 21 AN: And then, at the age of 18, I remember I started self-medicating, self-medicating with hormone
22 therapy.
- 23 AJ: So, underground.
- 24 AN: Underground. And I was actually going to this website called In-house Pharmacy,
25 inhousepharmacy.org or .biz, I think that was the name of it, and I think that website is still up to
26 this day.
- 27 AJ: Oh, my goodness.
- 28 AN: Yeah, and I would go . . . some of my good girlfriends, a lot of my good girlfriends from
29 Philadelphia and Baltimore would be like, "Take this, take that, and do this."
- 30 AJ: Right.
- 31 AN: I was taking spiro, I was taking Premarin, I was taking Estradiol and I was giving myself a shot.
- 32 AJ: Oh, my goodness. You was hormonized up.

- 1 AN: Let me tell you – like I said, my mother was very, very supportive. So, when it came out – like
2 I’m about to transition, the first thing she was like, “What the hell is a transition? What do you
3 mean you’re about to transition? What the hell is going on?”
- 4 AJ: So, you told her.
- 5 AN: I told her, yeah. And I was leaving to go away to college in the winter, in January. And, I was
6 turning 19, my birthday is January the 3rd, I left to go to college January the 9th and it was in
7 2009 . . . 2009, going into 2010 . . . no . . . yeah, 2009, going into 2010. I just packed up my shit,
8 literally, and I left and I drove to school. I went to school in York, Pennsylvania.
- 9 AJ: York?
- 10 AN: York, Pennsylvania – like near the Harrisburg, Lancaster area. That’s the first time I went to
11 college, I went to the Art Institute of York - Pennsylvania.
- 12 AJ: Oh, wow – because you’re an artist, right?
- 13 AN: Yeah.
- 14 AJ: I want to talk about that a little while . . . later, but keep telling me your story.
- 15 AN: So, I get there – it’s this rural, all-white, neighborhood area.
- 16 AJ: Yes.
- 17 AN: I’m Black, I’m trans – at that time I had no . . . there was none of this going on, it was just flat
18 chest, hair, make-up and people were looking at me like I was fucking crazy.
- 19 AJ: OK.
- 20 AN: So, going away to college. I stayed away for like a year, no one saw me – none of my close
21 friends, my mother didn’t see me for like a year. I hormoned fiercely – I was just moning myself
22 like crazy. But transitioning in college was very hard for me.
- 23 AJ: Sure.
- 24 AN: Because it was college – like I had a lot of pressure on me from my mother. My mother was the
25 type, “OK, you want to be transgender and what are you going to do? Are you going to go to
26 the Navy? Are you going to go to the Army? Or are you going to go to college?” That was how
27 my mother thought, she didn’t care the fact that . . . and I’m not saying that she didn’t care, like
28 she didn’t care that this was who I walking into becoming. From her standpoint, she was a
29 parent. So, “OK, you say that this is who you are,” coming from her context, this is how I had to
30 understand where she was coming from. “I want you to make something out of yourself.”
31 That’s exactly what she told me, “You’re not going to go out here and you’re not going to trick.”
- 32 AJ: Right.
- 33 AN: “You’re not going to do this, you’re not going to do that.” I had that structure in my life and
34 that’s a blessing.
- 35 AJ: Yeah.

- 1 AN: That's a blessing, because it could have been very different for me – very different for me. But
2 I'm blessed that it wasn't. But, you know, I have my mother to thank for me because she was
3 very stern. I was spoiled, but my mother was very strict. I was her only child.
- 4 AJ: And even though she had these challenges with addiction, she still wanted the best for you.
- 5 AN: Yeah. She was very adamant about that. I thank her for that so much to this day, because that
6 has shaped and formed me into the trans woman that I am today. So, without that guidance,
7 you know, I don't know where I would be at to this day.
- 8 AJ: Wow.
- 9 AN: So, I'm very, very . . . whenever I talk about my mother, I always talk about just the
10 understanding and just how open she was. I remember, rewind again, when I would come
11 home – like I said, I stayed away for a whole year with the first time that I went to college,
12 because I have two college degrees – not just one.
- 13 AJ: Oh, my goodness. Wow.
- 14 AN: We'll get into that later. I'm not using them but . . .
- 15 AJ: Well, you are . . . to use your college degree doesn't mean you have a job in that, but it helps
16 you think – hopefully, it helps you think and process things in the world. But . . . yeah.
- 17 AN: You know, when that happened, staying away from home for a year, I isolated myself. I isolated
18 myself and I slipped into a depression – you know, seeing a lot of the beautiful . . . in Hollywood,
19 I feel like in today's society, there's only a certain type of transgender girl that can get through.
20 She's long hair, she's fair skinned, she's this passable sex kitten.
- 21 AJ: Yes.
- 22 AN: I have dark skin, my hair . . . this isn't really how my hair looks – this is straight hair, my hair is
23 just as knappy as all outdoors.
- 24 AJ: As knappy as mine.
- 25 AN: I don't like to say knappy – I just have tight, course curls.
- 26 AJ: Exactly.
- 27 AN: That's what my hair is. For me, that's why earlier when you stated it like, "Who are you?" I'm
28 an African American transgender woman of color. I don't even like saying African American, I'm
29 just a transgender woman of color.
- 30 AJ: OK.
- 31 AN: And I have my own views on why I don't like to say African American.
- 32 AJ: Why?

- 1 AN: Because . . . we live in a world where they say, “Go to school, be who you want to be, go get
2 your education, be who you want to be,” and we do these things – we be who we want to be
3 and we’re ridiculed for it, we’re scrutinized for it, we’re crucified for it.
- 4 AJ: Crucified, yeah.
- 5 AN: So, how can I call myself an American when I’m living the American way, but I’m getting the
6 shitty end of the stick.
- 7 AJ: Oh, yeah – all right.
- 8 AN: You following me?
- 9 AJ: I’m absolutely understanding what you’re saying.
- 10 AN: So, that’s why, for me, I don’t . . . I just have different views on just society in its context, period.
11 Can we go into that? Because I kind of want to talk about that.
- 12 AJ: Please.
- 13 AN: For example, this whole Black Lives Matter movement, which I am completely for.
- 14 AJ: You support it.
- 15 AN: I completely support Black Lives Matter, but what we, as Black people, need to understand and
16 I’m not one to pull the race card, but clearly race is an issue, it’s always been an issue – as a
17 country we like to sweep shit under the rug instead of diving into the bushes head on, we like to
18 run around the bush, and that’s why we’ve gotten to this position where we’ve gotten to now.
19 Donald Trump is the president-elect.
- 20 AJ: Exactly.
- 21 AN: As Black people, I feel as though we are divided within ourselves, we’re divided within our own
22 race and until we understand that, as far as the LGBTQ . . . the African American . . . LGBT of
23 color community, and just the heterosexual of color community, until we understand that there
24 is a division between the two – and not even just between those two classifications, there’s a
25 division, period, within the African American community. There’s a division within the LGBTQ
26 African American community, there’s a division with the middle class African American
27 community, there’s a division with the higher class African American community – there is no
28 Black supporting Black-owned businesses anymore.
- 29 AJ: Right. Yeah – no, that’s true.
- 30 AN: And when things like this happen, when injustice happens, we want to preach, “Oh, it’s injustice
31 and it’s injustice,” and yes, it is injustice, but we have to take a look at ourselves and see the
32 division within our own community before we can go out here and demand respect from
33 another community. Because in my eyes, it’s easy to infiltrate, it’s easy to come in and infiltrate
34 on a group of people who are already broken.
- 35 AJ: Yeah.

- 1 AN: It's easy to do it, and we break ourselves – and when I say that we break ourselves, it's because
2 there's really no Black on Black support, or if there is Black on Black support, it caters to a
3 certain type of Black person. It doesn't cater to just a plethora of Black people . . .
- 4 AJ: The broad – yes.
- 5 AN: Just because what? Just because I'm transgender, that doesn't mean that I'm Black?
- 6 AJ: Yeah.
- 7 AN: Trust me, sweetheart . . .
- 8 AJ: Or human.
- 9 AN: Or human. Trust me, I have had people . . . I have had organizations, companies look at me,
10 "Well, you're Black, you're trans, and you're educated." That's a triple threat – that's a triple
11 threat, because they're looking . . . because society already looks at transgender people,
12 especially transgender women of color, we're nothing more than prostitutes, whores, and
13 fucking drug addicts. That's the perception that society has on the African American
14 transgender woman. Have you ever noticed they'll refer to a Black trans woman as a tranny, but
15 they're call a Caucasian or Latino or Puerto Rican transsexual a shemale? Why is there a
16 declassification there? Why is one term using, "Oh, she's a tranny," and then when there's
17 another type of transsexual, she's a shemale. So, there's a division . . .
- 18 AJ: Within the transgender community.
- 19 AN: Within the transgender community.
- 20 AJ: What do you think about those terms – tranny and . . ."
- 21 AN: I hate the word tranny. Don't call me a tranny, I'm a transsexual, transgender – tranny, I don't
22 like that word. I feel as though the word tranny is kind of the same context of a nigger.
- 23 AJ: Hmm, OK.
- 24 AN: For me.
- 25 AJ: The "n" word.
- 26 AN: Yeah, I feel like that's the same context . . . and not every transgender will take the word tranny
27 like that, just like not every Black person will take the word nigger – depending upon who is
28 saying it.
- 29 AJ: We use it a lot in our community.
- 30 AN: A lot – but see that's the thing that I've never really understood, we use it so much – we use it in
31 music, we use it on TV, we use it – we use it. And then another . . .
- 32 AJ: I know, I was watching this show called *Insecure* and every other word is like . . .
- 33 AN: Which is a good show, by the way.
- 34 AJ: It is a good show, but I'm like, "Wow, do they have to say the "n" word that many times?"
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- 1 AN: And then we ridicule other people for using it. We made it OK for the word to be used, so now
2 that other races are using it, we're just like, "Oh, my God."
- 3 AJ: "You can't say that."
- 4 AN: Just like with the word tranny, I don't like it when anyone says it because it's a degrading word.
- 5 AJ: I agree.
- 6 AN: What is a tranny? What the hell is that? I'm a transsexual.
- 7 AJ: Tell me more about college, though. You were talking about college.
- 8 AN: College, college, college.
- 9 AJ: So, you went to the Pennsylvania . . .
- 10 AN: The Art Institute of York – Pennsylvania.
- 11 AJ: And what did you study there?
- 12 AN: I studied fashion marketing.
- 13 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 14 AN: I have my Associate's Degree in fashion marketing. College was . . . I think college, for me, was a
15 growing point for me. And I say a growing point because that's where I started my transition –
16 college. So, for me, it was hormones . . .
- 17 AJ: At a little white school in a very rural community.
- 18 AN: Very rural community.
- 19 AJ: So, you were on your own . . . you were on your own, you didn't go home for a year.
- 20 AN: Nope.
- 21 AJ: Did you make friends there?
- 22 AN: I actually did . . . well, college . . . I'll take some of that back. College was not that bad. When I
23 first got there, of course at that time I wasn't on hormones, I wasn't developing anything.
- 24 AJ: So, you're just . . .
- 25 AN: So, once I started my hormones, though, and my breasts started to come in and I remember this
26 one time that . . . at first, I lived in the male dorms, I was in the male dorms but that started to
27 become a problem because, I remember, my little hormone tits were coming in and I had little
28 perky . . . nice little perky tits. I was just so happy. So, I was running around my dorm all the
29 time with no bra on.
- 30 AJ: Oh, wow – just bouncing around.
- 31 AN: Yeah, just bouncing around – but I had my own room though, so I had privacy. This one time, I
32 could have sworn that I was in my dorm by myself, I thought all of my roommates were gone so

- 1 I was walking around in my little night shirt, and I went to go wash my hair and . . . you know,
2 I'm over the sink, and I'm washing my hair, and water is getting on my shirt and it gets . . . and I
3 turn around and my roommate is standing there.
- 4 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 5 AN: My roommate was standing there and he was just looking like, "Ahh, what's up?" And I'm just
6 like, "Oh, no, this is not ideal." So, when that situation happened, I went to my housing
7 coordinator and I was just like, "Look, I know I don't have all my identification and everything
8 changed over . . ." One thing I can say about that school, though, it was a blessing because they
9 all . . . like all of the staff respected the fact . . . the she pronouns.
- 10 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 11 AN: Yeah, that's one thing I can say – and for some of my teachers, it was hard, because on the
12 roster my slave name would be there and then they're looking at me and they're like, "But,
13 wait." I had actually one teacher . . .
- 14 AJ: "You don't look like John."
- 15 AN: I had one communications teacher that was like, "Wait a minute, is this . . . this says so-and-so,
16 but so-and-so doesn't look like they're here." I'm just like, "No, actually teacher, this is what's
17 going on." And I would have to pull my teachers aside and explain to them.
- 18 AJ: But they were respectful.
- 19 AN: They were very respectful of it and that's just how it was. I was able to write Ameirah such-and-
20 such on my papers and they would still know that . . . so that wasn't bad. But, you know, the
21 experience that I had with fellow students and fellow peers, that wasn't always the best only
22 because how I look now is not how I looked then. It was a lot of whispering and ridicule – like,
23 "What is that?"
- 24 AJ: Were you bullied to your face?
- 25 AN: No, it was never said to my face. I never was really bullied.
- 26 AJ: Even in grade school?
- 27 AN: No, I was a fighter.
- 28 AJ: OK.
- 29 AN: I'm quiet so people thought that they were going to just walk up on me and bully me and then
30 when I opened my mouth, they're like, "OK, we're not going to be able to do that to her, we're
31 not." Well, I just have a zero tolerance for bullies. You're not going to come and just think that
32 you're going to walk up to me and try to ridicule me for who I am just to get your kicks and your
33 rocks off – you're not doing it. So, that's just how that was with school and as far as the bullying
34 goes, I wasn't allowing anyone to bully me – I just didn't see it happening.
- 35 AJ: Right. So, you mentioned hormones and things, to the extent that you feel comfortable talking
36 about this, what other medical things have you undergone in terms of your gender identity?

- 1 AN: Well, hormone therapy – even, I think, if a person is to get surgery – you can get all the surgery
2 you want in the world, hormone therapy still plays a major part in anyone’s transition whether
3 that’s female to male or whether it’s female to male, it just stops certain things and it boosts
4 certain things. So, hormone therapy is very, very necessary. I recently got my breasts done, my
5 breast aug in April of this year.
- 6 AJ: Wow, congratulations.
- 7 AN: Thank you. And I had some other things done.
- 8 AJ: OK.
- 9 AN: Well, that’s basically it – I didn’t really do too much, there wasn’t really too much that I felt like I
10 needed to do. I’ve just kind of . . . bare minimum.
- 11 AJ: Wow. I appreciate you sharing.
- 12 AN: No problem.
- 13 AJ: Have you experienced any negative things, interactions, since you’ve come out as being
14 transgender?
- 15 AN: All the time, all the time - yeah. A lot of it comes from people of color.
- 16 AJ: Really?
- 17 AN: Yeah. That’s where a lot of the ridicule that I’ve gotten, it doesn’t come from any other race but
18 my own race. I mean, I’m pretty sure that there’s been other races who probably said
19 something smart, but it’s more vocal . . .
- 20 AJ: It’s not in your face.
- 21 AN: . . . within my own race. Again, I think . . . I don’t fault my race for it, it’s lack of knowledge – it’s
22 lack of knowledge.
- 23 AJ: You look very passable, I mean – do people . . .?
- 24 AN: See the thing is, I’m proud of being a transgender woman.
- 25 AJ: Sure, yeah.
- 26 AN: And I think that all transgender women, regardless of what they look like, what their color is,
27 what their nationality is, you just start being proud of being a transgender woman. When it’s
28 this whole passable . . . I don’t really care about that. So, the whole passable thing . . . again, I
29 have to blame that on society because when you see a transgender woman in the spotlight,
30 she’s just this beautiful modellesque, this sex kitten, this sex goddess, she’s probably in the
31 tabloids because she’s sleeping with some football player or some basketball player – they don’t
32 want to talk about the transgender women who have doctor’s degrees and lawyer degrees and
33 things, they don’t want to talk about those type – they want to talk about the type that makes
34 people have a negative reaction.
- 35 AJ: Sure.

- 1 AN: "Oh, her husband was sleeping with this transsexual for four years," like you don't . . . that's not
2 what this is all cracked up to be. I'm sorry that society has painted this false picture of what a
3 trans life is like. I'm homeless, I've been homeless for a whole year.
- 4 AJ: Wow. Describe homeless. So, you stay at different friend's houses . . .?
- 5 AN: I've been staying at a shelter here in DC.
- 6 AJ: You stay at a shelter.
- 7 AN: Right now, I'm bouncing around from house to house – like right now I'm house sitting for a
8 friend until Sunday. After Sunday, I don't know where I'm going to go.
- 9 AJ: Oh, boy.
- 10 AN: So, yeah. It's just like people don't really . . . people don't really hear those types of stories.
- 11 AJ: Do you think that's because of your gender identity?
- 12 AN: Well, yeah. It took a while for me to get employment – thank God now I'm with an amazing
13 organization here in DC, which is called SMYAL – Supporting Monitoring Youth Alliance League.
- 14 AJ: Oh, wow. What do you do there?
- 15 AN: Basically, I am the peer ed coordinator there. Basically, what we do is we support LGBTQ youth
16 and where they are. We support them with coming out, we support them with distributing
17 condoms within schools – so we do a lot of great work.
- 18 AJ: Do you guys help with housing at all?
- 19 AN: For youth, but not with adults. And that's something that I've noticed . . .
- 20 AJ: Do they know you are housing insecure?
- 21 AN: They do, but it's one of those things where I don't like to mix too much personal with business.
- 22 AJ: Yeah, got you.
- 23 AN: I don't really feel like they're really at all sympathetic about it either, but, I mean, I don't have
24 the luxury of getting in my car and driving off to my beautiful home with my partner and my two
25 dogs. I don't have that luxury. Even within, like I said – even within the LGBTQ community,
26 there's still a division with the transgender women.
- 27 AJ: Absolutely.
- 28 AN: To me, we stand alone with the LGBTQ. I think the T has always stood alone – and, I know that
29 that's a strong statement to say, but it's the truth.
- 30 AJ: Speak the truth, Ruth.
- 31 AN: It's the truth – gay rights are looked at differently than trans rights. And then, when there's the
32 gay rights talk and when there is trans rights talk, people like to move them together and you
33 can't move them together. Just because they're on the same tree, they're on the opposite ends

- 1 of the tree – one branch is here and the other branch is there. They stem from the same roots,
2 but they're two different entities – they're on their own sides. I think that society doesn't get
3 that – society doesn't understand that. It's 2016, I thought we would be progressively
4 somewhere else with this whole transgender movement, but we're not – we have tons of work
5 to do.
- 6 AJ: Wow, I'm so concerned about your housing situation. Do you think this employment now is
7 going to be able to sustain finding housing? It's very expensive in DC.
- 8 AN: I do but people . . . it's very expensive in DC and they want it like that so a certain type of
9 people, person, can live in DC. They don't want it for middle class African American people,
10 that's not what they want. But, you know, it's hard saving money while you're homeless.
- 11 AJ: Right.
- 12 AN: It's not easy to save money while you're homeless and that's one of the major things that I'm
13 running into because it's like, "Where's my meal going to come from today?"
- 14 AJ: Yeah, because you've got to spend all the time . . .
- 15 AN: How am I going to get to work today? These are things that have to come out – it's cold out
16 here, I don't have a heavy coat – I'm still walking around in my fall jacket.
- 17 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 18 AN: That's a sacrifice that I've decided to make because I know that I need other things to survive.
19 So, it's extremely hard and it's extremely difficult and all the time people are like, "Well, you
20 don't seem like it." Yeah, I know but . . .
- 21 AJ: But it's real.
- 22 AN: Yeah, it's real.
- 23 AJ: The struggle is real.
- 24 AN: It's very real. It got very real for me – like I said, I've always said my mother was very, very, very
25 supportive with my decision to transition, my whole entire life it's just been my mother – me
26 and my mother. My mother died four years ago from breast cancer.
- 27 AJ: Oh, I'm so sorry.
- 28 AN: I lost my mother four years ago from breast cancer. She passed away . . .
- 29 AJ: So, your grandparents are all . . . ?
- 30 AN: My family is dysfunctional. I'm coming . . . I'm just at a point in my life where I'm tired of trying
31 to figure everyone else out.
- 32 AJ: Right.

- 1 AN: There's so much going on within myself that I have to figure out for myself, I can't spend that
2 much time and energy on trying to figure out what a whole other grown adult is doing, what
3 they're going to do, what they want to do.
- 4 AJ: Exactly.
- 5 AN: I'm jumping around everywhere . . .
- 6 AJ: Baby, this is all . . . go for it.
- 7 AN: So, my mother passed away four years ago from breast cancer. She passed away February the
8 18th, the same day that they were burying Whitney Houston, actually. I was at work and I was
9 watching them lower her into the ground and something just told me to call my mother. I called
10 my mom, she picks up the phone and the last words, ironically, that she says to me is, "Hold on."
11 And then within that moment and that time frame and me trying to call her back, she had
12 already transferred over to the afterlife.
- 13 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 14 AN: It's been very hard, it's been really, really hard for me because, like I said, I was blessed - I was
15 blessed to have a mother who believed in me and who wanted to see more out of me than just
16 you deciding that you want to be transgender. "Ok, you want to be transgender, what else do
17 you want to do with your life?" And that was how my mother always brought it to me and
18 that's how I stemmed into my artwork. For as long as I can remember, I've always drawn - I
19 always drew, I always had a thing for fashion, I just always had a thing to create. I can
20 remember drawing stick figures and my stick figures would have little triangles on them and the
21 triangles would be a shirt and the squares would be pants. I would color it in all sloppy and
22 stuff, and my mother - I guess she noticed that so she would buy me art supplies and paint and
23 canvases and personal colors. She would buy me all this stuff, because she knew that this was
24 my escape. Once my mother passed away, it's like . . . it's not that I don't love my artwork
25 anymore, it's just hard to find that inspiration. So, I'm a starving artist.
- 26 AJ: So, you haven't been creating lately?
- 27 AN: Well, I actually did a mural here at the organization here in DC called HIPS, which is Helping
28 Individual People Survive. It used to be prostitutes but they changed the prostitutes to people.
- 29 AJ: OK.
- 30 AN: So, basically HIPS is a non-profit organization, I used to work for them - it's just an amazing
31 organization, and it's just for sex workers, people who have drug issues - it's a free haven for
32 them to come, to relax, wash their clothes, take showers, get meals, case management. It's a
33 great place and they do great things.
- 34 AJ: And you made a mural there?
- 35 AN: I actually painted a mural there.
- 36 AJ: Inside or outside?

- 1 AN: Inside.
- 2 AJ: OK.
- 3 AN: We had this big art opening – it was really great, it was really great.
- 4 AJ: Oh, wonderful.
- 5 AN: And the crazy part about it was the whole time I was doing that mural, I was staying in a shelter.
6 So I would come in from the shelter to HIPS to paint all day, wake up and do it all over again.
- 7 AJ: Yeah. Did you have other young people helping you create the mural or you did it all by myself?
- 8 AN: No, I just did that whole mural by myself.
- 9 AJ: Wow.
- 10 AN: I did that whole mural by myself.
- 11 AJ: What are some of the images in it?
- 12 AN: Well, that's funny that you ask. Basically, it is . . . I wish you were staying longer because
13 Monday you could go take a look at it.
- 14 AJ: Oh yeah, I'm leaving tomorrow.
- 15 AN: It's basically a trans woman and a trans man and the skyline of DC is behind them, like they have
16 the monuments and things of nature, they have on headphones and there's a radio and the
17 radio is blasting music and basically in a world that can be so chaotic, if you just close your eyes
18 and let the music take you away you'll find your own sense of woosah and bliss and your own
19 inner existence – you can connect with your own . . . you can connect with your chakras, I'm not
20 sure if you're familiar with what the chakras are?
- 21 AJ: I am very familiar with chakras.
- 22 AN: I'm a very spiritual type of person and I believe in cleansing your energy portal, so when I drew
23 the blueprint of this mural, I drew three. The first one was of a trans woman and a trans man
24 and it was just their faces with flowers behind them and it said, "I'm uniquely beautiful." They
25 didn't like that and the one that is on the wall now, it was like the earth behind it, the skyline of
26 DC, the trans man, the trans woman with the radio in-between and the music is coming out, and
27 it's just, "I'm uniquely beautiful." That's the name of it and if you look at it, it's easy for me to
28 explain it but it would be better to see it in person.
- 29 AJ: Sure, yeah.
- 30 AN: You can just see that they're embracing themselves with self love and I think that, especially
31 being trans, I think that it is important to love yourself and just to embrace who you are.
32 There's more . . . Ameirah, I am a transgender woman, but that doesn't define who Ameirah is,
33 that's a part of Ameirah.
- 34 AJ: A part, yes.

- 1 AN: Do you get what I'm saying?
- 2 AJ: Oh, absolutely.
- 3 AN: I'm a whole other different . . . I'm a whole different entity within myself, if that makes sense.
- 4 AJ: It does – you're a whole person.
- 5 AN: Yeah, yeah.
- 6 AJ: That's just one part.
- 7 AN: Just one piece of the puzzle.
- 8 AJ: Being Black is another part – yeah, no, I get it. Absolutely. So, what other kinds of art do you
9 make?
- 10 AN: Oh, I'm really heavy in fashion illustration.
- 11 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 12 AN: I sew, I haven't sewn in years but I sew – I still know how to sew and things of that nature. I have
13 my bachelors degree in fashion design. After my mother passed away, I went to Tampa for four
14 years after my mom died.
- 15 AJ: Really?
- 16 AN: Yeah, I just couldn't be in the DMV area after she passed, but prior to I was already taking online
17 courses in Tampa. I went to this school called the International Academy of Design and
18 Technology where I got my BA in fashion design.
- 19 AJ: Oh, wow – cool. And then you came back. So, you've just been back.
- 20 AN: I've been back for a year now.
- 21 AJ: For one year.
- 22 AN: For one year, I came back last year – October of 2015.
- 23 AJ: And it's been hard to find housing.
- 24 AN: It's been hard to find housing, and it's not even just in DC – even in Tampa, oh my God. The only
25 reason why I survived out there was because it was cheaper out there, but Tampa is a very
26 confederate . . . it's the south. It was very confederate, I was never called a nigger by a white
27 person to my face, blatantly, until I went to Tampa.
- 28 AJ: Oh, my God.
- 29 AN: There was a guy, "There's a nigger." And I was just like, "Yeah."
- 30 AJ: By a white person?
- 31 AN: By a white person – yes. They were driving with confederate flags and everything – them
32 people don't care down there. I was just like, "Oh, my God, he just called me a nigger." I didn't

- 1 know how to feel because I'd never experienced it before. Of course, I wanted to go bush his
2 fucking windows out but I didn't do that. But living in the south was very . . . living in the south
3 was very different because I'm a northern girl, so moving all the way down there I was just like .
4 . . the weather was great, but just how the systems are set up, there's hardly no organizations
5 like solely in that area for a transgender woman, especially of color.
- 6 AJ: Right.
- 7 AN: So, I just felt like that wasn't a smart . . .
- 8 AJ: So, when you finished school you came back?
- 9 AN: After I finished school I came back here.
- 10 AJ: Wow, you've been sharing so much. I haven't even hardly had to ask you any questions. But,
11 talk to me about relationships. Are you in a relationship? Do you date men? Women? Trans
12 people? What's your sexual orientation?
- 13 AN: Well, my sexual orientation, I identify as being straight.
- 14 AJ: Straight, OK. Heterosexual.
- 15 AN: I identify as being a heterosexual woman, but relationships . . . relationships, oh God. Yeah, no.
16 No luck with relationships.
- 17 AJ: No luck, huh.
- 18 AN: I mean a lot of it is because these men, they think that . . . I guess men think because you're
19 transsexual that you're desperate these days. Like, excuse me, sir. Just because I like what you
20 may happen to have between your legs, that doesn't mean that I want you.
- 21 AJ: Yeah.
- 22 AN: That doesn't mean that at all. I have my preference . . . and it's just like I feel like a lot of these
23 men, they look at transsexuals as just a sexual fantasy – nothing more, nothing less than a sexual
24 fucking fantasy. It makes it very hard to date because it's just like is he really with me because
25 he's with me for who I am, or is he with me because he has some type of a secret fetish.
- 26 AJ: Yeah.
- 27 AN: So, it's very hard to date and then if you do date, you must worry about is this man a tranny
28 chaser.
- 29 AJ: What's a tranny chaser? I mean, I know – but we're doing this video so other people may not
30 know.
- 31 AN: A tranny chaser is a man who is just obsessed with sleeping around with a whole bunch of
32 different transsexuals – like one is not enough for a tranny chaser, there has to be multiple.
33 And, a lot of the times there are multiples.
- 34 AJ: Yes.

- 1 AN: I don't like to share, I'm not fond of sharing. Relationships are just hard, they're just really,
2 really hard for me to . . .
- 3 AJ: You don't have any girlfriends, like you can be roommates with? Or, that's not a thing?
- 4 AN: I'm just . . . I just like to move to the sound of my own drum.
- 5 AJ: Yeah.
- 6 AN: I enjoy my isolation moments, and not that isolating yourself is good, not for me because I do
7 suffer from depression so it's never good for me to be by myself completely, but as far as just
8 living wise, I just like my own space.
- 9 AJ: Sure, and everybody does.
- 10 AN: Yeah.
- 11 AJ: Ameirah, you told me . . . well, actually you said SMYAL is an LGBT organization, right?
- 12 AN: Yes.
- 13 AJ: Is HIPS an LGBT . . . ?
- 14 AN: Yes . . . well, they cater to everyone but they started out as an LGBT-based organization.
- 15 AJ: So you've worked for a number of LGBT. . . any others?
- 16 AN: No, just those two.
- 17 AJ: Just those two.
- 18 AN: Yeah, just those two.
- 19 AJ: Have you ever had any problems with the police, with schools, with the medical industry?
- 20 AN: Oh yes – yes, yes, yes, yes. This was actually last year . . . this year, the beginning of this year,
21 2016, I was actually at the New Carrollton Metro Stop. At that time I was staying with an aunt
22 who lived in Annapolis, Maryland. So, I was standing there waiting for the connector – because
23 New Carrollton is in New Carrollton, Maryland and then Annapolis is in Annapolis, Maryland but
24 there is a connector ride that takes you from New Carrollton to Annapolis, to the mall. I was
25 waiting, and I guess I was just prancing back and forth – you know how when you're impatient
26 you'll prance?
- 27 AJ: Yeah, yeah.
- 28 AN: And I was prancing and I saw this cop and the cop drove past me and he looked at me and I
29 noticed that he was looking at me and I was like, "OK, it's a copy, he's just doing his own thing."
30 I've never really had issues with the cops.
- 31 AJ: Right.

- 1 AN: So, as I'm minding my business and I'm prancing back and forth waiting for the connector ride to
2 come, the cop circled around in his car, gets out of his car, circles around me and he walks up to
3 me and do you know what he said? "You know you can't work here, right?"
- 4 AJ: What?
- 5 AN: And I'm confused. I'm like – work, why would he think that I'm working here. He thought by me
6 prancing back and forth, I was trying to sell some ass. And I'm just like . . . when it registered
7 into me what he was saying, I'm like, "Did you not hear what you just said to me? Do you know
8 that that's a law suit on so many different levels?" And I guess it registered to him what he just
9 said to me and then he circled back around and he was like, "I'm so sorry, I should have never
10 said that to you." By that time I'm already livid, I'm already pissed, I'm already on the phone
11 with the transit supervisor. "Someone needs to come up here," and just telling him about this
12 incident.
- 13 AJ: Wow.
- 14 AN: He was so apologetic about him making that statement, but by that time it was too late. This is
15 what you already think of me.
- 16 AJ: So, he profiled you as a sex worker.
- 17 AN: He profiled me as a sex worker. A lot of times when I say this I get a lot of flak, I've never had to
18 do sex work before. I was the only child to a single mother who wasn't going to . . . I didn't
19 foresee her . . . see, this is how I played my mom when I came out. I know in the past, a lot of
20 transgender people or people would just identify as being gay, they're bashed by their families,
21 a lot of their family turns their back on them.
- 22 AJ: Absolutely.
- 23 AN: So, I already knew in my mind that my mother was . . . she's a Cancer, she was bullheaded. So, I
24 was just like, "How am I going to play this on her?" So, when I told her, I was like, "You know,
25 I'm going to transition – I'm transitioning to a woman. I know you probably don't like this, but
26 you wouldn't want to disown me because you don't really have anyone else."
- 27 AJ: Oh, OK.
- 28 AN: That's how I played that – that's how I played that. I was just like . . .
- 29 AJ: Like, "I'm here for you, so you need to be here for me."
- 30 AN: Yeah. "I know that you're probably going to be upset by this, but you don't really have anyone
31 else. I'm really like your only go-to person, so do you really want to disown me because of
32 this?" And that's exactly what I said to her and I saw the click in her head and she was like,
33 "Shit, I don't really have anybody else, so I guess I'm going to have to do this." But you know,
34 like I said, again, it was a blessing – it was a blessing because, you know, my mother really
35 instilled a lot of values and morals within myself. Even as far as relationships, I don't like to be
36 alone – I urn to be in a relationship, but I'm not going to . . .
- 37 AJ: It will happen, but you don't sell your soul to be in a relationship.

- 1 AN: And you don't, that was something that my mom instilled in me. If you have goals and
2 expectations, your significant other needs to have goals and expectations. If I'm out here trying
3 to better myself, you need to be out here trying to better yourself so we can come together to
4 build a better foundation for the both of us.
- 5 AJ: True.
- 6 AN: So, I just haven't ran into that. Or, maybe I have ran into it, maybe I just ran him away.
- 7 AJ: Well, I'm glad you haven't had to do sex work in order to survive – even though, I mean . . .
8 people have to do it for many, many reasons.
- 9 AN: For survival, yeah.
- 10 AJ: So, there's no shame but . . . it's good that you have not had to resort to that.
- 11 AN: Yeah, and I think that . . . when I say that to a lot of other trans women, it's like, "Oh, you've
12 never had to do sex work, so you don't even know what the fuck a struggle is."
- 13 AJ: Not true.
- 14 AN: Not true at all. Just because I found other ways – like I've sold my artwork, I've stood outside of
15 a gallery place here in downtown DC and had my portfolio out. "Do you want to buy some
16 artwork?"
- 17 AJ: Hustle.
- 18 AN: Yes, a hustle. Do you know what I'm saying? I get flak from that – like, "You think you're
19 better." No, I don't think I'm better at all, that's how I was raised, that was instilled into me.
20 "You're going to go out here and you're going to get a fucking job – you're going to work."
- 21 AJ: Right.
- 22 AN: That's how my mother talked to me. That's what it was for me. There was no other option.
- 23 AJ: Sure.
- 24 AN: There was no other option for me than to go out here and get a 9-5. I've faced a lot of
25 discrimination because that was all that I knew – to go out here, go apply for a job. So, when
26 shit got rough for me and I needed to work, I would go out here and I would go apply for jobs –
27 sometimes I would get calls back, sometimes I wouldn't. When I was in college I had this one
28 company, Charlotte Russe actually – Charlotte Russe.
- 29 AJ: The clothing store.
- 30 AN: Yeah, they actually told me . . . the manager, at the time, actually told me, "I can't hire you
31 unless you dress physically as male." That was back in like 2010 . . . 2009.
- 32 AJ: Then you couldn't in Charlotte Russe because they only hire women, don't they?
- 33 AN: Yeah, I couldn't work in Charlotte Russe.
- 34 AJ: Yeah.

- 1 AN: Although I was presenting female because my identification and everything wasn't changed over
2 – it still said, "M". So, she was just like . . . at that time, no they hire men – because they were
3 willing to hire me.
- 4 AJ: Oh, do they? Every time I go in Charlotte Russe, it's always girls.
- 5 AN: They were willing to hire me but it was just that I had to peel and I wasn't doing that. I'm too far
6 along in my . . .
- 7 AJ: Have you been able to get your documents and everything in order now?
- 8 AN: Yes, all of my documentation and everything is changed over now – yes.
- 9 AJ: Wow, that's awesome. What do you think is the biggest challenge for transgender people?
- 10 AN: There's not just one, there's many of them.
- 11 AJ: Yeah.
- 12 AN: There's many of them – like the job market.
- 13 AJ: Employment.
- 14 AN: Employment, is the number one problem. You tell these companies and these organizations
15 and see a lot of people think that – oh, well, because she never had to do sex work, there's been
16 plenty of my jobs that I've been discriminated on. Do you know what I mean? Just because my
17 struggle isn't the average struggle, it doesn't mean that I don't have a struggle.
- 18 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 19 AN: You get what I'm saying?
- 20 AJ: Absolutely.
- 21 AN: I've had employers, like my last job I was working at at Wet Seal in Tampa.
- 22 AJ: Wet Seal, OK.
- 23 AN: Wet Seal – yup. That company is the most racial company I could have ever decided to work for.
- 24 AJ: Oh, my goodness.
- 25 AN: Actually, the reason why they actually closed so many stores was because they were actually
26 already in a lawsuit in North Carolina because they didn't want to promote assistant managers
27 of color to store manager level positions. They actually had a case and they had to settle like \$7
28 million outside of court. I was the only transgender woman of color there at my location and
29 they just did not like me, they just did not like me. One of the employees actually who was
30 acting store manager, actually said a couple of things around sale associates, like, "I can't
31 believe this company even hired a transgender woman, let alone her being Black – but a
32 transgender woman." Yeah, she said those things and the company did nothing about it. They
33 actually found . . . they actually fired me because they knew . . . they knew when they hired me
34 that I didn't have a car, it was no secret that I didn't have a car. Now, a lot of times with retail

- 1 companies you have to do deposits to the bank, but a lot of the times if retail companies have a
2 bank dispenser inside of the mall, they will deposit there because it's less of a safety hazard.
3 Let's say if you're getting in the car and you have \$5,000 on you . . .
- 4 AJ: Yeah, somebody is going to rob you.
- 5 AN: Somebody is going to rob you, right. So, it would make more sense to do the deposit within the
6 mall at one of the local bank vendors that is there in the mall – that's how a lot of companies
7 that I've worked for have done it in the past. Wet Seal didn't do it like that. You have to go to
8 the bank and deposit the money every morning. So then knowing that I didn't have a car,
9 sometimes my opener, which is my sales associate, if they have a car then we'll drive to the
10 bank and we'll deposit the money, we'll make change. It was a couple of times that my store
11 manager scheduled me with a sales associate that she knew didn't have a car.
- 12 AJ: Oh, OK.
- 13 AN: You follow where I'm going, so we couldn't go to the bank.
- 14 AJ: She set you up.
- 15 AN: She did that, and she kept doing that. And then, at one particular time, they were just like,
16 "Hey, you've missed too many deposits, we're going to have to fire you."
- 17 AJ: Wow.
- 18 AN: And, the crazy part about it is that they did it . . . the last time that I came back home, in October
19 of last year, it wasn't supposed to be me staying here – it was supposed to be . . . it was a visit. I
20 had my plane ticket and everything, my plane ticket was return – it was a return, it was a round
21 trip. They fired me two days before my plane left and they knew that I was scheduling this
22 round trip and they fired me. But, things happen for a reason. I wasn't happy there anyway.
23 Everything happens for a reason. But it just goes to show you that just because I may not be
24 facing the common struggle, I'm still facing a struggle with employment. That's just like now, I
25 work . . . I'm the only transgender woman of color at the organization that I'm working at now. I
26 don't feel . . . I love my job and I think that everyone there is amazing, but I do feel like there is a
27 sense of a disconnect because everyone else identifies as just homosexual, I identify as being a
28 transgender woman. So there is a disconnect there, to a certain degree.
- 29 AJ: Sure. Are there no lesbians there?
- 30 AN: There's lesbians there but even with the lesbians there's still a disconnect. I feel like there is a
31 disconnect, period, amongst . . .
- 32 AJ: Are there more Black people?
- 33 AN: No, it's only three of us . . . four of us.
- 34 AJ: Wow.
- 35 AN: But there are different classifications of Black people. And then when I say different
36 classifications, they're more of a . . . higher scale, I guess you could say.

- 1 AJ: Higher class.
- 2 AN: Higher class, not higher scale – I shouldn't have said that. Higher class – mannerisms are
3 different, you know. They can't relate to the things that I can relate to – you know what I'm
4 saying? To them, it's like, "Oh, wow, what is that?" But, I mean, it's a great organization. I love
5 the work that's being done and I believe in the mission of the organization. But, you know, it's
6 just . . .
- 7 AJ: SMYAL – what part of town is that in?
- 8 AN: SMYAL is in southeast, in the Eastern Market area.
- 9 AJ: OK, so kind of where you grew up?
- 10 AN: Not that far from that area.
- 11 AJ: Wow. Ameirah, where do you think transgender rights will be 50 years from now?
- 12 AN: Oh, gosh – 50 years from now? I'm hoping it's way better than what's going on now. The thing
13 about it is, for me – it's not so much about these rights, it's about once we get these rights
14 installed, what are we doing to make sure that these rights are being pursued?
- 15 AJ: Right.
- 16 AN: It sounds good on paper, it sounds great on paper, but what are the commanders in chief, what
17 are these people in power, what are they doing to really, really make sure that these rights are
18 being installed?
- 19 AJ: And protected, right?
- 20 AN: And protected from people like Donald Trump. What is being done? What strategies do you
21 have? What are you guys trying to do? How are you guys trying to do it? Is it for all trans
22 people? Is it for a particular group of trans people? What is the overall? Because, for me, the
23 overall is blurry of what is trying to be done.
- 24 AJ: Yeah.
- 25 AN: And the reason why I say is that it's blurry is because it needs to be done for all, it shouldn't just
26 be done for one group of color one color of people or one group of individuals, it should be
27 done for everyone. And when I say everyone, I mean everyone that falls underneath the
28 transgender bracket – whether you're Black or you're Latino, whether you're Caucasian – if you
29 are transgendered, period, this is what needs to be done.
- 30 AJ: Sure.
- 31 AN: And this is how we need to go about doing it. I'm hoping within the next 50 years that there's
32 more unity within our own trans community.
- 33 AJ: That's a good point. Is there anything, Ameirah, that I didn't ask you that you want to make sure
34 gets said?
- 35 AN: I think you've asked me . . . is there anything else you've got? I'm having a fun time talking.

- 1 AJ: I think you really have been very open and very honest about your life, your struggles, your
2 challenges. I guess I would ask one question, what has been the most positive thing for you
3 since you've come out as being your true gender?
- 4 AN: Oh, gosh. Just being able to live freely, just to be this woman that I saw so many years in my
5 head. I don't think a lot of society gets it. They hear the same story over and over and over
6 again. "Oh, when I was younger, I felt like this," and after a while . . . that is the story, for most
7 of us.
- 8 AJ: For a lot of us.
- 9 AN: For a lot of us, that's the story, but when you hear it so many times, after a while it can become,
10 "Oh, I know the transgender story." You don't know.
- 11 AJ: No.
- 12 AN: You have no idea. I can sit up here and tell you until I'm blue in the face, but people still don't
13 get it – what it's like to be inside of your vessel, because that's what this is – this is a vessel.
- 14 AJ: Just purely a vessel.
- 15 AN: This is a vessel, because what's inside of here once we're gone, that goes somewhere else. So,
16 this is just a vessel. But what I want people, especially heterosexual people and just any people .
17 . . not even heterosexual people, just individuals who want to get an understanding of what it
18 means to be trans. To be inside of your vessel and not have your vessel aligned, it throws you
19 off. I was in a depression for a very large portion of my life, a very large portion of not just my
20 life but my adolescent life. All throughout high school, I would sleep – sleeping, I would come
21 home from track practice – I was in track, I was a track runner.
- 22 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 23 AN: Yeah, and I would go to sleep. I would sleep – that's all I did throughout high school was come
24 home and sleep. It was chronic depression and then after my mother passed away, the
25 depression got really, really worse, so I actually tried to commit suicide a couple of times.
- 26 AJ: Oh, baby.
- 27 AN: Third time I almost took myself out. So, people don't get it – people just . . . they don't
28 understand it, they don't understand it.
- 29 AJ: Have you been able to access therapy or medical . . . ?
- 30 AN: I've been able to access therapy and go to therapy and I've recently been diagnosed manic
31 depressive, bi-polar disorder stage 2. My insurance was recently cancelled so the insurance that
32 I have with my job, my therapist and psychiatrist – they don't take that particular insurance, so I
33 . . . yeah.
- 34 AJ: So, you've got to find another clinic.
- 35 AN: I have to find another clinic, I'm going to have to find another clinic, I have to figure out how I'm
36 going to get my meds. People just don't get it, people just don't understand the average things

- 1 that a trans person has to go through. Like, they just don't understand it. A part of me is like we
2 can do as many of these documentaries and these short stories and these films and Laverne Cox
3 can step up, Janet Mock can step up, you know. But it's not a matter of do we have the people
4 to tell the stories, it's a matter of do the people want to know the stories.
- 5 AJ: Right.
- 6 AN: Do they want to listen? Do they care to listen?
- 7 AJ: Wow, better break it down.
- 8 AN: Well, that's the realization of it – that's the realization of it. As a society, are we there yet where
9 we want to make these changes as a society? The trans women, we can fight until we're blue in
10 the face, but if society isn't on board with it, which clearly they are one minute and they aren't
11 the next minute.
- 12 AJ: Right.
- 13 AN: I have some other things I want to talk about too, do we have time for that?
- 14 AJ: Like what?
- 15 AN: Well, just like when I said that society . . . it's one of those things where you'll see a transgender
16 woman in the public eye for a brief moment in time. "Oh, she's this," or, "Oh, she's that," or,
17 "She achieved this." And then I think that . . . that's just like when Caitlyn Jenner decided to
18 transition. For a brief moment, transgender life was on the forefront.
- 19 AJ: Sure, every news station, every newspaper.
- 20 AN: Yeah, everyone felt like they had it figured out and I'm just like, "First of all, this is a privileged
21 white man." I'm not taking away her womanhood, at all, but let's be realistic here. This is a
22 highly privileged white man who had the money, the doctors to just wake up one day and say,
23 "You know what? OK, Cait, let's go."
- 24 AJ: *I am Cait.*
- 25 AN: *I am Cait.* And that's how it happened, and that's her story. I can't take away her story, but her
26 story does not define the walk that many transgender women had to take. It wasn't that . . . it
27 wasn't glitz and glamour, it wasn't just this, "Oh, my God, OK."
- 28 AJ: Have you ever been on a cover of a magazine?
- 29 AN: "I want to be a woman today, I have that doctor there, that doctor there, and this doctor here,
30 I'm going to make it happen." That's not how it works – that's not how it works at all. Society
31 needs to understand that and they need to hear it, but they have to be wanting . . . they have to
32 want to hear the message. That's just like in Hollywood. I'm so sick of Hollywood casting these
33 men, these hard-ass men to play transgender women when there is a plethora of transgender
34 actresses who are more than qualified. There is a plethora of young faces who can represent
35 this woman, but yet you still get a man and put him in a wig and put some make-up on his face.
36 Is that how you see us?

- 1 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 2 AN: Do you see our womanhood at all? That's the question that I have.
- 3 AJ: Wow.
- 4 AN: So, yeah. I could go on - I could go on, but until society really, really sits down and pulls the
5 brims open to absorb this knowledge, it's going to be challenging. It's going to be challenging.
- 6 AJ: Well, I think we should end here. I want to thank you so much for sharing your story, your life,
7 your beautiful smile.
- 8 AN: Thank you.
- 9 AJ: And until we meet again, my friend.
- 10 AN: It was a pleasure.
- 11 AJ: Thank you.
- 12 AN: You're welcome.
- 13 AJ: Bye-bye.
- 14 AN: Bye.