

Quinton Neal
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

February 26, 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 Quinton Neal -QN
3
4 AJ: So, hello.
5 QN: Hi.
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. Today is February 26, 2016. I am on the campus of Minnesota
8 State University in Mankato, Minnesota, and I'm sitting here with Quinton Neal. So Quentin, I'm
9 going to ask you to state your name, spell your name; state what your preferred gender
10 pronouns are; state what is your gender identity today and what was your gender assigned at
11 birth.
12 QN: So my name is Quinton Neal. Q-u-i-n-t-o-n, last name Neal N-e-a-l. My pronouns – so my
13 pronouns are he/him she/her and my gender identity is . . . I identify as being gender fluid.
14 AJ: Gender fluid, all right.
15 QN: Yes.
16 AJ: Gender assigned at birth?
17 QN: Male.
18 AJ: OK, all right. Wow. So just to kind of get our juices flowing, Quinton, what is the first thing in
19 life you remember? What's your first memory in life?
20 QN: My first memory in life was . . . I would say when I was about . . . between 7 to 8 years old, I was
21 basically coming into trying to figure out sexuality at that age, and I didn't know what sexuality
22 meant, so I thought it was OK to be with guys and engage and kiss and all of that. So that was
23 my first memory in life.
24 AJ: Wow, OK. Kissing a boy or thinking about kissing a boy?
25 QN: Both – kissing a boy and also thinking about it.
26 AJ: Tell me a little bit about where you grew up.
27 QN: Yeah, so I was born in Peoria, Illinois and my father was incarcerated for committing murder and
28 once he left my mom felt the need for me and my sister to leave and give us a better life from . .
29 . we were, of course, as people say, "the hood," and moved to Phillie. We lived in shelters and
30 public housing, all of those, just to try and make it, trying to give us a better life. So in Phillie
31 and from there, went up until 11th grade, but during that time in Phillie was when I really started
32 to come into myself where I felt that I was a little bit more freer to kind of explore my options,
33 because Peoria, Illinois is a very small town.
34 AJ: Very small, very rural.
35 QN: Very rural, yes, very religious. And when I got to Phillie I just started exploring my options of
36 trying to find who I am and who I wanted to be. And so, I did. I became to realize about the age

1 of 15 that I was gay and that I was interested in men, and I just decided to start engaging
2 sexually with them and I enjoyed that. My mom didn't so much care for that. One, she had a
3 strict rule, because she's super religious . . . so for many years I had to keep my authenticity, or
4 expressing my true authentic self, I would say, inside for a while. I didn't really experience my
5 true authenticity, to be honest, until probably a year ago.

6 AJ: Oh wow, OK. So you went to grammar school, elementary school and high school in
7 Philadelphia?

8 QN: I did.

9 AJ: Was that . . . you had these thoughts about being with males when you were 7 or 8 years old,
10 did that ever express itself outwardly where classmates and neighbor friends would harass you
11 or bully you, as we would call it now?

12 QN: Yeah, absolutely. I actually have been bullied all throughout elementary, high school – all the
13 way up until my junior year of high school, and also my senior year of high school. So during
14 elementary, back then if you were interested in cheerleading or anything that was girl-related or
15 feminine-related, you were quote/unquote classified as being gay or a sissy or a fag. And I was
16 just interested in those things, but also I knew I was gay too, but I would get things thrown at
17 me, people would step on my shoes. In elementary, once then I tried to do my best, again, to
18 hold that true authentic self inside, but once everyone knew at the time, I just . . . there wasn't
19 anything I could do so I always did my best to walk home with friends, to not stay out late at
20 school for programs in elementary. So it was really rough, I did have people punch me in the
21 back of my head while walking down the hall. In high school I would get picked on, things
22 thrown at me, as well as also followed, as well as up until my junior year I rode the bus with a
23 particular gentleman, I don't even remember his name, but he would follow me and he would
24 harass me during lunch time – like smash my food and stuff.

25 AJ: Oh no.

26 QN: Yeah.

27 AJ: Wow, I'm so sorry to hear about that. Do you have siblings?

28 QN: I do. I have a little sister and a little brother.

29 AJ: Really? They're younger, you're the oldest?

30 QN: I am.

31 AJ: OK. What was the home environment . . .? You mentioned that your father went to
32 penitentiary and so you pretty much . . . I'm assuming you grew up in a single family home with
33 your siblings? What was that like?

34 QN: Hard, it was hard. Hard for me because I didn't have a father figure around, but hard for me to
35 see my mother struggle and that's what hurt the most. But also hard because I had to grow up
36 so fast too. So me and my sister just stuck it out and I had to, of course . . . I felt the need to
37 actually have to "be the man of the house" because my mom only could do so much. My

- 1 brother is my half-brother, so I didn't connect with him until I moved back to Illinois. And, me
2 and him are good, he's super protective. But it was difficult growing up – trying to take care of
3 my mom, raise my little sister, do well in school, trying to find safe spaces – it was so hard. I felt
4 like I was an adult before I became an adult.
- 5 AJ: Yeah.
- 6 QN: So that was the hard part. I felt like most of my childhood I didn't get a chance to really enjoy it.
- 7 AJ: Yeah, to be a kid.
- 8 QN: To be a kid.
- 9 AJ: So when was the first time that you realized that sort of your gender identity was not quite like
10 the gender you were assigned at birth?
- 11 QN: I'll never actually forget it. I was a junior in high school and I loved experimenting with clothes
12 because I was always into fashion and magazines. So, I would cut my jeans up and tie-dye them
13 in bleach and do all this stuff. At the time I didn't think of it, but I loved just women's clothing
14 and how it looked on my body. I enjoyed how my body looked in them, so I was pretty
15 androgynous, as they would say, but I knew then . . . walking outside, I would get my hair done
16 with weave and all that, and get the braids in there and all that. My mom would flip out, she did
17 not too much care for my creative expression and my gender identity at all. Like I said, she's
18 super religious, so again I had to suppress that but, again, I knew in my junior year of high
19 school.
- 20 AJ: So did you have single braids, box braids, Janet Jackson braids, dookie braids? What kind of
21 braids did you have?
- 22 QN: I had the corn row braids, where it's kind of similar to the new Beyoncé video.
- 23 AJ: OK, OK.
- 24 QN: So it's like I had the little things down . . . so yeah, my mom didn't like it. I only think I wore it for
25 like maybe two or three days, but super awesome – just black, no color.
- 26 AJ: Right, right. Yeah, it seems like color is starting to become a thing now with the braids.
- 27 QN: Yes.
- 28 AJ: So what terms do you use to describe yourself and how has that changed over time?
- 29 QN: Oh wow. What terms do I choose to describe myself?
- 30 AJ: I know you said gender fluid is sort of your gender identity today.
- 31 QN: Yeah, I guess I can say gender fluidity. I can see myself switching into gender . . . I feel like I
32 switch between gender fluidity and gender queer. So where there's part of me that does want
33 to be soft and feminine and then there's this part where I do want to be able to mix the two –
34 where there's just gender queerness. I find myself moving into that realm on certain days and
35 then other days it's just more like fluid on how I want to perform for that day.

- 1 AJ: Wow, that is so amazing – and so beautiful. What challenges have you faced since beginning to
2 really express your full gender identity?
- 3 QN: To be honest, I actually talked about this recently for a study I’m looking to do, which I don’t
4 know if I’ll do it – depending on harmful it might be, but I’m interested in researching about
5 Black queer bodies, male bodies, or just in general Black queer bodies and how they access Black
6 barber shops. I remember going to a particular barber shop in Bloomington-Normal and I was
7 very gender fluid, I guess you could say they could tell from the outside of my appearance. I
8 waited for three hours to get a haircut, which was ridiculous.
- 9 AJ: Yeah, I mean you wait for a little while, but three hours – that’s pretty . . .
- 10 QN: Yeah, I waited for three hours and I had my cute little boots, something similar to what you’ve
11 got on here, with my little jeans. I didn’t get service and the person that usually cuts my hair, or
12 the barbers that would cut my hair, didn’t want to. I ended up going with someone who was
13 new, or maybe was still in school and going through training.
- 14 AJ: Right, right.
- 15 QN: So that was my first time, I guess, expressing that out in public and going through that place of
16 feeling suppressed.
- 17 AJ: Or invisible. They just didn’t see you.
- 18 QN: No.
- 19 AJ: What have been some of the joys?
- 20 QN: Oh man. Some of the joys have been lately . . . first off, realizing that I do have a support system
21 and being able to express that true authenticity around that support system and knowing that
22 as long as I have that support system, I’ll be OK. I think being a part of the community and trying
23 to confine to these standards of what . . . to try to get a mate and find somebody has been
24 rough, but there’s been people that have been interested and didn’t care about my gender non-
25 conforming and me being gender fluid. So, just sticking to my guns and knowing that I have a
26 support system.
- 27 AJ: Oh good, I’m glad to know that there’s a support system. What’s your relationship like with
28 your birth family today? And then, you talked about the support system . . . do you have a
29 chosen family? Or sort of family network of support?
- 30 QN: Yeah, my family is good. It’s so interesting because I have . . . I haven’t . . . they haven’t really
31 seen me in my gender fluidity. I’m usually a little bit more “passing”. My grandmother is from
32 the south and so I just . . . out of her conscience, I’m going to be OK, she’s just super worried.
33 But my support system allows me to be my true authentic self and that’s just extended friends.
34 So, six gay men of color who allow me to be myself, they want me to be myself, and I feel safe
35 with them.
- 36 AJ: Nice.

- 1 QN: They're all gay men, so it's awesome. But they also are more masculine and more . . . so, I was
2 worried about that because I didn't want, I guess, their reputation of what they've built for
3 themselves to go down because of my visibility with them. So I will always be conscious of that,
4 but I decided to just come out with that and they were like, "No, you do you and we want you to
5 be you. We hear you talk about wanting to go in that realm but we don't see you do it," and so
6 when I finally did it, I was able to express that to them my senior year of undergrad – for a
7 Lavender ceremony.
- 8 AJ: Where did you go to undergrad?
- 9 QN: Southern Illinois University-Carbondale.
- 10 AJ: Carbondale – SIU, the Salukis.
- 11 QN: Yes.
- 12 AJ: I am really interested in this notion that you just introduced that somehow your gender identity
13 would have a negative impact on your Black gay male circle of friends.
- 14 QN: Yeah.
- 15 AJ: What do Black gay and lesbian folks think about transgender, gender fluid, gender queer Black
16 people, in your opinion?
- 17 QN: Ahh, such a good question. I feel like they think of us as weak, less than, kind of a disgrace to an
18 extent, because we're not upholding this ideal, what it means to be a Black gay person – or
19 performing these gender norms that are circulating. And so, it hurts. It hurts even when I'm
20 trying to talk or get to know other Black queer guys who are masculine. They don't really want
21 to engage with online dating. It's like, "No, not interested," looking for the straight acting and
22 all of that. It's difficult, but it hurts. I don't know what the deal is but that's kind of how I feel –
23 it's as though we're weak, we're too . . . as they say, weak, and then super gay and all of those
24 things.
- 25 AJ: So there's a divide in their mind?
- 26 QN: Absolutely.
- 27 AJ: Wow. To the extent that you feel comfortable, have you ever had any medical intervention
28 around your gender fluidity? Do you plan to have any medical intervention? Do you think about
29 it?
- 30 QN: Interesting. I haven't had any medical. Thinking about it? Yes. I have been thinking for this
31 year, actually I've been thinking about transitioning, but I'm not 100% sure. But I have been
32 thinking about it and it's been on my mind for a while and I think I have only talked to one
33 person about it because I don't want it to get out.
- 34 AJ: And I'm the second person?
- 35 QN: You're the second person, yeah.
- 36 AJ: Oh my God, I'm so honored. Thank you.

- 1 QN: No problem.
- 2 AJ: Has there been any specific moment or people or organizations that have had a significant
3 impact on you related to your gender identity?
- 4 QN: Yeah, I'm a part of Delta Phi Upsilon, which was the first gay fraternity that was established.
- 5 AJ: Oh really?
- 6 QN: Yeah.
- 7 AJ: So Delta, D-e-l-t-a Phi P-h-I . . .
- 8 QN: Upsilon.
- 9 AJ: Upsilon. U-p-s-i-l-o-n. OK.
- 10 QN: So yeah, red and gold. I love my Delta. They've been great. For so long I was looking for a
11 space to feel like I could be myself. I've always wanted to pledge Greek and I knew certain
12 family members did pledge Greek. I got no responses to the Divine Nine after trying to reach
13 out and see when they were going to have that information or intake. So, I did research and
14 said, "OK, universe, maybe this is a sign to go and do other things." I allowed it to just lead me
15 and I came upon Delta Phi Upsilon and I just expressed interest. The first time it wasn't a go
16 because they weren't ready to do the intake yet, but the next year around they contacted me
17 and it was like, "We would love you to apply." I applied, I passed the interview, and I crossed
18 over with my 13 other line brothers.
- 19 AJ: Oh wow.
- 20 QN: So I'm excited.
- 21 AJ: That's awesome.
- 22 QN: Thank you.
- 23 AJ: Is the alumni chapter pretty active?
- 24 QN: Yeah, it's very active. We just crossed three individuals, I want to say, a few months ago.
- 25 AJ: Oh wow. Is there a chapter here at Minnesota State?
- 26 QN: There is no chapter here. They crossed over in Houston, Texas, so that's where the alumni
27 chapter, or they would combine chapters together . . . if we don't have a chapter and you're
28 interested, we just get all of them all over the state and they come in and they get to know each
29 other and they cross over.
- 30 AJ: I just want to make sure I heard you correctly, you said you did research on the Divine Nine?
- 31 QN: I did.
- 32 AJ: What's the Divine Nine?
- 33 QN: The Divine Nine is the nine Greek letter organizations that are predominantly Black. So . . .

- 1 AJ: Phi Beta Sigma, Kappa Alpha Psi, Alpha Phi Alpha, Sigma Gamma Rho.
- 2 QN: Yes.
- 3 AJ: Delta Sigma Theta
- 4 QN: Yes, so I did research on the fraternities and I'm like, "Oh, OK, I think I know what I want to
5 pledge, I'm interested." But, unfortunately I didn't hear back, but interestingly enough, most of
6 them were interested in me sexually. I've been involved sexually with an Iota and a Sigma, so
7 yeah. So that's how . . .
- 8 AJ: Oh boy. So talk to me about love and relationships and romance. Who do you sleep with? Are
9 you in a relationship now? Are you open to . . . what's your sexual orientation?
- 10 QN: Yes, well my sexual orientation is I'm gay. As far as love, I'm not involved with anyone and I am
11 currently looking to date. I took some time off to really focus on myself. I went through a bad
12 break-up and me and my ex-partner are good. We're still really, really good friends.
- 13 AJ: So you guys communicate?
- 14 QN: Oh yeah, still communicate. We're really good friends, we talk every Sunday. But I loved him a
15 lot and things happened where I guess . . . he couldn't give me the things that I wanted and
16 that's how he felt. We just split. But I'm looking for love now and I'm open, open and my heart
17 is ready again. But I took about two and a half to three months off, just journaling about that
18 experience that I went through, that grieving process, and what do I want. What did I learn and
19 where do I want to go from this break-up? So I just did a lot of self-reflection and journaling. So
20 I kind of took some time off and now I'm back on the market. So I'm single.
- 21 AJ: Yeah. What has been, or has there been, any negative experiences accessing educational
22 institutions, run-ins with the criminal justice system, or medical institutions now that you've
23 begun to really express your true gender identity?
- 24 QN: That's a good question. OK, so as far as institutionally – as far as educationally, there hasn't
25 really been anything that I've seen or any negative towards me so far, being in graduate school
26 or even going through my undergraduate studies.
- 27 AJ: Good.
- 28 QN: Which is good. And I think the reason behind that had to do with being in departments that
29 were very progressive and very knowledgeable about trans rights, LGBTQ rights, women's rights
30 – so they were very updated and they were very . . . just really good at keeping up-to-date about
31 those issues. Police, I have not had anything with the gender identity aspect, but racially I have.
32 I actually, last semester for the first time ever in 31 years, was pulled over and arrested and
33 wasn't told why.
- 34 AJ: Wow.
- 35 QN: I was, of course, fearing for my life.
- 36 AJ: Yes.

- 1 QN: And just . . . yeah. Arrested, incarcerated. I bailed myself out, left at night – yeah, it was a very
2 traumatic experience, but unfortunately I had to go on it and go to court and get some things
3 situated that wasn't my fault and they kind of, of course, pretty much dismissed it so I was lucky
4 in that sense. But having to pay all those fees and not being told why I was . . .
- 5 AJ: And being denied your freedom.
- 6 QN: My rights – yeah, absolutely.
- 7 AJ: Even for a night. So that brings up a point that racial identity, particularly for Black people and
8 people of color, is as much or maybe even more detrimental than gender identity. What's your
9 thoughts about that?
- 10 QN: Well, I . . . for me, I would probably say yes to that. But then there's certain spaces where I do
11 feel that it's intersectional.
- 12 AJ: Mmm, OK.
- 13 QN: And I guess it depends on how my body . . . what is communicating at the time and in that
14 space. So, I believe when I'm, of course, around Black folks, you're the Black gay person, but I
15 think from the institutions as far as the police, we're looking at it from the lens of, of course, me
16 being Black and I've never had anything done to me by a police officer or any type of derogatory
17 terminology about the intersections of race and sexuality – and I hope not to. But, for that, I do
18 agree that it's definitely racial – yes.
- 19 AJ: Well, looking back over your decision to express your true identity, true gender identity, would
20 you make any changes? Would you do anything different?
- 21 QN: So for instance . . . so just choosing my gender identity as gender fluidity? No, I wouldn't.
- 22 AJ: Good for you.
- 23 QN: I'm very comfortable being who I am. It was a long journey but I wouldn't change anything for
24 that.
- 25 AJ: When you come out to your friends or family, and I know you said you haven't really broached
26 that topic with a lot of family members yet, but how do you talk to people about that? What's
27 your dialogue around that?
- 28 QN: I don't really have it and if I do, I usually have it with certain people. Because I was raped, years
29 ago, I talk to my grandmother, because she knows. My aunt, as well – and my mom. My circle,
30 my little support system. But certain family members, I don't tell them a lot of things because I
31 know their values and their morals and I just don't want to bear that stress and that hardship,
32 having to validate my voice, or to be looked down upon – so I don't go through it.
- 33 AJ: OK. Sexual violence is, many times, something, unfortunately, that males and Black males . . . all
34 males, I mean, perpetrate. Rarely do we hear males, particularly Black males, talk about being
35 victims of sexual violence and sexual abuse. Why do you think that is? And do you have any
36 thoughts about being more open around those issues in an effort to sort of help some people
37 who might be working through some of that stuff?

- 1 QN: Yeah. So, yeah, I was raped and . . .
- 2 AJ: I'm really sorry that you experienced that.
- 3 QN: It's OK. And, it was probably one of the most scariest moments and it was by a Black male in the
4 church. And, I didn't even know how to feel at the time, but I think I was able to regain my
5 power and my voice by talking about it. Once I expressed it to my grandmother, she was upset
6 – of course, his mom was upset, and everything was out in the open, but just talking about it. In
7 my undergrad . . . in undergrad in my performance studies course, I wrote a piece called, "The
8 Angry Gay Black Man," and I go through these series of finding my identity and being raped and
9 trying to find sexual liberation by using my body – or using my body as a weapon to resist those
10 spaces. I was talking about it and performing it, and I would just say for people who have
11 experienced this or . . . is (1) engage in self-care is the first thing; and (2) is to talk when you are
12 ready; and also realize that telling your story only helps bring things to the light and to actually
13 have a good dialogue, a facilitation around the topic, because if it happened to me, if it happens
14 to you or someone else, then more people will start talking about it.
- 15 AJ: Sure.
- 16 QN: I don't know why Black men particularly do that, but I wonder if it's more of upholding a very
17 Black masculinity façade that's, of course, been circulating in the African American community
18 for decades – or using Black gay male's bodies as objects and things in the dark just so they're
19 putting their problems on our bodies.
- 20 AJ: Wow.
- 21 QN: Through sex and having us to deal with it because they don't have to.
- 22 AJ: Whew – if I was in church I'd be like, "Come on, preacher – say that." I do want to be real clear
23 though, I wasn't implying that only Black men commit sexual violence. Men, generally, all
24 throughout the world are perpetrators of sexual violence and so I just want to make sure that
25 I'm not identifying Black men as the only perpetrators of sexual violence, in any way
26 whatsoever.
- 27 QN: Oh, totally understand.
- 28 AJ: When was the first time you ever met a gender queer or trans person?
- 29 QN: Oh my gosh . . . love, love her. My friend, Lamia, transitioned to Lamia. I didn't even know that
30 at the time he was transitioning. I didn't know. She reached out to me and I was like, "What?
31 What? I didn't even know." And so we connected and she was like, "Yeah." I think she's still
32 working at the airport and she's like, "Yeah, I went overseas . . . I was overseas, flew overseas,
33 and realized I just wanted to make the transition and I did and I did the surgery and everything
34 overseas." So yeah, that was my first . . . one of my very first, close, best friends. Yeah.
- 35 AJ: Wow, are you guys still connected today?
- 36 QN: We are – yes we are. She's great, she's great – she's doing really, really good.

- 1 AJ: Glad to hear that. I love hearing stories of trans women of color – not only surviving but
2 thriving. That’s what’s up. I talked to you about the relationship between the L, the G, the B
3 and the T relative to Black people, but more broadly, what do you think the relationship is of the
4 lesbian, gay, bisexual community to the trans community? There’s been this debate that maybe
5 . . . and even there was a petition that went around that said, “Hey, the T should be off on its
6 own and the gays and the lesbians . . . so let’s separate.” What’s your thoughts around that?
- 7 QN: I think that we should include the T. I think the T is very important and listen to your keynote – I
8 was like, “That is it.” You articulated that so profoundly.
- 9 AJ: Oh my goodness, wow.
- 10 QN: Where you described that if we tackle the T, everything else will fall in place. I’m like, “That’s it,
11 that is it.” But I always felt that the T should be there because of me thinking about that
12 transition. So, from my own experience and my own opinion, I feel that all the letters should be
13 available because people are still finding themselves and people are always changing and
14 morphing into who they want to be, or who they see themselves to be – and everything is fluid.
15 But I think that the T should be there, it shouldn’t be on its own. I feel like it’s basically
16 separating the Ts from . . . that’s ridiculous. We’re a community, we should be uplifting each
17 other and fighting for each other and each other’s rights – and especially transgender folks. I
18 totally think the T should be vocal and we need to be talking more about the T than the L and
19 the G. So yeah.
- 20 AJ: Well cool. Do you think there is an agenda for the transgender community?
- 21 QN: A good agenda – yeah, I do. I think it’s a good agenda. After talking to my friend, Lumia, just
22 having that dialogue . . . and also, in meeting or seeing transgender women give keynotes, there
23 is an agenda and it’s an important agenda. The agenda is not denying their womanhood, paying
24 attention to being criminalized and victimized and especially trans women of color. It’s rampant
25 and I don’t think that we should lose focus of that because I think that the transgender
26 community is . . . the agenda is . . . we need to be onboard because if we can be onboard as a
27 community, like you said in your keynote, everything else falls in its place.
- 28 AJ: Sure.
- 29 QN: So that’s . . . I think the agenda is great, I personally think the agenda is great.
- 30 AJ: OK.
- 31 QN: I’m always on board.
- 32 AJ: Yeah.
- 33 QN: So yes.
- 34 AJ: Have you ever worked for or volunteered for any trans-specific or LGBT organizations?
- 35 QN: I’ve never volunteered or anything for any organizations, the only thing I’ve done in undergrad
36 was actually I worked in administration in the LGBTQ Resource Center.

- 1 AJ: That's a lot. "The only thing I've done is work for the LGBT Center." That's a lot.
- 2 QN: It was great, and one of the graduate assistants is trans, Sarah Self is awesome. I'm still in
3 contact with her but I want to do more activist work and it's something I've been having
4 conversations with my mentors on campus is one foot in the academic but the other foot out in
5 the community and bridging theory and practice so that we're doing what we're saying.
- 6 AJ: Yeah. So you're an artist? What kind of art do you make?
- 7 QN: Oh man – dance is my first love.
- 8 AJ: Performance art?
- 9 QN: Performance art. So, I never really knew anything about performance studies until I went to
10 undergrad but I was actually just a dance major, but a lot of my regular dance performances
11 would do a lot dealing with gender, race, sexuality. But then I found performance studies, and
12 so I was able to incorporate my poetry, incorporate my life and experiences and it was beautiful.
13 I didn't even know that that was even an art. So if anything, I love performance studies and
14 tackling critical issues.
- 15 AJ: I feel like Duriel E. Harris . . . do you know this performance artist from Southern Illinois
16 University?
- 17 QN: Duriel E. Harris . . . no.
- 18 AJ: Poet, educator, scholar. It's no big deal, it occurred to me that they taught there for some time.
19 So you talked about activism and we're in this really, really amazing active activist time in
20 American culture, in Black culture. I mean, Black Lives Matter, the Black Liberation Projects that
21 are popping up all over the place. What's your thoughts around that? This whole call-out
22 culture and respectability politics – what do you think of all this stuff?
- 23 QN: I think it's necessary. I think there needs to be a space for it and I think when it comes to like
24 the Black Lives Matter movement, those spaces and our voices, those voices, matter. Trans lives
25 matter, that matters; Black lives matter, that matters; and I think we . . . I think the majority, not
26 all, the majority of society, particularly white folks or people who are privileged from . . . who
27 probably don't understand so much oppression, don't realize the importance around these
28 movements. I'm all for these movements and I realized how important they were when a good
29 friend of mine posted that, "All Lives Matter," and I was like, "Hmm, I'm not going to respond to
30 that." But my friend did, she got into it. I was like, "I need a break – ugh, I can't do that." But
31 she got in there. The woman was white and she went in on her. I let it be and I let that happen.
32 I think we need to learn how to be comfortable with being uncomfortable.
- 33 AJ: Ahhh, I said that earlier today. We have to sit in our uncomfortability.
- 34 QN: Yes, we have to – because otherwise we won't learn anything.
- 35 AJ: Wow, that's powerful. What do you think about the visibility that has been sort of afforded to
36 the trans community over the last few years now? Janet Mock wrote a bestselling book on *The*

- 1 *New York Times* bestseller list; Laverne Cox, Emmy nominations and cover of Time magazine;
2 Caitlyn Jenner, the cover of *Vanity Fair*.
- 3 QN: I know.
- 4 AJ: It's been an incredible amount of visibility. Is that visibility positive or harmful for transgender
5 people?
- 6 QN: I think the visibility is positive. I think the harmfulness is when we don't think about it
7 intersectionally. I think it's harmful when we don't look at the fact of who is reaping the most
8 visibility. I think we can talk about, of course, Janet and Laverne, and that's great. Caitlyn . . . I
9 think Caitlyn's story does matter.
- 10 AJ: Yes.
- 11 QN: But, we need to understand the background in which Caitlyn has come from to get that visibility.
12 So I think that the visibility as a whole, as a community – for the trans community, is great. But I
13 think we need to understand it intersectionally too.
- 14 AJ: Sure. And it's really important to get more voices, more stories, out there as a part of that
15 process. Do you feel like your gender identity, gender expression, has had any impact on your
16 professional life to date?
- 17 QN: Oh man. I don't think it has. I think I've always known that I've wanted to express that, but I
18 just never knew the time to express that. But I don't think it has any correlation to my life now
19 and career in academics. I do think a part of academics and scholarly work has pushed me to
20 become a little bit more confident in that, but I've always needed myself to believe it's OK to be
21 me and once I reached that place, academics helped me just live in that truth for me.
- 22 AJ: So are you planning to pursue a career in the academy over a long period of time?
- 23 QN: Yeah.
- 24 AJ: That's great.
- 25 QN: I am. I really . . . and this is just something that I don't see, and I know the education system
26 right now is just having some issues budget wise, but I really want to see more special topics
27 around . . . of course, we about LGBTQ and I get this because a lot of my work talks about how
28 white the community is and I don't see enough people of color. I'm like, "We need to talk about
29 this a little bit more in-depth." Like the Centers and things like that – how white the community
30 is – pride and all that. We are the people of color?
- 31 AJ: Because they exist.
- 32 QN: They totally exist and I really want to teach about, as E. Patrick Johnson would say, "queer
33 bodies," and having these topics around the struggles that help people of color that are part of
34 this community, navigate and create spaces for themselves, and not only just within their lives
35 but also within the community. So I'm really interested in talking more about that and flushing
36 all that out – and writing about it, of course.

- 1 AJ: Wow, Quinton, what a fascinating discussion. Is there anything that you want to share that I
2 didn't bring up or talk about?
- 3 QN: Not that I know of, I think you've hit some good stuff and had me think about some things too –
4 that's deep down there.
- 5 AJ: We were poking on some spots, huh?
- 6 QN: Yes, that's good – that's good for the soul.
- 7 AJ: It is. Thank you. Thank you so much for your honesty . . .
- 8 QN: Thank you.
- 9 AJ: For your willingness to sit and be a part of this project. And thank you for . . . you know, I just
10 want to say this on camera, for sharing about your thoughts around transition and sexual
11 assault. I really appreciate it. Thank you so much.
- 12 QN: No problem. Thank you for having me.
- 13 AJ: All right-y. Bye-bye.
- 14 QN: Bye.