

Andre Reed
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

September 6, 2017



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.

Andrea Jenkins
jenki120@umn.edu
(612) 625-4379

1 Andrea Jenkins -AJ
2 Andre Reed -AR
3

4 AJ: So, hello. My name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian for the Transgender Oral
5 History Project at the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota Libraries. Today is
6 September 6, 2017, and I'm on campus here at the University of Minnesota and there's a lot of
7 construction going on – so, we might have a little construction noise in the background, but
8 that's OK because we are about to do an amazing interview with Mr. Andre Reed – Andre DJ
9 Reed.

10 AR: DJ Reed, yes.

11 AJ: How are you doing today?

12 AR: I'm good, I'm doing really well, thank you for asking. How are you?

13 AJ: I'm doing OK. I'm a little stressed, as you know, it's been kind of a challenging morning but
14 we're making it through it and we're going to do what we do.

15 AR: Yes.

16 AJ: So, thank you for your patience.

17 AR: Yeah, no problem.

18 AJ: I've got a few questions that I want to get into to help shape who you are, and so, first of all, can
19 you state your name, spell your name so that we make sure that we have it all spelled correctly,
20 state your gender identity today, and your gender assigned at birth, and pronouns – your
21 pronouns.

22 AR: All right. My name is Andre Reed, that is A-n-d-r-e, last name R-e-e-d. What was the other
23 questions?

24 AJ: Gender as you define it today and gender assigned at birth, and your pronouns.

25 AR: All right. So, my gender identification today would be trans male, or I like to say a man of trans
26 experience.

27 AJ: I like that.

28 AR: I was assigned female at birth and my pronouns are he and him.

29 AJ: He and him, cool.

30 AR: Yes.

31 AJ: Thank you for being here today, Andre. I really appreciate it and just give us a chance to get to
32 know each other a little bit better. We've been seeing each other around in community for
33 years and years and years, and we've had a few moments of connection but not on a real, real . .
34 . so, just to get your memory juices flowing, can you talk about what's the earliest thing you
35 remember in life? It does not have to have anything to do with your transgender identity, just

- 1 what's your . . . even though if it does, that's OK, that's fine, but what's the earliest thing you
2 remember?
- 3 AR: The earliest thing I remember in life? I don't know. I don't know how old I was but we had a pet
4 German Shepherd that I used to like to ride around the house, his name was Bruno.
- 5 AJ: Bruno?
- 6 AR: Bruno.
- 7 AJ: And you would ride him, so you had to be pretty young.
- 8 AR: Yes. He was my favorite.
- 9 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 10 AR: So, that was one of my earliest memories.
- 11 AJ: Was he a puppy or a full-grown . . . ?
- 12 AR: No, he was a big dog.
- 13 AJ: Really? OK.
- 14 AR: Yes, he was full grown – my dad's dog.
- 15 AJ: That's awesome. Did you have a pet when you grew up?
- 16 AR: We had Bruno when I was little and then my dad ended up giving Bruno to his cousin that lived
17 in Florida, we were living in Georgia at the time. And then we got another dog named BJ, that
18 was a German Shepherd. We had him for a few years and then my dad got stationed in
19 Germany and my mom didn't want to go to Germany so we went to Indiana for a few years, so
20 we got rid of BJ.
- 21 AJ: Wow. So, you kind of led into my next question, which is where did you grow up?
- 22 AR: Yeah, I was born in Indiana but my dad joined the military when I was little. He got stationed in
23 Georgia so a lot of my childhood . . .
- 24 AJ: Fort Benning?
- 25 AR: Yes, Fort Benning. So, a lot of my childhood memories and all of that is between Fort Benning
26 and Indiana.
- 27 AJ: OK. Did you go to grade school in Georgia?
- 28 AR: I did, I sure did.
- 29 AJ: What was that like?
- 30 AR: I went to kindergarten through 2nd grade there, and then we went back to Indiana and I was in
31 3rd, 4th, and half of 5th grade in Indiana, and then we went back to Georgia when he got back
32 from Germany, so 5th grade and all through high school.

- 1 AJ: In Georgia?
- 2 AR: In Georgia, yes.
- 3 AJ: Wow, so you're a southern boy, a southern kid?
- 4 AR: I am, yes. I love Georgia – it's beautiful there.
- 5 AJ: And you were just mentioning to me that you took a road trip down to Georgia recently.
- 6 AR: Yes.
- 7 AJ: That's a long drive to the Deep South from Minnesota.
- 8 AR: Very long drive. I keep saying I will never do it again but I know I probably will.
- 9 AJ: Always end up jumping in the car again.
- 10 AR: Yes, my fiancé loves road trips.
- 11 AJ: Is that right? So, you have a fiancé?
- 12 AR: I do, I do. Akela.
- 13 AJ: Kaitlyn?
- 14 AR: Akela.
- 15 AJ: Akela.
- 16 AR: Yes.
- 17 AJ: Wonderful. How do you spell that, Akela?
- 18 AR: A-k-e-l-a.
- 19 AJ: OK, sweet. So, you were growing up in Georgia. What was home life like? It was kind of a long-
20 distance relationship it sounds like – your mom and dad.
- 21 AR: Yeah, I don't know. When he got back from Germany and we went to Georgia that last time and
22 he got out of the military and then they separated when I was in middle school.
- 23 AJ: OK.
- 24 AR: He was in and out a lot, but . . . it was cool though. I have a big brother and for the most part it
25 was just me and him a lot, and my mom. And then, when I was 11, she had my little brother, so
26 there's that age gap. So, just us three.
- 27 AJ: So, three guys.
- 28 AR: Yup.
- 29 AJ: Wow. So, growing up, did you have any idea around your gender identity in school?

- 1 AR: I did . . . I did. It was a super frustrating and confusing time for me. My mom is really . . . she's
2 this church going Christian woman.
- 3 AJ: Religious.
- 4 AR: Yes, very religious. And, I remember we were in Fort Wayne, Indiana, that's where my
5 grandparents live. Fort Wayne, Indiana, we were living there, this was when my dad was in
6 Germany, but I saw RuPaul on TV and . . .
- 7 AJ: Yeah? *Drag Race* – or was it before *Drag Race*?
- 8 AR: It was a music video . . . it was like . . . whatever video that was in the early 1990s.
- 9 AJ: "I'm beautiful, I'm beautiful, I'm beautiful - damn it."
- 10 AR: No, it was, "Work it, girl, do your thing . . ." I'm watching this video with my brother and I'm
11 like, "Man, she's pretty." And my mom comes walking by and she's just like . . . she stops for a
12 second and she's like, "That's a dude," and she just kept walking. I was so confused.
- 13 AJ: She took one glance and just proclaimed, right?
- 14 AR: "Oh, that's a dude." And so, I was confused, I was like, "Wait a minute? But that dude is super
15 pretty, that's awesome." So, I don't know – just trying to wrap my head around that at 8 or 9
16 years old and going through puberty and my friends were liking boys. I didn't like boys, but I
17 would look at them because I wanted to look like them.
- 18 AJ: Right.
- 19 AR: So, yeah, around the puberty time was when I started . . .
- 20 AJ: Is that right? Eleven, 12, in that age.
- 21 AR: Yes, 10-11-ish.
- 22 AJ: Did people in your school recognize this or your siblings?
- 23 AR: My big brother knew. He was the first person I came out to as a lesbian and as transgender.
- 24 AJ: Wow. How did he take that?
- 25 AR: He was fine. We're really . . . me and my big brother are kind of opposites. He's very
26 conservative. He's actually a police officer.
- 27 AJ: Is that right?
- 28 AR: Yes.
- 29 AJ: Where?
- 30 AR: He's in Michigan right now.
- 31 AJ: In Michigan – all right.
- 32 AR: He was . . . when I first came out to him . . .

- 1 AJ: Tell him don't shoot nobody.
- 2 AR: Yeah. He doesn't have to, he's a big guy – a big dude. When I came out to him the end of my
3 freshman year, and told him I liked girls, he was like, "Whatever, I don't really care." But he did
4 tell my mom, so he kind of outed me there.
- 5 AJ: He outed you, yeah.
- 6 AR: And then when I . . .
- 7 AJ: How did your mom take that?
- 8 AR: She took it hard – the whole church thing. She prayed for me and . . .
- 9 AJ: She didn't kick you out though.
- 10 AR: Not initially. The first time I got kicked out, I was almost 17. But, yeah. I don't know. It was a
11 tough time. I was kind of a difficult kid.
- 12 AJ: Yeah, you were going through some challenges and trying to make sense of the world around
13 you.
- 14 AR: Yeah, yeah – it was tough. So, yeah – no, the family . . . when I came out as a lesbian, my big
15 brother took it just fine, he was like, "Whatever." Mom took it hard, my dad pretty much
16 doesn't care what I do – he's chill. My little brother . . .
- 17 AJ: Not that he doesn't care about you, right?
- 18 AR: No, he cares about me but he's just like, "Whatever."
- 19 AJ: He's like, "Do your thing."
- 20 AR: Yup. Actually, I didn't . . . he knew that I was dating women, but I didn't talk to him about my
21 transitioning, I just kind of showed up after a few years.
- 22 AJ: Really? Oh, man, that must have freaked him out.
- 23 AR: Well, I opened the door . . . I hadn't seen him in three or four years and I told him I was going to
24 come down and see him for Father's Day. He's in Indiana now, so he was like, "Cool," so he sent
25 me his address and me and my fiancé showed up. He had gray in his beard and everything and
26 I'm like, "Man, you got gray in your beard now." He was like, "You've got a beard now."
- 27 AJ: Right. "Don't talk about my beard, you've got a beard now."
- 28 AR: We laughed about it and he was like, "All right, so what am I supposed to call you now?"
29 "Andre." And he was like, "All right, you're still mine."
- 30 AJ: Nice. How is your relationship with your family now? I know you said you just drove to Georgia
31 to see your mom.
- 32 AR: Yeah, things are good with me and my mom now. It was rough when I was younger. She just
33 stopped calling my girlfriends my friends about 10 years ago. Just when she was getting over
34 the lesbian part, I threw the trans thing in there. But, I think she knew. When I went home to

- 1 talk to her about it, I was like, "Mom, I've got to talk to you." And, the first thing she said was,
2 "What? You want to get a sex change?" I was like, "Yeah, actually." We talked about it and . . . I
3 mean, she still has some struggles and questions, but it's good.
- 4 AJ: Wow. What about other family?
- 5 AR: Her family is tough.
- 6 AJ: They just can't see it, huh?
- 7 AR: They can't get past it. I'm like, "Well, it's not really an option."
- 8 AJ: About you, right.
- 9 AR: Yeah, so I just don't . . .
- 10 AJ: Do they still call you your old name and all of that?
- 11 AR: They still try to and I'll correct them, and then they'll still try to and my big brother will correct
12 them.
- 13 AJ: How does that make you feel? I know some people just get really bent out of shape and worked
14 up about it, some people are just like, "Hmm, whatever."
- 15 AR: I think it used to frustrate me a lot more than it does now. Now I'm just like, "Well, whatever,
16 now you're just choosing to be ignorant and I don't have to be around for that." So, I don't see
17 them as much. I spend time with my dad's side of the family, my granddad. My dad's dad is
18 super cool.
- 19 AJ: Is that right? That's cool. He's in Indiana.
- 20 AR: He is in Chicago.
- 21 AJ: OK. How did you get to Minnesota?
- 22 AR: Funny. When my dad left Georgia, he came here for a job opportunity. So, I used to come back
23 and forth during the summer – see him, visit him, whatever. And then, yeah, I came when I was
24 19 and I was like, "I think I'm probably going to move here." But, yeah, I went back to Georgia,
25 did a couple more years of college and then I just moved here.
- 26 AJ: Is that right? Where did you go to college?
- 27 AR: Columbus State University.
- 28 AJ: Is that right? Columbus?
- 29 AR: Columbus, Georgia.
- 30 AJ: That's a good old military town.
- 31 AR: Yes.

- 1 AJ: I have some southern roots myself. My family is in Tuskegee, Alabama, which is about 30 miles
2 from Columbus, Georgia.
- 3 AR: Good old Alabama.
- 4 AJ: So, I've been to Columbus a couple of times. So, you saw RuPaul and that had an impact on you,
5 but when did you really determine for yourself that I am not the gender that I was born as?
- 6 AR: Oh, man. I had to be 18 or 19, somewhere in there. I was starting my first year of college and it
7 really used to bother me that . . . I was working out a lot, I was gaining muscle mass – whatever.
8 I cut all my hair off. And when people would call me, "Ma'am," it would just . . . do you know
9 what I mean? I was like, "What?"
- 10 AJ: Like what universe are they living in, right?
- 11 AR: Yeah. But, yeah, just little changes I started making to my physical appearance right around 18
12 or 19. I used to wear my hair braided all the time and it was pretty long. I just woke up one day
13 and I was like, "I'm going to cut it all off." So, I did, which made my mother very upset.
- 14 AJ: I would imagine your braids were corn rows, not dookie braids.
- 15 AR: Corn rows. There was this girl on campus, she used to braid my hair like every other weekend.
- 16 AJ: Is that right?
- 17 AR: Yes. So, I don't know – I'd always been masculine, or what I guess people would say, a tomboy.
18 I played sports and . . .
- 19 AJ: What sports?
- 20 AR: I played basketball, I ran track and to get in shape for basketball, I ran cross country.
- 21 AJ: Is that right? So, you took basketball serious then? You were training for it and . . .
- 22 AJ: Yes, I was the smallest one on the team.
- 23 AJ: Did you play on the team?
- 24 AR: Yes, I was the smallest one. I was the point guard – a lot of mess talking.
- 25 AJ: Do you still play?
- 26 AR: Not as much . . . not as much as I would like to. I don't have a whole lot of free time anymore.
- 27 AJ: Right. So, you're in college, kind of masculine presenting, you're dating girls, and I know for a
28 while you had a pretty big presence in the drag community.
- 29 AR: Yes, I did.
- 30 AJ: Talk about that a little bit.
- 31 AR: When I moved here, I didn't really know anybody – I knew a couple of people that I had met in
32 the summers when I would come here or whatever, but we would go to the 90s on Sundays

- 1 because that was the only day I could get in because I was still underage. One of the security
2 guards there, his name was Joshua, he was like, "I have a drag show here on Wednesday nights,
3 you should come and do it." I was like, "No, I don't even know what that means." I had never
4 seen a drag king. So, I came to check them out one Wednesday and I was like, "Oh, that looks
5 interesting, I could probably do that." I tried it out and fell in love with it. I made some pretty
6 cool friends, that's where I met a lot of other trans guys that I know. I met Gabe, who was
7 performing at the time as Puck, and just met a lot of . . . I made a lot of friends, that's how I
8 made friends in Minnesota.
- 9 AJ: Exactly.
- 10 AR: Yeah, I did that for a while.
- 11 AJ: And you ended up, I would say you ended up being one of the superstars of local drag. Did you
12 ever win any competitions or anything like that?
- 13 AR: I won Drag King Minnesota 2010.
- 14 AJ: Is that right?
- 15 AR: Yeah.
- 16 AJ: Would you travel . . . I know a lot of people go around the country and . . .?
- 17 AR: I've done shows all throughout Minnesota, I've done shows in Wisconsin, I've done shows in
18 Chicago. I haven't done anything south – but yeah, Midwest stuff.
- 19 AJ: Is it a pretty lucrative . . . can you make money in drag?
- 20 AR: You can, if you want to do it like that. It was just kind of something fun and social for me to do.
- 21 AJ: Right, it wasn't your full-time occupation or anything like that.
- 22 AR: No, no.
- 23 AJ: It takes a lot of effort though.
- 24 AR: It does, it does.
- 25 AJ: To get the costumes together and the music and . . .
- 26 AR: I think that was kind of the thing that . . . because I did it for years and then I took a break in
27 2008, 2009, and then I got back in it. But yeah, when it started feeling like work, then I didn't
28 want to do it. It wasn't . . .
- 29 AJ: Who was your favorite artist to perform as?
- 30 AR: Oh, goodness, that's tough. I do a lot of R&B and a lot of rap, but I got my stage name, Andre
31 1000, when I was doing Dykes Do Drag at Bryant-Lake Bowl, because I was performing Andre
32 3000 all the time, that was my favorite artist – he's so dope.
- 33 AJ: "I'm sorry, Miss Jackson."

- 1 AR: So good, OutKast is the best – hands down. So, I would do Andre 3000, I would do a lot of Usher,
2 Ne-Yo, and then my southern rappers, Ludacris, T.I.
- 3 AJ: Ahh, you're bringing hip-hop to the stage.
- 4 AR: Yes, you don't see too much of it.
- 5 AJ: No, you really don't. Usually, you know, Barry White and what's the other old cat's name that
6 passed away . . . Teddy Pendergrass.
- 7 AR: Yeah, all the performers of color were older cats, so they would get out there in these suits and
8 I'm looking at them, because I was like 24 or 25, and I'm like, "I'm not going to put on some suit
9 with a long coat." I'm going to do what's relevant to me.
- 10 AJ: Some hat, a big pimp hat or whatever. And, that's a thing. I'm not hating, but that's kind of the
11 caricature or the common way that you . . . when you think of drag kings, but you brought a
12 whole different flavor.
- 13 AR: Yeah.
- 14 AJ: Tims and sagging jeans.
- 15 AR: Yup, a hip-hop look to it. So, I kind of got myself stuck in that though because then when people
16 would cast me for a show, that's what they wanted. I'm just like, "OK."
- 17 AJ: "I can do more than this."
- 18 AR: "I'm not your rapper, I can do other stuff." Then I started to step outside of my box a little bit,
19 which was fine.
- 20 AJ: Yeah. Dre, can I call you Dre?
- 21 AR: Yes.
- 22 AJ: What has been some of the challenges that you have faced since you have really stepped out
23 and began to express your true gender identity?
- 24 AR: Some of the challenges. I'm a Black man now.
- 25 AJ: Yes.
- 26 AR: And a lot of people . . .
- 27 AJ: You pretty much took on the whole weight of the world.
- 28 AR: Yup. I'm a Black man now, so it's . . . life just totally switched up on me. Before I could stop and
29 talk to people – I was this masculine-presenting lesbian and they were like, "OK, I'm cool with
30 that." But then, you get some random Black man coming to talk to you now and they're kind of
31 intimidated. People are scared.
- 32 AJ: You scare people.

- 1 AR: People are scared of Black men. Before I could stop and play with babies or talk to kids. Now,
2 people are like, "Don't talk to my kids, don't touch my kids."
- 3 AJ: Yeah, I get it.
- 4 AR: Yeah, apparently, I'm a lot more scary to the world now.
- 5 AJ: Have you experienced police harassment or discrimination in the workplace?
- 6 AR: You know, for a while, when I was working . . . I worked at The Hyatt for eight and a half years, I
7 started my transition at The Hyatt.
- 8 AJ: The Hyatt Hotels?
- 9 AR: Yes, Hyatt Regency Minneapolis. I walked into HR and I said, "I am going to start transitioning,
10 so I need a different nametag and whatever." And the HR Director, she was super cool about it
11 – she was like, "OK, we've never had that before, so we'll have to figure this out together." And
12 that's what we did.
- 13 AJ: And they worked it out.
- 14 AR: Yes, we worked it out. She helped me with any workplace issues I had as far as co-workers that
15 didn't quite understand and she helped me with my health insurance stuff and everything.
- 16 AJ: Nice.
- 17 AR: I'm blessed because a lot of people don't get that.
- 18 AJ: Absolutely.
- 19 AR: So, yeah, I mean it was easy to transition at work for me. The rest of the world was a little crazy
20 . . .
- 21 AJ: A little more challenging, right. But, if you can have that one space in your life at work. Now
22 you can pay your rent, now you can go to the doctor, so whatever else anybody else is talking
23 about at least you kind of got the main things going for you.
- 24 AR: Yes.
- 25 AJ: So, you worked there for eight years. How long before you came out?
- 26 AR: I started working there in 2008 and I started transitioning in 2010.
- 27 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 28 AR: So, two years.
- 29 AJ: So, the majority of time you worked there was as yourself, as your male self.
- 30 AR: Yes.
- 31 AJ: That's pretty incredible.
- 32 AR: And there was . . .

- 1 AJ: I mean, I'm sure it wasn't . . .
- 2 AR: In hospitality, there's . . . there's a lot of people that have been there forever, but there was also
3 a lot of people – like the manager and stuff, so after a while there were only a handful of people
4 that knew me previous. So, yeah, it just . . . yeah, it was cool.
- 5 AJ: Yeah, I worked in hospitality for a while myself. So, you're right – it's kind of . . . it's a job that
6 people come and go.
- 7 AR: They come and go.
- 8 AJ: But, you were able to thrive in that environment and transition.
- 9 AR: Yeah.
- 10 AJ: That's pretty incredible.
- 11 AR: That was cool. It gave them sort of a foundation because after me there were a couple of other
12 transgender people that worked there so it helped HR be able to navigate that a little easier,
13 which was nice.
- 14 AJ: So, you're just blazing trails.
- 15 AR: Yes, for the Hyatt Regency in Minneapolis, for sure.
- 16 AJ: No, that's what's up . . . that's what's up. So, to the extent that you feel comfortable, and you
17 can tell me to fuck off if you want to, but what medical interventions have you undergone in
18 your gender journey?
- 19 AR: I started hormone replacement therapy in 2010 and then I had top surgery in 2014.
- 20 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 21 AR: And that's about it.
- 22 AJ: And your insurance was able to help with that?
- 23 AR: Yes. The first few months of hormone replacement therapy was a battle with insurance because
24 they didn't want to pay for my hormones, but yeah . . . we finally got them to cover it and my
25 co-pay is like \$10 for my hormones.
- 26 AJ: Yeah. Any thoughts about any future medical stuff?
- 27 AR: I don't know. I have friends that have gone further but, for me, I'm one of those people, I like to
28 take my time. Like I said, it took me four years to even get top surgery just because I like to
29 research and study and see everything, just kind of feel it out. So, right now, I'm OK with where
30 I am. They're not as advanced I would like for them to be with some of the other stuff.
- 31 AJ: Sure. Talk about this a little bit, because a lot of people . . . the world around us, that's the first
32 question that they ask, right?
- 33 AR: So inappropriate.

- 1 AJ: Yeah, deeply. And, surgery is not the end all and be all to what it means to be a trans-identified
2 person.
- 3 AR: Right.
- 4 AJ: So, what's your perspective? How has the social, and you've touched on this a tiny little bit
5 already because you said work was cool but the rest of the world was . . . the social transition,
6 that's what I'm more sort of interested in and how people are dealing with that.
- 7 AR: I feel like with society, you've kind of just got to groom them.
- 8 AJ: Kind of have to do what?
- 9 AR: Groom them.
- 10 AJ: Groom them, yes.
- 11 AR: Yes. I feel like people . . . and I'm OK with educating people because, for some people, I will be
12 the only trans person that they know, that they ever meet.
- 13 AJ: That they know that they've met, right.
- 14 AR: That they know, right. But, socially, it was tough at first because I hung out with, like I said, a lot
15 of drag kings but they all knew me as Andre, but then they would still refer to me with female
16 pronouns. So, when I started transitioning, just trying to get them to, "Hey, no, it's Andre, it's
17 he/him, male pronouns." It was . . . they would be like, "Oh, well - no, you know what I mean."
18 "Well, no, no we're not going to do that."
- 19 AJ: Because, just to be clear, most drag performers are not transgender people, right.
- 20 AR: Right, most of them are not. Right, that's true.
- 21 AJ: There are a few but the majority . . .
- 22 AR: The majority are still female-presenting people outside of drag.
- 23 AJ: Right. Or, male-presenting people outside of feminine drag, right.
- 24 AR: Yes. So, socially, like with my friends or whatever, it took a while to get them to get it. Like,
25 "Hey, it's Andre all of the time." And then I would answer whatever questions they would have
26 to my level of comfort. But, yes, people ask some of the most inappropriate questions and it's
27 like, "In what universe did you think that was OK to ask me that?"
- 28 AJ: Exactly.
- 29 AR: But, yeah, I think, for the most part, if you just keep telling people, "Hey, that's not OK to say
30 that or ask me that." And eventually they'll start to get it, or they could teach other people,
31 "Like, hey, you can't say that," or, "You can't ask that," or, "You shouldn't ask that."
- 32 AJ: Sure. I know, for me personally, it took me a minute – like I knew as Andre 1000, but I could
33 kind of see some signs but there was a point where I wasn't sure – like, are they transitioning or
34 are they just really taking this whole drag thing to the next level.

- 1 AR: Taking it to the next level. I had been performing for probably about six years before I even
2 started transitioning.
- 3 AJ: Right.
- 4 AR: Yeah, so . . .
- 5 AJ: Wow, thank you for sharing about that. It is deeply personal and I think the way people can ask
6 it is a lot of times really super insensitive and inappropriate and all of those things.
- 7 AR: Right.
- 8 AJ: I try to just make sure people know if you don't want to answer this you don't have to, there's
9 no requirements. But, looking back over your decision to really fully truly express your true
10 gender identity, would you do anything different?
- 11 AR: I think I probably would have handled my family a little differently, like with the beginning of my
12 transition.
- 13 AJ: Sure.
- 14 AR: Sometimes I feel like the reason that they are still in a place they are is because I was like, "Well,
15 OK, give them time." But, I . . .
- 16 AJ: You didn't press hard.
- 17 AR: I didn't press. I think that was my own comfort level with them. But, yeah, I probably should
18 have handled them a little more sternly, I guess. I don't know. I guess everybody can't be like
19 my dad where he's just like, "All right."
- 20 AJ: Yeah, it's kind of hard in Black families, though, and I'm speaking from experience.
- 21 AR: It's tough. It's so weird to me. I have a cousin that's . . . I think maybe she's bisexual – she's not
22 gay because she just got married. But anyway, they will treat . . . the way they treat gay or trans
23 members of the family is like we're total outcasts but then you have that creepy uncle or
24 whatever, and they're just like, "Oh, that's just how he is." It's like why is that? Why is that . . .?
25 I don't know. It's tough.
- 26 AJ: There are some different dynamics that happen, I think, in Black families. I don't know how to
27 really explain it, I think Black families – they love you still, but they just don't feel like they've got
28 to respect your . . .
- 29 AR: Yes. Yes, they just feel like they're going to do whatever they want to do.
- 30 AJ: Right, which is deeply problematic.
- 31 AR: Yup, that's not cool.
- 32 AJ: What were some pivotal moments that defined who you are right now? There's the RuPaul
33 moment.

- 1 AR: The RuPaul moment when I was little. And then there was this . . . I was at a bonfire or cookout
2 in the summer thing at one of my friend's house and I have a friend . . . I'll call him a friend, he's
3 one of the first people that ever asked me if I was trans.
- 4 AJ: Really?
- 5 AR: Yeah, and it made me . . . at the time, I wasn't really identifying as trans, I was just kind of
6 whatever. But, we were having this conversation at the cookout and he's trans and we were
7 talking about books or whatever, we were talking about the book *Stone Butch Blues* and . . .
- 8 AJ: Yeah, Leslie Feinberg, a good friend of mine. Rest in peace.
- 9 AR: Yes, yes – rest up. And Marquis was like, "Are you trans?" I just kind of sat there for a minute
10 and I was like, "I don't know, maybe. I might be." And then, I think that's what really got me to
11 thinking about it. Like, "Well, am I trans? Is that what I would call that or how I would identify?"
12 I was 23 or 24 at the time.
- 13 AJ: So, that was a moment, huh?
- 14 AR: That was a moment.
- 15 AJ: Were they one of the first trans people you had ever met?
- 16 AR: I knew Gabe. When I first met Marquis, I didn't know he was trans.
- 17 AJ: Wow, OK.
- 18 AR: I thought my friend, who identified as a lesbian, I was like, "Well, maybe she's just doing
19 something different, she wants to date this guy." All right, whatever.
- 20 AJ: She's dating this straight dude, what's up with her.
- 21 AR: You know, do your thing. Yeah, so when I met him, when she introduced me to him I was like,
22 "Ah, cool, whatever." And then through conversation is when he came out to me as trans and I
23 was like, "Oh, cool, all right." But, having that conversation with him got my wheels turning a
24 little bit and then I started having more conversations about it with him and then with Gabe and
25 Joshua – I think you know him, he got me started doing shows. Those three, just conversations
26 with them and talking with them about their experience like, "Oh, OK, this is something that . . .
27 OK, I can do this."
- 28 AJ: The possibility is real, it can happen.
- 29 AR: Yes. Because back home I didn't know any trans people, at all.
- 30 AJ: Right. In Georgia?
- 31 AR: In Georgia, yeah.
- 32 AJ: Or Indiana, I would imagine. That's one of the things that we were kind of talking about before
33 we turned on the camera, is this trans-masculine invisibility.
- 34 AR: Yes.

- 1 AJ: I'm not trans masculine, so I don't really know, but I have my own theories and ideas, but it just .
2 . . . in many ways it feels like the masculizing effects of the hormones work really well and many
3 trans men sort of pass and blend into culture and society and . . .
- 4 AR: Move under the radar.
- 5 AJ: What's your thoughts about that? I know a lot of people, sort of trans men particularly post-
6 transition, feel, or at least they say they feel like they're invisible and nobody really understands
7 their struggle. How do you feel about that?
- 8 AR: There's truth to that. I mean, I feel like I don't really blend in with the cis gendered male
9 because my experience is different from theirs. A lot of times I find a lot of them highly
10 offensive.
- 11 AJ: Yeah, yeah. Sexist and patriarchal and homophobic.
- 12 AR: Misogynistic and . . . yeah, just the whole deal.
- 13 AJ: Do you have any straight cis homies?
- 14 AR: You know, that's funny, because that's a conversation that I was having with some of my other
15 friends. I wouldn't consider myself close friends with any cis gendered Black men.
- 16 AJ: OK, yeah.
- 17 AR: I mean, they'll be cool with me at first, until they find out that I'm trans, and then they get all
18 weird. So, it's like OK, whatever. And then in the GLBT community, yeah – just kind of invisible.
19 If I go to a club where I'm not in a show, they're kind of looking at me like, "Why is the straight
20 guy here? Who brought the straight guy?" Or, they just think I'm a gay man. But, yeah.
- 21 AJ: Do gay guys hit on you?
- 22 AR: Yes.
- 23 AJ: I'm sure.
- 24 AR: Yes, they do.
- 25 AJ: You're a very handsome man, so I'm absolutely sure that you get propositioned quite a bit.
- 26 AR: Thank you. It's fun, it's cool, it doesn't bother me. But, even with gay men, when they find out
27 that I'm trans, then they get all weird about it.
- 28 AJ: Yeah. No, I think there is a definite struggle and challenge for trans men in trying to navigate in
29 the world. Yeah, I mean, it's probably a struggle that a lot of 6'2" Black trans women would
30 trade for, but it is a struggle.
- 31 AR: For sure.
- 32 AJ: I always say whether some people have a hangnail and that's their biggest issue – like that's an
33 issue for them, right. And, somebody else might have a broken neck and that's their issue, but
34 that doesn't make their problem bigger than this person with the hangnail's problem – to them.

- 1 AR: To them, exactly.
- 2 AJ: So, you've got to respect people's journey no matter where they are. You mentioned something
3 about the LGBT community and being in LGBT spaces, what do you think the relationship is
4 between the L, G, B and then the T? And, have you ever been involved or worked for any LGBT
5 organizations?
- 6 AR: I haven't.
- 7 AJ: Or volunteered, or anything like that?
- 8 AR: I mean, every now and then I'll do some volunteer work. I've volunteered to chaperone the
9 queer youth prom or something like that, but I don't really . . . yeah, I don't really . . .
- 10 AJ: You're just doing your thing.
- 11 AR: I just do my thing.
- 12 AJ: Man, that's all good.
- 13 AR: If I do a show or something like that or something with the ballroom scene, that's kind of my
14 interaction with the GLBT community, but outside of that I don't . . .
- 15 AJ: But, that's pretty significant though. I know a lot of times drag shows – like you guys raise
16 money for different charities and causes and stuff.
- 17 AR: Yes.
- 18 AJ: Yeah, that's pretty significant. What's your thoughts, though, around how gay and lesbian,
19 bisexual and then trans people sort of communicate? Should we all be one community? Should
20 trans people kind of go off and do their own thing?
- 21 AR: Well, ideally you would think that it should all be one community, right? But, I mean, they don't
22 understand . . . I think sexuality is different than gender identity, so I don't really see why it
23 would all be grouped together in GLBT.
- 24 AJ: Right.
- 25 AR: And maybe that's their argument too, I don't know.
- 26 AJ: No, a lot of people make that argument – yes.
- 27 AR: But then you have some transgender people . . .
- 28 AJ: But, to the world . . .
- 29 AR: To the world, they see us all as one group of . . .
- 30 AJ: Yeah, they think that a trans person is just a man in a dress. I mean, that's kind of what people
31 say, so they think you're gay.
- 32 AR: Yes, they do.

- 1 AJ: Or lesbian.
- 2 AR: Some mis-guided lesbian that needed to take it to the next level.
- 3 AJ: Exactly.
- 4 AR: I'm like, "Well, no, not really."
- 5 AJ: So, even if we didn't want to be together, the world sort of lumps us together.
- 6 AR: Oh, yeah, they'll still clump us, but within the community itself, we're kind of the outcast of the
7 GLBT community.
- 8 AJ: Yeah.
- 9 AR: Which is tough – because there are a lot of transgender people that identify as queer or gay or
10 bisexual, pansexual.
- 11 AJ: Everybody has got a sexual identity no matter male, female, trans.
- 12 AR: Exactly.
- 13 AJ: Still . . . or, even if you're not having sex, you're asexual, you have a sexual identity.
- 14 AR: Exactly.
- 15 AJ: And many, many trans people are, like you said, lesbians, gay, bisexual, queer, pansexual, demi
16 sexual.
- 17 AR: Yeah, there's a lot of different . . .
- 18 AJ: The list goes on.
- 19 AR: Forever, that list can . . . there's something new added every day.
- 20 AJ: Right, exactly. Talk to me about love and relationships.
- 21 AR: Love and relationships.
- 22 AJ: You've got a fiancé.
- 23 AR: I do have a fiancé, we've been together for . . . a long time now, five years?
- 24 AJ: Wow.
- 25 AR: We dated for like a year and a half and then we broke up for eight months and then we got back
26 together. So, yeah, it's tough.
- 27 AJ: Yeah.
- 28 AR: It's tough . . . I feel like a lot of my transgender friends feel like they can't be in a successful,
29 healthy relationship.
- 30 AJ: Key phrase – healthy.

- 1 AR: Yes, healthy relationship. But, it is possible. This is the healthiest relationship I've had. When I
2 started my transition, it was tough. The partner I had then, she was trying to wrap her head
3 around my transition and what that meant for her sexuality and family stuff and all of that. It
4 got too complicated. But, yeah, my fiancé now, she loves me for me. Yeah, it's easy, it's not
5 complicated.
- 6 AJ: Yeah.
- 7 AR: When she told her family, she was like, "This is Andre, this is my boyfriend." She told her mom,
8 "He's trans," but yeah, she had to, of course, have that conversation with her mom, "But, you
9 know, in the long run this is what I'm doing."
- 10 AJ: She didn't really have to have that conversation with her mom, but she felt like owed her mom
11 that to be authentic.
- 12 AR: Her and her mom are super close.
- 13 AJ: That's the main reason why I came out, I just don't want to keep lying to myself, to the people I
14 love, to the people I care about. So, I would imagine that would have been some of the thought
15 process too.
- 16 AR: Yeah. I mean, it's like when you look at relationships and wanting to be with this person
17 forever, right, and there's things that come up. "Oh, how was your childhood?" Things like that.
18 I like her mom so I don't want to lie to her mom forever.
- 19 AJ: Yeah, no way.
- 20 AR: "Hey, this is my reality."
- 21 AJ: "This is who I am, yeah." Exactly.
- 22 AR: It's cool, it works out. She's good to me and she's good for me.
- 23 AJ: Wow. And, you get along with her family and they are cool, they're comfortable.
- 24 AR: Yeah. She's not real close with her dad, she's has a couple siblings – but yeah, everybody gets
25 along.
- 26 AJ: That's good. Do you go to Christmas and . . . ?
- 27 AR: Yes, we spend some holidays with her family and some with mine. Yeah, it's cool. My mom
28 loves her.
- 29 AJ: Is that right? Wow.
- 30 AR: Yeah, loves her.
- 31 AJ: Your Christian church, bible banging . . .
- 32 AR: Well, I think she's happy now because . . .
- 33 AJ: And I'm not trying to disparage your mom, I mean my momma goes to church every Sunday too.

- 1 AR: She's good now, she has a daughter again.
- 2 AJ: All right, OK.
- 3 AR: Take her, do all of that – you guys do all of your girly stuff, do what you've got to do, leave me
4 out of it. So, yeah, she loves her.
- 5 AJ: But you were never one for going to the mall and . . .
- 6 AR: Nope, fight it tooth and nail – not at all.
- 7 AJ: Going to Ulta, getting make-up and doing all that stuff, that wasn't really your thing, was it?
- 8 AR: We're not doing no dresses, we're not doing none of that. It was horrible.
- 9 AJ: Oh, goodness. So, now your mom is happy.
- 10 AR: She's happy.
- 11 AJ: Are you guys thinking about children at all?
- 12 AR: Yes, yes.
- 13 AJ: Yeah, so . . . say more, I don't know. Adoption? In vitro?
- 14 AR: Yeah, we're going to have to figure something out. She wants kids, I want kids – yeah. I
15 definitely think the world should have an Andre, Jr. at some point.
- 16 AJ: Yeah, there you go. I'm with it.
- 17 AR: So, yeah, we're going to cross that bridge when we get to it. I'm kind of old school. I told her I
18 want to be married first.
- 19 AJ: Right.
- 20 AR: I'm not going to be nobody's baby daddy.
- 21 AJ: Yeah, I feel you. So, she would carry the baby I would assume.
- 22 AR: Yeah, if . . . yeah. If she couldn't, then I could I guess – I suppose.
- 23 AJ: If you guys really want the kid, yeah.
- 24 AR: Yeah, I'm open to it.
- 25 AJ: Yeah, I had a friend . . . a couple of months ago, they're gay . . . they're both trans but they
26 wanted kids and one of them carried the child.
- 27 AR: Yeah, it's definitely a possibility. She's kind of concerned about it because her parents had a
28 hard time getting pregnant with her. Her mom actually didn't have her until she was like 39.
29 They tried for a long time with her, so she's a little concerned about that aspect of it, if she'll be
30 able to get pregnant or whatever. I'm just like, "Hey, if push comes to shove and I have to do it,
31 I'll do it."

1 AJ: I'll do it.

2 AR: I'll do it, but that would be a little tough trying to explain that to the convention center.

3 AJ: Yeah, you might have to do some tap dancing a little bit.

4 AR: Whatever, but I would do it if I needed to, for sure.

5 AJ: Right. Dre, what do you think the agenda should be for the transgender community moving
6 forward?

7 AR: What do you mean?

8 AJ: You know, we're in this . . . it's so interesting, I've been doing this project for three years and
9 when I first started and Obama was in office, things were so hopeful for the transgender
10 community. It seemed like we were the next civil rights movement and we were making all of
11 these gains and Laverne and Janet was on the cover of magazines, and Caitlyn came out.

12 AR: We made some huge strides then.

13 AJ: Everyone in the world can say the word transgender now, but since November 8, 2016, shit
14 done changed.

15 AR: Yeah.

16 AJ: So, what I'm saying is, what should we be focusing on as a community to try to get us free?

17 AR: Get us free. Just equality. We deserve the same rights as everyone else – like healthcare, if I
18 want to fight for my country I should be able to.

19 AJ: Access to affordable housing, do you think is a . . . ?

20 AR: Yes, yes.

21 AJ: Should be able to get a job somewhere.

22 AR: Yes, job security for sure. It's so hard for me just to see some of my trans sisters not being able
23 to get a job or being forced into sex work because that's the only way they can make money.

24 AJ: The only option – yeah.

25 AR: Bills still have to be paid so you've got to do what you've got to do.

26 AJ: As far as I know, trans people are human and humans have to eat three times a day.

27 AR: Yeah.

28 AJ: Or you don't survive.

29 AR: Yeah, and that's what people don't get. It's like there have been people that I've helped . . . I'll
30 go in my pocket personally and help you go down here and get your name and help you file for
31 the paperwork because they're presenting different from what their ID shows, so they can't . . .

- 1 AJ: Yeah, they can't show up at Wal-Mart and be like, "I want to apply for this job." They break out
2 their I.D. and they're like, "Oh, Thomas . . ."
- 3 AR: Yeah, so we all deserve equal rights when it comes to that. You should just respect the fact that
4 if this is how I present, that's what . . .
- 5 AJ: Right, this is who I am.
- 6 AR: This is who I am, that's what my nametag should say. It shouldn't be this big to-do.
- 7 AJ: That's what my paycheck should say.
- 8 AR: Exactly, this is what my paycheck should say, my nametag should say. It's tough.
- 9 AJ: And, my gender identity has nothing to do with my ability to do my job.
- 10 AR: Exactly.
- 11 AJ: Which is, a lot of times, people are just not being hired because of who they are.
- 12 AR: Yes.
- 13 AJ: Which is something that we have dealt with as Black people for a pretty long time, pretty much
14 since day one.
- 15 AR: Yeah, since day one. I sit in an office five days a week, it's just an office full of cis gendered
16 white men. I'm like if they knew . . . if they had any inkling. I'm already one of the few brothers
17 in the building and I'm like if they knew that I was transgendered, how would this play out.
- 18 AJ: Yeah – so there is no awareness. What about HR and all of those people?
- 19 AR: Yeah, actually the lady that's in Business Services that did all my onboarding paperwork, we
20 used to work together at the Hyatt.
- 21 AJ: Oh, wow – OK.
- 22 AR: Yeah, so I got lucky with that. I'm just blessed – like OK, cool. Whatever.
- 23 AJ: Did she help you get over to the convention center?
- 24 AR: No, she posted on her Facebook page that they were hiring for a position and I was like, "Oh, I
25 should apply for it." But yeah, she didn't have anything to do with the hiring process. But yeah,
26 that's how . . .
- 27 AJ: But, once you got hired, she kind of was walking you through . . .
- 28 AR: Yeah, once I got hired she did all my onboarding, all my paperwork, all that stuff.
- 29 AJ: That's cool, that's awesome. Yeah, it kind of feels like it's a whole new world for trans-identified
30 people right now. Like I said, there was so much hopefulness and so much progress.
- 31 AR: It's scary.

- 1 AJ: And now . . . I've been out for 25 years, or longer – I can't even hardly keep count now, but I've
2 never really been externally as afraid . . . like I used to have this internal fear when I first came
3 out, like I think a lot of trans people do. "What if they clock me?" Or, "What if they . . ." But
4 now, I give zero fucks about that, but it's like now I fear for . . . I literally fear for my safety.
- 5 AR: Yeah.
- 6 AJ: In just everyday situations, which I really didn't feel like that two years ago – a year ago even.
- 7 AR: Yeah, it's a different world right now and it's . . . yeah, it's just a different world.
- 8 AJ: Wow.
- 9 AR: All 5'4", 165 lbs of me is . . . you know, if the cat gets out of the bag then what's going to
10 happen?
- 11 AJ: Yeah, you got this.
- 12 AR: I think I do. I'm OK, I'm pretty confident in it, but like you said, it's just sometimes you just kind
13 of be like, "OK, is this a safe situation for me."
- 14 AJ: Right, for me to be in. Yeah. Well, I deeply appreciate the opportunity to just get to hear a little
15 bit of your story and some of your thoughts.
- 16 AR: I appreciate you having me.
- 17 AJ: Is there anything that you want to make sure that you say that I haven't asked you about? Any
18 advice you want to give to these young Black trans men coming up?
- 19 AR: Oh, gosh – advice to young Black trans men?
- 20 AJ: The butches and the . . . what's the other term they use for . . . good grief. There's a word . . .
21 aggressives.
- 22 AR: Aggressives, butches, studs.
- 23 AJ: Studs.
- 24 AR: Just be yourself, that's it. That's the only advice I have for people. Don't let anybody put you in
25 a box.
- 26 AJ: Yeah.
- 27 AR: Just be yourself, that's it.
- 28 AJ: Which actually, that's one of the things that does kind of fascinate me about sort of Black
29 masculine of center culture. I see a lot of people that . . . they're like married, they've got kids,
30 they've got a shaved head, the kids call them daddy, and they're like, "I'm she, they're not really
31 buying this trans language." Which is fascinating to me and it's like . . . it's kind of what you're
32 saying, they're like, "I'm not going to jump in that box." Do you experience that? I would
33 imagine that's a community that you have some familiarity with.
- 34 AR: I don't . . . I've never been fond of people putting me in any boxes. I literally just do what I want.

- 1 AJ: Right.
- 2 AR: And, I really feel like that's why I probably don't have very many, well any, Black cis gendered
3 male friends. A lot of people, when they meet me, think I'm a gay guy.
- 4 AJ: Right, yeah.
- 5 AR: I hang out with all gay guys or studs or other trans men, and I'm not terribly masculine. I present
6 masculine but then when people start having conversations with me, they're like, "Huh?" I
7 mean if I weren't with my fiancé, who's to say, I might date a trans woman, I might date a gay
8 guy. I'm very vocal about I'm attracted to femininity however that presents itself. So, a lot of
9 people don't know how to take that type of language and so they're just like, "I don't know
10 about this guy."
- 11 AJ: Right.
- 12 AR: But, I've always just been true to myself. I feel like a lot of . . . like culturally, for Black trans men
13 they feel like when they start transitioning they have to be this macho, hard, tough . . . if that's
14 not you, that's not you.
- 15 AJ: Right.
- 16 AR: Don't get caught up in that.
- 17 AJ: And when you fake it, people can tell.
- 18 AR: Yup, yup – because you look like you're faking it. So, they get caught up in that and I don't want
19 to be caught in that bubble and that box, I just want to be me.
- 20 AJ: I just want to be me.
- 21 AR: I just want to be me, that's it.
- 22 AJ: That's a perfect way to end.
- 23 AR: Yeah, yeah.
- 24 AJ: Hey, thank you, Andre, for being willing to sit down with me today.
- 25 AR: Thank you. Not a problem. Thank you for having me.
- 26 AJ: Absolutely.
- 27 AR: I wouldn't have done this with anybody else.
- 28 AJ: Wow, well I'm deeply honored. Peace out.
- 29 AR: Yes.
- 30 AJ: Until we meet again, my friend.
- 31 AR: All right. Thank you.