

Catalina Velasquez  
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins  
Interviewer

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

December 9, 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.

Andrea Jenkins

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1     Andrea Jenkins           -AJ  
2     Catalina Velasquez       -CV  
3  
4     AJ:     So hello.  
5  
6     CV:     Hi.  
7  
8     AJ:     My name is Andrea Jenkins, and I am the oral historian for The Transgender Oral History Project  
9             at the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota. And today is December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016. I'm in  
10            Washington D.C., and I am here today with Catalina Velasquez.  
11  
12    CV:     Mhm.  
13  
14    AJ:     Velasquez. And I know I'm not saying that correctly so, uhm, Catalina, I'm going to ask you to  
15             pronounce your name, uh, spell your name, so that we have, so we make sure we have the  
16             correct spelling. Tell me your gender identity today, how you, how do you define yourself, uhm,  
17             today. And your gender assigned at birth and the pronouns that you use.  
18  
19    CV:     So I'm Catalina Velasquez.  
20  
21    AJ:     Mhm.  
22  
23    CV:     Uhm, C.A.T.A.L.I.N.A. Velasquez. V.E.L.A.S.Q.U.E.Z. as in zebra, Zimbabwe. Uhm, I go by Queen  
24             Goddess Sister, and my gender is transgender woman.  
25  
26    AJ:     Okay.  
27  
28    CV:     Uhm, yeah.  
29  
30    AJ:     Wow, uh, Queen Goddess.  
31  
32    CV:     [Laughs].  
33  
34    AJ:     I love that. Uhm, so if people that don't know you and they want to refer to you as she or they,  
35             which one do you, when do you correct people?  
36  
37    CV:     If I have to go with a basic pronoun...  
38  
39    AJ:     Uhuh.  
40  
41    CV:     ... it will be she/her/hers.  
42  
43    AJ:     Okay. Alrighty, yeah. But you're not basic so you don't have to go with a basic pronoun.  
44  
45    CV:     [Laughs].  
46  
47    AJ:     Uhm, Catalina, where are you from?

1  
2 CV: I, uhm, that's a loaded question.  
3  
4 AJ: Okay. [Laughs].  
5  
6 CV: I'm ethnically Colombian, raised and born in Colombia.  
7  
8 AJ: Okay.  
9  
10 CV: I came to the United States when I was fourteen, uh, through the Miami International Airport.  
11  
12 AJ: Mhm.  
13  
14 CV: I'm part of the forty percent of the 11.2 million undocumented immigrants in this country...  
15  
16 AJ: Mhm.  
17  
18 CV: ... uh, that overstayed their visas, uh, and fell out of status. Uhm, and I'm part of the two  
19 hundred and sixty-seven thousand undocumented trans and queer identified folks living in this  
20 country. Uhm.  
21  
22 AJ: What was that number again? I'm sorry.  
23  
24 CV: Two hundred and sixty-seven thousand...  
25  
26 AJ: Wow.  
27  
28 CV: ... undocumented trans and queer folks living in this country.  
29  
30 AJ: Wow. I had no idea.  
31  
32 CV: Mhm. In a world that criminalizes people based on gender identity and expression, in a world  
33 where it's not safe to be transgender...  
34  
35 AJ: Mhm.  
36  
37 CV: ... in a world where over eighty countries can put you to jail...  
38  
39 AJ: Mhm.  
40  
41 CV: ... uhm, or prosecute you or even sentence you to death based on gender identity, gender  
42 expression, and sexual orientation. Uh, trans and queer immigrants...  
43  
44 AJ: Mhm.  
45  
46 CV: ... are just a reality, that we're just gonna continue to see.  
47

1 AJ: Is Colombia one of those eighty countries that...?  
2  
3 CV: Colombia is definitely a place that, uh, being transgender is very hostile. Uhm, it's not safe.  
4 Uhm, it is not safe to be transgender in the United States either but it is, uh, there are conditions  
5 that exacerbate that vulnerability in Colombia for sure such as an over fifty year civil war...  
6  
7 AJ: Wow.  
8  
9 CV: ... that has been taking place.  
10  
11 AJ: Catalina, what's your earliest memory in life? Like what's the first thing you remember?  
12  
13 CV: What is the first thing that I remember? I remember just, you know, my mother.  
14  
15 AJ: Mhm. Okay.  
16  
17 CV: She is my earliest memory...  
18  
19 AJ: Yeah.  
20  
21 CV: ... as a lovely, strong, uhm, resilient, uhm, feminist. Lineage to look up to, and my mother is the  
22 first image that I recall.  
23  
24 AJ: Okay. Does your mother live here in the United States?  
25  
26 CV: My entire family was deported my first semester of Georgetown University.  
27  
28 AJ: Mmm.  
29  
30 CV: Uhm, after living in this country for a little bit over seven years, and so it's been almost eight  
31 years since I last hugged my mother.  
32  
33 AJ: Oh, boy. That's hard.  
34  
35 CV: Yeah.  
36  
37 AJ: Uhm.  
38  
39 CV: Hard is an understatement.  
40  
41 AJ: I, I very much appreciate that. I, you know, I just don't know the language to use cause, you  
42 know, I don't want to minimize it. I don't want to necessarily overstate it, uhm, as well. Uhm, so  
43 your first memory is your mother. What was your home environment like growing up in  
44 Colombia? What city in Colombia?  
45  
46 CV: I was born in Cali, Colombia. I consider myself Medellín cause that's where, you know, I pretty  
47 much went through a strong formative period.

1  
2 AJ: Uhuh. So Cali. C.A.L.I.?  
3  
4 CV: Yes.  
5  
6 AJ: And then you said you think of yourself as...  
7  
8 CV: Medellín...  
9  
10 AJ: Oh, Medellín.  
11  
12 CV: ... which is the second largest city in Colombia.  
13  
14 AJ: Yes, alrighty. Uh, what was it like growing up there? Like what was home life like?  
15  
16 CV: It depends from what angle are we tackling this question, uh, with regards to whether it was  
17 wonderful. Medellín is eternal spring.  
18  
19 AJ: Uhuh.  
20  
21 CV: So there's nothing wrong with living in spring.  
22  
23 AJ: Okay. No. I would love to live in the spring all year round.  
24  
25 CV: Uh, it's beautiful to be surrounded by the powerful, uhm, energy that Colombian people have.  
26 There is forty-eight million people, uhm, living in Colombia.  
27  
28 AJ: Wow.  
29  
30 CV: Uhm, approximately. And, uhm, I grew up in, in a privileged family.  
31  
32 AJ: Mhm.  
33  
34 CV: Uhm, a political family from my mom's side. A more humble, uhm, family from my dad's side.  
35  
36 AJ: Okay.  
37  
38 CV: I benefit from light skin privilege.  
39  
40 AJ: Mhm.  
41  
42 CV: Both of my parents are hypereducated.  
43  
44 AJ: Oh, wow. Okay.  
45  
46 CV: Uhm, and, uh, yeah, I mean that, that facilitated a lot of things in life.  
47

1 AJ: Mhm.  
2  
3 CV: That came with a lot of resources that also came with a target on our backs by many outback  
4 guerrillas and insurgent groups.  
5  
6 AJ: Mhm.  
7  
8 CV: That, uh, have, uhm, targeted my family in different ways, uh, that led to our migration to the  
9 United States.  
10  
11 AJ: Wow. Do you have, did you have brothers and sisters growing up?  
12  
13 CV: I have a wonderful, beautiful, intelligent sister.  
14  
15 AJ: Okay.  
16  
17 CV: Uhm, who is twenty-six years old.  
18  
19 AJ: Oh, wow. What did you study at Georgetown? You mentioned Georgetown.  
20  
21 CV: I went to the, uh, Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service.  
22  
23 AJ: Mhm.  
24  
25 CV: I got a Bachelor's in Science in Foreign Service and International Law at Nordson Institute.  
26 International Politics is the exact Bachelor's they created, uh, former President Clinton, uh.  
27  
28 AJ: Oh really?  
29  
30 CV: Yeah.  
31  
32 AJ: Oh.  
33  
34 CV: Uh, the same focus and whatnot.  
35  
36 AJ: Mhm.  
37  
38 CV: It's, uh, it's a very rigorous, uh, academic foundation rooted primarily in economic theory and,  
39 uhm, and whatnot and so it's, it's a Bachelor's of Science to how focus of a degree it is, and not  
40 as open ended as a Bachelor's of Arts.  
41  
42 AJ: As a Bachelor's of Arts. Yeah.  
43  
44 CV: And so, uhm, I had the opportunity to get a certificate in Women's and Gender Studies, and,  
45 uhm, specialize in Italian, my second language.  
46  
47 AJ: Oh wow.

1  
2 CV: Uhm, and, yeah, I mean, again, in many ways it was breaking a glass ceiling.  
3  
4 AJ: Mhm.  
5  
6 CV: I was the first undocumented trans woman to go there.  
7  
8 AJ: Sure.  
9  
10 CV: Uhm, and to my knowledge I was the first one to graduate from there.  
11  
12 AJ: [Laughs].  
13  
14 CV: Uhm, I think that I was able to leave a school that now has over twenty undocumented  
15 immigrants, fully funded.  
16  
17 AJ: Wow.  
18  
19 CV: When I went there were times that I went hungry too to class, and, uhm, and so it's, I have seen  
20 progress, and I'm able to leave, uh, a footprint in that space and continue to work with the  
21 university community to champion immigrant rights, to champion queer and trans rights...  
22  
23 AJ: Mhm.  
24  
25 CV: ... uhm, and different elements of the multifaceted identities that I hold.  
26  
27 AJ: Catalina, what was, when was the first time you realized that you were not the gender you were  
28 assigned at birth?  
29  
30 CV: I have, my earliest— going back to some of my earliest memories...  
31  
32 AJ: Mhm.  
33  
34 CV: ... uhm, I always know that I was a woman. I always know that I was a feminist stron— that I had  
35 a strong feminine energy...  
36  
37 AJ: Mhm.  
38  
39 CV: ... and, and that's something that was so natural, so easy to me.  
40  
41 AJ: Mhm.  
42  
43 CV: Uhm, and in contrast, you know, every time that I was, uh, forced, reprimanded, or instructed to  
44 like adopt masculine elements it just made it extremely hard. Uhm, and it just came off as fake,  
45 it came off as, you know, just unnatural.  
46  
47 AJ: Mhm.



1  
2 CV: Uhm, and I am aware that gender is a function of culture, and I am aware that gender is learned.  
3 Uhm, at the same time, I'm also aware that, uh, our sex is a construct and that actual biological  
4 elements of our sex are never taken into account. I'm aware that our hormones are producing  
5 our brains.  
6  
7 AJ: Mhm.  
8  
9 CV: And I'm aware that when doctors determine people's sex, it's not based on science but on  
10 stereotype.  
11  
12 AJ: Mhm.  
13  
14 CV: Uhm, stereotyping genitalia...  
15  
16 AJ: Sure.  
17  
18 CV: ... and assumptions are not based on actual understanding of chromosomes and whatnot.  
19  
20 AJ: Mhm.  
21  
22 CV: And so that led to the myth leading impression on my family that I was of a different gender  
23 than the one that I was.  
24  
25 AJ: Right. Wow. That a fascinating answer.  
26  
27 CV: [Laughs].  
28  
29 AJ: Uhm, so, you had this very early recognition. Did other people recognize...  
30  
31 CV: Yes.  
32  
33 AJ: ... differences in you?  
34  
35 CV: Everyone, well yeah, it made me a target.  
36  
37 AJ: Sure.  
38  
39 CV: I experienced rape...  
40  
41 AJ: Mmm.  
42  
43 CV: ... because of my feminine energy...  
44  
45 AJ: Sure.  
46

1 CV: ... that, uhm, unfortunately made me more vulnerable to toxic masculinity, to prey on the  
2 feminine.  
3  
4 AJ: Mhm.  
5  
6 CV: Uhm, and I was aware that is was my femininity that made my father hypersensitive to making  
7 sure that I was following, uh, a track of what the expectation of manhood is.  
8  
9 AJ: Mhm.  
10  
11 CV: Uhm, it also, you know, I know that it was my gender that led to all sorts of concerns and stress  
12 for my mother. Uhm, but also, uh, a lot of, uhm, confusion from my sister. Like, "Why is she so  
13 feminine?"  
14  
15 AJ: Yeah. [Laughs].  
16  
17 CV: I was even more feminine than, I think I'm the most feminine woman in my family.  
18  
19 AJ: Oh boy. Okay.  
20  
21 CV: And so it's, you know, it's a, it was a source of, uhm, definitely I'm a gender scholar among other  
22 things.  
23  
24 AJ: Mhm.  
25  
26 CV: And one of the biggest things that I like to say is when you study gender you study how to shake  
27 people's world. Uh, and it definitely shook the people around me...  
28  
29 AJ: Mhm.  
30  
31 CV: ... uhm, because, you know, it's, it goes against, uh, conventional, uh, archaic notions of the  
32 static rigidity that, uhm, folks around me, uh, have with regards to gender.  
33  
34 AJ: Wow. Uhm, wow, that's an amazing answer. Uhm, so you, you described yourself as Queen  
35 Goddess. How did you come to that label?  
36  
37 CV: Uhm, through a journey that was rooted in self-love...  
38  
39 AJ: Mhm.  
40  
41 CV: ... self-appreciation, self-discovery.  
42  
43 AJ: Mhm.  
44  
45 CV: Uhm, and just self-acceptance, and I think that, you know, as an academic, uhm, we all have  
46 different intrinsic motives to pursue knowledge. And one of the biggest ones, uhm, in which  
47 people really embark on is self-discovery...

1  
2 AJ: Mhm.  
3  
4 CV: ... and understanding who I am, uh, how I am perceived, how that affects my surroundings, how  
5 that ultimately affects, uhm, the resources I have access to, uhm, and how that really will play in  
6 a deep understanding of me allowed me to be more strategic, uh, navigating the patriarchal  
7 white nationalist nativist xenophobic anti-immigrant imperialist ablest racist U.S.  
8  
9 AJ: Wow. Okay. [Laughs]. Uhm, so talk to me about, and you have described this a little bit, but,  
10 uhm, what have been some of the challenges that you have faced, Catalina, since you have  
11 begun to outwardly express your true gender identity?  
12  
13 CV: Since I started breathing and walking unapologetically my truth...  
14  
15 AJ: Mhm.  
16  
17 CV: ... uhm, and taking control of my narrative and existence and by extension my body.  
18  
19 AJ: Sure.  
20  
21 CV: I'm practicing the feminist principles of self-determination, bodily autonomy, and, uhm, self-  
22 sovereignty.  
23  
24 AJ: Mhm.  
25  
26 CV: Uhm, I, I will lie if I said that, you know, like of course I experience misogyny, of course I  
27 experience patriarchy, of course I experience cisgender normativity and heteronormativity...  
28  
29 AJ: Mhm.  
30  
31 CV: ... and I'm not foreign to those things. Unfortunately, due to my immigrant identity as an  
32 undocumented transgender goddess...  
33  
34 AJ: Mhm.  
35  
36 CV: ... I am aware that, uhm, some elements of who I am, uhm, create, uh, different urgencies. And  
37 so to me those identities are all interlocked, and they all make me more vulnerable due to the  
38 multiple-isms and systems of oppression that I mentioned previously.  
39  
40 AJ: Sure. Mhm.  
41  
42 CV: Uhm, but that's to say that I have, uh, primarily focused on my survival and that, uh, means  
43 going back to the basics, understanding that without a work permit I can't really fight for labor  
44 protections, understanding that without a work permit I can't really change my name, without  
45 citizenship I can't really change my name, understanding that, uh, without access to health  
46 insurance because of my undocumented nature fighting for gender...  
47

1 AJ: Mhm.  
2  
3 CV: ... affirming health care. Uh, it's a step ten in a ten-step process, right?  
4  
5 AJ: Sure.  
6  
7 CV: And step one has forced me to think about my basic needs in a way that U.S. citizens don't  
8 think. Uh, from a cell phone to renting an apartment...  
9  
10 AJ: Mm.  
11  
12 CV: ... you require a social security number.  
13  
14 AJ: Yeah.  
15  
16 CV: You require all of these elements that create and exacerbate already existing systemic barriers  
17 for trans people to access. And so due to the interlocking identities that I hold, uhm, my  
18 immigrant identity has been the way I have navigated my trans identity...  
19  
20 AJ: Mm.  
21  
22 CV: ... if that makes sense.  
23  
24 AJ: Yeah, no, it absolutely does.  
25  
26 CV: [Laughs].  
27  
28 AJ: Uhm, what have been some of the more positive aspects of your, uhm, this journey to, uhm... I, I  
29 can't phrase it as eloquently as, as you did but since you've begun to, uh, express your true  
30 gender?  
31  
32 CV: Uhm, I think that there's the positive elements have been very personal.  
33  
34 AJ: Mhm.  
35  
36 CV: Uhm, in the sense of just confidence looking at myself naked.  
37  
38 AJ: Sure.  
39  
40 CV: Confidence in my sexuality.  
41  
42 AJ: Mhm.  
43  
44 CV: Confidence in dating. Uhm, and, and I think that, so I balance different narratives, different  
45 truths. Uhm, truths that sometimes are competing against one another. Cause let me look at the  
46 camera and be very clear. Transitioning is engaging with poverty at a level that you never  
47 experience.

1  
2 AJ: Hm.  
3  
4 CV: Transitioning is engaging with discrimination at a level that you never experience in a system  
5 that you're just as fine to die, that is meant to kill you and that there is no fixing because it's  
6 innately designed for that. And so it takes a lot of you to take a step and a stance. And those are  
7 ablest language cause not everyone can take a step and a stance.  
8  
9 AJ: Mhm.  
10  
11 CV: But I can, and it takes a lot. And so transitioning has been extremely difficult. And, uh, I will lie if  
12 I told you, you know, if it wasn't because of this is who I am I will, you know.  
13  
14 AJ: Sure.  
15  
16 CV: And I have no alternative. It's a lie if I were to think or say at this moment that it's not. It  
17 definitely comes with a lot of negatives. But those negatives are pale in comparison to my  
18 happiness.  
19  
20 AJ: Mhm.  
21  
22 CV: My inner, uh, confidence and my ability to relate with the world with a desire to wake up every  
23 morning. So, hopefully that gives you insight into things.  
24  
25 AJ: Yeah. No. Thank you.  
26  
27 CV: Was that helpful?  
28  
29 AJ: It was amazing. Actually, it was really beautiful. Beautifully stated. Uhm, and yes, this is, this is  
30 interview that is certainly interested in the theoretical and academic but also the deeply  
31 personal as well so as much as you're willing to share. It's perfectly okay. And there are no right  
32 or wrong answers so.  
33  
34 CV: Absolutely. [Laughs].  
35  
36 AJ: It's your life so this is what we are trying to, uh, document. To the extent that you feel  
37 comfortable, goddess, uhm, what have been some of the medical transitions that you have  
38 undergone or think about undertaking?  
39  
40 CV: Uhm, I think that this is... so two things before I answer that.  
41  
42 AJ: Yeah.  
43  
44 CV: One of them is we are more than the summation of our body parts.  
45  
46 AJ: [Snaps fingers]. Come on sister.  
47

1 CV: Another one is, you know, this fixation on genitals...  
2  
3 AJ: Mhm.  
4  
5 CV: ... and, uh, medical transitions.  
6  
7 AJ: Yeah.  
8  
9 CV: Uhm, which in itself is anti-feminist, uh, because it's objectifying. Uh, and it simplifies us, uh, as  
10 a fetish or, or, or an object of fetish or mysticism. Putting that aside because, clearly, I am in  
11 control of my narrative.  
12  
13 AJ: Mhm.  
14  
15 CV: Uhm, before I even answer that question, uh, because I am speaking to a black trans woman so I  
16 feel comfortable answering that question...  
17  
18 AJ: Thank you so much.  
19  
20 CV: ... uhm, I do want to say that you don't need to medicate yourself and go through any sort of  
21 procedure for you to be who you say you are.  
22  
23 AJ: Mhm.  
24  
25 CV: People have to trust you. Uhm, and that comes with a lot of privileges.  
26  
27 AJ: Mhm.  
28  
29 CV: Uhm, and privilege is what most people wouldn't even think of, right? If you have certain body  
30 conditions, if you are a type one diabetic, if you have, uh, genetic conditions, like that could  
31 prevent you from engaging in hormone therapy.  
32  
33 AJ: Sure. Mhm.  
34  
35 CV: Right, and so like we are not here to define, uh, who people are or create by no means a  
36 template.  
37  
38 AJ: Mhm.  
39  
40 CV: And whoever tells you that this is the way is lying.  
41  
42 AJ: Yes.  
43  
44 CV: I want to be very clear about that.  
45  
46 AJ: Mhm. Absolutely.  
47

1 CV: Uhm, because there is no right way and everyone is unique and every transition is unique.  
2  
3 AJ: Mhm.  
4  
5 CV: Uh, and it is customized to peoples unique particular needs and whatnot. Having said that I've  
6 been on hormone therapy. Breast augmentation is something I'm pursuing. And I have grown, my  
7 breast tissue has grown tremendously.  
8  
9 AJ: Oh wow.  
10  
11 CV: Uhm, and what else can I tell you? I mean from laser, uhm, like hair removal...  
12  
13 AJ: Mhm.  
14  
15 CV: ... to, you know, like all sorts of elements.  
16  
17 AJ: Sure.  
18  
19 CV: Uhm, but then again, you know, the biggest transition has been shifting my mind...  
20  
21 AJ: Yeah.  
22  
23 CV: ... uh, into a liberated woman, a feminist woman. And I think transition are beyond physicality.  
24 Uhm, and so I've always been a woman...  
25  
26 AJ: Mhm.  
27  
28 CV: And I always, you know, have engaged with me in a more, uh, spiritual, intellectual way that has  
29 led to affirm my physicality. Uhm, but it started by my spirituality and intellect.  
30  
31 AJ: Mh. Absolutely. Uhm, yeah, no, I often, uhm, just talk about how the social transition is, to use  
32 that language that, you know, a majority of people can understand, uhm, is the biggest  
33 challenge.  
34  
35 CV: Mhm.  
36  
37 AJ: Right, and whatever, whatever sort of confirmation physically that people choose to overgo is  
38 actually secondary to, uhm...  
39  
40 CV: Their feelings.  
41  
42 AJ: Yeah. Absolutely.  
43  
44 CV: And who they actually are. Yeah. Uh, cause we age. Cause people get mutilated. Cause people  
45 get breast cancer. Cause people lose body parts and gain body parts. And that doesn't define  
46 them.  
47

1 AJ: Absolutely.  
2  
3 CV: And, uhm, that's just key.  
4  
5 AJ: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, if someone loses their hand for whatever reason, that doesn't make them any  
6 less human, right?  
7  
8 CV: Or less of their gender.  
9  
10 AJ: Or less of their gender.  
11  
12 CV: So in the words of, uh, Kim, uh, Audre Lorde...  
13  
14 AJ: Uhuh.  
15  
16 CV: Uh, it's important to use... I understand where you're at using the master's tools to dismantle  
17 the master's house.  
18  
19 AJ: Mhm.  
20  
21 CV: Uh, language, meaning making colonialists, right?  
22  
23 AJ: Mhm.  
24  
25 CV: Uh, imperialists, to our peoples, uh, and the reason many of our ancestors have been killed.  
26 Uhm, but also the only way we get to like convey our humanity and that comes with a lot of  
27 limitations so I see where you're coming from.  
28  
29 AJ: Yeah, yeah. Uhm, has there been a specific moment, a person, an organization that has had a  
30 significant impact related to your gender identity?  
31  
32 CV: Uhm, it takes a village to raise anyone...  
33  
34 AJ: [Laughs]. Yes.  
35  
36 CV: ... and I don't think that that's, uh, that trans people are an exception to that. Uh, my gender is  
37 informed by the strong, powerful, resilient, uh, women that I've always been surrounded...  
38  
39 AJ: Mhm.  
40  
41 CV: ... uh, from my mother and aunts to my sister to my chosen family.  
42  
43 AJ: Okay.  
44  
45 CV: I think that a lot of my girlfriends, actually, in terms of friends...  
46  
47 AJ: Mhm.



1  
2 CV: ... uhm, from college and whatnot have informed my womanhood.  
3  
4 AJ: Sure.  
5  
6 CV: Uhm, in terms of, uh, giving a name, just because this question is about giving a name.  
7  
8 AJ: Yeah, sort of. Yeah, actually, it is. [Laughs].  
9  
10 CV: I know.  
11  
12 AJ: Yes.  
13  
14 CV: And so I'd like to say, you know, Ruby Corado...  
15  
16 AJ: Really?  
17  
18 CV: ... uh, really encouraged me to, to trust me...  
19  
20 AJ: Mhm.  
21  
22 CV: ... to love me. She was the first person that I outwardly expressed my gender to.  
23  
24 AJ: Mhm.  
25  
26 CV: Uhm, and she really had this wonderful, encouraging, supportive, loving idea of facilitating  
27 everything I needed...  
28  
29 AJ: Hm.  
30  
31 CV: ... to look the way I did.  
32  
33 AJ: Wow.  
34  
35 CV: And I was terrified. I was so scared. And for the first time, you know, I put a pair of heels and I  
36 wore a beautiful outfit and I walked the streets and I remember I couldn't even look up. And,  
37 but I was crying and crying of happiness. And this was Ruby Corado, right, an amazing  
38 transgender Salvadorian, uhm, national and international leader that, uh, in many ways has  
39 continued to champion the legacy of Sylvia Rivera and other trans, uh, gender people who come  
40 from Spanish speaking, uh, ethnicities. And so...  
41  
42 AJ: Wow. That, you gave me chills. And, cause you made me think about the first time I, uhm, had  
43 that experience, and, uhm, it was very powerful. Say a little bit more, I mean, because Ruby is  
44 such a powerful leader, uh, can you talk about the work that, I mean, certainly that was a, a  
45 personal connection but Ruby, you know, is the founder of Casa Ruby.  
46  
47 CV: Mhm.

1  
2 AJ: Uhm, can you talk about, a little bit about Casa Ruby or do you feel comfortable?  
3  
4 CV: Sure. Yeah, I mean, Casa Ruby has been a client. Ruby has been a trans mother for me.  
5  
6 AJ: Mhm.  
7  
8 CV: Uh, I can very comfortably speak about Casa Ruby. It's a direct service organization. It  
9 provides— it's the largest employer after the military of trans woman of color in this country.  
10 Uhm, it's very intentional in building capacity among different, uhm, centering those who are  
11 disproportionately affected by structure of violence.  
12  
13 AJ: Mhm.  
14  
15 CV: Uh, so the trans women who are in the invisible within the invisible. Uhm, it works on providing  
16 the basics, right? The basic needs.  
17  
18 AJ: Housing, clothing.  
19  
20 CV: Housing. It has over three shelters. Clothing.  
21  
22 AJ: Mhm.  
23  
24 CV: It has like a goodwill like for those of us that are dressing up for something.  
25  
26 AJ: Sure.  
27  
28 CV: Or who need to affirm our gender.  
29  
30 AJ: Uhuh.  
31  
32 CV: But like it's not safe to go to a store.  
33  
34 AJ: Right.  
35  
36 CV: Uhm, food. You never miss food at Casa Ruby.  
37  
38 AJ: Wow.  
39  
40 CV: Preventive care from hepatitis to, uh, gonorrhea to chlamydia, HIV screening, uhm, to  
41 psychological and mental health services.  
42  
43 AJ: Hm.  
44  
45 CV: And so Casa Ruby is a blueprint of what transformative justice looks like.  
46  
47 AJ: Mm.

1  
2 CV: And what real change and power looks like in a way that defines the non-profit industrial  
3 complex...  
4  
5 AJ: Mhm.  
6  
7 CV: ... because people are not expected to be clients forever. Like many of the big institutions...  
8  
9 AJ: Right.  
10  
11 CV: ... benefit from having the same clients...  
12  
13 AJ: Over and over and over.  
14  
15 CV: ... and just keep them growing. No, we give them time but an expiration for them to get out to  
16 sea...  
17  
18 AJ: [Laughs].  
19  
20 CV: ... uh, with a lot of the things and that has proven to be so helpful. And it focuses a lot on youth  
21 but it's very cross-generational, very multi-ethnic, multi-racial.  
22  
23 AJ: Mhm.  
24  
25 CV: Uhm, yeah, multilingual, uhm, multigender space. And so, uhm, that's what Casa Ruby is, and I  
26 invite you to look at casaruby.org.  
27  
28 AJ: Uhuh.  
29  
30 CV: Uh, and give a donation.  
31  
32 AJ: Yeah, absolutely. Where is it located?  
33  
34 CV: Casa Ruby is located, uh, here in Washington D.C.  
35  
36 AJ: Washington D.C.  
37  
38 CV: Uhm, and, uh, yes.  
39  
40 AJ: [Laughs]. Wow. You speak very fondly of Casa Ruby, which is beautiful. Uhm, delving back into  
41 the personal again.  
42  
43 CV: Mhm.  
44  
45 AJ: Uhm, are you in any relationship?  
46  
47 CV: Yeah.

1  
2 AJ: What's your sort of sexual orientation?  
3  
4 CV: I'm a straight woman.  
5  
6 AJ: Yeah.  
7  
8 CV: And I'm attracted to cisgender men.  
9  
10 AJ: Uhuh.  
11  
12 CV: Uhm, I have a wonderful boyfriend who works on national security.  
13  
14 AJ: Hm.  
15  
16 CV: Uhm, who is part of the Air Force.  
17  
18 AJ: Oh wow.  
19  
20 CV: Who is very accomplished, and I'm a very lucky girl.  
21  
22 AJ: Wow. Yeah, no. Have you— you made me think of, uh, Calpernia Addams. Do you know this  
23 person?  
24  
25 CV: No.  
26  
27 AJ: She dated, uhm, a military man. She's a very beautiful transgender woman. Uhm, unfortunately  
28 in the military her service man, husband was murdered by his colleagues because of... they  
29 perceived him as gay. Uhm, so you, you date, uhm, cisgender heterosexual men. What, talk  
30 about the sort of intense challenges for men who are attracted to transgender women if, if you  
31 think there are any issues.  
32  
33 CV: I think, yeah, there's definitely challenges.  
34  
35 AJ: Mhm.  
36  
37 CV: I do think it's distracting to, you know, to draw the conversation that way. Uhm, what do I mean  
38 by that? I think that there is challenges in any relationship.  
39  
40 AJ: Absolutely.  
41  
42 CV: There are, and so what we tend to do with trans people is, uh, exoticize and, uhm, hyper  
43 emphasis, sensationalize our experiences.  
44  
45 AJ: Mhm. Mhm.  
46  
47 CV: It is challenging to be in a relationship.

1  
2 AJ: Any relationship.  
3  
4 CV: Whether you're trans or not trans.  
5  
6 AJ: Yeah. Absolutely.  
7  
8 CV: Uh, if you've been in a relationship you know what I'm talking about.  
9  
10 AJ: [Laughs].  
11  
12 CV: It's a lot of work.  
13  
14 AJ: Yes.  
15  
16 CV: And it's extremely challenging.  
17  
18 AJ: Mhm.  
19  
20 CV: So there is challenges that people face when they are in relationships. I think that the challenges  
21 that come with being trans are experienced by trans people.  
22  
23 AJ: Mm.  
24  
25 CV: Uhm, and whoever is not trans doesn't experience trans challenges. They experience challenges.  
26  
27 AJ: Mhm.  
28  
29 CV: Uh, as someone in a relationship, of course there's challenges. Uhm, you know, we got to  
30 navigate fragile, toxic masculinity. That's not my boyfriend, but that's the world we live in...  
31  
32 AJ: Sure.  
33  
34 CV: ... uh, where patriarchy is the norm and heteronormativity. Uhm, I think that, you know, when  
35 you love who you are, when you know who you are...  
36  
37 AJ: Mhm.  
38  
39 CV: ... you command a respect and you command, uhm, an attention, uhm, that leaves room for no  
40 questions but like appreciation.  
41  
42 AJ: Hm.  
43  
44 CV: And to know me is to love me. And so I— it doesn't, I haven't necessarily, uhm, I won't  
45 necessarily, I mean, outside of safety, right...  
46  
47 AJ: Mhm.

1  
2 CV: ... how some people are like persecuted for their online dating profiles and whatnot.  
3  
4 AJ: Mhm.  
5  
6 CV: When it comes to dating straight cisgender men, uhm, and, you know, I want to be very clear, it  
7 could be based on my light skinned privilege, it could be based on the fact that I have been able  
8 to affirm my gender and I have, you know, what some might call passing privilege and whatnot  
9 and that requires money and that requires resources and that, you know, like putting that on  
10 the table because that's important.  
11  
12 AJ: Yeah.  
13  
14 CV: I haven't really felt, uhm, that my, that any other body part has, uhm, taken the attention from  
15 the goddess, uh, that she seeks and that she, uh, engages with. Uhm, I think that conflict arises  
16 when like someone from in any other relationship fails to communicate...  
17  
18 AJ: Mhm.  
19  
20 CV: ... fails to be vulnerable, fails to trust, and fails to, you know, love as if they've never been hurt,  
21 right? That brings a baggage that they're not willing to unpack.  
22  
23 AJ: Hm.  
24  
25 CV: And so we're all hurting beings. It's a very hostile world.  
26  
27 AJ: Mhm.  
28  
29 CV: Everyone is affected by cisgender normativity and patriarchy and racism. Some folks are more  
30 affected than others.  
31  
32 AJ: Yeah.  
33  
34 CV: But we are all affected by racism. We're all affected by this, uhm, social monsters, and so by  
35 extension because we're all affected we all have that responsibility to ourselves to unpack and  
36 our willingness to unpack will determine the challenges you face.  
37  
38 AJ: Hm. Wow. Uh, what do you think the relationship is between the LGB and the T?  
39  
40 CV: The same relationship there is between the Asian Pacific Islander community, the black  
41 community, uh, the Arab community, the Latinx community. These are outside of a shared  
42 humanity. These are completely different communities and communities, and there are so many  
43 communities within that community.  
44  
45 AJ: Right.  
46

1 CV: And I think that one of the biggest things that I have seen, uh, as a limitation in, uh, western  
2 academia, uh, but also in the imperialistic U.S. analysis of the world is this, uhm, need to  
3 commodify people's existences for basic understanding in a way that packages us for those who  
4 are unwilling to understand that we are all nuanced people, and these are nuanced  
5 understandings of each other.  
6  
7 AJ: Mhm.  
8  
9 CV: And that is all to say that we're extremely different. I face gender discrimination. I don't face  
10 homophobia.  
11  
12 AJ: Hm.  
13  
14 CV: I mean, I said that we're all affected by the isms, yes.  
15  
16 AJ: Yes.  
17  
18 CV: But I am mostly affected, right...  
19  
20 AJ: Mhm.  
21  
22 CV: ... I'm kind of correcting myself...  
23  
24 AJ: Yeah.  
25  
26 CV: ...so I don't contradict myself.  
27  
28 AJ: Sure.  
29  
30 CV: But like, you know, what I face as a trans woman is gender discrimination. Homophobia affects  
31 me but that's not the direct monster that I fight every day.  
32  
33 AJ: Sure.  
34  
35 CV: Uh, and I think that that's more than just a semantical difference.  
36  
37 AJ: No, absolutely.  
38  
39 CV: I think that that's huge. But beyond that for folks who have diverse sexual orientations, when  
40 you really look at a lesbian agenda, you must look at access to abortion, you must understand  
41 corrective— rape...  
42  
43 AJ: Mhm.  
44  
45 CV: ... you must see the world from different lenses that are not necessarily the lens of the  
46 privileged cisgender gay male.  
47

- 1 AJ: Right.  
2
- 3 CV: And so I think that there's a lot of nuance, and I think diversity and exploring those nuances can  
4 only make us better as a society.  
5
- 6 AJ: Mhm.  
7
- 8 CV: What cannot, what, what will prevent us from getting there is ignoring those nuances, ignoring  
9 those differences. So I caution folks against those acronyms. I'm more than an acronym. I'm  
10 more than a letter.  
11
- 12 AJ: Mhm. Mhm.  
13
- 14 CV: I'm a multifaceted, multidimensional being. And I deserve the respect that those in more  
15 dominant, uh, hegemonic groups receive.  
16
- 17 AJ: Mhm. Absolutely.  
18
- 19 CV: And I don't think that that's given to us when we're simplified to a letter or an acronym.  
20
- 21 AJ: Oh, great answer. You mentioned earlier, uhm, Sylvia Rivera in the context of Ruby and the work  
22 that she's doing. Uhm, but Sylvia Rivera, by many people, myself included, uhm, is widely  
23 considered sort of the, the mother of this politicized, uhm, gay liberation, which is what it was  
24 called at the time that, uhm, she was active in trying to create space for, uhm, sort of non-  
25 conformative identities and so, uhm, very much connected herself to this sort of broader gay  
26 community, uh, if you will. What, what do you think about that in terms of her, uhm, her  
27 significance to the movement.  
28
- 29 CV: I think white supremacy and patriarchy pervasive. I think that they use erasure, uh, as a tool,  
30 uhm, to undermine feminine leadership, to undermine, uhm, feminine contributions to our  
31 society and the betterment of us as a world, as earth. And I think that that's something that  
32 every feminine being has faced when we look at western history.  
33
- 34 AJ: Mhm.  
35
- 36 CV: And I also think that gender defiance does not start with Sylvia Rivera.  
37
- 38 AJ: Mhm, no. Not at all.  
39
- 40 CV: And I think that who gets mentioned has a lot to do with a lot of relative privilege and what not.  
41
- 42 AJ: Mhm.  
43
- 44 CV: But here's the two, another nuance to further complicate this matter.  
45
- 46 AJ: Sure.  
47



- 1 CV: Gender defiance is when a cisgender woman decided to wear pants over a skirt, is when a  
2 woman said I'm not using makeup because you told me. And I'm going to show up with a  
3 ponytail instead of the lushest hair.  
4
- 5 AJ: Right.  
6
- 7 CV: I think that I invite folks to understand that gender defiance is liberation. And it's not liberation  
8 just for trans people.  
9
- 10 AJ: Mhm.  
11
- 12 CV: It's liberation for all of us.  
13
- 14 AJ: Absolutely.  
15
- 16 CV: Cause nobody should be policing the way they are.  
17
- 18 AJ: Mhm.  
19
- 20 CV: And how they sit or what they wear.  
21
- 22 AJ: Yeah.  
23
- 24 CV: And that fight did not start with Sylvia Rivera.  
25
- 26 AJ: Mhm. Absolutely.  
27
- 28 CV: Right. That fight started with a lot of feminine beings both trans and cis who have died for us to  
29 stand up, for me to being in front of this camera to stand with the shoulders of giants. Uhm, I  
30 think Sylvia Rivera is definitely iconic.  
31
- 32 AJ: Mhm.  
33
- 34 CV: I think Sylvia Rivera, uhm, did a wonderful job at bridging what has been very divided...  
35
- 36 AJ: Mhm.  
37
- 38 CV: ... gender justice and queer movement...  
39
- 40 AJ: Mhm.  
41
- 42 CV: ... uhm, I think there's a lot of work to be done. I think that current revolutionary freedom  
43 fighters like myself are doing that work.  
44
- 45 AJ: Mhm.  
46
- 47 CV: And I think that, uhm, like Sylvia Rivera, we have a Ruby Corado.

1  
2 AJ: Mhm.  
3  
4 CV: Right?  
5  
6 AJ: Yeah.  
7  
8 CV: We have, uhm, Arianna Lint.  
9  
10 AJ: Arianna.  
11  
12 CV: We have, uh, Bamby Salcedo.  
13  
14 AJ: Mm.  
15  
16 CV: Jennicet Gutiérrez. Uh, Catalina Velasquez.  
17  
18 AJ: [Laughs].  
19  
20 CV: Like a lot of other folks that, that are in the fight.  
21  
22 AJ: Mhm.  
23  
24 CV: And I think that, uhm, we're all bringing huge contributions. I mean every day, uhm, this is about  
25 everyone's own liberation. Like this is really collectively about like pushing each other, uh, to a  
26 better world where we don't have to apologize for who we are but where everyone's living  
27 standards are increased.  
28  
29 AJ: Absolutely. Yeah, and I just want to just be sure that I mention Marsha P. Johnson who also was  
30 in solidarity and sort of...  
31  
32 CV: Absolutely.  
33  
34 AJ: ... uhm, step by step with, uhm, with Sylvia Rivera as well.  
35  
36 CV: Sylvia Rivera. And many others...  
37  
38 AJ: Oh so many.  
39  
40 CV: ... who didn't make it to that list.  
41  
42 AJ: Right exactly. Yeah. Speaking of many, many others who didn't make it to that list, what is your  
43 thoughts around this, uhm, very recent sort of transgender explosion of transgender visibility,  
44 uhm, that we've been witnessing I would say for the past five years or so, uhm, you know, Janet  
45 Mock had a bestselling book on the New York Times best seller list and, uh, Laverne Cox was  
46 nominated for an Emmy and Caitlyn Jenner has become the most recognizable transgender face  
47 in the world literally. Uhm, is this visibility helpful or harmful in your opinion? And that narrative

1 of the celebrity, uhm, uhm, trans identity. And I want to be clear that I am not disparaging any  
2 of these women, but they are at a different sort of strata and their stories represent a certain,  
3 uhm, certain place in this movement. What are your thoughts?  
4

5 CV: Uh, I have thoughts that add to the list of renowned people Carmen Carrera...

6  
7 AJ: Absolutely.  
8

9 CV: Angelica Ross is another black trans goddess and actress. Uhm, I think that, uhm, there is room  
10 for all of us to shine.  
11

12 AJ: Mhm.  
13

14 CV: I think that there is different angles for all of us to push. I think that an integrated approach to  
15 liberation is key.  
16

17 AJ: Mhm.  
18

19 CV: Uhm, and putting ourselves for other young trans people to see and grow up seeing is important  
20 and part of, you know, a safety strategy.  
21

22 AJ: Mhm.  
23

24 CV: I also think that, uhm— and, and we are no less deserving than any of the other group of people  
25 to see ourselves in different roles.  
26

27 AJ: Absolutely.  
28

29 CV: Uhm, and celebrities do play a role in the way we, uhm, uhm, build our consciousness and  
30 politicize ourselves because people nowadays grow up attached to technology...  
31

32 AJ: Yeah.  
33

34 CV: ... and it's the twenty-first century.  
35

36 AJ: It is.  
37

38 CV: People use internet, people use T.V.  
39

40 AJ: Uhuh.  
41

42 CV: Right? And to pretend that that's not there, uhm, and to not celebrate us occupying space in  
43 that realm, uhm, it's unfair.  
44

45 AJ: Sure.  
46

- 1 CV: Uhm, I, and this is typical U.S., uhm, academia and way of framing things. It's not right or wrong.  
2 It's not good or bad. There's a lot of grey.  
3
- 4 AJ: Mhm.  
5
- 6 CV: There's a lot of positive elements, right?  
7
- 8 AJ: Absolutely.  
9
- 10 CV: It gives many of us a sense of security that like we can start being more us.  
11
- 12 AJ: Mhm.  
13
- 14 CV: That, uh, there are names and understandings for who we are, uh, to, to oppression of all sorts  
15 were never extended to us.  
16
- 17 AJ: Mhm.  
18
- 19 CV: I think that trans people, just like cis gender people, just like any other group of people...  
20
- 21 AJ: Mhm.  
22
- 23 CV: ... uhm, come in all shapes, sizes, professions, and, uh, every movement from the women's  
24 rights to the racial movement for black liberation in this country to the immigrant justice  
25 movement has been built off the backs of trans people.  
26
- 27 AJ: Mm.  
28
- 29 CV: Trans are statisticians. Trans people are athletes. Trans people are in the military. Trans people  
30 are teachers. Uhm, and I think that, you know, those stories are also worth mentioning and  
31 stories are also, you know, there is a journalistic duty...  
32
- 33 AJ: Mhm.  
34
- 35 CV: ... to cover that too and bring that light too.  
36
- 37 AJ: Yeah.  
38
- 39 CV: On the not so positive side of visibility, you know, with visibility we have seen an increase in  
40 hate crimes.  
41
- 42 AJ: Mhm.  
43
- 44 CV: With visibility we have seen an increasing, uhm, cyberbullying. With visibility we have seen, uh,  
45 a more, uh, direct attacks to who we are.  
46
- 47 AJ: Mhm.

1  
2 CV: And they have come at a high cost. We're talking about blood.  
3  
4 AJ: Yeah.  
5  
6 CV: And so I think that visibility is not the problem, right? Correlation versus causation.  
7  
8 AJ: Mhm.  
9  
10 CV: And we need to be, you know, the academic in me is like let's not attach this to that.  
11  
12 AJ: Right. Uhuh.  
13  
14 CV: Right? Visibility is very positive but we also have to deal with the aftermath of visibility, uh, as it  
15 is used to kill.  
16  
17 AJ: Mhm. Mhm.  
18  
19 CV: And, you know, let's also name who is getting killed. It is mostly trans women of color and to be  
20 more specific it's mostly black trans women. And so there—  
21  
22 AJ: Mhm. In this country.  
23  
24 CV: In this country. And so, yes, in this country, the U.S.  
25  
26 AJ: In South America...  
27  
28 CV: In, well, it's hard to say, right?  
29  
30 AJ: Mhm.  
31  
32 CV: We still have more black people than any country in Africa with the exception of Nigeria, with,  
33 you know, uhm, how many, I think it's a hundred and two, uh, over a hundred thousand, uh,  
34 million people.  
35  
36 AJ: Mhm.  
37  
38 CV: And, uhm, in Nigeria. And so I think that like, you know, this is another conversation but  
39 dismantle the myth and the problematic element of using ethnic umbrella terms like Latinx to  
40 make assumptions about people's lives...  
41  
42 AJ: Mhm. Sure.  
43  
44 CV: ... and races and backgrounds is very America.  
45  
46 AJ: Yeah.  
47

- 1 CV: It's very imperialistic, and it's very false.  
2
- 3 AJ: Mhm.  
4
- 5 CV: Uhm, but it also prevents us from doing actual adequate research, uhm, with the nuanced  
6 curated data needed to actually make adequate assessments of different populations and  
7 things. Uh, because a Colombian what we need is very different from what a Bolivian, a  
8 Peruvian, a Mexican, a Salvadorian. Uhm, and our push factors and our migrations are different  
9 and whatnot and so clearly that was triggering.  
10
- 11 AJ: Mhm.  
12
- 13 CV: Uhm, we're fine.  
14
- 15 AJ: Yes.  
16
- 17 CV: I just saying, you know, it's, uhm, yes but to go back to in the United States it's been that.  
18
- 19 AJ: Mhm.  
20
- 21 CV: And it's very unfortunate. And it's very unfortunate but, uhm, at the same time we can't be  
22 silent about it. We need to do something. And, uhm, we need to do something, uh, from the  
23 understanding that this is a resilience, powerful community. This is not about oppression  
24 Olympics. This is not about pity. This is about recognizing how strong we are, how defiant we  
25 are, and what we can do to make sure that the life expectancy of trans people increases because  
26 what is it? Thirty-five years of age?  
27
- 28 AJ: That's what I've heard, yeah. Mhm.  
29
- 30 CV: So that's extremely saddening is that the metric that, uh, self-proclaimed arrogant U.S. claims to  
31 be a developed country...  
32
- 33 AJ: Mhm.  
34
- 35 CV: ... is that a statistic for a developed country?  
36
- 37 AJ: Sure.  
38
- 39 CV: No, it isn't. And so, just like many contradictions in this country, right, which I will be quite frank  
40 as an international foreign service scholar it is not a developed country.  
41
- 42 AJ: [Laughs].  
43
- 44 CV: Uhm, it's important for us to discuss.  
45
- 46 AJ: Yeah.  
47

1 CV: Because, uh, development is more than GDP.  
2  
3 AJ: Mhm.  
4  
5 CV: And I invite folks to go to Mississippi and Alabama and tell me a little be more about  
6 development.  
7  
8 AJ: Sure. Yeah. Uhm, talk to me a little bit about, uhm, Trans United. Why...  
9  
10 CV: Trans United.  
11  
12 AJ: What is Trans United, and why did you become involved?  
13  
14 CV: Trans United Fund is this political trans movement...  
15  
16 AJ: Mhm.  
17  
18 CV: ... aimed at championing trans people, particularly trans people of color, but leveraging  
19 resources for us to become a more recognized, respected, and organized group within U.S.  
20 society that can leverage political, that, that, to leverage, uh, political power but also like, uhm,  
21 like social standing and like capacity building and whatnot. It's a wonderful new, pretty much  
22 organization...  
23  
24 AJ: Mhm.  
25  
26 CV: ... that I have helped fund.  
27  
28 AJ: Yeah.  
29  
30 CV: I'm one of the funders and so are you.  
31  
32 AJ: So am I.  
33  
34 CV: And, and...  
35  
36 AJ: It just began this year, right?  
37  
38 CV: ... other folks. And it's just very magical. A, because it's trans run, trans lead. But B, because it's  
39 trans diverse run and trans diverse lead.  
40  
41 AJ: Uhuh.  
42  
43 CV: I'm putting that, you know, it, it kind of creates a political voice that has never been there. And,  
44 uhm, you know, I can tell you more about me but, uh, I work in different spaces. I own my own  
45 consulting firm, Consult Catalina.  
46  
47 AJ: Mhm. [Laughs]. I love that. Consult Catalina.

1  
2 CV: Yes, consultcatalina.com.  
3  
4 AJ: What, what do you specialize in or...?  
5  
6 CV: I'm a political consultant and media consultant. I also do diversity management work.  
7  
8 AJ: Mhm.  
9  
10 CV: Uhm, and I have different clients and work with different clients. Uhm, and I say this because,  
11 you know, I was part of the LGBTQ policy team for Senator Sanders running for presidential  
12 office and whatnot.  
13  
14 AJ: Oh, okay. Wow.  
15  
16 CV: And, uhm, you know, just to show trans people are really everywhere.  
17  
18 AJ: Mhm.  
19  
20 CV: Uh, but in those spaces, in those political spaces that I have been part of...  
21  
22 AJ: Okay.  
23  
24 CV: ... for a long time, it's clear to me that we need, uh, unified, uh, strong political trans voice...  
25  
26 AJ: Mhm.  
27  
28 CV: ... that it's not just about direct services or 501(c)(3) advocacy.  
29  
30 AJ: Mhm.  
31  
32 CV: But that it actually changes the hearts and minds of the elected officials in an intentional way...  
33  
34 AJ: Mhm.  
35  
36 CV: ... so that every trans person is not just some, is not just in survival mode but allowed to train, to  
37 plan, to act, to thrive.  
38  
39 AJ: Mhm. And you see Trans United as one vehicle to get—  
40  
41 CV: The one organization at the national level that is doing that political work that is needed where  
42 we cannot afford to be absent, not with the life expectancy we have...  
43  
44 AJ: Mhm.  
45  
46 CV: ... not with the mortality rates we have, not with the crazy hate crimes that we have.  
47



1 AJ: Mhm.  
2  
3 CV: And that helps further conversation. That helps stir public opinion. That helps stir so many  
4 things, right? The political is personal, and the personal is political.  
5  
6 AJ: Mhm. Another Audre Lorde quote.  
7  
8 CV: Right, and this is done in a very intersectional manner. All intersectional borrows from Kimberlé  
9 Crenshaw, uh, so yes.  
10  
11 AJ: Yeah, yeah.  
12  
13 CV: Uhm, so yes, we all borrow.  
14  
15 AJ: Absolutely.  
16  
17 CV: I say that because it's important to give intellectual credit to different folks.  
18  
19 AJ: Mhm. Absolutely.  
20  
21 CV: Uh, but at the same time it's important to highlight how wonderful and how truly amazing and  
22 like revolutionary a Trans United Fund is in, in this country, and yeah.  
23  
24 AJ: Mhm. I think it's important to say too that it is a 501(c)(4) and so they can't—  
25  
26 CV: And you have to say (3) too.  
27  
28 AJ: And a (c)(3) as well but we certainly can support political candidates, uhm, through fundraising,  
29 through, uhm...  
30  
31 CV: Endorsements...  
32  
33 AJ: Endorsements.  
34  
35 CV: ... and direct conversation...  
36  
37 AJ: Mhm.  
38  
39 CV: ... which makes it very difficult if you only have a 501(c)(3) license.  
40  
41 AJ: Right, yeah. You can only do a certain amount of advocacy, yeah. Thank you so much for that. I  
42 was going to ask have you ever worked or volunteered for a trans or LGBT organization, and we  
43 just talked about Trans United. Are there others that you, uhm...  
44  
45 CV: I mentioned Casa Ruby.  
46  
47 AJ: Yes. Absolutely.

1  
2 CV: I used to work with, uh, a trans woman of color collective, TWOCC.  
3  
4 AJ: Mhm.  
5  
6 CV: Uhm...  
7  
8 AJ: Which is another influential, uhm...  
9  
10 CV: It's another influential, uh, group...  
11  
12 AJ: Mhm.  
13  
14 CV: I have grown out of it but I think that there is tons of value...  
15  
16 AJ: Absolutely.  
17  
18 CV: ... into it. Uhm, and I think that it, uhm, centers black brilliance and in a world where there's so  
19 much anti-blackness that's important.  
20  
21 AJ: Absolutely.  
22  
23 CV: Uhm, I also, I'm part of the board of, uh, Get Equal. A grassroots, trans and queer organization.  
24  
25 AJ: Mhm, mhm.  
26  
27 CV: Uhm, with other wonderful trans people like Gaby Garcia-Vera or whatnot and I think that, uhm,  
28 yeah, I mean, I, I every day I wake up to thinking how do I make the lives of, uhm, people who  
29 will follow us better, particularly those who are trans and queer, uhm, and on the fringes.  
30 Invisible within invisible. The undocumented trans and queer. The black trans and queer. Uh, the  
31 Arab trans and queer. The Muslim trans and queer. The people who are differently abled trans  
32 and queer.  
33  
34 AJ: Mhm.  
35  
36 CV: I mean, we come in so many different and complex identities, uhm, that it won't do us justice  
37 unless we like name them and work through each...  
38  
39 AJ: Right.  
40  
41 CV: ... and every one of them.  
42  
43 AJ: Mhm. Uh, Catalina, is there any question... Well, before I finish with that question, let me ask  
44 you A, what is the transgender agenda in your mind or what it should be? And, uhm, B, where  
45 do you see this community and this whole notion of a binary gender spectrum, uhm, in fifty  
46 years?  
47

1 CV: Oh, those are like three questions.  
2  
3 AJ: [Laughs].  
4  
5 CV: Uh, where do I start. So it's not a transgender community, it's transgender communities. Uhm,  
6 again, we come in so many different flavors...  
7  
8 AJ: Mhm.  
9  
10 CV: ... and I keep on. I, I cannot emphasis this enough.  
11  
12 AJ: Sure.  
13  
14 CV: Because there's no such thing as a trans experience.  
15  
16 AJ: Mhm.  
17  
18 CV: Your black and trans, it looks, it, you're affirming process is looking very different than like white  
19 and trans.  
20  
21 AJ: Mhm.  
22  
23 CV: If you're latinx and trans, if you're undocumented and trans, and so like there are so many  
24 variables. So we're not a unified community.  
25  
26 AJ: Got it.  
27  
28 CV: A trans agenda, oh that sounds like the far-right conversation.  
29  
30 AJ: [Laughs].  
31  
32 CV: It's a human rights agenda. I think it's a social justice agenda, is rooted in the right for people to  
33 self-express, the right for people to breathe. And I think that that's not unique to trans people,  
34 right? I think that is unique to... that it's something humans have been pushing for.  
35  
36 AJ: Sure.  
37  
38 CV: Uh, it's the twenty-first century. It's a globalized economy, interconnected world.  
39  
40 AJ: Mhm.  
41  
42 CV: Every day there is more people who are outside of this rigid notions, who are challenging rigid  
43 notions, who are challenging, you know, uh, norms that have been forced upon them. Everyday  
44 more people who are identifying as trans.  
45  
46 AJ: Mhm.  
47

1 CV: And that's not by coincidence. Right? That's not something new either. Uhm, we know that  
2 there's been trans people documented in every civilization.  
3  
4 AJ: Absolutely.  
5  
6 CV: Uhm, and so I think that the trans agenda is a human rights agenda. It's a social justice agenda.  
7 There are particularities to being trans. Uhm, but when you really think of them they don't seem  
8 to overall message of fairness and equity and love and dignity for everybody.  
9  
10 AJ: Mhm.  
11  
12 CV: Because every day that I take my hormone...  
13  
14 AJ: Mhm.  
15  
16 CV: ... my estrogen, that's not different from the contraception that a cis woman takes to have  
17 agency over her body.  
18  
19 AJ: Mhm. Absolutely.  
20  
21 CV: And so I think that there is more in common than we think.  
22  
23 AJ: Mhm.  
24  
25 CV: And I message it as such cause we need to be building bridges.  
26  
27 AJ: Yeah.  
28  
29 CV: And we cannot continue... I'm not an exotic bird.  
30  
31 AJ: Mhm.  
32  
33 CV: It's not just a few of us. It's really all of us.  
34  
35 AJ: Right.  
36  
37 CV: And, uh...  
38  
39 AJ: Everybody has a gender.  
40  
41 CV: Everyone has a gender but, you know, when it comes to what we need, the particularities that I  
42 mentioned, they're not a, they're, you know, a Hobby Lobby threatens transgender people as  
43 much as it threatens cis gender people.  
44  
45 AJ: Yeah.  
46

1 CV: Because ultimately what we're all fighting for is for bodily autonomy, self-determination, agency  
2 over who you are, our right to self-express, our right to live.  
3  
4 AJ: Mm.  
5  
6 CV: And that's a human agenda.  
7  
8 AJ: Absolutely. Is there anything that I didn't have the foresight or the, uhm, I don't know,  
9 intelligence to ask you that you think is important to say?  
10  
11 CV: No, I think you're extremely intelligent. I think that you're extremely amazing.  
12  
13 AJ: Awe.  
14  
15 CV: And I want you to, it's a tactic of white supremacy for us to self-doubt like that. Uh, you're  
16 wonderful. Uh, I think we were very through in this interview, and I think that, you know, I don't  
17 even want to hear anything else from me...  
18  
19 AJ: [Laughs].  
20  
21 CV: ... but I think I was...  
22  
23 AJ: You were, you were extremely succinct, you were extremely on point, but, you know, I just want  
24 to make sure that there aren't some thoughts that are floating around in your head that you  
25 want to make sure it's said and, uhm...  
26  
27 CV: I think that right now it's just, you know, let's remember we are nuanced people living nuanced  
28 lives.  
29  
30 AJ: Mhm.  
31  
32 CV: Uh, let's challenge everything we know. And it's not just about our understandings of the trans  
33 community. It's also about our understandings of terms like Latinx, of terms like African  
34 American...  
35  
36 AJ: Mhm.  
37  
38 CV: ... of terms like Native American. They don't do us justice. They're not helpful. They erase a lot of  
39 aspects of our community.  
40  
41 AJ: Hm.  
42  
43 CV: They take away from the four-hundred thousand undocumented Latin immigrants. They take  
44 away from the fact that not every black person speaks English...  
45  
46 AJ: Mhm.  
47

1 CV: People speak Swahili, Bantu, Arabic, Berber, Creole, French, Spanish. That this is the United  
2 States, and we are not a melting pot. We are not looking to be uniform. We're a tossed salad.  
3  
4 AJ: [Laughs].  
5  
6 CV: And that tossed salad needs to be seen for what it is.  
7  
8 AJ: Mhm.  
9  
10 CV: We need to celebrate the croutons and the lettuce and the spinach and so one and so forth. I  
11 think that we don't do each other justice when we don't see each other.  
12  
13 AJ: Hm.  
14  
15 CV: And using broad terms and broad strokes to commodify people's identities is killing us.  
16  
17 AJ: Hm.  
18  
19 CV: And it's very harmful and detrimental to humankind. And as an oral history project, I expect  
20 nothing but nuance to challenge the very, uh, western, uhm, limiting views that are taught in  
21 our current universities and colleges and what is considered beacons of knowledge.  
22  
23 AJ: Mhm.  
24  
25 CV: Let's not forget that schooling and education are completely different things.  
26  
27 AJ: Hm.  
28  
29 CV: And, uh, schooling does not guarantee an education. Education is pursuing knowledge outside  
30 of schooling. Education is self-discovery. Education is decolonizing your mind, questioning, and  
31 unlearning, and seeking the, the facts. Schooling is what you're used to. And not all of us, very  
32 few of us engaging that journey. So wake up.  
33  
34 AJ: Wow. You have certainly educated me this evening, Catalina. Uhm, your brilliance is, uhm,  
35 amazing and your light shines really bright, and I just want to thank you.  
36  
37 CV: Thank you goddess for having me here, and, uh, allowing me to share, uhm, my brilliance with  
38 everybody.  
39  
40 AJ: Wonderful. Thank you so much.