

Andrea Jenkins  
Narrator

Dominique Tobbell  
Interviewer

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

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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 Dominique Tobbell -DT

2 Andrea Jenkins -AJ

3

4

5 DT: Hi, my name is Dominique Tobbell. I'm a historian at the University of Minnesota. Uh, it's a great  
6 pleasure to meet with you today. Uhm, could you introduce yourself? Uhm, your, uhm, state  
7 your name, your preferred gender pronouns, and your gender identity and the gender you were  
8 assigned with at birth.

9

10 AJ: Okay, so, uhm, my name is Andrea Jenkins, and I am the oral historian for the Transgender Oral  
11 History Project at the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota Libraries. And, uhm,  
12 wow, today is July twenty...

13

14 DT: Fifth.

15

16 AJ: ...fifth...

17

18 DT: Yeah.

19

20 AJ: ... uh, 2017. And we're here on campus at the University of Minnesota. Uhm, my gender  
21 pronouns are, uhm, she, her, and hers. I identify as a transgender woman. And I just want to say  
22 something about the term preferred pronouns cause, you know, uhm, it, it, when that term is  
23 used, you know, preferred, it seems like there is a preference. I mean, and really in, in my own  
24 world it's who I am. It's not like, "Oh, I prefer to be a woman." Rather it's like, "This is the, uhm,  
25 this is who I was born to be." Uhm, so, yeah. And hopefully you don't hear that as any kind of  
26 chastisement or anything. It's just I want to make sure that we can start to dispel that, uhm, idea  
27 that, that it's a preference. It, it is my pronouns. So yeah.

28

29 DT: I appreciate that clarification.

30

31 AJ: Yeah.

32

33 DT: It's really important.

34

35 AJ: Yeah.

36

37 DT: Cool. Uhm, so when did you first learn about the plans for the Oral, the Transgender Oral  
38 History Project?

39

40 AJ: Mhm. I first learned about the project in, in 2014. I was an employee at the city of Minneapolis.  
41 Uhm, and I was involved in a project called the Trans Equity Summit which is a gathering, an  
42 annual gathering for transgender and gender non-conforming folks in the city of Minneapolis,  
43 uh, that sponsored, cosponsored by the city of Minneapolis to help, uhm, trans identified folks  
44 understand some of the opportunities and options that are available through the city of  
45 Minneapolis as well as an opportunity to think about how can the city of Minneapolis be more  
46 proactive in creating better outcomes for transgender, uh, and gender non-conforming folks.  
47 Uhm, and so we held our first summit on campus here at the University of Minnesota. And,

1        uhm, it was at the Humphry, uh, School for Public Policy. And the Tretter Collection was there to  
2        recruit for the project. And, uhm, so Lisa Vecoli, who directs the, uhm, Tretter Collection, asked  
3        me if I would be willing to help spread the word. Uhm, and I thought to myself, no. [Laughs]. I  
4        will not do that. In fact, I may apply for this myself. Uhm, and, and that's what I did. So that's  
5        kind of how I learned about it. Uh, and it, when I first heard about it, I'm like this has never  
6        happened. Like a major academic institution, research institution at that, uhm, has a full-time  
7        position to go and talk to transgender people. And, uhm, and identify and document their  
8        stories and preserve them in a state of the art archive, the whole space here at the University of  
9        Minnesota. And, yeah, I just thought what an incredible opportunity.

10  
11    DT:    What lead you, uhm, what was your reason for wanting to, uhm, apply for the position to be the  
12    Transgender Oral Historian?

13  
14    AJ:    Mhm, uhm, so I think there were a number of reasons why I really wanted to be involved in this  
15    project. Uhm, you know, first of all it's historic and, you know, to be one of the few people in the  
16    world that's doing this kind of work was really appealing to me. Uhm, I really wanted to make  
17    sure that there was a broad range of voices included in the project so, you know, I wanted to  
18    insure that there were black trans women and black trans men and Latina and Latino  
19    undocumented, uh, trans people. Uhm, disabled people. Uhm, hearing impaired folks. Uh, white  
20    transmasculine identities, and, uhm, there was, there was age diversity in our project. And so,  
21    uhm, uhm, that was, uh, that was a really key factor for me wanting to be involved. And then,  
22    you know, I, I sort of think about it in terms of like when you go on a long road trip, and you  
23    wanna, you know, you feel most comfortable when you're doing the driving. Uhm, and so, uhm,  
24    I wanted to be the driver. Like I wanted to, uhm, insure that that happened, and I just felt like I  
25    couldn't leave that to chance.

26  
27    DT:    Do you, uhm, were there other, uhm, other people that you knew who also kind of had that  
28    same kind of view that they wanted to maybe be in the driving seat, that it was important.

29  
30    AJ:    Sure. I think, I think, I know that there was a very strong, uhm, thought that it had to be a trans  
31    identified person to take on the project. Like the buzz was like, it could not be a cisgender  
32    [laughs] person no matter how well intentioned they were. Uhm, so I know that there was that.  
33    Uhm, I certainly know that a number of people applied for the position. Uhm, you know, but,  
34    and I've heard that even the people who had applied were sort of rooting for me. [Laughs]. I  
35    mean, they, they have said that, uhm, since then. Uhm, so, uhm, that felt good. And I'm not sure  
36    if... I'm absolutely positive that people had the idea that they wanted to do the best job  
37    possible. Uhm, you know, I honestly, I'm not sure if some of the people that I know to have  
38    applied had the same reach and deep, deep connections into, uh, the community as I had had,  
39    as I have and have been able to bring to the project. Not only in the Upper Midwest but  
40    throughout the entire country. And, uhm, you know, I'm really proud of the work that we've  
41    been able to do so far. And, uhm, I'm not quite sure if, given the pool of people that I saw,  
42    would have been able to pull it off to that extent.

43  
44    DT:    Why do you, why is community ownership of the project, why is that so important? The fact that  
45    there was this, you know, strong feeling that it needed to be someone who identified as trans to  
46    be the oral historian. What's that about?

1 AJ: You know, uhm, I think there's been a long history of transgender invisibility, right? Uhm, I  
2 mean, I, I know for a fact that transgender, gender non-conforming, gender, uhm, consciousness  
3 has been around since the beginning of humanity on the planet. However, uhm, it's been only  
4 very recently that, uhm, transgender identity has become much more of a, uhm, visible part of  
5 the American landscape. Uhm, and so, and even up until this point there has been a history of,  
6 uhm, depending on other people to speak for the community. That has not always benefited the  
7 trans community, uhm, politically and/or socially. And so, uhm, people were really skeptical  
8 about that being a reality that, uhm, a non-trans person would be, you know, responsible for  
9 making sure that our stories are heard. Uhm, and I think that, uhm, just in terms of getting  
10 people engaged in the project, uhm, that, you know, given the sense of empowerment that the  
11 transgender community has, has gained up until this point. Uhm, people would have been very  
12 reluctant to talk to a non-transgender person about their personal lives, and it, I can tell you  
13 that had that occurred it would have been a really huge uproar. I mean, I think there's some,  
14 you know, for as much work that the University of Minnesota, particularly through the Program  
15 in Human Sexuality has done to, uhm, you know, in their minds, improved the lives of  
16 transgender people. Uhm, there was a very significant backlash about the university, uhm,  
17 specifically about the PHS program but even more broadly about some of the research practices  
18 at the University of Minnesota. And, uhm, I think that having a authentic voice that is from the  
19 community, uhm, was absolutely critical to the success of this project.

20  
21 DT: Do you, was there, uh, did you encounter, uhm, still some concern because the project was  
22 associated with the University or just the fact that you were the oral historian that you are like a  
23 leading member of the trans community that that kind of, uhm, obviated that concern that it  
24 would be a university project?

25  
26 AJ: I think it did, uhm, to a certain extent, to a large extent. Uhm, you know, I've, I've had very few  
27 people express concern about being involved in the project because it was the University of  
28 Minnesota. On the same note though I've had many people that I've interviewed express their  
29 concerns about the university within the context of the interview, but, uhm, for the most part  
30 there has been... because I think the right steps were taken. You know a community member  
31 was hired to do the project. Uhm, you know, you know that I've been a part of this community  
32 for a long time, and so, uhm, I've been able to build up a certain level of, uh, respect in the  
33 community. And, uhm, I think that led to the credibility of the project, and we have been very,  
34 very clear that it is not, that this particular part of the project is not a research-based project. So  
35 we did not seek IRB, uhm, for this project, uhm, intentionally so that, you know, we could be,  
36 that, we could be more free to, uh, I think discuss issues that, uhm, that impact people, both  
37 positively and negatively. And we were also clear that there may be researchers who want to do  
38 research, uhm, and then let, but they would need to get permission from the participants or the  
39 narrators if you will, uhm, to be able to do that kind of work. So, I think people felt comfortable  
40 with that and were able to sort of get beyond some of the community concerns around the  
41 Program in Human Sexuality. I do want to say that I think that the perception, uhm, of the  
42 Program in Human Sexuality has, uhm, improved, uhm, pretty significantly over time. Uhm, and I  
43 know that they have been on the forefront of a lot of positive change. Uhm, including, uhm, sort  
44 of helping to restate some of the, what were once called the Harry Benjamin Standards of Care,  
45 which sort of, you know, every medical condition has a documented standards of care. And so,  
46 uhm, Harry Benjamin Standards of Care, was like what is protocol to treat, you know, gender  
47 dysphoria as it is known. Uhm, and some of that people felt was really archaic and restrictive

1 and, uhm, you had to live in the opposite gender for two years before you could be, uhm, uhm,  
2 prescribed hormones and, and sort of do medical transition you had to go through therapy for  
3 two years and, you know, which is costly and a lot of people feel like, "Hey, I know what the  
4 challenges are. Why do I have to go through this sort of, you know, uhm, you know, obstacle  
5 course, if you will, to, to get to the outcomes that I wanted." And so the, the PHS, uhm, Program  
6 in Human Sexuality, like I said has been in, in the forefront of helping to lead some of that  
7 change. And so now the standards of care are, uhm, I think they've done away with the quote  
8 "real life" test and, uhm, use not a specifically informed consent model but only require like a  
9 year of, uhm, therapy. And, I think informed consent is an option for folks. Uhm, if you want to  
10 pursue informed consent, you can, they will give you a referral for another clinic to be able to  
11 access some of that. Uhm, so, again, their, their perception has improved, uhm, over time. Yeah.

12  
13 DT: I mean, it brings up a question about, it's, it's, uhm, I mean, really, having, uhm, your own, uhm,  
14 sense of gender, your own gender identity being medicalized and that, it's being perceived as a  
15 medical issue...

16  
17 AJ: Mhm.

18  
19 DT: ... do you fill that that in itself has kind of been problematic?

20  
21 AJ: Yes. I, I do to some extent. I know that there are many, many people who feel like it is absolutely  
22 abhorrent. [Laughs]. Uhm, you know, my own personal thoughts are, and for my own personal  
23 life, you know, I, I did want to be sure that there wasn't some underlying personality disorder or,  
24 uhm, identity disorder, you know, multiple personalities and, uhm, depression, like, you know, I,  
25 I really wanted to just be sure that I was thinking healthy thoughts and, uhm, and, and I needed  
26 support and sort of coping with, uhm, the internal struggle that I was going through but  
27 recognizing that if and when I overcame my internal struggle and was able to live fully out. Like  
28 then the struggle becomes external because not everybody, and we're talking about the  
29 majority of, not everybody [laughs] understands and/or appreciates, uhm, transgender people  
30 when, so transgender, you know, when you come out as transgender, you could potentially face  
31 many, many, many challenges. Employment. Uhm, your family. You know, your immediate  
32 family. I mean, many people come out, get divorced, their, their, uhm, parents disown them.  
33 Their siblings don't speak to them. Their children don't speak to them. Uhm, you know, you can  
34 get harassed on the street. Uh, police harass transgender people, particularly, uhm, women of  
35 color, as automatically being prostitutes. Uhm, you're, you're now, depending on which gender  
36 you transition into, you know, you're subject to sexism [laughs] or how to deal, how to, you  
37 know, as, as a transgender male, how to overcome sexism within that context. Uhm, so it's a  
38 very challenging, uhm, life change. And I wanted to be sure that I was, you know, mentally  
39 strong enough to deal with that, uhm, as well as just the physical changes that your body  
40 undergoes. I, I really felt like being in the hands of [laughs], you know, somebody with my best  
41 interests but also aware of the challenges, the potential challenges, uhm, the real challenges  
42 that people are gonna face, uhm, was on my team to kind of help me do that process. Uhm, and,  
43 and even taking hormones is a really major step in gender transition, and I wanted to be sure  
44 that I was under medical care to monitor how my body was responding and, you know, make  
45 sure that, uhm, there aren't gonna be complications. Or at least if there were complications like  
46 having access to being able to deal with those, uhm, effectively. So for me it, it made a lot of  
47 sense. Uhm, I know for a lot of other people, uhm, they sort of rail instead. I kind of think it's a

1 generational thing in, in doing some of the interviews that I've been able to do. Uhm, there's a,  
2 there's a fairly clear demarcation [laughs] of people who appreciate that kind of support and  
3 people who very much issue that. And I think, yeah.  
4

5 DT: So in terms of it being generational, it is the younger or the older, how does that...

6  
7 AJ: [Laughs].  
8

9 DT: ... which way is the generation going?  
10

11 AJ: Sure, yeah. I kind of left that question for you. Uhm, yeah, the younger folks are very much  
12 independently thinking and like I know who I am, I know what I want. Uhm, I don't need to go  
13 through all of this extra, perceived extra, and, you know, I'm, I'm sort of generalizing a little bit  
14 cause I talk to some younger people who really do appreciate that model. Uhm, but, yeah. The  
15 younger folks tend to be much more inclined to, uhm, pursue an informed consent model,  
16 which is, just to define informed consent. It's, uhm, you know, kind of a document that says, you  
17 know, I understand the risks. I understand the potential, uhm, challenges and/or side effects,  
18 and I am comfortable with that, and don't need to pursue this standard of care model. Uhm,  
19 and it's sort of, it gives the, the individual, you know, more autonomy and, and it also sort of  
20 releases the institution from any responsibilities. Yeah.  
21

22 DT: I mean I know that this is a, I mean, we are getting into some different area than just focusing on  
23 the project specifically but I am, uhm, really interested in kind of what you think and this could  
24 be based on the interviews that you've done accounts for that generational shift in attitude  
25 towards standards of care verses informed consent.  
26

27 AJ: Yeah. Yeah, much more, way more awareness, uhm, more acceptance. I mean, it's, we're  
28 certainly nowhere near, uhm, full acceptance of the transgender identity, uhm, as a legitimate  
29 way of being human in the world. Uhm, but, but there is much more than there was thirty years  
30 ago. Uhm, and the empowerment that, uhm, young people have had, I mean, when I, when I  
31 came out there were very few role models of transgender identified people that were living  
32 productive lives and had families and love and, I mean, you know, the role models that I saw  
33 were sort of destitute and sex workers and, uhm, you know, and not to say that there's any  
34 shame in that struggle but it seemed like a really, very challenging struggle, uhm, for, for most  
35 people. I think more recently we've seen many, many people who are transgender identified  
36 who are, you know, on the cover of a magazines and [laughs], you know, have Emmy  
37 nominations and, uhm, Caitlyn Jenner was once, uh, an Olympic Gold Medalist. You know, uh,  
38 and is now a millionaire. Like there have been some very positive role models. Uhm, very visible  
39 role models. And I think that in some parts has accounted for, uh, people being more, uhm,  
40 more willing to say, "I know about my life." And I also think that the advent of the internet, uhm,  
41 which has allowed people to build community online, to ask questions, to get information, uhm,  
42 and so you no longer need, you know, uhm, well educated white man [laughs] basically, I mean,  
43 that's kind of who is in these institutions, to tell you, uhm, you know, what it means to be  
44 transgender like you can, like there are people who are transgender who you can ask, uhm, and  
45 talk about their own processes and so the information is more accessible. Uhm, there's more  
46 visibility. Uhm, and I think as a society even just more broadly as a society people have become  
47 more, uhm, wanting instant results. And [laughs], uhm, you know, that has just become our

1 mindset. I mean we all walk around with a computer in our hand, and we can download  
2 information that sometimes would have taken three years to gain in three seconds. So, yeah, all  
3 of that has sort of played into what leads this. I think younger more millennial, uhm, generation  
4 to really say, you know, I know what's good for my body. I know what's best for my body. And  
5 when I need some more information I'll check in with you but right now I got this. [Laughs].

6  
7 DT: What, and it's, I mean, this project is, uh, potentially this great resource for young people, older  
8 people who are , uhm, struggling or looking for information.

9  
10 AJ: Mhm.

11  
12 DT: There are so many, uhm, voices, who are, you know, people who are recounting their, their  
13 situation.

14  
15 AJ: Sure.

16  
17 DT: Do you think this project is gonna be a valuable resource?

18  
19 AJ: Absolutely. I, the range of, uhm, journeys that are, uhm, expressed in this project are just  
20 fascinating. Uhm, you know, I think the oldest participant is 91 years old. Uhm, the youngest is  
21 18. Uhm, like I interviewed a person a week after they graduated from high school. Uhm, uh, a  
22 Somali transgender male [laughs] one week out of high school, and, and he's fascinating. Uhm,  
23 so, yeah, there's a, there's a deaf individual. There's, uhm, African American disabled man who,  
24 uh, has adopted nine children and is married. Uhm, there's a woman who is 84 years old who  
25 was the oldest participant for a while, uh, named Big Mama who was like one of the first out  
26 trans people, uhm, in the Twin Cities, in, in Minneapolis, St. Paul and served as sort of the  
27 ambassador for trans people. Uhm, she worked at a local night club called the Gay 90s for  
28 twenty plus years as the coat check lady. And so she, Coat Check Girl as she actually called  
29 herself. So, and, uhm, so came across the whole range of the LGBT community, and, and was  
30 like this pioneer if you will. And she actually had surgery here at the University of Minnesota at  
31 the Program in Human Sexuality. When they were doing, uhm, they were the second university  
32 in the nation to do transgender, uhm, confirmation surgery as it is called now. Back then it was  
33 called SRS or Sexual Reassignment Surgery. Uhm, but, uhm, yeah, there are undocumented  
34 immigrants, uhm, there are national policy directors. Uhm, candidates for office. Yet, I, this will  
35 absolutely be a resource for almost any person at any stage in life, uhm, in any sort of station in  
36 life. Uhm, I've interviewed a billionaire who is transgender identified. Uhm, and I interviewed  
37 some homeless folks. Uhm, you know, people living with HIV and AIDs. Uhm, people who have  
38 been divorced from their former spouse and have gotten back together post transition. Uhm,  
39 one of the most beautiful stories is happened very early on in the project. Uhm, I interviewed a  
40 gentleman from New York City in Washington D.C. Uhm, and he drove. I was gonna be in D.C.  
41 And, you know, I was kind of telling folks I have my camera. He wanted to be in the project to  
42 the extent that he drove and met me in Washington D.C. And, you know, if you know anything  
43 about the country that's about a four-hour trip.

44  
45 DT: Oh yeah. That highway...

46  
47 AJ: It's a commitment.



1  
2 DT: Congested.  
3

4 AJ: Yeah, it's very congested. Uh, it's a commitment. 75, I think it is, I don't know which.  
5

6 DT: 95.  
7

8 AJ: 95! Yeah, that's what I thought but yeah. So, uhm, at any rate, uhm, he had been raped as a  
9 child. 14 years old. He was, he was sort of a very witch-y lesbian, and the neighbor thought, "I'm  
10 gonna cure you of this." [Laughs]. And, uhm, there was a subsequent baby. And, uhm, the  
11 father, this, this person's father, uhm, was very religious and their mother had passed away and  
12 so the father just decided that the baby should go and live with family in Chicago but didn't tell,  
13 uhm, the person where they were taking the child. And they left home. You know, they took off  
14 and lived on their own and eventually ended up in New York City. Uh, worked a great job in the  
15 Department of Sanitation, uhm, in New York City which, I mean, is kind of a stinky job but in  
16 New York City it's a very lucrative job, and it's actually, you know, with great benefits and  
17 stability. I mean, it's, it's really a good job, particularly for a transgender identified person. So as  
18 they were going to pursue gender confirmation surgery, they, uhm, they had a contact via  
19 Facebook from a young lady. And the young lady happened to be their daughter. And they  
20 reconnected. And the daughter works for the airline so they would, they started visiting each  
21 other and building relationship and the daughter accompanied him to his first surgery cause for  
22 transgender males it's sort of a multiple stage surgery, uhm, and she nursed him. You know,  
23 there's a lot of, uhm, recuperation time, uhm, post-surgery. And she stayed with him and nursed  
24 him, and they had built this really beautiful relationship. And the reason I know is you could just  
25 see his eyes light up telling me this story. Uhm, and because he had been pretty disconnected  
26 from a lot of family, uhm, up until this, and this was 30 years later, right? She's, she was 30  
27 [laughs] when this reconnection happened. Uhm, and, uhm, it was just such a beautiful story. He  
28 then was gonna have, cause we became friends, you know, he was having, he had had his  
29 second surgery, and she had been involved in helping with the recuperation and all of that but  
30 apparently there was some kind of complications or some challenge and issues, uhm, and he  
31 died...  
32

33 DT: Oh my goodness.  
34

35 AJ: ... last year. Uhm, but... I know he wasn't ready to die. He was, he had so many plans and so  
36 much, he was actually ready to retire and like he had friends in Africa and Europe and all over  
37 the world like just a loveable, beautiful person. Uhm, and, uhm, it was just so heartbreaking...  
38

39 DT: Yeah.  
40

41 AJ: ... to know that he had really accomplished this lifelong journey of gender transformation,  
42 reconnected with his daughter, uhm, and they were able to develop a beautiful relationship,  
43 even out of the, the tragedy that was her, you know, birth, uhm, and, and that they been  
44 separated from each other, uhm, and, uhm, yeah, so there's that story.  
45

46 DT: Yeah, that's incredible.  
47

1 AJ: I hope not many people are experiencing but if they are that story is there.  
2  
3 DT: That's incredibly powerful, and, as you say, the, the beauty in it...  
4  
5 AJ: Mhm.  
6  
7 DT: ... amidst the tragedy...  
8  
9 AJ: Yeah.  
10  
11 DT: ... and heartbreak.  
12  
13 AJ: I really wanna make that movie. [Laughs].  
14  
15 DT: [Laughs]. Maybe that's the next step.  
16  
17 AJ: I just, I just, I, it's a movie.  
18  
19 DT: Yeah.  
20  
21 AJ: It is. I just know it is.  
22  
23 DT: Absolutely.  
24  
25 AJ: [Laughs]. Yeah so yeah.  
26  
27 DT: So I wonder, uhm...  
28  
29 AJ: It's a very long winded answer to your question.  
30  
31 DT: Though a really powerful answer to the question...  
32  
33 AJ: Yeah.  
34  
35 DT: ... so I appreciate, appreciate that.  
36  
37 AJ: No problem.  
38  
39 DT: Uhm, so going back a little bit. Uhm, so you were hired for the position here. Where, I mean,  
40 was it, as much as you were like passionate and committed to the project, was there any  
41 difficulty with leaving your previous position? I mean...  
42  
43 AJ: Yeah. I mean, I, I worked in a pretty high-power environment. I was, uh, aid to, uh, one of the  
44 city of Minneapolis city council members. Uhm, deeply connected in community, the broadest  
45 level of community. Uhm, and, uhm, and I was good at my job. You know, I was earning a, a  
46 decent salary for a African American trans identified woman who grew up in, you know, a low  
47 income working class family in Chicago. Uhm, like I was doing pretty well for myself. And this job

1 required me to take a pay cut, a very, very slow downed pace of life, which is nice in some, to a  
2 large extent, uhm, even though I've sort of refilled all of that time [laughs]. And I'm probably  
3 even more busy now than I was back then. But, but it was, it took, it was a different pace. I  
4 mean to go from working in city hall where there's politicians from every level of government  
5 you're interacting with every day, the media, your colleagues, your community, corporations.  
6 Like everyday I'm dealing with fifteen different issues. Uhm, and juggling that and tracking that  
7 and, you know, making, managing projects and, and that kind of thing, to... One project [laughs]  
8 at a special collections archival library, which is a very quiet place [laughs], uh, and all of my  
9 colleagues are librarians who by definition [laughs] tend to be a little more introverted and,  
10 uhm, you know, sort of internally focused, uhm, it was quite a culture shift. [Laughs].

11  
12 DT: I bet.

13  
14 AJ: Uhm, but, you know, it, it actually, in some ways, it's, it's kind of like a little break in the action.  
15 Uhm, though it has been, uhm, busy and it is very fulfilling. I mean to know that I am able to  
16 document and preserve and archive these incredible stories and journeys, uh, and experiences  
17 is, is such an honor. Uhm, that, you know, I, you know, I, I rationalized that, you know, the salary  
18 that I was gaining here was enough to, to live on, like it was, you know, it, it wasn't what I was  
19 making but it was certainly enough. And that, the benefit of the project was way more valuable  
20 than the dollars. Uhm, like it's an immeasurable amount of value that I personally have, uhm,  
21 gained, and I think the broader community has gained, uhm, and, and the, the transgender  
22 movement more broadly, uhm, benefits from this work. Yeah.

23  
24 DT: So when you were hired what did you see as the, the main, the kind of main challenges that  
25 would face you in undertaking this project?

26  
27 AJ: Mhm, mhm. You know, I really thought the, the sort of, uhm, reputation of the university could  
28 be a really big issue. Uhm, people are really skeptical of institutions these days, man. And so it's  
29 not just the University of Minnesota. Uh, I think all universities have had, I think medical  
30 institutions in and of themselves, I know you are a medical historian, and, and even though, you  
31 know, arguably, medicine is one of the most helpful institutions in our society. Uhm, when it  
32 comes to marginalized communities, they are very, very skeptical of medical institutions. So I  
33 thought that could be a challenge. You know, I kind of thought that potentially like just getting  
34 the, I mean, I thought this was a very ambitious project from the very first time I sat down and  
35 really read through the expectations, uh, which were to capture, document, uhm, two-hundred,  
36 up to two-hundred stories or two-hundred to three-hundred hours, uhm, I think we've already  
37 reached the three hundred hour goal. Uhm, I'm certain we'll reach the two-hundred people goal  
38 because right now we're sitting at a hundred and seventy-nine interviews.

39  
40 DT: Wow. That's incredible.

41  
42 AJ: Uhm, but I wasn't as concerned, I mean, I knew I had a pretty broad network of transgender and  
43 gender non-conforming people and then that they could connect me to some of their networks  
44 and, you know, uhm, I thought we could recruit, you know, I haven't had to do like even one day  
45 of recruitment. Like there have been no fliers, no, no online like participants needed or anything  
46 like that. Uhm, I mean, I have been marketing because I do quite a bit of public speaking, and,  
47 uhm, you know, I'm a poet and so I do a lot of poetry readings and I'm invited to, to speak all

1 around the country, uhm, and the state and the region. And so, you know, whenever I am in  
2 those spaces I'm talking about the project. And there was a lot of media that, uhm, came with  
3 the project because of it's sort of broad and historic nature. Uhm, and I think the fact that I left  
4 city hall to come and do the work that it attracted some media attention. So there's been some  
5 sort of organic and natural, uhm, recruitment, if you will but not a, we didn't really have to  
6 implement our recruitment plan, you know, that we developed. Uhm, it just sort of happened  
7 organically. Literally people have been calling me up introducing themselves and wanting to  
8 interview. Friends have been calling me up like, "Hey Andrea, like, uh, you haven't called me yet  
9 for the interview. Like, what? You don't like me anymore or something like that?" Uh, so, uhm,  
10 and, and it's, it's a tremendous feeling to have been able to be this successful with the project  
11 without having to put all of that effort into recruiting for the project which means that that  
12 effort could be spent on other aspects of the project cause it's a big project. [Laughs]. There's  
13 lots of moving parts to it. Uhm, you know, one hour on camera, uhm, requires, you know, even  
14 though I said that that, you know, recruitment hasn't been hard but scheduling of that and  
15 getting people to [laughs] to sit down and making sure that we can have our schedules can  
16 match up and, and get that is, is work and it's a part of the process. Uh, preparing for the  
17 interviews, uhm, is absolutely a part of the process. And then, uhm, you know, actually doing  
18 the interviews but, again, that's, that's probably two to three hours, uhm, and, but afterwards,  
19 you know, you have to make sure you download the videos and, uhm, save them on multiple  
20 hard drives so that the videos don't get corrupted. Uhm, we send off the audio to a  
21 transcriptionist and have that transcribed. We have to input all the metadata from the project  
22 and to make sure that we're tracking, you know, ethnicities, addresses, gender identities, uhm,  
23 you know, origin of birth, original, I mean, assignment, gender assignment at birth. All of these  
24 kinds of things, uhm, which is work, you know, uhm, and then we create abstracts from the  
25 transcripts. They come back to have, you know, uhm, because it's a, the ab— I mean the  
26 document is maybe a 26, 27 page, uhm, transcript and the videos maybe an hour and a half. You  
27 know, you need to have some sort of baseline information to pull people into wanting to spend  
28 time to look at, uhm, the transcripts or listen to the audio or watch the video. So, uhm, you  
29 know, there's quite a bit of processing that needs to happen after the interview is completed.  
30 [Laughs]. Yeah.

31  
32 DT: Do you, you said the transcripts that are made of the interview, do you send them back to the  
33 narrators to review?  
34

35 AJ: We do. Uhm, we do and we give the narrators, uhm, uh, up to sixty days to respond. Uhm, there  
36 have been some responses, uhm, you know, I meant to say this or please phrase this that way.  
37 Uhm, there have been some people who have read their transcripts and were like, you know,  
38 my parents have been, you know, what I said about them was true but now they've been much  
39 more accepting. Maybe I wanna, you know, change that or, and/or redo the interview. And so  
40 we've done that. Uhm, but, yeah, we're, we do, we send out the transcripts back to the  
41 narrators and, uhm, and they have an opportunity to respond, uhm, and make changes if they  
42 desire. Also, uhm, people can limit the amount of access, uhm, to their stories as well. Uhm, we  
43 have some people who don't want their stories to be publicly shared until, uhm, 25 years, uh, or  
44 their death, whichever one comes first, you know.  
45

46 DT: So, uhm, you talked earlier in this interview about what some of your goals were for the project.  
47 And one of those being kind of a diversity of voices.

1  
2 AJ: Mhm.

3  
4 DT: Uhm, do you, were, were there other goals you were hoping to achieve, and, and how do you  
5 feel those goals have been met?  
6

7 AJ: Mhm. Uhm, it, raising awareness and creating awareness about the issues that are, uhm,  
8 impacting the transgender community. You know, I feel, based on sort of the media response  
9 that we have gotten and the number of conferences and panels that I've been invited to, uhm,  
10 the fact that the libraries here has one, uhm, a prestigious national library award, uhm,  
11 exemplifies that we've met that goal. Uhm, I really wanted to have community involved, and I  
12 feel like we have a really, uhm, beautiful community and advisory group that has come together  
13 to help think about, uhm, best practices for the project. Uhm, so that felt really important. Uhm,  
14 it's also been exemplified by the fact that we've been able to raise about \$30,000 for the project  
15 as well which was one of our goals. And, and that goal has been met. Uhm, so, uhm, and I guess  
16 the other goal was to really have it be a regional, uhm, project and so that we're not just talking  
17 to urban voices. And, uhm, I think we've done a pretty good job at reaching out to, uhm, rural  
18 communities in Wisconsin and, uhm, Minnesota, uhm, North Dakota, uhm, as well as Kansas and  
19 Detroit and, [laughs], you know, people from Ohio. Uhm, so that feels really good. We've been  
20 able to meet that goal too. Yeah.  
21

22 DT: Are there any, do you feel like there's been, uhm, certain kind of diversities that you were trying  
23 to reach that you haven't been able to, uhm, include in the project?  
24

25 AJ: You know, I mean, I think it would be really, uhm, beautiful to have more Southeast Asian voices  
26 though we do have some. Uhm, maybe three or four people. Uhm, and even broader Asian  
27 identities as well. Uhm, API, I guess you could say. Uhm, but, uhm, I would, I would probably like  
28 to see a little bit more of that. Uh, we still have a little ways to go and want to make sure that  
29 we're capturing a few more, uhm, regions. So Madison, Wisconsin is still a goal. Uh, as is  
30 Milwaukee, you know, which is, you know, I mean, Milwaukee is certainly a city, uh, but it's in  
31 the Midwest which I think is a little unique, uhm, even from Chicago or, and, and Minneapolis, I  
32 mean. You know, it's, yeah, it's different and, and Madison is a little smaller so we wanna make  
33 sure we capture some of those voices. But for the most part, man, I feel like we've really gotten  
34 an amazing job at being able to, uhm, reach out to different identities, different ethnicities,  
35 different abilities. You know, I think two spirit voices are still a little limited in the project. Uhm,  
36 maybe a few more Latino voices. Uhm, you know, yeah. There's, there's so much out there. And,  
37 and those identities are included in the, in the project but, uhm, for a little more balance I still, I  
38 know that we're still a predominantly, uhm, white project. Probably, maybe like 51 to 49%, uhm,  
39 but, and even within that whiteness there is diversity. So male/female, different abilities,  
40 different ages, uhm, different class, uh, identities, so we've done a pretty good job.  
41

42 DT: I would say so, I mean.  
43

44 AJ: [Laughs].  
45

46 DT: It's incredible. It really is.  
47

1 AJ: Yeah, it's kind of hard for me to say I but I've done a really good job.  
2  
3 DT: I, I think you could take that.  
4  
5 AJ: I said it.  
6  
7 DT: You could take that ownership.  
8  
9 AJ: [Laughs].  
10  
11 DT: So, I mean, you mentioned that, I mean, one of the great strengths, many strengths you have  
12 brought to the project is the network that you have within, uhm, the community.  
13  
14 AJ: Mhm.  
15  
16 DT: Not just within the cities. More broader than that.  
17  
18 AJ: Mhm.  
19  
20 DT: I wonder though has that, uhm, I mean you mentioned earlier about haven't friends call you up  
21 and say, "Why haven't you reached out to me?"  
22  
23 AJ: Yeah.  
24  
25 DT: Has that, has that actually been an issue where you've had to say, you know, I, I because of  
26 balance...  
27  
28 AJ: Uhuh.  
29  
30 DT: ... I can't interview everyone that's in my network.  
31  
32 AJ: Right. I, yeah. Yes. Uhm, I mean, I haven't been able, I don't want to say it directly. So it's you  
33 know, this has been very much a curatorial process and fortunately I have had curatorial  
34 experience prior to coming to this project. Uhm, you know, and even as a poet and artist I  
35 consider myself, you know, curating ideas and images and trying to put them together to make a  
36 whole. Uhm, and so, you know, sometimes, you know, I'll just say I don't have my camera with  
37 me or [laughs], you know, uhm, I won't ask certain people. If people reach out to me, I will  
38 absolutely try to respond and, and make sure that we can include them in the project. Uhm, I  
39 have had to, you know, I've had some parents who were interested in interviewing, and I had to  
40 say, you know, "I'm sorry. Uhm, we really want to talk to trans identified people themselves.  
41 You know, maybe that's a different project for parents. I, not to say that it is, that it's not a  
42 journey and a story and, uhm, something that should be documented and preserved, uhm, but  
43 this is not that project. Uhm, I've had people who don't live in the Twin Cities, and not sort of on  
44 my light route [laughs] if you were, as it were. And they wanna do the interview via phone but,  
45 or Skype or some other technology, uhm, which is amazing that we have these kind of  
46 capabilities. But, you know, we as an advisory committee determine that the best interview  
47 process for this project is in-person interviews so I've had to say, "Sorry, you know, we're just

1 not doing technologically based interviews. We've got enough technology involved already.  
2 Uhm, and, you know, yeah, and just, and I, I think that like an all Skype project could be fine, like  
3 I think it could be amazing, you know? But that's not this project, right? Uh, cause I think that  
4 there's, there's a different level of interaction and response to a sort of a technologically driven  
5 interview versus an in person conversation. Uhm, and it would be interesting to see what  
6 comes, what could come out of that. Uhm, so I've had to say, "Yeah, sorry. We're not doing to  
7 those individuals," which felt kind of icky but hard but, I mean, I'm comfortable. I've said it to a  
8 number of people. Uhm, and uncomfortable with the decision we've made. I think it was the  
9 right decision. Uhm, I think people really like being in the room, like, and I think it is a, a more  
10 powerful interview.

11  
12 DT: So, I mean, this brings up, uhm, what I would see as one of the potential challenges. You're one  
13 person.

14  
15 AJ: Mhm.

16  
17 DT: You had a mandate or a goal or an expectation...

18  
19 AJ: Mhm. Sure.

20  
21 DT: ... to do two-hundred interviews. The project has been, you know, actually going, uhm, in  
22 operational for, for like say two years maybe?

23  
24 AJ: Mhm.

25  
26 DT: How, how does one person, uh, conduct two-hundred interviews in that space of time? I mean,  
27 what, what, have there been particular challenges around the fact that you are just one person  
28 doing as many different interviews in this many different places?

29  
30 AJ: Mhm. Yeah, my body has been physically taken a huge toll. Uhm, uh, when I first started maybe  
31 not perfectly healthy [laughs] but, uhm, but I've definitely aged and, uhm, been impacted by the  
32 sort of the amount of equipment, energy, and travel, uhm, and time commitment to meeting  
33 those goals. Cause it really meant doing an average of two interviews a week. You know, we  
34 calculated it out [laughs], uh, and, you know, and that's for the whole three hundred and sixty-  
35 five days, right? So we know that there are holidays and weekends and vacations and, uh, even  
36 though I haven't really been able to take a vacation through this process. Uhm, but, you know,  
37 different reasons why, uhm, that would impact you meeting that goal. Uhm, so, you know,  
38 there's, there have been weeks when there's been no interviews, and, and you kind of alluded  
39 to or noted, cause it's a three-year funded project. And so, uhm, but we didn't get operational,  
40 you know, after I was brought on until, uhm, maybe three months after the initial hire. You  
41 know, we had to finalize our, uhm, release of information documentation, and, and work out all  
42 the legalities of that. Uhm, you know, I had to sort of immerse myself into what it means to be a  
43 oral historian, and we had to purchase the equipment. And we had to develop, uh, advisory  
44 committee to even begin to even think about those processes. So, and then learn how to use  
45 the equipment. Uhm, and I used to call myself the worst photographer in the world. [Laughs].  
46 But I've gained some new skills again. Uhm, so it's, it's really been like a solid two years, uhm, up  
47 to this point, and, uhm, it's been a fast and furious pace. It's a lot of pressure to, you know,

1 make sure we're getting those interview, even though I have the network. I mean, they still have  
2 to be contacted, and, you know, uhm, and a few cases moved a little bit but not very much.  
3 Most people are like very acquiescent immediately. Uhm, but the challenge of, you know,  
4 scheduling a time, which I hate, personally. Uhm, like my own life I don't even schedule as well  
5 as I should which is a challenge sometimes, but, but I've been, I've been much better at it for  
6 this project. Clearly cause it has to happen and there's no assistant, there's no scheduler that's  
7 doing that work for me. Uhm, so, yeah, I mean, I think those have been some of the challenges.  
8 Uhm, you know, people live all over the place, and, uhm, even, even though we, I work at, we  
9 work at this sort of major land grant university, uhm, surprisingly there are limited spaces to do  
10 [laughs] private interviews in. And, uhm, the limitation and constraints are generally that other  
11 people are using the spaces that are available. Uhm, so, you know, sometimes finding a space to  
12 do the interview, cause like I mentioned some of the people that I've interview have unstable  
13 housing or they live with roommates because, you know, of their employment situation. Uhm,  
14 and, you know, sometimes it's just not conducive to them. Uhm, and so I've done a lot of  
15 interviews in my home studios [laughs]. Uhm, you know, but I do travel to people's homes too,  
16 and, uhm, do that. I've done lots of interviews when I'm traveling in my hotel room. Uhm, you  
17 know, so those have been some of the challenges. The trips have been, you know, when we go  
18 on the trips I try to make sure that it's worthwhile so we're capturing four, five interviews, uhm,  
19 at a time. Uhm, so that's been, that's helped us to reach what I knew was an aggressive goal  
20 [laughs]. Didn't realize how aggressive it was until I started talking to other, uh, historians and,  
21 uhm, newscasters who are like, "Wow, I've been doing this for eight years, and I've only done,  
22 you know, [laughs] eighty interviews." You know? Uh, you know, that's, like wow. Kinda blowing  
23 my mind. Uhm, and, and in-between all of that, you know, I, I already talked about all the  
24 backend stuff that has to happen, but there's been like a lot of media requests for interviews  
25 and photoshoots and filming and documentaries, uhm, uhm, you know, I've been invited to  
26 submit to various publications. You know, I'm a writer but specifically for the project, uhm, you  
27 know, uhm, and, and doing a lot of talks and speeches around the country so, uhm, it's, you  
28 know, it gets highly pressurized. One of the projects that I'm really thrilled that I probably would  
29 not, it's debatable, but probably would not have felt so committed to the opportunity. Uhm, and  
30 maybe not even have been presented the opportunity, uhm, is a project called the Sojourner  
31 Truth Leadership, uhm, Council. STLC. And it's, uh, sponsored by Auburn Seminary. And in their  
32 first cohort they had like nine women of color, no maybe twelve women of color but they're all  
33 of various faiths. And the purpose of the fellowship was to help them to, uhm, develop some  
34 self-care practices for women who are in leadership positions, you know, within, religious  
35 communities. And it's multi, uhm, faith kind of thing. So not specifically Christian or Judaism or  
36 Muslim but sort of all various religions. Uhm, and then they did a second retreat but specifically  
37 for transgender women. Black transgender women. Specifically. Like not trans women of color  
38 but black transgender women. And I was invited to be one of the facilitators of the year long  
39 fellowship. And, uhm, you know, one of the, uhm, sort of, I guess, uhm, requirements for me to  
40 participate was, you know, I wanted to be able to interview the women, uhm, while we were  
41 engaged in the project. Uhm, and they were thrilled. Uhm, because now we not only get to  
42 document these individual stories but we get to document this process too sort of. Uhm, though  
43 I'm not going filming sort of, of the retreat, uh, but people are responding about the retreat in  
44 real time like as we're in it. Uhm, which just feels like an incredible diamond to have as a part of  
45 this project. Uhm, so.

46  
47 DT: Yeah, that sounds like an incredible opportunity, and...



1  
2 AJ: Yeah.  
3  
4 DT: experience.  
5  
6 AJ: Mhm. It has been. And we still have one more, uh, retreat left. And we've already interviewed,  
7 uhm, six of the nine women then, so we'll finish up in October. Yeah.  
8  
9 DT: So given, you know, a hundred seventy-nine interviews, uhm, such diverse identities, could, do  
10 you think, are there certain themes that have come through in the interviews?  
11  
12 AJ: You know, yes. I think, uhm, so one of the things that we're doing, uhm, is developing a digital  
13 exhibition because, again, nobody is going to sit through three hundred hours of [laughs], you  
14 know, interviews. I mean, that may be a couple of people who do it but not a lot. Uhm, and so  
15 we wanted to create something that's more immediate and impactful and, uhm, coherent, if  
16 you will. Uhm, and so we hired a digital editor to create, uhm, an online exhibition, and we're  
17 still in production but he's making videos like challenges, identities, uhm, perspective on the  
18 national scene, uhm, the future, so, you know, because we have a set guideline for the  
19 questions that we ask, uhm, we don't get the exact same responses but we get some pretty  
20 similar responses, uhm, I think that one of the themes that I can speak to is that almost to a  
21 person, uhm, when asked what is the, uhm, more positive aspects of living your true identity,  
22 almost to a person it is the ability to be in myself. Like people felt like when they were, uhm,  
23 struggling internally that they were not fully living their true identity. And, and this is people  
24 who had no problems with their parents. They stayed married. They kept their job. They [laughs]  
25 had it all happening to people who lost all of that, and incomes went to a third of what they  
26 were and they have been sex workers or, you know, HIV posit— like almost to a person that has  
27 been the response. Uhm, you know, the, one of the themes that I have certainly can extrapolate  
28 and, and we visualize it on a spreadsheet even, is that the range of identities that people are  
29 using to claim their lives is way beyond male and female. [Laughs]. So, uhm, it's sort of an  
30 existential theme maybe? But it is that gender is boundless. Uhm, you know, and there, there  
31 have been some other themes I think that have immersed, uhm, but none more succinctly as  
32 those two.  
33  
34 DT: Mhm. And those, you know, that's very profound. And it comes through in the, in the interviews  
35 that I've read, those, that's...  
36  
37 AJ: Mhm.  
38  
39 DT: ... definitely, those are definitely...  
40  
41 AJ: Yeah?  
42  
43 DT: ... there.  
44  
45 AJ: Okay.  
46  
47 DT: And visible.

1  
2 AJ: So I'm not just imagining things. [Laughs]. No, that's great. Yeah.

3  
4 DT: Do you feel like, given that you have had, uh, regional variation and urban/rural, that kind of  
5 thing, do you think there are diff, differences based on region on, on people's experiences?  
6

7 AJ: Well, certainly a little bit. I mean, you know, for example, in Fargo there's very few resources for  
8 people to access. I mean, they have to drive to Minneapolis in order to sometimes access  
9 hormones. Uhm, and therapy and so, of course, that's gonna impact the kinds of experiences  
10 that people have. So there's that going on in some of the rural communities. Uhm, you know,  
11 again, with the internet though, it's sort of, I think as it has just in American life in general has  
12 sort of flattened out [laughs] people's experiences. And, you know, now we can all watch  
13 Orange is the New Black or, you know, uhm, I am Cait or [laughs], you know, those kinds of  
14 things. But, yeah, you know, I think sometimes in, in smaller communities it's much more  
15 restrictive and, uhm, not a lot of the medical and emotional supports that sometimes can be  
16 available in larger communities. Uhm, so, you know, I would, I see that as some of the main, you  
17 know, sort of things. I mean, you know, I don't know, you would kind of think maybe there's  
18 more opportunities for love and romance in the cities but, uhm, you know, I think, I think that's  
19 a challenge for people everywhere. [Laughs]. No matter where you are. Uhm, particularly if you  
20 identify, I mean, even if you don't identify as, you know, uh, in any way transgressing gender, it's  
21 a challenge but when you do it becomes even more stifling. Uhm, and, and that's kind of all over  
22 the place but, uhm, yeah I think people in, in some smaller communities struggle a lot more with  
23 harassment and, or fear of harassment, uhm, than sometimes in larger urban areas.  
24

25 DT: So you mentioned, uhm, having raised \$35,000 dollars, which is really, really huge.

26  
27 AJ: Mhm.

28  
29 DT: Uhm, and the project already had three years of, of funding.

30  
31 AJ: Mhm.

32  
33 DT: Uhm, how, how important has that additional \$35,000 been in order to fulfill the goals of the  
34 project?  
35

36 AJ: Well, actually that has been what has allowed us to travel. I mean, initially, uhm, in the original  
37 grant there was like \$4,000 to travel, which is basically two trips. Uh, [laughs]. Uhm, actually  
38 about one and a half but, you know, uhm, so that has enabled us to do, uhm, a lot of the outage  
39 and travel that, uhm, that we've been able to do. Uhm, some of it has been in kind too. And  
40 that, uhm, you know, I personally get invited to go and speak at, let's say, you know, University  
41 of Minnesota-Duluth or North Dakota State University or Mankato State or [laughs] Winona  
42 State or all of these places I have been, and, uhm, and, you know, they will support my travel to  
43 get there. Uhm, and so, and then, you know, it's contingent on me being able to interview some  
44 folks while I'm there. And so, uhm, we get the interviews for the project, and, uhm, and at the  
45 same time, you know, we don't have to spend those dollars on travel. Uhm, so the additional  
46 resources that we've been able to, to gain have been invaluable. Uhm, and really, really helped  
47 us dip up the commitment to do the travel, which is, you know, by the way, what, I mean, we

1 sort of knew we had that as a goal. Uhm, even though I would encourage, there is, uh, another  
2 phase to this project that it includes travel funds upfront. You really don't want to be, uh,  
3 dependent on fundraising to actually, I mean, if the goal of the project is to do [laughs] regional  
4 documentation how are you supposed to get there? So, yeah.

5  
6 DT: How was that fundraising effort? Was it, uhm, difficult? Uhm, I mean, how did you approach  
7 that fundraising to raise that \$35,000?

8  
9 AJ: Well, we did a few, uhm, different methods. We wrote some grants and were able to, to get  
10 some grants. Uhm, we held a couple of fundraiser events where people came and contributed.  
11 Uhm, and, you know, the in-kind stuff from my travel, uhm, really sort of got us there. Yeah.  
12 [Laughs]. And, uhm, yeah. That's, but, you know, so it was work. I mean, I, I wouldn't say it was  
13 excruciatingly difficult but it was, it was, you know, work that was sort of in addition to the  
14 actual work of interviewing, preserving, and archiving, [laughs] and doing all of that.

15  
16 DT: And just it really kind of emphasizes again the very multifaceted nature of this project. There  
17 were a variety of, a great variety of skills...

18  
19 AJ: Mhm.

20  
21 DT: ... that you have, uhm, had to mobilize.

22  
23 AJ: Yeah. Absolutely. Yeah, cause I, I mean, I was very engaged in the grant process from seeking  
24 out the grants [laughs] to, uhm, being engaged in the actual writing of the grants. Uhm, so yeah.

25  
26 DT: So you mentioned the advisory committee several times, and I wonder if you, uhm, might  
27 comment, say a little bit more about what role the advisory committee played in this project.

28  
29 AJ: Mhm. Uhm, so the advisory committee, I was, I was pretty proud of what we were able to pull  
30 together to engage people. You know, there's a, a trans Latina professor, PhD who, you know,  
31 but, I'm sorry, she's not trans but she has actually, she's Latina and she's queer and has very  
32 much worked with the trans Latina community to, uhm, do research and develop  
33 documentation and such. Uh, so she frames a unique ally perspective to the project. Uhm,  
34 there's a, uhm, American history professor who, uh, identifies as queer and who is a part of the  
35 project. There's a number of transgender identified people, uh, from different age ranges who  
36 bring, I think, often authenticity to the project. Uhm, yourself as a, as a university historian and,  
37 and oral historian have, have brought your skills and expertise to the project and greatly  
38 appreciate it. And I think it adds credibility to this project. Uhm, so, you know, that's sort of the,  
39 uh, makeup of the advisory group but, you know, they, they helped develop the questions that  
40 we, uhm, posed to the participants of the project. Uhm, they've helped us think about, uhm,  
41 when and where to host fundraisers and those kinds of issues. Uhm, it's just a great sounding  
42 board to be able to, uhm, have a connection with, to be able to say, "Hey, are we doing this  
43 right or are there some people who you think we should be talking to?" And, in fact, uhm, when,  
44 when we first started the project, the advisory committee did provide, uhm, a really great list of,  
45 uhm, folks that they thought we should reach out to and, and talk to and I pretty much been  
46 able to interview, uhm, a great majority of those folks so, uhm, they've been very impactful. And  
47 I think it just adds more credibility to the project that there's this outside community, uhm, that

1 doesn't necessarily have an allegiance to the university per se that, uhm, is, is having some  
2 oversight on this project and some input, yeah.

3  
4 DT: So, what do you, uhm, what are the plans for the project moving forward? You mention the  
5 additional exhibit.

6  
7 AJ: Mhm.

8  
9 DT: Uhm, can you say a little bit more about that and then other plans that, that you have for the  
10 project?

11  
12 AJ: Sure. So the digital exhibit was part of the original grant. Uhm, that was funded by Tawani, uhm,  
13 Foundation, uhm, and so, you know, we always knew that we wanted to have something that  
14 was compact and, you know, vibrant that people could access without having to wade through  
15 all of the, uhm, the documentation, which will live online. Uhm, so the full, raw video, audio,  
16 and the transcripts are all gonna be available to people through the university website. This sort  
17 of stand alone website slash digital exhibition will, uhm, you know, hopefully maybe include  
18 some of this footage. [Laughs]. Uhm, and, and really give a broad overview of the project and,  
19 uhm, have these, as I mentioned, sort of vignettes that identify some of the struggles that  
20 people have gone through. Uhm, what are some of the gender identities that people claim?  
21 Uhm, what might be some of the themes that are emerging from the conversations that we're  
22 having. Uhm, and, and packages those in a way that is, you know, somewhat entertaining,  
23 informational, uhm, and accessible for folks. Uhm, it will likely have music engaged and, uhm,  
24 that kind of stuff so. That's kind of what the, the digital exhibition will be all about. Uhm, we'll  
25 have a physical exhibition, because, after all, the Tretter Collection is a, uhm, archive of  
26 historical documents and posters and, you know, artifacts, books and things and so, uhm, we'll,  
27 we'll be hosting this Fall an exhibition to highlight, uhm, some of the collection, and, uhm, as  
28 well as, we'll have monitors that will, uhm, display, uhm, some of the video and stories that  
29 we've collected and audio capabilities for people to be able to listen to it. And we'll kick that off  
30 with a, with a big public event and, and invite as many of the participants who are willing and  
31 able to come to be a part of it, and we'll have some, uhm, entertainment and some food. It'll be  
32 a community celebration. Uhm, I really would like to write a memoir about this process. Uhm,  
33 and the project. Uhm, you know, I haven't been in any conversations with any publishers about  
34 it to date but, you know, I'm just kind of putting it out there in the universe. Uh, and, uhm, yeah.  
35 Who knows what else can happen. I mean potentially there is a phase 2 to the project. That I  
36 know the libraries are working on to, uhm, broaden the project from just, uhm, a sort of  
37 individual story to what is the broader, uhm, story of the movement, uhm, and particularly talk  
38 to organizational leaders and movement activists and, uhm, community leaders about the  
39 broader trans movement because it is such high visibility and rapidly shifting landscape, uhm,  
40 and all of the anti-transgender legislation that is going on but, uhm, but at the same time this  
41 rise in transgender empowerment and so how is that, uhm, how is that gonna play out, and how  
42 do we capture that in real time, uhm, as it's happening? So that's sort of the next phase that  
43 the, the libraries is pursuing. There hasn't been any commitments to date but, uhm, but I think  
44 that's what, what their hoping to be able to do.

45  
46 DT: I, I think that would be wonderful and just to, uh, I mean this project is so incredible and so  
47 important for all the reasons that you expressed.

1  
2 AJ: Mhm.  
3  
4 DT: And, uhm, I hope that the libraries can move forward with that.  
5  
6 AJ: Yeah. It'll be awesome. I hope so too.  
7  
8 DT: And I hope that you do write your memoir. [Laughs].  
9  
10 AJ: [Laughs].  
11  
12 DT: Cause I think that will be fantastic...  
13  
14 AJ: Yeah.  
15  
16 DT: There's a lot of, I mean, there's a lot there that I think will be really, really important to get out.  
17  
18 AJ: Maybe, maybe I can use this, uhm, this transcript as a, uhm, uhm, a pitch letter [laughs]...  
19  
20 DT: [Laughs]. That would be, that would be fantastic.  
21  
22 AJ: An introductory chapter if you will.  
23  
24 DT: Yeah.  
25  
26 AJ: Yeah.  
27  
28 DT: Uhm, just a couple more questions.  
29  
30 AJ: Sure.  
31  
32 DT: Uhm, so you mentioned that the Tretter Collection, I mean, it's an archive. Uhm, it includes a  
33 vast range of artifacts and documents...  
34  
35 AJ: Mhm.  
36  
37 DT: Have you been able to have the narrators in your, in the project, have they been willing, uhm, to  
38 contribute artifacts and documents that, that will be housed within the Tretter Collection?  
39  
40 AJ: Sure. You know, I think that has been one of the most significant shortcomings of the project.  
41 Uhm, we've gotten some. Uh, but not, not a lot and not to the extent that I think was hoped for.  
42 Uhm, although, I mean, I think there's a strong debate that says that the two hundred  
43 interviews is a pretty significant contribution to the archives.  
44  
45 DT: Absolutely.  
46

- 1 AJ: Uhm, but, yeah, we, we certainly wanted to get more, uhm, uhm, artifacts and documents and  
2 that kind of stuff involved. It feels like conflation of two different things. So when I'm talking to,  
3 you know, a participant, you know, we're really focused on the interview, and so when I ask  
4 about, "Hey, do you got stuff?" that feels kind of like afterthought. And, uhm, and, and I'm not  
5 sure if it fully registers with people. Uhm, and, I mean, I've asked a lot of people have been like,  
6 "Yes! I will do that and in fact I'm gonna be picking up some stuff from a person this week," but,  
7 uhm, really thought that it probably would have been, uhm, more. But again it, it's, it's a  
8 challenge, I mean, when you go in and you're doing an interview like that's the focus and that's  
9 the thing. And, uhm, uhm, and in order to do two hundred interviews in two years it's like you  
10 gotta be pretty focused on that. [Laughs].  
11
- 12 DT: Yeah. Absolutely.  
13
- 14 AJ: So the acquisition of, uhm, materials has been a bit of a challenge.  
15
- 16 DT: And I would, uh, I mean just to say that, yeah, I mean, having done my own oral history projects  
17 I think that is, I mean, you're right. Like absolutely right.  
18
- 19 AJ: Mhm.  
20
- 21 DT: It's like two different things.  
22
- 23 AJ: Right.  
24
- 25 DT: Uhm, and one requires, it requires a different kind of energy and all of your energy, and, uh, I  
26 mean, if we, will, as oral historians that's a particular skillset but I think kind of being an archivist  
27 and trying to acquire...  
28
- 29 AJ: Mhm.  
30
- 31 DT: ... and kind of speak to people and educate people on why they might want to...  
32
- 33 AJ: It's a different set of skills.  
34
- 35 DT: Yeah. And, uh, I think, so I just want to validate your experience...  
36
- 37 AJ: Oh okay. Yeah.  
38
- 39 DT: ... and say, I mean, maybe if all the other oral historians that we have, are better, are more able  
40 to do this, but I think it's a real challenge.  
41
- 42 AJ: Yeah.  
43
- 44 DT: And I think you've identified why it's a particular challenge.  
45
- 46 AJ: Wow. Yeah. It, it is. It just is.  
47

1 DT: And, I mean, I think a lot of people, uhm, maybe they're not kind of thinking about, well, what  
2 artifacts do I have but also those, they may have a plan for them themselves...  
3  
4 AJ: Mhm.  
5  
6 DT: ... to keep within their family.  
7  
8 AJ: Right. Exactly. Yeah.  
9  
10 DT: So.  
11  
12 AJ: Yeah, and I think, yeah. I mean, it's all speculation but I just think people like you said they are  
13 so like focused on what I'm I gonna say like the artifact piece it just doesn't really stick. I don't  
14 know. It's kind of odd.  
15  
16 DT: But maybe that can also be, uhm, something, you know, the libraries thinks about...  
17  
18 AJ: Right.  
19  
20 DT: ... as...  
21  
22 AJ: We, we have this resource of people. Like now they can be sort of followed up on, with to, to  
23 talk about acquisition, you know. Yeah. I would love to see them do that. [Laughs].  
24  
25 DT: Yeah. Me too. [Laughs].  
26  
27 AJ: Yeah.  
28  
29 DT: Uhm, so we have covered a tremendous amount of ground, although not as much as your, you  
30 know, hundred seventy-nine interviews that you've done.  
31  
32 AJ: Oh my god, no.  
33  
34 DT: But I feel like we've covered a lot of ground but other things that you, uhm, feel need to be, that  
35 you would want to get on record that, you know, I haven't asked you about.  
36  
37 AJ: Mhm. Will complete two hundred interviews. Uhm, I've, I've traveled internationally, uhm, as a  
38 representative of this project, and, and collected interviews. I've, I've talked to and documented  
39 some of the pioneers of the modern transgender movement. Like Dr. Jamison Green. Uhm, I,  
40 I've interviewed celebrities [laughs], uhm, Jena Rosaro, uhm, Kate Bornstein, uh, I've  
41 interviewed major activists in the movement. Uhm, I've interviewed almost all of the staff at  
42 PHS, at the Program in Human Sexuality so that we're able to really document their significance  
43 and their history within the transgender movement. And, because they were one of the first,  
44 uhm, clinics and medical schools in the country to, uh, really begin to address the medical needs  
45 of transgender identified people and have really moved on to think about what all the emotional  
46 and, uhm, and psychological supports that can be offered not only to transgender people but to  
47 really shift the consciousness of, uhm, everybody around gender because we all have a gender.

1 Uhm, yeah, there's one thing that I hope that people can take out of this even project is that  
2 everybody on the planet has a gender. Not all of us think about it. Uhm, many, many of us on  
3 the planet just take it for granted that this, the gender that they assigned me at birth really  
4 correlates with how I feel. [Laughs]. And I don't have any problems or questions or concerns  
5 about it. There are quite a number of other people who have really deep concerns. I thought  
6 about gender everyday of my life since I've been conscious enough to remember so that's  
7 probably about four years old. Uhm, you know, always wishing and, and actually knowing like  
8 you know how you just have, just a little knowing about yourself, uhm, that I would, I would live  
9 life as a woman, fully as a woman someday. Uhm, and, and their helping to expand that so that  
10 we can all, I think so many of the challenges that we face as a community and as a society is  
11 wrapped up in gender and sexism and, uhm, this sort of false sense of patriarchy that, uhm, and,  
12 and what many people in my even videos call toxic masculinity, you know, uhm, and some of  
13 that stems from not being able to fully, feeling like you can't really express yourself, uhm, and  
14 that you have to live up to these sort of, uhm, gender expectations or else you will be banished  
15 from, you know, the society, from the village. And, and that's not the case and if we can open up  
16 more space for more creative gender expression, that we can live, all live healthier, uhm, and  
17 happier lives, and so, you know, I, I think that that's coming out of this project in some ways.  
18 Uhm, you know, I'm, I'm, I'm probably getting ready to move on from this project. I mean it was  
19 a three year project to start with but as I've been engaged with this project I've been, uhm,  
20 really trying to position myself to take, uhm, some of the skills that I have developed in this  
21 project and all along the way to, uhm, a higher level of elective office to be able to try to move  
22 some of these goals forward. Uhm, and, uhm, it's been a incredible journey. I've been out for  
23 twenty-five years. I thought I knew everything I needed to know about my own gender. I have  
24 been changed. I have shifted. I have moved. Uhm, I, I developed such, uhm, depended love and  
25 respect for gender non-conforming and transgender people who are able to recognize who they  
26 are, have the courage to express that to themselves and then to other people, and still operate  
27 out of a sense of love and responsibility and commitment to humanity that makes me deeply  
28 emotional and deeply grateful to be a part of that community.

30 DT: I'm glad that you brought, you brought all of that up but especially kind of the transformative  
31 role the project has had on you personally. I think that's really profound.

33 AJ: Yeah.

35 DT: And I'm glad that you shared that. I appreciate that you shared that.

37 AJ: Thank you. [Laughs].

39 DT: Uhm, I just want to say thank you for all the, you know, outstanding work that you've done.

41 AJ: Wow.

43 DT: I mean, as someone who is cisgendered I, I'm learning from reading...

45 AJ: Mhm.

47 DT: ... the interviews...



1  
2 AJ: Wow.  
3  
4 DT: ... listening to the interviews.  
5  
6 AJ: Mhm.  
7  
8 DT: Uhm, I've learned a lot, a tremendous amount from you in the last couple of years.  
9  
10 AJ: Mhm. Oh wow.  
11  
12 DT: Uhm, and so I just, I, I hope, I know this was not necessarily one of the goals of the project but I  
13 mean I think this is, this is also a powerful resource for the community itself. But I think, I think it  
14 is a powerful resource for allies and hopefully building more allies...  
15  
16 AJ: Mhm.  
17  
18 DT: ... in the broader community.  
19  
20 AJ: Sure. And, and I think that was a goal, and I hope it achieved. Uhm, because, as I mentioned, it  
21 really is, it's, it's about all of humanity. If we all have a gender, so it's not even ally. It's like this is  
22 your life too, man. [Laughs].  
23  
24 DT: Yeah.  
25  
26 AJ: We're, we're just trying to make all of our lives better, and if you, if you need to think about it in  
27 an ally way, fine, but you need to kind of understand that. This is about lifting all of us up. So.  
28  
29 DT: I think, I think that's true. I mean, reading through, you know, when you ask questions of your  
30 narrators, I think it, I hope that the people who, the people who are watching...  
31  
32 AJ: Mhm.  
33  
34 DT: ... either the video or reading the transcript then kind of are reflective about those questions for  
35 themselves too.  
36  
37 AJ: Sure. Yeah.  
38  
39 DT: And, and as you say, this is about everyone. It's, everyone has gender.  
40  
41 AJ: Mhm.  
42  
43 DT: Uhm, I'm sure more people than not [laughs] experience some questions about gender...  
44  
45 AJ: Right.  
46  
47 DT: ... even if you're not, if they haven't thought about it before.

- 1  
2 AJ: Yeah. Exactly. I mean, yeah, it's, and, you know, certainly women think about gender but in a  
3 different way, right? Like anything about how oppressed, uhm, we are because of our gender,  
4 and that's a aspect of it, and most men are kind of clueless about gender, they, other than they  
5 continue to perpetuate the, the sort of negative norms, uhm, that are really destructive to what  
6 I hope we can accomplish as humanity, as to all that live on this planet, uhm, with equal  
7 opportunity and equal access to resources, uhm, and unfortunately a lot of guys try to take all of  
8 that up, and, uhm, like we have to make this place, uhm, better for everybody.  
9
- 10 DT: Yeah. Well, thank you for being such an important part of that important part of that journey. So  
11 thank you Andrea.  
12
- 13 AJ: Thank you Dominique. It's been my pleasure.