

Kye Allums  
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins  
Interviewer

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

September 4, 2015



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 Kye Allums -KA

3

4 AJ: So my name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian with The Transgender Oral History  
5 Project at the University of Minnesota's Tretter Collection. Today is September 4, 2015. I am  
6 here to interview Kye Allums. And I'm just going to ask you to state your name and maybe spell  
7 it for our transcriptionist. But also, tell us your preferred gender pronouns, your gender  
8 identity, and your gender assigned at birth.

9

10 KA: OK. My name is Kye Allums K-y-e, last name A-l-l-u-m-s. My gender identify is queer fluid trans,  
11 my preferred gender pronouns are he and him, sometimes they and their – you can mix it up, I  
12 like that. My gender assigned at birth was female.

13

14 AJ: Cool. Queer fluid . . . and there was one other?

15

16 KA: Trans.

17

18 AJ: Queer fluid trans – wow. That's pretty . . . I have not heard that identity yet, but I suspect that  
19 as many people as I interview, I can likely have that many identities. It just speaks to this  
20 changing, I think, notion of what gender is and hopefully we'll get a chance to talk a little bit  
21 about that. Kye, tell me, what is your earliest memory – period.

22

23 KA: Wow. My earliest memory, period. That's a great question. Do I really want to tell this story?  
24 Well, a early memory that I have . . . I was five, I think I had just turned five. I'm not sure if it  
25 was my birthday or not that day – because I grew up as a Jehovah's Witness and so we didn't  
26 celebrate birthdays or holidays, so a birthday was just like another day, but there was something  
27 special that day. My mom was having a party with some neighbors, I was on the arm of a chair  
28 and there was a lot of adults, nobody was really talking to me, they weren't paying me any  
29 attention, but I remember surveying the room, looking around and like, OK, this is what adults  
30 do, this is how the world kind of works. We've got guys over here, the masculine folks are  
31 grouped together and they just talk about sports – guy things, whatever. And then you have the  
32 ladies over here in the kitchen who are cooking and preparing things for whatever, and I just  
33 remember just being like, "I am a boy, I am a guy, this is where I'm supposed to be – I'm not  
34 that." But it was more so, I was saying that not because I didn't like cooking or I didn't like the  
35 things that women did necessarily, I just felt more like . . . out of those two options, I would  
36 rather be here because this just seems more comfortable to me. At that time, of course, I didn't  
37 know about the different possibilities of being able to do anything in order to express yourself,  
38 but I remember just being like, "This is me, that's it – boom. If I have to choose, I'm right here,  
39 I'm not going over here." But from that point forward . . . no one ever saw that, they were just  
40 like, "No, you're just a tomboy, you're still a girl though because this is your body." And from  
41 that point, it never made sense to me – ever. How can you tell me who I am because you don't  
42 think that I see myself or feel this way?

43

44 AJ: Wow, so your first memory is sort of that of feeling like . . .

45

46 KA: This is who I am.

1  
2 AJ: A boy. Masculine – not female.  
3  
4 KA: Yeah.  
5  
6 AJ: That’s fascinating because that’s actually a future question, like when did you first realize – but  
7 that is all rolled into this early memory of yours. Where did you grow up?  
8  
9 KA: All throughout the Twin Cities, all over Minnesota really. But the Highland Park area – Snelling  
10 and Lexington, that’s been my life, my early childhood.  
11  
12 AJ: Wow, so you’re a Minnesota native.  
13  
14 KA: Yes, a Minnesota boy.  
15  
16 AJ: That’s awesome. Can you tell me a little bit about your home environment? Did you have  
17 siblings? What were those relationships like?  
18  
19 KA: I have three siblings, I’m the oldest. So there’s me and then there’s my brother who is now in  
20 his twenties, 21, and then my sister who is 16 now, and then my younger brother who is 14.  
21  
22 AJ: So you’re the oldest?  
23  
24 KA: Yeah.  
25  
26 AJ: OK. What’s that like being the first child? Was that a different sort of feeling for you?  
27  
28 KA: I mean, it’s the only thing I know, but I definitely felt like more of the leader, the caregiver, the  
29 person who looks out for folks and who gets things together. Yeah, just the big brother.  
30  
31 AJ: So do your siblings look up to you now?  
32  
33 KA: I would say so, yeah. I think they always have, at least that’s what they tell me. Through sports  
34 they always compare themselves to me. We’re all athletes so they’re always like, “Oh, well you  
35 know, I didn’t get to do this, I didn’t make this championship but you did, or I didn’t get to do  
36 that but you did.” Although I feel like they’re better athletes than me. Both my brother and my  
37 sister, the middle ones, they’re both taller than me and they’re great athletes – amazing  
38 athletes, better than I did. And then my younger brother, he’s more on the quiet side until you  
39 get to know him. But he’s just now getting into himself, or growing into himself. But I’d say that  
40 we’re really similar in a lot of ways now, now that I’m growing up. We’re all pretty close - and  
41 distant at the same time.  
42  
43 AJ: Well that’s fascinating that you describe your siblings as better athletes than you because one of  
44 the things that really makes your whole story unique is that you played Division I basketball,  
45 which means you’re pretty much an elite athlete – like that is the top echelon of athleticism in

1           our culture and in our society. Talk about that experience, tell what made that unique beyond  
2           just being a first-class or elite athlete.

3  
4   KA:    Playing Division I basketball is . . . it's your job, it's tough. I feel like I've always just been really  
5           intense when it comes to sports or competition, I'm a very competitive person. My siblings, like  
6           they are better athletes than I am . . . but I think it's because . . . I mean, when they were  
7           younger they got to see what I did. They got to see me and other people . . . that's not how I  
8           wanted to answer that question.

9  
10   AJ:   Well let me put it a little more specifically. You were the first transgender athlete . . .

11  
12   KA:    Division I athlete.

13  
14   AJ:    . . . to play on a women's team and you played at . . .

15  
16   KA:    GW – George Washington.

17  
18   AJ:    George Washington University in Washington, DC.

19  
20   KA:    Yes.

21  
22   AJ:    How was that? People are just . . . you played on a women's team, what made you decide to  
23           come out and continue to want to play on a women's team?

24  
25   KA:    I think what made me decide to come out was I didn't like . . . once I figured out what trans  
26           meant, or that it existed and that's how I self-identified and I could actually say, "No, I would like  
27           for you to use these preferred gender pronouns because this is me, use this name because this  
28           is me." Once I knew that there was no turning back. I wanted to tell my teammates and  
29           coaches because I see them every single day, we practiced every single day and having to know  
30           this is me and then walk into a space where no one knows that, I couldn't focus on basketball, I  
31           couldn't focus on anything else because it was too much. So I ended up coming out and telling  
32           one of my teammates who then ended up telling all the rest of the team and then I told the  
33           coaches. Long story short, everyone ended up at least trying and supporting me and saying,  
34           "Kye" and using male pronouns – even though they messed up sometimes, but they still tried.  
35           And that made the difference for me. Coming out publicly, I didn't even really think about that.  
36           I wasn't thinking that way, it was more just my immediate folks – that option presented itself  
37           after my team and folks around me who knew me and knew that I was trans, they kept sharing  
38           with me trans things. "Hey, look at this project, look at this trans person, look at this, this, this."  
39           And I'm like, "Great, thank you, I didn't need it but OK." And one of the things was a  
40           photography project that Jeff Sheng was doing called, "Fearless," and he traveled around the  
41           country filming openly LGBTQ high school athletes and college athletes. They were like, "Hey,  
42           why don't you submit? Tell him who you are and see if he'll come and take a picture of you."  
43           So I just emailed him and was like, "All right. Hey, this is who I am." And certainly enough he  
44           came to my school one summer and he did a photo shoot. Then a journalist saw that photo and  
45           saw that I was a Division I athlete who identified as trans and he got my information and called  
46           me and was like, "Oh my God, we've never had an openly trans Division I athlete before, can I

1 tell your story?" And at first I was like, "Nah, I don't want to do that. I'm good." But then after  
2 that I kind of started thinking about it a little bit more and then I started to see things around  
3 me or at least be more aware of other folks who did not feel comfortable saying, "This is who I  
4 am." I saw folks kind of pretending, like, "Yeah, I like this boy," when really they had a girlfriend,  
5 they just didn't feel comfortable saying that because they didn't want to get fired, they didn't  
6 want to get kicked off from wherever they were. I was just seeing a lot of that and I don't like  
7 that, I want people, like my friends and people who I care about, to not feel like they can love  
8 who they want to love. That makes no sense, that doesn't determine how well or how poorly  
9 you're going to do your job. That's just you as a person. So I saw that and I then saw the  
10 opportunity to share my story in a different light, like maybe this could inspire people or give  
11 them courage to say, "This is who I am," or "This is who I love." And I came out – or called him  
12 back. I was like, "Hey, are you still interested?" And I told him my story.

13  
14 AJ: So from my research, this became a national story though, right? ESPN.

15  
16 KA: It was all over the world – it was everywhere.

17 AJ: Who is Jeff Sheng?

18  
19 KA: Jeff Sheng, he's an LGBT activist, a photographer. I know he's a professor . . . I'm not sure if he's  
20 a professor at Harvard or if he attended there, or if it was Stanford. But I know he's a professor,  
21 teacher, researcher, artist, athlete – I believe he played tennis. Jeff's going to kill me that I don't  
22 know. But he's an amazing person.

23  
24 AJ: How do you spell his last name?

25  
26 KA: J-e-f-f, Jeff and then Sheng, S-h-e-n-g. It's the Fearless Project.

27  
28 AJ: OK, great. Wow. I'm going to have to go look that up. So has your identity shifted or changed  
29 over time? I know you've talked about being fluid. How so? How has it changed?

30  
31 KA: The shift. So when I first came out in 2010, I came out as being a trans man and at that time I  
32 really only knew about being a trans man or a trans woman, that was just kind of it.

33  
34 AJ: Right. That was the binary, right?

35  
36 KA: Yes, so I was like, "OK, so I'm a trans man." After graduating and becoming a public speaker, I  
37 began to meet so many different LGBTQ folks and I began to . . . I learned about all different  
38 possibilities of expression and ways of being and saw that I am not just a trans man. I'm more  
39 than that. It's not just more than that – that's just not me, that's not all I am. So queer fluid  
40 trans – queer, I feel like I shifted from . . . well first you have man. I feel like me being that  
41 before, I feel like that was what I thought I had to be. I could only go from being a female to  
42 now, all right, I'm going to be a man and do these things. But then looking around I see other  
43 people who are a man and I'm like, "That's not really me. I actually don't . . . that doesn't fit  
44 well anymore." I started to realize that and embrace my, I guess, femininity, or just all my  
45 different ways of being and I felt like queer, that word allowed me – or just felt more  
46 comfortable for me because I didn't have to . . . queer isn't just feminine or masculinity, it's

1           whatever you decide it is. I am who I am, I could be feminine one day or be masculine the next  
2           day or interchange throughout the day – the fluid part. I change. I say that my gender identity  
3           or my sexuality . . . when people have asked me in the past, “How do you self-identify?” or,  
4           “Who are you attracted to?” If I have to pinpoint and give you one exact thing, if I say that I’m  
5           going to be immediately like, “No, that’s not all, there’s more than that.” And so I feel like  
6           saying queer fluid allows me the room or it’s just a great description of exactly who Kye is. And  
7           then trans – I’m trans.

8  
9   AJ:     What kind of challenges have you faced since expressing your true gender identity, if any?

10  
11   KA:    Many, so many challenges. Read the question again, I’m going to give one answer.

12  
13   AJ:     What challenges have you faced since expressing your true gender identity?

14  
15   KA:     I’d say the first thing that comes to mind is waking up every day and having to decide how am I  
16           going to dress? Am I going to dress in a . . . dress somehow that is really comfortable to me that  
17           day, which might be dressing more lax, having on a hat, having on a muscle shirt. I’ve got to  
18           wear that while going out but I know if I do that, I know how people are going to see me, how  
19           they’re going to treat me, and that might attract more negative attention and people might  
20           think that I’m a threat. Am I going to do that today? Or am I going to dress up like this? Dress a  
21           little bit more like a student, a little bit cleaner, put on this even though it’s hot outside and I  
22           feel like I’m just . . . ah, I would love for nothing to just wear a cut-off shirt. But a Black man with  
23           muscles and even a little bit of facial hair, you’re always a threat. I just feel that more often  
24           from my experience. Every day is like, “Ahh, what do I have the energy for?” I know if I’m going  
25           to dress up like that and show my muscles or something, or show skin, then I may just smile a  
26           little bit more. But even that might be a little bit creepy, so it’s playing the line of how can I just  
27           go outside and be without having people think that I’m doing something that I shouldn’t be  
28           doing or do something that’s going to harm someone. Those are always the thoughts when it  
29           comes to my expression of my gender, not so much, “Oh, I identify as a queer trans person,” or,  
30           “I identify as a trans person.” It’s more just, I want to wake up and just be, but I have to choose  
31           for my own wellbeing or safety and all of that, and just kind of to be respected – to be seen as a  
32           person. If I’m dressing like this, people will say, “Oh, hi sir, how are you doing? Can I help you?”  
33           If I dress the other way, I don’t exist. It’s like you’re not even here and if I speak up and say,  
34           “No, I am here,” I feel like then I get their attention but only because I speak this way. I might  
35           say, “Hi, is that a single-stall restroom?” And people will be like, “Oh.” Because they’re  
36           expecting me to be like, “Yo, is that good? Can I use that?” Because I ask, “Is this a restroom?”  
37           Then they’ve got to, “Oh, OK – you speak . . . OK, great.” So it’s like those things – expression  
38           and . . . yeah. And I feel like those things shouldn’t even really matter. I should be able to just  
39           be like, “Oh.” I feel like what I would want my answer to be is, “What do I think about how I feel  
40           today? I’m going to dress up with no shirt on and maybe just this and run outside.” That’s it,  
41           because I feel like that today, but no it’s more of how do I want to be seen, what do I have  
42           energy to deal with today.

43  
44   AJ:     So, wow, you’ve brought up some really deep and significant issues as being a trans person of  
45           color and particularly being masculine identified, and some of the issues that Black men face in  
46           our culture here in America. So, I’m just wondering how does it feel to take on those

1 stereotypes, that persona, those perceptions of what it is to be a Black male in this society and  
2 how do you deal with it. I know you talked a little bit about maybe I've got to smile a little bit  
3 more or maybe I turn my baseball cap straight as opposed to having it to the back or something  
4 like that. But, beyond that there's issues around employment and access to housing and all of  
5 these things that affect Black men in our society. How do you deal with that? And do you see  
6 that as a separate issue beyond being trans?  
7

8 KA: Yes, I see it as a separate issue. It could also be the same issue for some folks depending on our  
9 experiences but for me I see them as two different things, until folks know who I am or until  
10 they know how I self-identify. But off the bat, two different things. How do I deal with all of  
11 this? It's just . . . I'm figuring it out one moment at a time. I observe, I sit back, I ask questions, I  
12 try things out. Yesterday I was going grocery shopping and there was a couple of kids right here  
13 and their mom and I was like OK, what is appropriate for me – how do I handle the situation  
14 walking by? Do I go way out of my way, do I just go right by, do I look at them, do I not? One of  
15 the kids dropped something and I was going to pick it up but I was like, no Kye, just keep going,  
16 don't pay them any attention – but don't go out of your way, just keep going and if they do say  
17 something then you can politely just be like, "How can I help you?" or something like that. So I  
18 just did that, and that worked. So I was like, "OK."  
19

20 AJ: Was this a Black family?  
21

22 KA: It was a white family, so white folks, or at least who I thought was white, but yeah, things like  
23 that. So, here's the situation - stay calm, breathe, boom, let's see how this goes. That's kind of  
24 how I've been taking it or how I've been learning, just moment by moment. I started to . . . I've  
25 been Black my whole life, I was born Black, I was born a person of color.  
26

27 AJ: Sure, absolutely.  
28

29 KA: But I just . . . it's still recent for me to . . . like being treated in this kind of way, that just started  
30 either . . . it was last year in January. So for the last three years I've been traveling and speaking  
31 - traveling in airports and hotels. I don't know what it was but . . . so I'm used to going and  
32 getting my tickets at the airport and then having people interact with me. People, at first, I  
33 would come up, "Hi, I'm going here." They would say, "OK, da-da-da." They would smile, have a  
34 conversation – whatever, whatever. But that progressively started to change and last January it  
35 just started. I would be doing the same thing, going to get my ticket, but folks they wouldn't see  
36 me still. It was like, "OK, next." I'd be right there and they'd just be calling the next people. I'd  
37 be like, "I'm here." I had to be like, "Hey," and it was so weird. It was like, "Is it me, am I doing  
38 something wrong?" But then it just kept happening. If I would go and try to order some food or  
39 I'd be in line, folks would just cut in front of me even more so often or people wouldn't take my  
40 order or they would take someone else's order. Or walking on the airplane and trying to put up  
41 bags or whatever. If I took too long I could feel it (he's snapping his fingers), people would be  
42 like, "Come on, let's go." No one would help me out, they wouldn't help me with anything, I had  
43 to get my stuff down but if it was someone else or anyone else, they would be like, "It's cool."  
44 I'd be like OK, that's fine, I don't mind, I can speed it up a little bit, but it just began to shift. So  
45 for a long time I was just so mad and I was like, "You know what? Forget all y'all, all y'all are the  
46 same." I was like I was not going to eat, I'm not going to order this stuff, just skim my feelings. I



1 remember one day I was on my way home at an airport and it was an older white couple, the  
2 person came up to me and he was going to say something. I thought I was sitting somewhere I  
3 wasn't supposed to and I felt like he was going to say so, so I was like, "What?" I was just that  
4 irritated. And he was like, "Oh, I'm sorry, I was just wondering are you on the North Carolina  
5 plane because the gate changed and I didn't want you to miss your flight?" I was like, "I'm sorry,  
6 I'm good – thank you though." It's not everybody, it's just people are different and after that I  
7 started to ask questions from my mentors – some older black men, asking my brother. "Y'all  
8 have been men your whole lives, you've been seen this way your whole lives, how are you still  
9 here doing this and living your lives?" And they were like, "You just get through it and you figure  
10 it out and you surround yourself with people who do love you and see you." You realize that  
11 just because someone else might treat you that way, that doesn't define you – that's their issue  
12 and that just means that you don't have to entertain that, that you don't have to spend your  
13 energy worrying about the fact that they think that you are this way, that's them. You just keep  
14 doing what you're doing and that's it, focus on what makes you happy and it's clearly not people  
15 like them.

16  
17 AJ: That's kind of how we all get through the world, period. But you do have to come to that sort of  
18 conclusion and understanding, I think. What are some of the positive aspects of being trans or  
19 expressing your true gender identity?

20  
21 KA: The positive of just being trans . . . hmmm. I'll just say being a Black masculine person. I can say  
22 that.

23  
24 AJ: It's a double-edged sword, right? Like that's good and it has its challenges.

25  
26 KA: Yeah, yeah. I guess I like the fact that I kind of . . . I'm different from most folks, or it's just  
27 different. I've met lots of trans people, but I love being different, I love being not what I'm  
28 supposed to be. Well no, I know what I'm supposed to be but I love not being how other people  
29 think I'm supposed to be. I guess I feel like the good things about it . . . being able to try different  
30 things out, being able to really explore things that really make me feel good – like if some of my  
31 friends are throwing out some heels, and I was like, "Oh, I want to try those on." I've already  
32 learned, I used to hate them so much but now I'm like, "You know what? I can do that – let me  
33 see." I can do that. It's OK, not just because I'm trans but that is me – it's at my core and I feel  
34 like I'm at a place where I'm more comfortable with expressing myself differently. One thing  
35 that really pops into my head was just the fact that I guess masculine privilege and being able to  
36 . . .

37  
38 AJ: It's real.

39  
40 KA: Yes it is. Being able to be more introverted and that's OK. I feel like before when my voice was  
41 not like this, if I was introverted, I had to be forced to entertain or to speak. People still expect  
42 that from me now but when I say, "I'm good," or, "no," they're like, "He's good." It's like it's OK,  
43 or I can just be like straightforward and ask a question and it's like that is respected as a  
44 masculine person. I love that, I really do, because that's how I am at my core. I do just want to  
45 be more of a straight-forward person – chill, lax, and so that's a cool aspect.

- 1 AJ: That makes total sense to me. To the extent that you're comfortable can you tell me about any  
2 medical interventions you may have had or done or contemplating?  
3
- 4 KA: I've only taken testosterone. I've been on testosterone for about four years – that's it.  
5
- 6 AJ: Wow, that's it.  
7
- 8 KA: And I work out a lot.  
9
- 10 AJ: And we say that's it like that's a small thing - but that's a big thing.  
11
- 12 KA: Yeah, yeah, yeah. It is a huge thing.  
13
- 14 AJ: That's a big thing.  
15
- 16 KA: And the changes have been real.  
17
- 18 AJ: Yeah? Talk about some of the changes?  
19
- 20 KA: I mean, I feel like everyone talks about physically – muscles and facial hair and voice change.  
21 Yeah, I've got all those things but I think internally, mentally, the way I assess things, how I see  
22 things, it's all different. It's like my best day off of testosterone . . . no, how can I say this?  
23 Taking "t" is better . . . my worst day taking "t" is better than my best day not taking "t".  
24
- 25 AJ: Wow, I think that says it all.  
26
- 27 KA: Yeah. So taking that, since I've been on hormones I feel like everything has just kind of come  
28 more full circle. It's like things are clear, I'm able to focus more on things I should be focusing  
29 on. Like in sports, for example, now when I'm on the court and I'm playing, I'm not dribbling,  
30 da-da-da-da, doing something and about to pass and, "Oh, I feel uncomfortable," or I'm thinking  
31 about my body or this. Now it's more, I pass the ball – next thing, boom, and it's the entire  
32 time. I can focus and I can see and just pinpoint. I think that is a tribute to taking hormones and  
33 people being able to see and hear me as a masculine person and now I don't got to worry about  
34 it. It's like, "I'm here." But, I still feel a little uncomfortable sometimes because I haven't gotten  
35 top surgery, which has been on my mind since forever – do I do it? Do I not do it? Why do I do  
36 it? It's still there but I think being able to have the expression, and the fact that I have a smaller  
37 chest, it's not big – most people think I have had top surgery but I haven't. So I think that also  
38 gives me a little more privilege and, I guess, opportunity to be able to be more comfortable  
39 because they're not thinking about that so I don't feel that necessarily. But, yeah – those things  
40 . . . a lot of different mental changes though really.  
41
- 42 AJ: Let's talk a little bit about romance and relationships, love. So, what's your sexual orientation?  
43 Are you dating? Marrying? Do you want those things in your future, your reality? Tell me  
44 about romance.  
45
- 46 KA: Yeah, my sexual orientation is queer fluid. I am single.

1  
2 AJ: So that means you're open to relationships with men, women?  
3  
4 KA: I have relationships with people – people who make me feel good, people I have a connection  
5 with.  
6  
7 AJ: Sure.  
8  
9 KA: People who have good energy, people who make me smile, people who make me laugh. It's  
10 about the person on the inside. I don't really care about labels . . . I care about your label – if it  
11 makes you happy. I care about your body if it makes you happy, but it's about you and  
12 conversation and all of that. Conversation, connection, energy.  
13  
14 AJ: So right now you're single.  
15  
16 KA: Yes, I'm not dating anybody – I'm dating myself. I'm dating myself and I'm going to be . . . I want  
17 to commit to that for at least the next year or two. I really want to get to know me because I've  
18 learned that trying to jump into relationships or doing that without truly knowing yourself or  
19 loving yourself makes it nearly impossible, for me at least, to be able to be in a real relationship  
20 – or at least give myself 100%. It's difficult for me to put 100% of myself into a relationship  
21 when I don't even know who I am. It's like I'm just doing it just to do it. But I love relationships,  
22 I love love – I love it, love it, love it. I love seeing people connect, I love talking to other people  
23 about their relationships and what they go through. I love everything about it but I think right  
24 now the most important relationship is with myself. That's what I'm really trying to master and  
25 just connect with. I need to connect with me, I've lost touch with myself.  
26  
27 AJ: Wow, very self-evolved. Tell me about the first time you ever met another trans-identified  
28 person. Was it a trans masculine person or trans feminine? Or how did that transpire?  
29  
30 KA: The first trans person, who I knew was trans, that I met . . . it was a class, a Human Sexuality  
31 class, there was a panel of LGBTQ folks, he was a trans guy and he was sharing his story on the  
32 panel. He was the first person, a white trans masculine person. That's when I was like, "Wow,  
33 this is possible." I was really shy in the back, I didn't really know about all this stuff obviously. I  
34 wanted to ask a question, I wanted to go up and talk to him but I didn't. He was the first person  
35 who I saw. The first person I actually had a conversation with . . . what is his name? Oh my  
36 goodness. I just went there today . . . it'll come to me.  
37  
38 AJ: Was it a person of color?  
39  
40 KA: Yes. Black trans masculine person. He was the first Black guy, Black trans guy that I met and I  
41 was like, "Wow, we can really do this – yes, it's all right."  
42  
43 AJ: Kyler?  
44  
45 KA: No, no – it wasn't Kyler. It was someone in DC. I haven't talked to him since I've been in DC so  
46 I'm blanking on his name. But he was everything. He really just talked about his experiences,

1 coming out and all of that, as a black trans man and what his life had been like being in the DMV  
2 and working within the trans community, outside the trans community, and what those  
3 experiences were like for him. But it was everything to be able to meet someone in person.  
4

5 AJ: It was helpful for you?  
6

7 KA: Yeah, it's not just a white trans – it was a Black thing, it's OK for me to do this too, this is kind of  
8 what it looks like.  
9

10 AJ: Wow, that's powerful. What do you think about the relationship between the LGBT  
11 communities – like the relationship between the T and the LGB communities?  
12

13 KA: It's interesting.  
14

15 AJ: Do you have any ideas or thoughts around that?  
16

17 KA: Interesting. I guess I've always been one that, "The T needs its own space, the T should be over  
18 here because it's a different thing from LGB because LGB, those are sexual orientations, it's  
19 about who you're attracted to and the T is about you."  
20

21 AJ: Right.  
22

23 KA: So you, who are you and how do you self identify? To me I've always felt like grouping it  
24 together, it confuses folks but only if you're not aware. Ahhh, there's so much about this as  
25 well. So I guess my journey, my identity timeline or whatever, going from being identifying as  
26 being a lesbian – like I used to look at bi-sexual people like, "No, I ain't going to mess with y'all  
27 because y'all greedy – trying to be with everybody. Nope, nope, nope." But then I remember  
28 evolving into being more of a bi-sexual person and being like, "Oh, this actually makes sense. I  
29 get it, I get it now." To then realizing, "Oh, I'm trans." But before just being bi-sexual, I  
30 remember just seeing a drag queen and associating that person with being trans and just being  
31 like, "No, this just doesn't make sense." But then only later finding out I'm trans, oh my  
32 goodness – wait, that's really not what trans is, this is what trans looks like. And now just  
33 getting to this point of being queer, just the Q or whatever – just being me, and now seeing that  
34 everybody is different and there are some trans people who are lesbians, trans people who are  
35 bi-sexuals, and trans people who are gay and some trans people who are just straight. There's  
36 all different kinds of folks and the LGBT is just . . . I feel like it's a symbol, it's a title, it's a label.  
37 It's something that represents diversity or just different kinds of people, people who are exactly  
38 who they say they are. It's like we don't always have to be against each other or constantly  
39 being policing folks or policing our gender expressions or our sexualities or whatever. It's like as  
40 long as you're happy and you're not harming anyone else, what's wrong with identifying in a  
41 way that makes you feel most comfortable. I do believe that I know that LGBTQ can exist  
42 together, it's just a matter of showing love and not hate and not trying to say, "No, you can't be  
43 this because you look this way," or, "You're not trans enough, you're not gay enough." It's like  
44 we're still trying to fit into certain things within our own community and not really allowing  
45 people the freedom to just be.  
46

1 AJ: Well, cool. Do you think there is an agenda for the trans community going forward?  
2

3 KA: I feel like there's always an agenda. I feel like it may look different for every trans person or for  
4 different communities, depending on what's happening where you are or what you're going  
5 through.  
6

7 AJ: What are some of the issues you think are facing the trans community right now?  
8

9 KA: Housing, health care, access to education, resources, being able to walk outside without being  
10 killed, being able to get a job, being able to eat, being able to workout, being able to just be  
11 without being bothered, being heard, being seen. Yeah, just feeling valued and worthy. Have a  
12 life.  
13

14 AJ: It's very real. So the agenda, then, would be to address all of those concerns that you just  
15 identified?  
16

17 KA: Yes. And allowing people room to be able to say this is really what's going on, and sharing that  
18 with the world and not just dismissing folks or not sharing stories because you might think that  
19 it's too much for whoever, for the world, to hear or to understand. These things are happening,  
20 they're going on, and people need to be aware.  
21

22 AJ: Can we do that? Is there a trans community . . . is there a unified trans community in your  
23 mind?  
24

25 KA: I think so. I just think it's a matter of organizing – organizing and getting us together and doing  
26 it. Things are being done. People are working very hard, things have been getting done. I know  
27 that there's a lot of great things happening amongst the not-so-great things. But yeah.  
28

29 AJ: So you feel optimistic, hopeful?  
30

31 KA: Yeah, I am an optimistic person. I always go to the, "We can do this, we can figure it out."  
32

33 AJ: Got it. Have you ever worked for or volunteered in any trans or LGBT organizations before?  
34

35 KA: Yes. I've been volunteering at the Hancock Rec Center. They have youth nights on Fridays.  
36

37 AJ: Can you spell that? The Hancock . . .  
38

39 KA: Hancock Rec Center – so H-a-n-c-o-c-k and Rec . . .  
40

41 AJ Rec, OK. R-e-c.  
42

43 KA: And Center. A Night Out, that's what it's called, A Night Out, on Fridays for LGBTQ youth to  
44 come together and just kick it, play sports, watch movies, have conversations, do art, all those  
45 things – cook.  
46

1 AJ: That's incredible.  
2  
3 KA: Yeah, so I've been volunteering there. That's over near Hamline University.  
4  
5 AJ: In St. Paul?  
6  
7 KA: Yes. I also did a workshop, along with Zyon Gray at Reclaim with their youth on Thursdays.  
8 We're doing a letter writing workshop, a coming out letter writing workshop. That was really  
9 great. We'll be doing a lot more volunteering here in the Twin Cities but other than that I've  
10 worked with many of the over 40 different colleges and universities and their LGBT student  
11 organizations.  
12  
13 AJ: As a public speaker?  
14  
15 KA: Yeah. Public speaker . . .  
16  
17 AJ: Trainer?  
18  
19 KA: Trainer, workshop facilitator. I've worked with You Belong and one of their youth sport camps  
20 in Chicago. I worked with GLISTEN, Gay and Lesbian Sports Education Network in New York,  
21 kind of looking over or revising, I don't know what the word is, their . . . like trying to create a  
22 high school trans policy but based off of the NCAA policy. So I worked with them a little bit  
23 when I first came out. And a whole bunch of other organizations. But yeah . . .  
24  
25 AJ: I know you were involved with GLAD for a little while, weren't you?  
26  
27 KA: I did a few projects with them . . . I think a few video projects, as well as GO! Athletes and NBJC,  
28 the National Black Justice Coalition. Yeah.  
29  
30 AJ: So you've been deeply involved in sort of activist, political, cultural shift work for quite some  
31 time.  
32  
33 KA: Yeah.  
34  
35 AJ: What has been the impact of being trans identified on your professional life?  
36  
37 KA: What's been the impact?  
38  
39 AJ: If any, I don't know.  
40  
41 KA: I mean really having to talk about, I guess, that's my job, which is talking about something that is  
42 so personal, something that is just so me as my job. And it gave me access to folks to be able to  
43 ask me personal questions, so I just open myself up to that time in and time again – with anyone  
44 and everyone, with people who I just first meet. "Hey, yup, boom, I'm Kye, the trans person."  
45 It's been great, I've had some really great, amazing transformational conversations with folks  
46 and I've learned a lot. But it's also been exhausting and draining because you have to be on, it's

1 your job. I realize that sharing such personal parts of me, it does drain me in a way – it takes a  
2 lot of energy to really bring my full self consistently, time in and time out, time in and time out,  
3 to different people and all the different kinds of people that I meet, which is why I think I’m at  
4 this place now of just being home and being like, “You know what? I want to work more behind  
5 the scenes.” I still want to create change, I still want to do something that has an impact on  
6 LGBTQ youth, LGBTQ youth of color, but I just don’t want to be the face. I don’t want to me like,  
7 “Hi, let me put myself out . . .” No, let me create a platform for other people to be able to come  
8 and y’all share your stories, y’all do your thing. I will support from the back.  
9

10 AJ: Yeah, it’s a lot of work and a lot of energy and a lot of effort. It’s very much appreciated that  
11 you were able to do it for as long as you did.  
12

13 KA: Three years.  
14

15 AJ: And I’m sure that you will still be visible.  
16

17 KA: In some kind of way – some kind of way.  
18

19 AJ: In many ways, many beautiful ways. Have you lost any friends since coming out?  
20

21 KA: Yes. But I wouldn’t say it’s because of me being trans, I think it’s just from me being a bad  
22 friend, me not doing the things I said I was going to do, me not showing up, me promising that  
23 I’m going to do something and I don’t do it, me not calling when I said I’m going to call, me not  
24 spending time, me not acting like I really care about what my friends are going through in their  
25 lives because I’m so preoccupied with me and what I’m doing. I feel that. I learned a lot about  
26 myself in this search for who I am and the things that I’ve done. I’ve hurt a lot of people, a lot of  
27 people who I really cared about because I’ve just been so focused on trying to make a  
28 difference, trying to help other people. I think now I’m trying to go back and show . . . be more  
29 intentional about where I spend my time, be more intentional about OK, Kye, you know you like  
30 to say yes to everything – no, say no to some things and really commit to OK I’m going to go and  
31 hang out with this person or I’m going to just call them and check in, or just text, or whatever.  
32 It’s been a transition of just learning how to balance, create more balance and set boundaries –  
33 balance and boundaries have been huge. I haven’t lost all my friends. I have a few really, really  
34 good friends who have been tough on me, like, “Kye, you’ve been a shitty friend, you need to  
35 get your shit together.” They have really helped me just kind of snapping out of myself and just  
36 been like, “Yeah, you’re right.” And when I catch myself doing things that I . . . committing to  
37 things when I know OK – no, no, no, no Kye, remember. And then having to retract and then be  
38 like, “Actually, I’m sorry, I know I said I could this but I actually can’t.” So that I can do what I  
39 know I’m supposed to do, or be where I know I’m supposed to be. And I think that’s just a  
40 matter of being more of a responsible person or handling my responsibilities and being an adult.  
41

42 AJ: I don’t think I’ve ever heard anybody be quite that honest and introspective about themselves.  
43 It’s beautiful that you recognize that in yourself and that you’re working to take steps to rectify  
44 that.  
45

- 1 KA: Yeah. My friends, they mean everything to me and I think that's . . . after doing all this work, I've  
2 been spending a lot of time on people who aren't really my friends. Yes, I might meet you, I  
3 might see you at an event, and we have a great conversation, we have a great connection, but  
4 there are those people who really have always had my back or who are there. Those are the  
5 people that I should be nourishing or checking in with and that's what really matters at the end  
6 of the day. Those people who you just met for five seconds aren't going to be there when you  
7 really need someone. Yeah, I don't want to hurt my friends anymore, I don't want to lose any  
8 more people who really do have my back because being public has really taught me and showed  
9 me who my real friends are – who's real and who is not. And so now that I know that I'm like OK  
10 – let's get it together, what do I want my life to look like? Who do I want in my life and who is  
11 there now? That's what I want.  
12
- 13 AJ: Awesome. Have you had any experiences where people have been helpful or insensitive like  
14 within the medical industry or . . . ?  
15
- 16 KA: Like doctors or nurses or . . . ?  
17
- 18 AJ: Doctors and nurses, educational institutions, criminal justice system? Where have you run into  
19 obstacles and where have you received support?  
20
- 21 KA: I haven't really been out much in that sense of doing things. Doctor visits are always interesting.  
22 I was in DC, that's where my main doctor was and then I got used to a person in New York. But  
23 then moving back here to Minnesota, I had to kind of . . . all right, what am I going to do? Well,  
24 a physician that I was working with, they had to Google again trans folks, like what is this?  
25
- 26 AJ: That's scary, but at least they were willing to do it.  
27
- 28 KA: Yeah. But it's still like . . . ah, I would like to go to a doctor that knows what they're doing. That  
29 happened to me in New York one time. I had to go to the emergency room and at first they  
30 weren't going to let me in, I told them that I needed to get my blood drawn, that I was a trans  
31 person and they were just like, "Oh, well you need to go to a clinic, we can't help you." And I  
32 was literally about to pass out but luckily I was with one of my friends and she does not play and  
33 she went back in there and she was like, "No, this is what's going to happen, he needs to get  
34 help." And then she was like, "All right, all right, all right." And then they saw me. But when I  
35 got in, one of their doctors/nurses, they had to Google it too – they just didn't know, they were  
36 just like, "We're just going to give you all the tests and take everything out." I was like,  
37 "Whatever, just do what you've got to do." But still, it's like unless I go to a LGBT or trans-  
38 specific place, sometimes they won't know - they might not know. They might not know how to  
39 best care for you and that's scary when it's your life.  
40
- 41 AJ: Yes. But you always self-disclose prior to?  
42
- 43 KA: Well, I mean, I think because of my job I'm just so used to, "Hey, I'm Kye, I'm trans." It's just  
44 kind of a thing. I did that a lot then. Now, more so, I tend to kind of . . . I'll feel it out. But yeah,  
45 before I would always just kind of say it.  
46



1 AJ: Wow. Well that gives people an opportunity to figure out how to deal with whatever the issues  
2 are. Where do you see the trans community ending up? Or where do you see the trans  
3 community fifty years from now?  
4

5 KA: The trans community . . . trans people are everywhere. I think we're just going to continue to  
6 grow. I feel like the more visible people continue to get, more people will be able to see there  
7 are possibilities and realize, "Oh, OK, yes – this describes exactly who I have been my entire  
8 life." Or, "This is right for me." I feel like that's going to continue to happen and trans won't  
9 really be – it won't be a thing, you are who you are – great. I feel we will definitely get to that  
10 point and people will probably be sick of asking, "OK, how do you identify?" "What does that  
11 mean?" Because everyone is going to be different. I feel like we'll just be . . . I feel like in fifty  
12 years we'll probably get to people slowing down and just being like you know it's not about  
13 knowing everything, it's about being in the moment and having conversations. "Hi, who are  
14 you? Let me not judge because of what you look like or whatever." No, no, no. "Hi, how are  
15 you doing? What's your name? Where are you from?"  
16

17 AJ: That vision would have some positive impacts for our entire society.  
18

19 KA: Yeah.  
20

21 AJ: I like it. Kye, is there anything else you want people to know about you? About the community?  
22 About life? I don't know.  
23

24 KA: I am who I am, I'm a regular kind of person. I use the words regular, normal. I feel like everyone  
25 is regular and normal. When you wake up and whatever you experience, that's your every day,  
26 that is your normal. What am I trying to say? I feel like when people hear trans and they don't  
27 understand that, they might be fearful or think that it's a negative thing. "No, this can't be  
28 possible, these people don't know who they are." We know exactly who we are, it's just a  
29 matter of listening and allowing us to say, "This is who I am." And when we tell you this is who  
30 we are, if I say I'm a trans person or I say I'm a trans man or trans woman or these are my  
31 preferred gender pronouns, this is who I am – you don't need to question it. Yeah, you don't  
32 need to question it – that's it. It's pretty simple. It's not rocket science – you don't gotta back  
33 and be like, "Well, so then does that mean that you were . . .?" No, no, no – that means exactly  
34 what I just said. I think of this example of someone . . . we were at an LGBT thing and she was  
35 like, "You know, I'm just walking around and I just want to know, how do you self-identify? I'm  
36 just asking people so I can be respectful." "OK, I'm queer." "All right, so you're bi-sexual?" "I'm  
37 queer." "So you're pansexual?" "I'm queer." And she's like, "OK." It's like people will tend to .  
38 . . "OK, it can't be this so it must be this or more like that." "I just told you exactly who I am, just  
39 say 'OK, great' and keep it moving. You can ask me where I'm from, you can ask me what I like  
40 to eat or what I don't like to eat, all those things." But we know exactly who we are, it doesn't  
41 have to be as scary as people make it out to be.  
42

43 AJ: What do trans people eat anyway?  
44

45 KA: We eat whatever we like. We eat what we like.  
46

- 1 AJ: I'm just kidding. Kye, thank you so much for this amazing hour together. I really appreciate it.  
2 Man, we'll talk soon.  
3  
4 KA: I look forward to it.  
5  
6 AJ: All right.  
7