

Valerie Spencer  
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins  
Interviewer

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

October 5, 2017



The Transgender Oral History Project of the Upper Midwest will empower individuals to tell their story, while providing students, historians, and the public with a more rich foundation of primary source material about the transgender community. The project is part of the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota. The archive provides a record of GLBT thought, knowledge and culture for current and future generations and is available to students, researchers and members of the public.

The Transgender Oral History Project will collect up to 400 hours of oral histories involving 200 to 300 individuals over the next three years. Major efforts will be the recruitment of individuals of all ages and experiences, and documenting the work of The Program in Human Sexuality. This project will be led by Andrea Jenkins, poet, writer, and trans-activist. Andrea brings years of experience working in government, non-profits and LGBT organizations. If you are interested in being involved in this exciting project, please contact Andrea.

Andrea Jenkins

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1     Andrea Jenkins           -AJ  
2     Valerie Spencer       -VS  
3  
4     AJ:     So hello. My name is Andrea Jenkins. I am the oral historian for The Transgender Oral History  
5             Project at the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota Libraries. Today is September 5<sup>th</sup>.  
6             It's actually one minute after midnight so it is October 5<sup>th</sup>, not September 5<sup>th</sup>. October 5<sup>th</sup>. Uh,  
7             it's a full moon tonight. Did you know that?  
8  
9     VS:     I didn't. No, I did not.  
10  
11    AJ:     [Laughs]. Uh, and I'm here today with Valerie Spencer, the legendary, the iconic, the queen bee.  
12  
13    VS:     [Laughs].  
14  
15    AJ:     Uhm, yeah. Oh my goodness.  
16  
17    VS:     In a hotel.  
18  
19    AJ:     In a hotel...  
20  
21    VS:     Story of my life.  
22  
23    AJ:     ... in New York City.  
24  
25    VS:     Mhm.  
26  
27    AJ:     Uptown in fact. Harlem.  
28  
29    VS:     Tired and exhausted.  
30  
31    AJ:     Tired and exhausted cause we've been working. We've been putting in some work. Uhm, how  
32             are you doing this morning?  
33  
34    VS:     Other than tired and exhausted I feel wonderful. Uhm, I feel enthusiastic. I feel, uh,  
35             contemplative. I feel reflective. I feel nervous about the change that's happening...  
36  
37    AJ:     Yeah.  
38  
39    VS:     ... in my life in a good way.  
40  
41    AJ:     In good ways.  
42  
43    VS:     Uhm, you know, life is taking place.  
44  
45    AJ:     Mhm.  
46  
47    VS:     For me I'm no exception. Life is... the challenges are taking place.

1  
2 AJ: Life challenges is all right?  
3  
4 VS: Ah, it does.  
5  
6 AJ: Mhm.  
7  
8 VS: In some very challenging ways.  
9  
10 AJ: Yeah.  
11  
12 VS: But I have to remind myself that I am resilient believe it or not. And, uh, keep on pushing.  
13  
14 AJ: Well, I'm glad you're... you mentioned you're in a reflective mood.  
15  
16 VS: Mhm.  
17  
18 AJ: I'm glad to hear that. So Valerie, I will start with a couple of questions. Uhm, state your name.  
19  
20 VS: Mhm.  
21  
22 AJ: Spell your name just so we can have the, make sure we spell it right. Uhm, and tell me, define  
23 your gender identity today and your gender assigned at birth and the pronouns that you use.  
24  
25 VS: Okay. My name is Valerie Spencer. That's spelled V.A.L.E.R.I.E. Spencer. S.P.E.N.C.E.R. At the  
26 time of interview comma MSW. [Laughs].  
27  
28 AJ: Alright. Alright.  
29  
30 VS: Master's in Social Work.  
31  
32 AJ: Uhuh.  
33  
34 VS: Uh, let's see, what's my gender identity? Today I would say woman parenthesis trans.  
35  
36 AJ: Mh. Okay.  
37  
38 VS: I view my, I am a woman but I view my transness as, uh, a sexual and in some instances a  
39 medical issue.  
40  
41 AJ: Mhm, mhm.  
42  
43 VS: If it needs to be, even though I'm very proud of my, uh, identity politic...  
44  
45 AJ: Right.  
46

1 VS: ... uhm, today that plays a background and I've just returned to being Valerie. Uhm, let's see.  
2 Gender assigned at birth. I think, uhm, well of course I was born male bodied.  
3  
4 AJ: Mhm, mhm.  
5  
6 VS: Uhm, and I discovered who I was along the way.  
7  
8 AJ: Sure.  
9  
10 VS: And today I am a fully actualized being.  
11  
12 AJ: [Laughs].  
13  
14 VS: Uhm, and I like it.  
15  
16 AJ: Yeah.  
17  
18 VS: It's fun. Mhm.  
19  
20 AJ: Wow. Uhm, if someone wants to refer to you by anything other than queen or Valerie what  
21 pronouns would they use.  
22  
23 VS: If they mean queen in a very flattering way, I'll receive that.  
24  
25 AJ: Uhuh.  
26  
27 VS: Uh, if they mean queen in a very colloquial way...  
28  
29 AJ: Oh yeah.  
30  
31 VS: ... I find that rather offensive.  
32  
33 AJ: Sure.  
34  
35 VS: But, uh, she.  
36  
37 AJ: Well I meant it only...  
38  
39 VS: I know. [Laughs].  
40  
41 AJ: ... in the most highest graceful way.  
42  
43 VS: Thank you. Thank you, thank you. I know that. Uhm, she, her, hers, Ma'am...  
44  
45 AJ: Ma'am.  
46  
47 VS: ... works. All of those good things.

1  
2 AJ: [Laughs]. Oh you're so beautiful.  
3  
4 VS: Thank you.  
5  
6 AJ: Uhm.  
7  
8 VS: Take a little sip.  
9  
10 AJ: So Valerie where are you from?  
11  
12 VS: I was born and raised in Los Angeles, California.  
13  
14 AJ: Mhm.  
15  
16 VS: Uh, today, uh, today I still live right outside of Los Angeles in the suburbs.  
17  
18 AJ: Okay.  
19  
20 VS: So I'm a California woman.  
21  
22 AJ: California. Woman.  
23  
24 VS: Yes, yes. Born and raised.  
25  
26 AJ: So one of the first questions I ask everybody just to try to give people into their head and, you  
27 know, into their memory bank like what's the first thing you remember in life?  
28  
29 VS: Oh, that's a very painful memory.  
30  
31 AJ: Really?  
32  
33 VS: Yeah, I have gotten in touch with...  
34  
35 AJ: If you don't want to talk about it, that's...  
36  
37 VS: I'm okay. I'm solid. I'm on solid ground. My very first memory, uh, was as a child as a baby.  
38  
39 AJ: Mhm.  
40  
41 VS: In fact, I remember hearing my father beating my mother. And my mother screaming.  
42  
43 AJ: Mhm.  
44  
45 VS: Uhm, my very first memory as a child, uhm, it's not as loud as of an amplified sound as it is in  
46 my— as it was in my head.  
47

1 AJ: Sure.  
2  
3 VS: Earlier I just remember the memory. And also, uhm, there was a Halloween mask of a devil's  
4 mask in my bedroom and that just scared the dickens out of me.  
5  
6 AJ: Wow.  
7  
8 VS: But I really, I remember the devil mask, and I remember, uh, my mother screaming. Oddly  
9 enough my mother doesn't remember that.  
10  
11 AJ: Really?  
12  
13 VS: Uh-uh. But I vividly remember and, and I remember, uh, him tossing the nurse's shoe with the  
14 ridges.  
15  
16 AJ: Uhuh, yeah. Right, uhuh.  
17  
18 VS: The jagged ridges on the bottom.  
19  
20 AJ: Uhuh.  
21  
22 VS: The white nurse's shoe. That's the shoe that he was beating her with and he tossed it into the  
23 bedroom where I was, uh, as he was finished.  
24  
25 AJ: Mh.  
26  
27 VS: That is my very first memory, uhm, as a child.  
28  
29 AJ: That is a painful memory. [Laughs]. Uhm, so, uhm, wow, you, uhm, thank you for sharing.  
30  
31 VS: But don't worry about me. I'm solid. I'm solid.  
32  
33 AJ: I appreciate it.  
34  
35 VS: It's a painful. It's a painful memory to have.  
36  
37 AJ: Mhm.  
38  
39 VS: But it does not cause me pain. And whatever trauma that it, uh, had in my consciousness or  
40 subconsciousness, I've long since worked through it.  
41  
42 AJ: You've worked through.  
43  
44 VS: Yeah.  
45  
46 AJ: I'm glad to hear that. Uhm, so did you grow up in an intact family with mom and dad around  
47 and...

1  
2 VS: Initially my father and mother were married.  
3  
4 AJ: Mhm.  
5  
6 VS: Black family living in Los Angeles. However when I was two my mother and father divorced.  
7 Uhm, thank god. [Laughs]. My mother and father divorced. And my father came around  
8 sporadically.  
9  
10 AJ: Sure.  
11  
12 VS: Uhm, but I lived primarily with my mother.  
13  
14 AJ: Okay.  
15  
16 VS: Uhm, and my great aunt helped to raise me so some of who I am today as a result of my great  
17 aunt's influenced a lot of who I am today as a result of my loving, beautiful mother who I just  
18 worship and adore, and we live together, uh, to this day.  
19  
20 AJ: Lulu.  
21  
22 VS: Lulu is my girl.  
23  
24 AJ: [Laughs].  
25  
26 VS: She is my heartbeat and the center of my universe.  
27  
28 AJ: What's your great aunt's name?  
29  
30 VS: Uh, Naomi Berriman.  
31  
32 AJ: Oh wow.  
33  
34 VS: She's since moved on to another expression of living.  
35  
36 AJ: Mhm, mhm.  
37  
38 VS: Uhm, but yes, she taught me a lot, and, uhm, poured so much into me but, uh, my father came  
39 around from time to time, and, uh, I think he knew...  
40  
41 AJ: Mhm.  
42  
43 VS: ... thank my father was a career Navy man, boxer.  
44  
45 AJ: Okay. Wow. [Laughs].  
46  
47 VS: Uh, the original bougie black man, spoke Mandarin and Cantonese.



1  
2 AJ: Oh my goodness.  
3  
4 VS: Fluently Navy man cause he traveled throughout...  
5  
6 AJ: All around the world, yeah.  
7  
8 VS: Especially throughout Asia.  
9  
10 AJ: Asia, mhm.  
11  
12 VS: Uhm, and so he prided himself on his intelligence and his...  
13  
14 AJ: Prowess. [Laughs].  
15  
16 VS: Yes. And his business acumen. It's where I get much of my professionalism today, I believe.  
17 Uhm, but I think he knew early on that this is not... this is not my imagining of what my son...  
18  
19 AJ: Mhm.  
20  
21 VS: ... should be. And he responded to that very violently.  
22  
23 AJ: Really?  
24  
25 VS: And I was not, yeah, I was not his ideal of his spitting image.  
26  
27 AJ: Mm.  
28  
29 VS: Uhm, I was a very soft and frail child. I was a very dainty child.  
30  
31 AJ: Mhm.  
32  
33 VS: Uh, I'm a very feminine woman today.  
34  
35 AJ: Absolutely.  
36  
37 VS: And, uh, you know, it's nothing I boast with. It's just who I am.  
38  
39 AJ: No, you are one of the feminine women I know.  
40  
41 VS: [Laughs].  
42  
43 AJ: And I know a lot of women.  
44  
45 VS: [Laughs]. And, uhm, and, uhm, and so he knew this was not, I was not going to be a player. I was  
46 not going to be another notch. I wasn't gonna jump rope like he wanted me to like a boxer.  
47

1 AJ: Right.  
2  
3 VS: He sort of knew that he could look at me, and he really resented that I looked like my mother.  
4  
5 AJ: Mhm.  
6  
7 VS: We looked a lot alike. She's shorter than me and lighter than me.  
8  
9 AJ: Mhm.  
10  
11 VS: Uhm, but many people say we look just alike.  
12  
13 AJ: Oh wow.  
14  
15 VS: And, uhm, he wanted me to be butch, bless his heart. [Laughs].  
16  
17 AJ: [Laughs]. Bless your heart.  
18  
19 VS: Bless his heart. In short he wanted me to be his son.  
20  
21 AJ: Right.  
22  
23 VS: He wanted me to be his son and he sensed early on, without having the language...  
24  
25 AJ: Mhm.  
26  
27 VS: ... uhm, that I was...  
28  
29 AJ: That that really wasn't going to be the reality.  
30  
31 VS: I was not his son, and he really responded to that. [Laughs].  
32  
33 AJ: Wow. [Laughs].  
34  
35 VS: Yes.  
36  
37 AJ: Any siblings?  
38  
39 VS: Nope, I'm an only child. Actually, uhm, I was born with an older brother...  
40  
41 AJ: Mhm.  
42  
43 VS: ... who was murdered when I was four.  
44  
45 AJ: Oh no.  
46  
47 VS: That made... I was always an only child in the home.

1  
2 AJ: Mhm.  
3  
4 VS: But my brother was much older than me and, uh, once he was murdered I became the official...  
5  
6 AJ: The official, only...  
7  
8 VS: ... only child in my mother's. My father had another daughter that I never saw her, my  
9 stepsister.  
10  
11 AJ: Mhm.  
12  
13 VS: I think I met her once.  
14  
15 AJ: Yeah.  
16  
17 VS: And, uhm, that was, that was that.  
18  
19 AJ: Mhm. Wow. So what was life like in Los Angeles in the late '60s, 70s? I mean you came of age in  
20 the '70s?  
21  
22 VS: Uhuh. I did.  
23  
24 AJ: Uhm.  
25  
26 VS: I really came of age in the '80s.  
27  
28 AJ: In the '80s. Okay.  
29  
30 VS: Yeah. You know, my childhood was, uhm, you know, I wouldn't say I was picked on as a child. It  
31 was a very innocent space. I spent a lot of alone time cause I was an only child.  
32  
33 AJ: Okay.  
34  
35 VS: And I liked it.  
36  
37 AJ: Right.  
38  
39 VS: I liked being adored by my mother.  
40  
41 AJ: Mhm.  
42  
43 VS: And dotted on by my mother. And I made friends with the neighborhood children. And, uh, my  
44 mother, you know, suddenly, you know, the neighborhood child was my brother or my sister,  
45 and, uh, at that time in our neighborhood, uh, although it wasn't the same neighborhood but at  
46 the time in culture, period...  
47

1 AJ: Right.  
2  
3 VS: ... uh, women weren't just mothers to their children. They were mothers to all of the children.  
4  
5 AJ: All of the children. Mhm.  
6  
7 VS: Uhm, and if one woman spanked you, you know, she had every right to spank you.  
8  
9 AJ: Right.  
10  
11 VS: Uh, and she didn't just feed her children. She fed all of them. My mother was an exceptional  
12 hard working woman.  
13  
14 AJ: Mhm.  
15  
16 VS: She was a nurse at the time, a private duty nurse and works at Good Samaritan Hospital with my  
17 aunt.  
18  
19 AJ: Mhm.  
20  
21 VS: Uhm, and had moved here from Northern California, moved to LA from Northern California for a  
22 better life.  
23  
24 AJ: Right, right.  
25  
26 VS: And she got it. She got it but, uhm.  
27  
28 AJ: Sacramento?  
29  
30 VS: Stockton.  
31  
32 AJ: Stockton.  
33  
34 VS: Stockton. Okay. Uhm, and... [Laughs].  
35  
36 AJ: [Laughs].  
37  
38 VS: And, uh, so my childhood was very innocent and playful and, uhm, you know, skipping through  
39 the neighborhood. I used to love to skip.  
40  
41 AJ: Really? [Laughs].  
42  
43 VS: It was my thing. It was my thing. I would go into my bed. I would get a penny.  
44  
45 AJ: Uhuh.  
46  
47 VS: And I would skip to the liquor store on Adams all the time.

1  
2 AJ: Oh wow.  
3  
4 VS: I would skip to the liquor store and I would get my little penny bubble gum.  
5  
6 AJ: Uhuh.  
7  
8 VS: And I would skip back home, and I would pick flowers along the way. And someone would say,  
9 "Why are you picking those flowers out my?" "These are for my moma."  
10  
11 AJ: Oh. [Laughs].  
12  
13 VS: However, uh, the ground started shaking, shall we say.  
14  
15 AJ: Uhuh.  
16  
17 VS: Uh, when I went to kindergarten.  
18  
19 AJ: Yeah.  
20  
21 VS: That's when the, the ground started shaking.  
22  
23 AJ: Okay.  
24  
25 VS: Uh, Miss Quan was my kindergarten teacher.  
26  
27 AJ: Mhm.  
28  
29 VS: And, uh, it was time to play dress up.  
30  
31 AJ: Mm.  
32  
33 VS: It was time to play dress up. Everybody's gotta dress up. It was time to play dress up, and I  
34 automatically went to the girl's box, and I pulled, I would forget it, this black beaded gown.  
35  
36 AJ: [Laughs].  
37  
38 VS: It wasn't to the floor. It was like a knee length gown, like past the knee length...  
39  
40 AJ: Uhuh.  
41  
42 VS: ... with little straps. And it had a beaded pillbox hat to match with it. That and a matching  
43 beaded purse, black purse. That, my dear, was my outfit.  
44  
45 AJ: I'm only laughing y'all that's listening to this cause that's Valerie right now, right? Like you might  
46 see her in a black...  
47

1 VS: I don't see myself that way!  
2  
3 AJ: ... sequin...  
4  
5 VS: Oh, never! Oh!  
6  
7 AJ: ... pearls.  
8  
9 VS: No.  
10  
11 AJ: [Laughs].  
12  
13 VS: No, not at all.  
14  
15 AJ: You give them class, honey.  
16  
17 VS: Well, I, I'm a classy chick. I will say that.  
18  
19 AJ: You do. You give them class.  
20  
21 VS: Thank you. [Laughs]. But, uhm, touch my gown and die was my attitude and, and my  
22 kindergarten teacher, Miss Quan, said...  
23  
24 AJ: Mhm.  
25  
26 VS: ... "Oh, no, no, no! You're supposed to go to the other box?" And I thought, "Oh, there's suits  
27 and stuff over there."  
28  
29 AJ: [Laughs]. "Why? Why would I go over there?"  
30  
31 VS: "Why would I go over there?"  
32  
33 AJ: [Laughs].  
34  
35 VS: And called my mother to the school, of course, and my mother is just like, "I don't know." And  
36 so my teacher Miss Quan said, "Well, I guess we are gonna have to go ahead and... since your  
37 mother doesn't mind, we're gonna let you play in the box that you want to," which for me was  
38 like, "I'm so sure."  
39  
40 AJ: Right.  
41  
42 VS: Absolutely. And move away from my gown. This is mine.  
43  
44 AJ: Okay. [Laughs].  
45  
46 VS: This is my outfit. And I went to this same outfit every... but first grade was where I started to be  
47 teased...

1  
2 AJ: Mm. Mhm.  
3  
4 VS: ... for something that I did not know like, like why are they, you know, tease me? Why these two  
5 girls trying to beat me up? I lived in a rough neighborhood anyway.  
6  
7 AJ: Right.  
8  
9 VS: I didn't know it was rough on my block...  
10  
11 AJ: Mhm.  
12  
13 VS: ... because my mother would walk to the school and then walk me home and then she would  
14 walk to the school and hide and watch me walk home.  
15  
16 AJ: Right, right.  
17  
18 VS: You know, she did that sort of thing.  
19  
20 AJ: Mhm.  
21  
22 VS: Uhm, but first grader was where the rumblings...  
23  
24 AJ: Mm.  
25  
26 VS: ... uh, started...  
27  
28 AJ: Began.  
29  
30 VS: ... began, yeah.  
31  
32 AJ: Hm. When did you first realize that you were not this gender that was trying to be thrust  
33 upon you?  
34  
35 VS: Oh, I don't think I ever knew that. Uh, I don't think I ever knew that. I knew... early on there was  
36 something about me that people were responding to...  
37  
38 AJ: Mhm.  
39  
40 VS: ... in this very interesting way. And suddenly I knew that I was not safe for reasons beyond my  
41 knowing like I knew that I was not safe. So I tried to be a quite as possible.  
42  
43 AJ: Mm.  
44  
45 VS: I hid a lot as a child. That was my thing. Hiding on the furniture, at the babysitter.  
46  
47 AJ: Where the baby at? [Laughs].

1  
2 VS: We know you in this front room somewhere. We know you in this dining room. Come on up  
3 from under there, and it's time for you to eat your cheese sandwich.  
4  
5 AJ: Uhuh.  
6  
7 VS: Then I'd come out.  
8  
9 AJ: Right. [Laughs].  
10  
11 VS: But I was always hiding. I was always hiding and isolating because I knew I just was not safe.  
12  
13 AJ: Mm.  
14  
15 VS: Uhm, but I didn't know it was things like girl or boy or even gay or straight.  
16  
17 AJ: Mhm.  
18  
19 VS: Uh, I just knew that there was something about me that was like... people are responding to me  
20 in some ways, and I'm not really safe. And my father used to pick me up from home or pick me  
21 up from this babysitter.  
22  
23 AJ: Mhm.  
24  
25 VS: And every single time he would take me see his rulebook...  
26  
27 AJ: Wow.  
28  
29 VS: ... take my clothes off, buy me a suit, shirt, and tie, and throw my clothes in a bag and toss it in  
30 the car.  
31  
32 AJ: Oh wow.  
33  
34 VS: Every time he came from visitation or whatever...  
35  
36 AJ: Uhuh.  
37  
38 VS: ... he would complete— he would go make a B line...  
39  
40 AJ: Wow.  
41  
42 VS: ... and go buy me a whole new suit of clothes and, cause my father was an insurance agent at  
43 Equitable Life Insurance...  
44  
45 AJ: Okay.  
46



1 VS: ... [Laughs]. And he was like, he would look at me and he would be like, "Get in the car." "Okay."  
2 And he would go straight to Sears.  
3  
4 AJ: Wow.  
5  
6 VS: And buy me a whole, "I don't know whatcha moma's dressing is... some bullshit."  
7  
8 AJ: [Laughs].  
9  
10 VS: And he would take... I think my father knew...  
11  
12 AJ: Mhm.  
13  
14 VS: ... what it was when he took me to the playboy club as a child...  
15  
16 AJ: Mm.  
17  
18 VS: ... with one of his colleagues.  
19  
20 AJ: Uhuh.  
21  
22 VS: And 2020 Avenue of the Stars...  
23  
24 AJ: Oh wow.  
25  
26 VS: Century City, California.  
27  
28 AJ: Uhuh.  
29  
30 VS: He took me to the playboy club, and this was his effort to butch me up. He had many of these  
31 efforts.  
32  
33 AJ: Right. [Laughs].  
34  
35 VS: But his first big one, the epic fail, as I call it.  
36  
37 AJ: Right. [Laughs]. Epic fail.  
38  
39 VS: He was taking me to the playboy club.  
40  
41 AJ: Mhm.  
42  
43 VS: And he said, "Look at, come here," and he'd call the playboy bunny over and wonderful,  
44 beautiful white woman, and she had this yellow playboy bunny with the ears.  
45  
46 AJ: Okay.  
47

1 VS: "Look at her titties." And I said, "I like your tail. I like your tail."  
2  
3 AJ: [Laughs].  
4  
5 VS: "Can I touch your tail?" And his colleague was with him, and I said, "Daddy, get me the tail."  
6  
7 AJ: Oh, wow.  
8  
9 VS: "I want me a tail, and I want the ears."  
10  
11 AJ: [Laughs].  
12  
13 VS: And he, his colleague just sort of... and I said, "Excuse me lady, lady, lady, I like your fluffy stuff."  
14  
15 AJ: Uhuh.  
16  
17 VS: And she said, "You like my," I will never forget this, she said, "You like my cleavage?" I said, "I  
18 like your fluffy stuff." She said, "That's called my cleavage." And I said, "Daddy, get me some  
19 cleavage!"  
20  
21 AJ: [Laughs].  
22  
23 VS: "Daddy! Daddy! Will you get me some cleavage? Daddy!" And I was touching on her cleavage.  
24 "Daddy, will you get me some cleavage? Daddy! Get me some cleavage."  
25  
26 AJ: [Laughs].  
27  
28 VS: And his colleague began to laugh. And I said, "Oh, you smell, oh, you smell." And she said, "I'll be  
29 right back." And she got me a little sample of kanu kanu aftershave.  
30  
31 AJ: Oh, my goodness.  
32  
33 VS: And I took it and...  
34  
35 AJ: Uhuh.  
36  
37 VS: ... just dabbing it, right? And he was furious.  
38  
39 AJ: [Laughs].  
40  
41 VS: And he said, "Clap your hands and rub it in." And I did not do that.  
42  
43 AJ: [Laughs].  
44  
45 VS: I was like, "Oh my god, no." And he got so furious...  
46  
47 AJ: Uhuh.

1  
2 VS: ... of me asking. I was like, "Daddy, get me some cleavage. Daddy, I want some cleavage." And he  
3 was furious. He was embarrassed.  
4  
5 AJ: Yes.  
6  
7 VS: And when we got home, he expressed his rage.  
8  
9 AJ: Mm.  
10  
11 VS: He expressed his rage.  
12  
13 AJ: Oh wow.  
14  
15 VS: Yeah, that was, that was the epic fail...  
16  
17 AJ: Yes.  
18  
19 VS: ... of butchness as I call it.  
20  
21 AJ: [Laughs]. You didn't request cleavage anymore, did you?  
22  
23 VS: No. I did not request cleavage anymore. Uhm, you know, he tried to, we were watching  
24 television one time when I was a bit older that's when the problems really began when I was  
25 about, uhm, nine or ten that's when the problems. The problems really began. We would be  
26 watching television. He would grab my hand, and I would hear some sort of metal movement by  
27 my hand and I'd hear "snip." "What are you doing? What are you doing? No!" And he would be  
28 trying to clip my fingernails...  
29  
30 AJ: Oh wow.  
31  
32 VS: ... as a child. "No! Daddy, no! What are you doing cutting off my..."  
33  
34 AJ: [Laughs].  
35  
36 VS: And he would, and he also expressed his rage.  
37  
38 AJ: Mm.  
39  
40 VS: He was very, very physically abusive man.  
41  
42 AJ: Oh wow.  
43  
44 VS: Uhm, I forgive him. I forgive him.  
45  
46 AJ: Yeah?  
47

1 VS: He wanted a son. I couldn't be no son.  
2  
3 AJ: I know. I know.  
4  
5 VS: That's when I first, uh...  
6  
7 AJ: Is your father still alive?  
8  
9 VS: I don't know. I have not spoken to him since I was sixteen.  
10  
11 AJ: Wow.  
12  
13 VS: I haven't spoken to him since I was sixteen.  
14  
15 AJ: Uhm, when did you come out?  
16  
17 VS: So, I came out through the gay experience.  
18  
19 AJ: Mhm.  
20  
21 VS: So, uh, just trying to check my fro here.  
22  
23 AJ: [Laughs].  
24  
25 VS: Uh, I had tons of gay friends, tons of lesbian friends.  
26  
27 AJ: Mhm.  
28  
29 VS: See back then we didn't know anything about gays and lesbians.  
30  
31 AJ: Right.  
32  
33 VS: We had punks, sissies, faggots, bulldaggers, dykes, drag queens, and queens.  
34  
35 AJ: Right.  
36  
37 VS: I didn't find out about gay and lesbian people until I was about thirty.  
38  
39 AJ: Okay. [Laughs].  
40  
41 VS: Until I was in my late twenties. I was raised by old bulldaggers and faggots.  
42  
43 AJ: Right.  
44  
45 VS: Uhm, and so...  
46  
47 AJ: Sissies.

1  
2 VS: Sissies! Bulldaggers. Dykes. Miss Pat was the butchest you ever seen. And so our house where I  
3 lived with my moma, it was, it was the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center of Color.  
4  
5 AJ: Okay.  
6  
7 VS: So if you got put out your house, I'm going over Lulu's house and stuff.  
8  
9 AJ: Oh really?  
10  
11 VS: Oh yeah, my mother would call your mother and be like, "Don't put your child off of that." And  
12 then finally my mother asked me one day, "Are you gay?"  
13  
14 AJ: Uhuh.  
15  
16 VS: And I was like, "Darling," [laughs]...  
17  
18 AJ: [Laughs].  
19  
20 VS: "Well, of course," I mean, "Darling."  
21  
22 AJ: [Laughs].  
23  
24 VS: And so she tried to act like she was upset for about maybe like an hour.  
25  
26 AJ: Right.  
27  
28 VS: And she was like, "Child, come on, uh, tell John he can move in one of my gay friends, his  
29 boyfriend..."  
30  
31 AJ: Uhuh.  
32  
33 VS: "... tell John in and stay for a couple of weeks." It was like, [makes noises], uhm, and that was  
34 that and then my father last time I saw him, I was walking to the bus stop. And he said to me,  
35 "Well, I see it's taken hold."  
36  
37 AJ: Mm.  
38  
39 VS: And I was like, "Hi, daddy." And he said to me, "Well just don't catch AIDs and die."  
40  
41 AJ: Oh.  
42  
43 VS: And I didn't. I didn't.  
44  
45 AJ: Yes.  
46

1 VS: Well I was going with somebody at the time who bought me a dress and I thought, "Why would  
2 you, dear, bring me..."  
3  
4 AJ: Mhm.  
5  
6 VS: "... a dress? Like, what?" He said, "Baby, this is for you. This is what you supposed to be in."  
7  
8 AJ: [Laughs]. Right.  
9  
10 VS: "You need to take them pants off. This is for you." And I thought, "Oh my god, he thinks I'm a  
11 girl. You're near psychotic. What's wrong with you?" And, as I share that with my friends, but by  
12 that time I knew that, you know, I was, I was abused. I was picked on because I was feminine.  
13  
14 AJ: Mhm.  
15  
16 VS: I was put out of churches because I was feminine.  
17  
18 AJ: Right.  
19  
20 VS: You know, I had had a couple of exorcisms on me by black church folks.  
21  
22 AJ: Mhm.  
23  
24 VS: You know, because I was fear of feminine.  
25  
26 AJ: Sure.  
27  
28 VS: I was what's known as a faggot back then.  
29  
30 AJ: Mhm.  
31  
32 VS: And, uh, you know, beat up by the neighborhood and all of that. But by then I had knew  
33 something, nah ah. No, this gay thing, this is not, no. This is...  
34  
35 AJ: This is not... I'm not feeling this, right?  
36  
37 VS: This is not like it. This is not it. This is...  
38  
39 AJ: Mhm.  
40  
41 VS: There's something else. This is not it. And so when I shared that with, cause we used to come to  
42 my house and smoke weed...  
43  
44 AJ: Mhm.  
45  
46 VS: ... my mother could care less. And when I just sort of mentioned that to my friends, they were  
47 like, "We have been waiting for you to like change..."

1  
2 AJ: [Laughs]. Wow.  
3  
4 VS: "... cause, bitch, you ain't one of those sissies, girl. You one of the queens."  
5  
6 AJ: Right.  
7  
8 VS: And so my friends said to me...  
9  
10 AJ: [Laughs].  
11  
12 VS: "You should just be a drag queen." And I thought, "A drag queen?" "You should do shows and  
13 stuff." And I thought, okay, when I told my mother, "I'm gonna do a drag show," she, my  
14 mother, bless her heart...  
15  
16 AJ: Mhm.  
17  
18 VS: ... I think my mother was like a fag hag in another life or a drag hag...  
19  
20 AJ: Right.  
21  
22 VS: ... cause when I told my mother I was gonna go in drag for Halloween...  
23  
24 AJ: Uhuh.  
25  
26 VS: ... she went all out.  
27  
28 AJ: Did she? Went and purchased the costumes and everything? [Laughs].  
29  
30 VS: Oh my god, she went, I've always been sewer so she went and bought the fabric.  
31  
32 AJ: Uhuh.  
33  
34 VS: She rented myself and my friend a car.  
35  
36 AJ: Wow.  
37  
38 VS: She took me to the nail shop and got my nails done.  
39  
40 AJ: For Halloween. [Laughs].  
41  
42 VS: For Hallow— she gave me some money so I could go to Lindale Shoes in Los Angeles...  
43  
44 AJ: Uhuh.  
45  
46 VS: ... and bought my very first pair of red suede polka dot pumps.  
47

1 AJ: Oh my goodness.  
2  
3 VS: She, and when I got in drag she was thrilled.  
4  
5 AJ: Huh.  
6  
7 VS: So when I tell, and she was at the drag show that I did on Halloween. She was front row center.  
8  
9 AJ: Wow.  
10  
11 VS: Her and my godmother both.  
12  
13 AJ: Mhm.  
14  
15 VS: And at seventeen, uh, I begin to feel like, you know, not a drag queen. No, that's not what this  
16 is. Oh, this boy thing is not, ah, no.  
17  
18 AJ: Mm.  
19  
20 VS: And so I had an ear infection.  
21  
22 AJ: Mhm.  
23  
24 VS: And I went to the doctor and, uh, my birth last name is Gilmore, like my mother's last name.  
25  
26 AJ: Mhm.  
27  
28 VS: I changed my first and last name.  
29  
30 AJ: Okay.  
31  
32 VS: And so the doctor kept saying, get Miss Gilmore's chart, get Miss Gilmore's this.  
33  
34 AJ: Mhm.  
35  
36 VS: And the nurse kept doctor look at the chart. Doctor look at the chart.  
37  
38 AJ: Mhm.  
39  
40 VS: And finally she said, doctor look at the chart. And he looked at the chart and he looked at me  
41 and he looked at the chart. And he said, "Come into my office. I want you to talk to me." He  
42 said, "Are you— do you feel like trapped and stuff?" And I was like, "I don't know."  
43  
44 AJ: Mhm.  
45  
46 VS: And he referred me to this support group...  
47



1 AJ: Mm.  
2  
3 VS: ... that at the time was at this old kinda house on Highland and Hollywood.  
4  
5 AJ: Mhm.  
6  
7 VS: This old rickety kind of building. Well, that was the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center, and  
8 it's...  
9  
10 AJ: In West Hollywood?  
11  
12 VS: And it's... well, at this time it was in LA, it was in Hollywood, yes.  
13  
14 AJ: Uhuh.  
15  
16 VS: And so he referred me to a support group. I did not identify with anybody there.  
17  
18 AJ: Right.  
19  
20 VS: But I knew, "Aha! This is what it is."  
21  
22 AJ: Mhm.  
23  
24 VS: "I'm a transsexual. Aha!" And so it was just a matter of how I was going to tell my mom. So I did.  
25 I, when I was seventeen, I told my mother, "When I come home from vacation, I'm gonna  
26 change my name. I'm a girl and stuff."  
27  
28 AJ: Mhm.  
29  
30 VS: "I'm a transsexual. I think that's what I am." And my mother, which is why I worship her to this  
31 day...  
32  
33 AJ: Mhm.  
34  
35 VS: ... "Alright, well come on home and stuff and we going to give all your clothes away to the  
36 halfway house down the street."  
37  
38 AJ: [Whispers]. Wow.  
39  
40 VS: And what made my transition smooth was we were moving from LA all the way out to where we  
41 are now in the Inland Empire.  
42  
43 AJ: Okay.  
44  
45 VS: No one knew us there.  
46  
47 AJ: Sure.

1  
2 VS: And so my mother would always pay her rent up like four months in advanced.  
3  
4 AJ: Mhm.  
5  
6 VS: So she said, "I'm gonna move and you live out, you and your friends live out the rest of the  
7 rent."  
8  
9 AJ: Okay.  
10  
11 VS: And that is where I begin to dress fulltime.  
12  
13 AJ: Wow.  
14  
15 VS: And so by the time I got to Pomona, which is where we are now...  
16  
17 AJ: Mhm.  
18  
19 VS: ... I was dressing fulltime.  
20  
21 AJ: Mhm.  
22  
23 VS: And so my mother in that big yellow suitcase packed up all my clothes except for very few  
24 things...  
25  
26 AJ: Mhm.  
27  
28 VS: ... and when she get off work she swings by the thrift shop...  
29  
30 AJ: Wow.  
31  
32 VS: This is a black straight woman...  
33  
34 AJ: Mhm.  
35  
36 VS: ... in the '80s and '90s. This is why I worship.  
37  
38 AJ: Yeah.  
39  
40 VS: All the neighbors in LA said you need to put that child out on the street. My mother was like,  
41 "Put my child out? I'm not gonna put my child out on those streets."  
42  
43 AJ: Right.  
44  
45 VS: "In fact, I want other faggots to come over here, and they can stay with me too."  
46  
47 AJ: Okay. [Laughs].

1  
2 VS: And they did. And so my mother brought my first, she couldn't buy the shoes.  
3  
4 AJ: Uhuh.  
5  
6 VS: I had to find my own means for that. And then, uh, I changed my name and became Valerie  
7 Spencer.  
8  
9 AJ: Tell me about that. You said you changed your last, first, and last name.  
10  
11 VS: Ah, now that was the only thing that upset her.  
12  
13 AJ: Mm.  
14  
15 VS: She was mad about that.  
16  
17 AJ: [Laughs].  
18  
19 VS: "You're not gonna be no Gilmore."  
20  
21 AJ: [Laughs].  
22  
23 VS: "No, I'm not gonna be no Gilmore."  
24  
25 AJ: [Laughs].  
26  
27 VS: "Well, we're not going to have the same last name." "No, we are not gonna have the same last  
28 name. You wanna be a Spencer?"  
29  
30 AJ: Okay. [Laughs].  
31  
32 VS: "Or let's just both do your maiden name."  
33  
34 AJ: Uhuh.  
35  
36 VS: My idea was I did not want to take that evil motherfucker's name into my new, beautiful life.  
37  
38 AJ: Right.  
39  
40 VS: He was an evil ass man. And I did not want to take his name into my new life.  
41  
42 AJ: Mhm.  
43  
44 VS: I, no. "And why would you wanna keep it either, girl? He was horrible to you. You, let's just be  
45 your maiden name."  
46  
47 AJ: Yeah.

1  
2 VS: "Or you could be Spencer too."  
3  
4 AJ: [Laughs].  
5  
6 VS: "Well, where you even get that shit from?" "I saw it on TV." [Laughs].  
7  
8 AJ: [Laughs].  
9  
10 VS: Which is true.  
11  
12 AJ: The Valerie part too?  
13  
14 VS: Uhuh.  
15  
16 AJ: Okay.  
17  
18 VS: And, uh...  
19  
20 AJ: It so fits you like Valerie Spencer Like when your name comes up your image is there. I mean...  
21  
22 VS: I wanted a name that could be workable.  
23  
24 AJ: Mhm.  
25  
26 VS: I had, uhm, hm, I don't want to sound insulting but I didn't have a lot of trans role models.  
27  
28 AJ: Right.  
29  
30 VS: So and the...  
31  
32 AJ: They just weren't there.  
33  
34 VS: No. And the trans women that I knew were performers.  
35  
36 AJ: Mhm.  
37  
38 VS: And they all had— or were prostitutes.  
39  
40 AJ: Right.  
41  
42 VS: Ain't no shame in hollering.  
43  
44 AJ: No. Not at all.  
45  
46 VS: But they had very showgirl kind of names. Just not very daytime like names. And I knew I  
47 wanted a name where I could actually work and be, you know, in the world. Not just...

1  
2 AJ: So you don't wanna be like Candy Straw or...  
3  
4 VS: I did not want to be and it just didn't fit me. It did not fit me.  
5  
6 AJ: Uh, Valerie Spencer is cute. I love it.  
7  
8 VS: I'll take it. I'll take it. [Laughs]. I did take it.  
9  
10 AJ: Yes.  
11  
12 VS: Yeah.  
13  
14 AJ: Uhm, what has been some of the joys for you, Valerie, in living your truth as a woman, uhm,  
15 parenthesis, trans.  
16  
17 VS: Mm. Well, let's see. I think the first joy is, you know, I grew up very ostracized within the black  
18 church experience...  
19  
20 AJ: Mhm.  
21  
22 VS: ... the black Pentecostal church experience. I grew up very ostracized, very punished, very  
23 oppressed. And sort of early in my transition like in my early 20s, I came upon a dynamic man  
24 named Carl Bean, now Archbishop Carl Bean but then Reverend Carl Bean.  
25  
26 AJ: Hm.  
27  
28 VS: And the Unity Fellowship Church.  
29  
30 AJ: B.E.A.N.  
31  
32 VS: That's correct.  
33  
34 AJ: Mhm.  
35  
36 VS: And I'm a daughter of his work. I'm a daughter of his work. I will, I will never be the Valerie  
37 Spencer that you know without him. Just pouring into me.  
38  
39 AJ: Mm.  
40  
41 VS: And, uhm, there at Unity we learned this new relationship with God.  
42  
43 AJ: Mhm.  
44  
45 VS: We learned this new interpretation of God where we were not punished and there was no hell.  
46 Oh my god.  
47

1 AJ: Mhm.  
2  
3 VS: And we were not reprobate minds, and we weren't going to burn forever but God was love and  
4 love was for everybody.  
5  
6 AJ: Right.  
7  
8 VS: Uh, there I could be in church, this place that I really loved. And I could breathe. I could breathe.  
9 So I think my first joy was really getting reacquainted with the divine.  
10  
11 AJ: Mhm.  
12  
13 VS: And sort of reprogram, uh, and once that stuck everything got sweeter, everything got, got  
14 sweeter. I mean, you know, I had challenges along the journey but everything got reinterpreted  
15 and flipped.  
16  
17 AJ: Mhm.  
18  
19 VS: Once I had this new relationship, uh, with God. This new knowledge of myself that God had  
20 about me that I wasn't this sinful abomination, hell bound, foul stench of the nostril of God.  
21 This, no God don't make— they don't know what to say to, to the trans women or the trans  
22 people.  
23  
24 AJ: Right.  
25  
26 VS: So the only thing they can say is, "You know, God don't make no mistakes."  
27  
28 AJ: Right. Exactly.  
29  
30 VS: And I didn't have a response to that.  
31  
32 AJ: Mhm.  
33  
34 VS: But today my response is you're absolutely right. I'm not a mistake. That was very intentional...  
35  
36 AJ: Yes.  
37  
38 VS: ... when he made this six foot black girl...  
39  
40 AJ: Mhm.  
41  
42 VS: ... named me.  
43  
44 AJ: Yeah.  
45  
46 VS: So, yeah, that's the first joy. Some of the other joys, uh, I would say, you know, learning and  
47 finding myself through activism.

1  
2 AJ: Mm. Mhm.  
3  
4 VS: Uhm, learning that I had a voice and how to use it. I didn't know how to use my power. I'm still  
5 learning that.  
6  
7 AJ: Sure.  
8  
9 VS: How to use my pollical power, my connection power, my business acumen power, you know, my  
10 connections.  
11  
12 AJ: Right.  
13  
14 VS: Didn't, didn't know how to parlay stuff. Still learning that but learning my own person voice and  
15 the impact that it has has been brilliant. I love being my mother's daughter.  
16  
17 AJ: Mhm.  
18  
19 VS: I love being my mother's daughter.  
20  
21 AJ: Wow.  
22  
23 VS: Uhm, I love knowing that, and I tell my mother, "You know the reason why you've lived to  
24 almost eighty?" "Why?" "Because you're the mother of a queen."  
25  
26 AJ: [Laughs]. Yes.  
27  
28 VS: "And god has blessed you with long life. It may not be that way if you were not the mother of a  
29 trans woman."  
30  
31 AJ: Uhuh.  
32  
33 VS: "All of it would be different." And she goes, "Oh."  
34  
35 AJ: [Laughs].  
36  
37 VS: I love being my mother's daughter. I love knowing that she can stand toe to toe...  
38  
39 AJ: Mhm.  
40  
41 VS: ... with anybody on the planet and say, "That's my daughter, and I'm very well. I've lived my life  
42 that way."  
43  
44 AJ: Mhm.  
45  
46 VS: Uh, and of course I'm very proud. Uhm, I'm very proud to have completed some of the academic  
47 achievements that I have.

1  
2 AJ: Talk about that. Like your MSW.  
3  
4 VS: Mhm.  
5  
6 AJ: Uhm, you're studying to be, uhm...  
7  
8 VS: Interfaith minister.  
9  
10 AJ: Interfaith minister.  
11  
12 VS: Soon to complete my doctorate.  
13  
14 AJ: Wow.  
15  
16 VS: Soon to start pursuing my doctorate but I'm doing this interfaith piece first.  
17  
18 AJ: Where, where's that at?  
19  
20 VS: One Spirit Interfaith Seminary...  
21  
22 AJ: Mhm.  
23  
24 VS: ... based in New York.  
25  
26 AJ: One Spirit Interbate?  
27  
28 VS: Interfaith.  
29  
30 AJ: Interfaith. Sorry.  
31  
32 VS: What is Interbate? What is interfaith? Interfaith, Interfaith Ministry believes that all religions,  
33 spiritual practices, and pathways are beautiful and sacred and should be respected.  
34  
35 AJ: Mhm.  
36  
37 VS: Because at the core of them is this sacred mysticism that we call God or spirit or all of those  
38 names.  
39  
40 AJ: Mhm.  
41  
42 VS: But the reason why I am proud of my academic achievements is because they are that.  
43  
44 AJ: Right.  
45



- 1 VS: They are academic achievements but also because of the reasons why I did them. I got to the  
2 point of my trans activism work where frankly, uh, I was tired of talking about trans... I didn't  
3 want to say transistor radio, transportation...  
4
- 5 AJ: [Laughs].  
6
- 7 VS: I was simply over it, and I was really over talking about HIV because I've worked in HIV  
8 prevention for so long as an advocate.  
9
- 10 AJ: Mhm.  
11
- 12 VS: And I was tired of talking about HIV because I felt and feel that the heart of the matter is not  
13 being discussed which is this internal sense of brokenness that comes from a perpetuating  
14 culture. Uh, particularly for people of color for black folks. This, uh, internal, uh, religious drum  
15 that beats. It's almost in the cellular structure of black people that you are going to hell. All of  
16 that stuff. And we, you know, the CDC has no way of addressing that. They can't. That's our stuff  
17 to do. We weren't doing that so I was tired of talking about HIV. I was tired of talking about  
18 transness.  
19
- 20 AJ: Mhm.  
21
- 22 VS: I felt it just... I just, it felt, it just made me trans and I have other things to say and other gifts to  
23 bring and people said things like, "Well, don't destroy your brand," but it was a brand that I, I  
24 did not exclusively want. I wanted to be trans inclusive but not trans exclusive.  
25
- 26 AJ: Mhm.  
27
- 28 VS: Uhm, and so I, I really just discovered that, you know, I'm trying to save us and we. I'm talking  
29 about us and we.  
30
- 31 AJ: Mhm.  
32
- 33 VS: And us and we are doing great but I'm struggling.  
34
- 35 AJ: Yeah.  
36
- 37 VS: I'm struggling. So I'm going to step off this activism train, and I'm gonna go back to school and I  
38 did that.  
39
- 40 AJ: Mhm.  
41
- 42 VS: I complete my bachelor's degree and that was, uh, not academically challenging. It was hard in  
43 terms of just making it all work.  
44
- 45 AJ: You gotta, yeah, it's a grind.  
46

- 1 VS: Oh, it was a grind, especially because I had a busy travel schedule at the time as a national  
2 consultant speaker.  
3
- 4 AJ: Mhm.  
5
- 6 VS: Uhm, and I had to be in this classroom so many days a week and in some instances that meant I  
7 had to leave the airport and go straight to class with my luggage and bring my luggage to class  
8 and have the shuttle pick me up from class and take me to the airport, uhm, because...  
9
- 10 AJ: Oh wow.  
11
- 12 VS: Oh baby, because professors were saying, "You're not gonna miss another one of my classes. I'm  
13 gonna drop you." So I had to make it work. Uh, this is how I earn a living in many cases.  
14
- 15 AJ: Mhm.  
16
- 17 VS: So I had to do that and so that made it really challenging. My master's, however, was  
18 emotionally difficult, uh, emotionally very difficult. It was academically difficult but I was  
19 prepared for that. I had talked to a number of fellow MSWs, LCSWs, MFTs.  
20
- 21 AJ: Right.  
22
- 23 VS: Uhm.  
24
- 25 AJ: Marriage and Family Therapists.  
26
- 27 VS: Marriage and Family Therapists, uh, psychologists, and they had prepared me for the academic  
28 rigor.  
29
- 30 AJ: Mhm.  
31
- 32 VS: They have prepared me for being broke.  
33
- 34 AJ: Yeah.  
35
- 36 VS: Cause it's a two year commitment to being broke, right? Just broke. Get over it. There is no nail  
37 shop.  
38
- 39 AJ: Oh!  
40
- 41 VS: Get over it. There is...  
42
- 43 AJ: No cable?  
44
- 45 VS: Well, you know, you can have cable but Lulu held me down.  
46
- 47 AJ: Yeah.

1  
2 VS: But there is no new hair.  
3  
4 AJ: Okay.  
5  
6 VS: There are... purse, shoes, now that's, no. There is no new lipstick. Forget it. You are dirt ass  
7 broke. [Laughs].  
8  
9 AJ: Wow. [Laughs].  
10  
11 VS: You're broke but emotionally it was difficult because, uh, in the middle of my first internship, uh,  
12 I was called and told, uh, "You're not allowed back in the building."  
13  
14 AJ: Mhm.  
15  
16 VS: "You're security clearance has not been cleared, and you need to contact the Department of  
17 Justice."  
18  
19 AJ: What?  
20  
21 VS: Yes. [Laughs]. And so I—  
22  
23 AJ: The feds? [Laughs].  
24  
25 VS: I called— What made it really hard to believe was that I had just come from the White House.  
26  
27 AJ: Wow.  
28  
29 VS: And, uhm, I had worked at Charles Drew University for a number of years, and they did a  
30 thorough FBI screening on me.  
31  
32 AJ: Mhm.  
33  
34 VS: Uh, as a condition of your hire. So I had been investigated and vetted several times. I've been to  
35 the White House. I have been honored by the state's capital, and I have to be investigated for  
36 that. So I was like, "Well what y'all got?"  
37  
38 AJ: Wow.  
39  
40 VS: "I've been arrested for traffic tickets but what y'all got?"  
41  
42 AJ: Okay. [Laughs].  
43  
44 VS: So they said they're looking for drug offenses and sexual offenses. So I'm like, "Well I ain't got  
45 any of those. What y'all find?" And so the Department of Justice said call the organization. The  
46 organization said to call DOJ and the school was like, "Is there something you're not telling us,  
47 Miss Spencer?"

1  
2 AJ:     Hm.  
3  
4 VS:     So I had to be re-fingerprinted, and I sent the stuff straight to the school and then they looked at  
5         it and was like, "Well, there ain't nothing here."  
6  
7 AJ:     Right.  
8  
9 VS:     And that means I had to be uprooted and placed in a new internship which was not to my liking.  
10         It wasn't doing work that I really wanted to do.  
11  
12 AJ:     Mhm.  
13  
14 VS:     And my other classmates were moving on and thriving and telling stories each week. And I just  
15         cried and cried and cried in class and cried in class.  
16  
17 AJ:     Wow.  
18  
19 VS:     And my academic advisor was like, "Girl, you're going to have to pull it together, girl, cause this  
20         is killing you." And it was, it was. Uhm, and so I discovered that there was some transphobia in  
21         the air.  
22  
23 AJ:     Hm.  
24  
25 VS:     And, you know, sometimes when transphobia is in the air, it's like a fragrance.  
26  
27 AJ:     Yes.  
28  
29 VS:     You can smell it wafting but you can't quite track down.  
30  
31 AJ:     Right, exactly. Where it's emanating from.  
32  
33 VS:     Who is wearing this fragrance? Who is doing this? But I told my advisors I've smelt this fragrance  
34         before.  
35  
36 AJ:     Wow.  
37  
38 VS:     I've smelled this. Uhm, what I did not tell people was that the rat race of being a student, a  
39         woman...  
40  
41 AJ:     Mhm.  
42  
43 VS:     ... growing from one profession into this newly emerging behavior health person...  
44  
45 AJ:     Right.  
46  
47 VS:     ... taking care of an aging parent.

1  
2 AJ: Mhm.  
3  
4 VS: Uh, being broke.  
5  
6 AJ: Right.  
7  
8 VS: Being black. Being trans.  
9  
10 AJ: Mhm.  
11  
12 VS: Uh, not seeing myself as trans but it's coming up in very inconvenient ways...  
13  
14 AJ: Sure, yeah.  
15  
16 VS: ... uhm, that it was wearing on my consciousness while I was in school much more than I  
17 admitted. I was overwhelmed.  
18  
19 AJ: Mm.  
20  
21 VS: And I had slipped into a bout of major depression.  
22  
23 AJ: Mhm.  
24  
25 VS: I was severely depressed and so I tried to hold it and keep it.  
26  
27 AJ: Sure.  
28  
29 VS: And just, you know, you just keep pushing cause you see graduation in sight...  
30  
31 AJ: Right.  
32  
33 VS: ... until it collapsed.  
34  
35 AJ: Mm.  
36  
37 VS: And my second year internship supervisor said to me, "Girl, you think you're fooling me? You're  
38 not fooling me at all. I've been an LCSW for thirty years..."  
39  
40 AJ: Mhm.  
41  
42 VS: "I see you coming and going. You trying to hold it all together..."  
43  
44 AJ: Mhm.  
45  
46 VS: "You don't know what you want to do, what your next move is gonna be. You're trying to take  
47 care of Lulu. You're a black woman. I'm a white woman but you're a black woman..."

1  
2 AJ: Uhuh.  
3  
4 VS: "You're trying to hold it up. I see you. I see you. And I thought she meant, "I know that you are  
5 trans."  
6  
7 AJ: Uhuh.  
8  
9 VS: She meant, "I know that you..." and she finally came out, "I see that you're depressed. I know  
10 you're depressed."  
11  
12 AJ: Mm.  
13  
14 VS: "I know what depression looks like." And she broke it down. "I'm gonna give you a box of tissue.  
15 You're gonna start crying and screaming in this office right now cause you trying to not bust, and  
16 you busting."  
17  
18 AJ: Wow.  
19  
20 VS: "You are depressed." And I was. And because of that, uhm, cause remember, when I was  
21 uprooted from my internship...  
22  
23 AJ: Mhm.  
24  
25 VS: ... all the while with that investigation and finding me a new one meant that I had to make up all  
26 of those hours.  
27  
28 AJ: Oh, yeah.  
29  
30 VS: So the other, while everybody was on summer break and winter break I was not on break.  
31  
32 AJ: You were still going to school.  
33  
34 VS: I never got a break during my whole program. Never. Not one break. Not one holiday. Not one  
35 anything.  
36  
37 AJ: Wow.  
38  
39 VS: Uhm, but, you know, you're trying to, then you gotta write a thesis.  
40  
41 AJ: Mhm.  
42  
43 VS: Uhm, but I did get through it. I got some support from my academic institution.  
44  
45 AJ: Mhm.  
46

1 VS: My advisor said to me, uhm, you know, "Yeah, I see you too. I've talked to you for about an hour  
2 or so. Yeah, I, I'd clock you too."  
3  
4 AJ: Hm.  
5  
6 VS: "You are depressed."  
7  
8 AJ: Wow.  
9  
10 VS: "And I read your thesis. One of those pages you're writing over and over again."  
11  
12 AJ: Oh.  
13  
14 VS: "Oh yeah, you're depressed. And you going to get some help today." [Laughs].  
15  
16 AJ: [Laughs].  
17  
18 VS: Uh, and I did but that meant that I had to keep it a secret cause I was ashamed.  
19  
20 AJ: Hm.  
21  
22 VS: But I had to complete, after graduation, after I walked, I had to wait and then I had to complete  
23 another year of my second year internship cause they didn't think it was substantive enough.  
24  
25 AJ: Wow.  
26  
27 VS: I made it through that. If I ever thought I was a formidable woman I made it through that. I now  
28 know.  
29  
30 AJ: Mm.  
31  
32 VS: I know that I'm a bad ass bitch.  
33  
34 AJ: You are a bad ass bitch.  
35  
36 VS: [Laughs]. For sure.  
37  
38 AJ: Uhm, I just wanna acknowledge that we are here in New York City.  
39  
40 VS: Uhuh.  
41  
42 AJ: Uh, as a part of the...  
43  
44 VS: I still haven't got a break.  
45  
46 AJ: [Laughs]. Yeah. No, you have not. Uhm, but we're at the Sojourner Truth Leadership Circle.  
47

1 VS: Mhm.  
2  
3 AJ: Uhm, and it's part of the Auburn Seminary.  
4  
5 VS: Mhm.  
6  
7 AJ: And it's specifically focused on black trans women and self-care like leadership support.  
8  
9 VS: Who are in social justice.  
10  
11 AJ: Who are in social justice movements.  
12  
13 VS: Mhm.  
14  
15 AJ: Talk about your experience in this process?  
16  
17 VS: Oh, well you were some of the, the, uhm, the catalyst for me coming into the internship.  
18  
19 AJ: Mhm. Yeah.  
20  
21 VS: Uhm, at first I was like, "What?"  
22  
23 AJ: I reached out. [Laughs].  
24  
25 VS: Yeah. At first I was like, "What is this?" Uhm, and once I got in the fellowship, I'm drinking coke  
26 you guys so I'm belching...  
27  
28 AJ: [Laughs].  
29  
30 VS: ... but I do it really smooth. Uhm, I got, you know, "What is this fellowship?" I was sick for our  
31 first meeting as a dog. Flu shot drama.  
32  
33 AJ: Yeah.  
34  
35 VS: Uhm, really sick.  
36  
37 AJ: Wearing yourself out.  
38  
39 VS: Yeah, but that flu shot worked girl. That was the other thing during my program. My, my  
40 master's program. My mom got sick so I had to miss class...  
41  
42 AJ: Mhm.  
43  
44 VS: ... classes. So once she got well I said, "Well, let me take a flu shot so I won't get sick." I got sick  
45 for a month. And I had, I was sick for a month and a half.  
46  
47 AJ: From the flu shot?



1  
2 VS: From the flu shot. And my internship was like, "Girl, girl, go home."  
3  
4 AJ: Go home, boo.  
5  
6 VS: "You're exhausted."  
7  
8 AJ: [Laughs].  
9  
10 VS: But for this fellowship at first it was like, what is this?  
11  
12 AJ: Mhm.  
13  
14 VS: At our second meeting, which was in Atlanta that I was able to be at, uhm, it was still rather off-  
15 putting...  
16  
17 AJ: Mhm.  
18  
19 VS: ... to be in a space that was exclusively designed to celebrate a firm and love up on me.  
20  
21 AJ: Mhm.  
22  
23 VS: Specifically because I was a black woman.  
24  
25 AJ: Mhm.  
26  
27 VS: A leader in social justice movements...  
28  
29 AJ: Right.  
30  
31 VS: ... who happened to be trans.  
32  
33 AJ: Sure.  
34  
35 VS: All of those pieces were integral to this process.  
36  
37 AJ: Mhm.  
38  
39 VS: And all of those pieces were specifically why they wanted to just pamper us and educate us and  
40 ritual us...  
41  
42 AJ: Mhm.  
43  
44 VS: ... and nurture us and give us some tools to take care of ourselves. That was new. That is new...  
45  
46 AJ: Yeah.  
47

1 VS: ... for me. I operate as a refugee most of my life...  
2  
3 AJ: Mhm.  
4  
5 VS: ... that there will always be parts of myself that I have to dissect in order to be in culture. If I  
6 show up as just another black woman, I dissect the fact that I'm trans. It's not safe to be that  
7 here. If I show up as a trans person, I have to dissect the fact that I'm a straight woman.  
8  
9 AJ: Mhm.  
10  
11 VS: Uh, it's, it's not only safe to be that, not safe to be that here. It's not comprehended. It's not  
12 understood and that distracts from the issue. I have to rationalize it or defend it. "What do you  
13 mean you're straight, black?"  
14  
15 AJ: Right.  
16  
17 VS: Uh, it's a little bit better now but there's always parts of my, you know, people call me an  
18 advocate.  
19  
20 AJ: Mhm.  
21  
22 VS: They don't acknowledge, "She's a therapist. She's in behavioral health."  
23  
24 AJ: Yeah.  
25  
26 VS: Uhm, and for those that know me in behavioral health, I have to dissect this rich history of HIV  
27 activism I come from. You know, they don't know me like that.  
28  
29 AJ: Right.  
30  
31 VS: So, uhm, for all of my identities, my intersecting beings to come together to be pampered and  
32 nurtured was so fresh and so new and, uhm, I'm gonna try to continue that process for myself.  
33  
34 AJ: Mhm. Yes.  
35  
36 VS: I like it. Yeah.  
37  
38 AJ: Yeah. No, that is a beautiful thing. Uhm, there were seven other women.  
39  
40 VS: Mhm. Beautiful. Brilliant.  
41  
42 AJ: Many young sisters, black women, black girl brilliance, uh, in the space all of, all of whom are  
43 leaders in their own spheres of influence.  
44  
45 VS: Mhm.  
46

1 AJ: But yeah this experience doesn't happen very often, uhm, which is why I jumped at the  
2 opportunity, I mean. Lisa, I think, barely got the question out of her mouth when she told me  
3 what it was.  
4  
5 VS: Yes!  
6  
7 AJ: And I was like yes!  
8  
9 VS: Hell yeah!  
10  
11 AJ: Yeah, I will be there.  
12  
13 VS: [Laughs].  
14  
15 AJ: No problem. [Laughs]. Come lift up black trans women, yeah. I'll do that.  
16  
17 VS: Mhm.  
18  
19 AJ: Absolutely. Uhm, so, you know, Valerie, man, a lot has changed since you and I— we first met  
20 for the first time in, I believe we narrowed it down to 2005, uh, at the first CDC, uhm...  
21  
22 VS: Consultation.  
23  
24 AJ: Consultation.  
25  
26 VS: Transgender consultation. I coordinated the consultation for and with the CDC.  
27  
28 AJ: Yeah.  
29  
30 VS: Mhm.  
31  
32 AJ: Yeah. Uhm, Dede Champlin was there...  
33  
34 VS: Yeah.  
35  
36 AJ: ... who is in this fellowship that we just been talking about.  
37  
38 VS: Trans women from Puerto Rico.  
39  
40 AJ: Cecilia Chung was the first time that I met her.  
41  
42 VS: Puerto Rico, Guam, Hawaii.  
43  
44 AJ: I met this sister from Hawaii.  
45  
46 VS: Hena.  
47

1 AJ: Yeah.  
2  
3 VS: And Ashley, yeah.  
4  
5 AJ: Ashley, Ashley Anna.  
6  
7 VS: Yes.  
8  
9 AJ: Yeah.  
10  
11 VS: She's a school teacher.  
12  
13 AJ: She's a school teacher now.  
14  
15 VS: Hena is the cultural attaché of Hawaii.  
16  
17 AJ: Is that right?  
18  
19 VS: Mhm.  
20  
21 AJ: Wow.  
22  
23 VS: Uh, so it's been a long time...  
24  
25 AJ: Mhm.  
26  
27 VS: ... that we've known each other but it seems like the visibility of the trans community has really,  
28 uhm, blossomed like full circle or full blast if you will.  
29  
30 AJ: Mhm. Uhm, and just wanting to get some of your perspectives on that. I mean, you know,  
31 there's young brilliant beautiful sisters out there...  
32  
33 VS: Brilliant.  
34  
35 AJ: ... that are, you know, getting all the love and all the accolades and magazine covers and respect  
36 and TV shows and yada, yada, yada.  
37  
38 VS: Mhm.  
39  
40 AJ: Like you made that space for them to be there.  
41  
42 VS: Oh not by myself.  
43  
44 AJ: There were many others.  
45  
46 VS: Yeah.  
47

1 AJ: Myself included but, uhm, but how do you, how do you, how, how, how do you react, respond  
2 to the fact that, you know, Janet Mock has, you know, had her first book on the New York Times  
3 bestseller list, and, uhm, Laverne Cox was nominated for an Emmy.  
4  
5 VS: Mhm. Mhm. Honey I love it.  
6  
7 AJ: Uh, Miss Jenner came out and became the most famous transgender person on the planet.  
8  
9 VS: That separated.  
10  
11 AJ: Okay. [Laughs].  
12  
13 VS: I have some feelings I'm very open about.  
14  
15 AJ: Yeah.  
16  
17 VS: I love it...  
18  
19 AJ: Yes.  
20  
21 VS: ... first of all. I, I adore it. And here's why. Trans women have always been brilliant.  
22  
23 AJ: Mhm. Right.  
24  
25 VS: Multifaceted, gifted, talented. We make much out of little.  
26  
27 AJ: Mhm.  
28  
29 VS: And our talents have been overlooked and what we can bring to science, innovation, business...  
30  
31 AJ: Right.  
32  
33 VS: Uhm, navigation. What we can bring to aerospace engineering, what we bring to, uh, law. What  
34 we bring to all facets of human development.  
35  
36 AJ: Mhm.  
37  
38 VS: Uh, we were not allowed to be fully in that space. We were not allowed to have physical space,  
39 public space, and now, even though we're challenged still...  
40  
41 AJ: Right.  
42  
43 VS: ... now more where we are and so I love it. I love seeing Janet, beautiful, bright, and happy. I  
44 love to see Laverne. I text her whenever I see something.  
45  
46 AJ: Mhm.  
47

1 VS: Particularly yummy.  
2  
3 AJ: Yeah? [Laughs].  
4  
5 VS: I text her and say, "Go heffa, go."  
6  
7 AJ: Yes.  
8  
9 VS: Uhm, many of the people behind the scenes that work with them as well are trans as well.  
10  
11 AJ: Mhm.  
12  
13 VS: So that's good to see. I love it. Now, my feeling about Caitlyn Jenner...  
14  
15 AJ: Uhuh.  
16  
17 VS: ... is a little bit different.  
18  
19 AJ: Yes. [Laughs].  
20  
21 VS: And I will be very vocal about that. I'm critical of Caitlyn Jenner.  
22  
23 AJ: And she's in the, essentially the same community, right? West... where does she live?  
24  
25 VS: No, she's up in Malibu. She's hardly fraternizing no where near my house.  
26  
27 AJ: Okay. [Laughs].  
28  
29 VS: Uhm, no.  
30  
31 AJ: Well, southern Cal basically.  
32  
33 VS: She's in southern California, yes she is. Uhm, I like that she's wealthy. I like that she was able to  
34 transition quickly. Uh, I like that she's happy with her life.  
35  
36 AJ: Mhm.  
37  
38 VS: I, you know, just one trans woman happy is worth the whole race.  
39  
40 AJ: Yes.  
41  
42 VS: The thing that makes me very critical of her and her process...  
43  
44 AJ: Mhm.  
45  
46 VS: ... is there is a reason why you transitioned late at life.  
47

1 AJ: Mhm.  
2  
3 VS: You knew yourself much earlier on.  
4  
5 AJ: Yes, absolutely.  
6  
7 VS: You talked publicly about, uh, your wife finding you and clothing and having that discussion even  
8 with your first wife.  
9  
10 AJ: Right.  
11  
12 VS: There was a reason why you transitioned later in life. And that is because the culture was not  
13 prepared to loose you from Bruce Jenner.  
14  
15 AJ: Mhm.  
16  
17 VS: And not allowing you to be Caitlin Jenner.  
18  
19 AJ: Right.  
20  
21 VS: But there was a system behind that dis-allow-ment. Everytime freedom fighters, such as  
22 myself...  
23  
24 AJ: Mhm.  
25  
26 VS: ... move the needle a little bit further. There was a group of people, a coagulate, a coagulated  
27 imagery...  
28  
29 AJ: Mhm.  
30  
31 VS: ... that moved that needle back or blocked it from moving forward. That group of people is  
32 called the conservative right wing republican party.  
33  
34 AJ: Mhm.  
35  
36 VS: So now you begin cheering for the very team that has blocked our progress...  
37  
38 AJ: Right.  
39  
40 VS: ... that has blocked you from being you.  
41  
42 AJ: Mhm.  
43  
44 VS: Except for being a multimillionaire that team would still be succeeding and blocking you from  
45 being you. But you've created your own equal space...  
46  
47 AJ: Right.

1  
2 VS: ... where you can exist and inside of that equal space is white privilege and lots and lots of  
3 wealth.  
4  
5 AJ: Mhm.  
6  
7 VS: And frankly celebrity, the curiosity that comes with celebrity.  
8  
9 AJ: Yeah.  
10  
11 VS: Not saying that her process is easy.  
12  
13 AJ: No.  
14  
15 VS: But there's been a permission that her wealth, her bubble has allowed her to... well trans  
16 women such as myself and others do not share that wealth and privilege. We don't live in that  
17 ecosystem, and so that same team that blocked you from transitioning earlier that you're now  
18 advocating for...  
19  
20 AJ: Mhm. Right.  
21  
22 VS: ... and with are still blocking other trans people from enjoying even air...  
23  
24 AJ: Mhm.  
25  
26 VS: ... even air. And so when she says things like, "Let me be the spokesperson for, for trans people  
27 in the republican party," you're ignoring, ignoring the beast that it is.  
28  
29 AJ: Mhm  
30  
31 VS: It is the republican conservative evangelical, in some cases...  
32  
33 AJ: Right.  
34  
35 VS: They don't want to talk to you.  
36  
37 AJ: Mhm.  
38  
39 VS: They don't want to talk to you. And furthermore, you just got on the trans bus.  
40  
41 AJ: [Laughs]. Right.  
42  
43 VS: You haven't even gotten your regular bus pass in the mail.  
44  
45 AJ: [Laughs].  
46  
47 VS: You're still riding...



1  
2 AJ: Riding on a temporary.  
3  
4 VS: You're riding on transfers and temporaries.  
5  
6 AJ: Okay. [Laughs].  
7  
8 VS: Cut chicks like me a check...  
9  
10 AJ: Uhuh.  
11  
12 VS: ... and sit down and be... and learn from us.  
13  
14 AJ: Yes.  
15  
16 VS: I know what to say to the republican party.  
17  
18 AJ: Mhm.  
19  
20 VS: I know what to say and if I don't, I got some chicks in the bag. We have been skilled and trained  
21 by way of our work.  
22  
23 AJ: Right.  
24  
25 VS: We know what to say. You just go, and, you know, get a facial.  
26  
27 AJ: Mhm.  
28  
29 VS: And learn from us. I must admit that I was in that original concept cast...  
30  
31 AJ: Of IMK, mhm.  
32  
33 VS: I was asked.  
34  
35 AJ: Yeah.  
36  
37 VS: And when they kind of rolled it out for me I thought absolutely not.  
38  
39 AJ: Mhm.  
40  
41 VS: I'm not going to be shipped up to Malibu...  
42  
43 AJ: Mhm.  
44  
45 VS: ... to talk to Caitlyn Jenner about being trans and me being a, a as they call it a stateswoman for  
46 trans people.  
47

1 AJ: Mhm.  
2  
3 VS: I'm not gonna do that. I have wine glasses at my house.  
4  
5 AJ: Right.  
6  
7 VS: I have bottles of wine chilling in my refrigerator.  
8  
9 AJ: Mhm.  
10  
11 VS: It's a brand new Samsung refrigerator. We chill wine bottles when guests come over.  
12  
13 AJ: Right.  
14  
15 VS: I've been to Crate and Barrel, and I have a couch.  
16  
17 AJ: Mhm.  
18  
19 VS: It's not lusciously decorated like your home is but you're coming on my pew.  
20  
21 AJ: Right.  
22  
23 VS: I've been sitting on this pew, hoeing on this corner for a long time.  
24  
25 AJ: Okay.  
26  
27 VS: So don't' ship me up to your lavish life...  
28  
29 AJ: Mhm.  
30  
31 VS: ... inside of your bubble so that I can pour into you my wisdom. Come get it.  
32  
33 AJ: Right.  
34  
35 VS: Sit at the, come get it. Come get it.  
36  
37 AJ: Yeah.  
38  
39 VS: Uhm.  
40  
41 AJ: That's real. That's what's up.  
42  
43 VS: No, no. It's, it's almost disrespectful.  
44  
45 AJ: Mhm.  
46

1 VS: So I declined the invitation. And, uh, I would decline it again, but I just think that Caitlyn has, uh,  
2 you know, she's assumes that the culture will stop being what it is in certain aspects because  
3 she has stepped onto the scene. No, baby, that same system...  
4  
5 AJ: Yeah.  
6  
7 VS: ... that put rubbish in the streets for everybody, and you were able to be helicoptered over it  
8 because of your wealth, well that same system is still putting rubbish in the streets.  
9  
10 AJ: Right.  
11  
12 VS: Per North Carolina and the bathroom issue and all the other hate crime laws and all those things  
13 so I'm rather critical of my sis— but she's my sister.  
14  
15 AJ: [Laughs].  
16  
17 VS: And I fuck you u if you fuck with us.  
18  
19 AJ: Rightfully so. I think it's, uhm, I think it's a very fair assessment. Uhm, to the extent that you feel  
20 comfortable, and you brought it up earlier, much earlier, uhm, have there been any medical  
21 interventions or plans or ideas around your gender journey?  
22  
23 VS: Uhm, I have been graced by a medical professional or two.  
24  
25 AJ: Okay. [Laughs].  
26  
27 VS: I have been graced by a medical professional or two.  
28  
29 AJ: Uhuh.  
30  
31 VS: In order to, uh, feel beautiful like any other woman does from time to time.  
32  
33 AJ: Mhm.  
34  
35 VS: Uhm, however, I don't feel that, uh, my gender needs to be confirmed.  
36  
37 AJ: Mhm.  
38  
39 VS: I did that a long time ago.  
40  
41 AJ: Sure.  
42  
43 VS: So anything that I have, uh, done has only been, uh, just to sort of put cherries on top of the  
44 very well ornamented dessert.  
45  
46 AJ: [Laughs]. These analogies are giving me life, baby. Oh my goodness. [Laughs].  
47

1 VS: [Laughs].  
2  
3 AJ: Ah, some well placed cherries. [Laughs].  
4  
5 VS: [Laughs]. I'm cool.  
6  
7 AJ: That rich food will last a long time. [Laughs].  
8  
9 VS: [Laughs]. I'm cool.  
10  
11 AJ: Wow, uhm...  
12  
13 VS: Yeah, let me explain the use of the analogy.  
14  
15 AJ: Mhm.  
16  
17 VS: I believe that trans women, trans people, have a right to their own genitalia.  
18  
19 AJ: Mhm.  
20  
21 VS: And not have that be, uhm, a publicly consumed hors d oeuvres.  
22  
23 AJ: Yeah.  
24  
25 VS: Right? You know, it's like, uhm, on Thanksgiving when they feed the homeless...  
26  
27 AJ: Mhm.  
28  
29 VS: ... uhm, you know, turkey and dressing is served for the masses to eat. And often the subject of  
30 trans people and their bodies is just this mass consumption for people to feast on. And I believe  
31 that we have a right to, uh, privacy with regard to physicality. In fact, it's the norm.  
32  
33 AJ: Mhm.  
34  
35 VS: No one would walk up to any black woman in their fifties and sixties and say, "Tell me about  
36 your pussy."  
37  
38 AJ: Right.  
39  
40 VS: "Tell me about your titties."  
41  
42 AJ: Yeah.  
43  
44 VS: "Tell me about your nose. Have you had your trachea shaved?"  
45  
46 AJ: Right.  
47

1 VS: Without the expectation that the shit is getting ready to be slapped out of them.  
2  
3 AJ: Right. Exactly.  
4  
5 VS: No one would do that. In the early days people used to walk to us and grab our parts.  
6  
7 AJ: I know.  
8  
9 VS: No, I'm a grown woman. I'm a grown woman and so whatever is under my clothes is for my  
10 medical professional to know or the man that I have allowed into my, uh, erotic space.  
11  
12 AJ: Mhm. Right.  
13  
14 VS: But, uh, but I'm pleased.  
15  
16 AJ: Hm.  
17  
18 VS: I'm pleased with the journey so far. [Laughs].  
19  
20 AJ: Right. Right. You're a therapist yourself.  
21  
22 VS: I am.  
23  
24 AJ: Uhm, do you work with people sort of concerned about gender issues or...?  
25  
26 VS: I, I didn't at the beginning. Not, not because I didn't want to.  
27  
28 AJ: Uhuh.  
29  
30 VS: Just because the location of where I was.  
31  
32 AJ: Sure.  
33  
34 VS: It wasn't...  
35  
36 AJ: Just wasn't, the client weren't there.  
37  
38 VS: No, and the few trans people that did come to me did not come to me because of their  
39 transness. Uh, one example was because of their anxiety and depression.  
40  
41 AJ: Mhm.  
42  
43 VS: Uh, and another came because of some addiction issues. However because of recent changes at  
44 certain area hospitals more and more clients are coming because, uh, they want to work with  
45 someone therapeutically so that they can move on and get, you know, certain surgeries and  
46 medical interventions. So more and more. More and more, but I'm gonna say it's refreshing not  
47 working with trans people because I've worked with trans people in such a concentrated space.

1  
2 AJ: Sure. Uhuh. For a very long time.  
3  
4 VS: It's refreshing to talk to someone who is going through a divorce.  
5  
6 AJ: Right.  
7  
8 VS: And is not trans. It's like this is kind of cool.  
9  
10 AJ: Okay. [Laughs].  
11  
12 VS: I'm working with a young trans person now that's like pre, pre, pre-transitioning.  
13  
14 AJ: Uhuh.  
15  
16 VS: And, uh, we finally came to the conclusion, "Let's not use the word transgender. It's too heavy  
17 for you to lift right now. Let's just talk about you being who you are, uhm, and moving forward.  
18 So it's kind of refreshing to be able to navigate and support emotionally other issues in the  
19 room.  
20  
21 AJ: Wow.  
22  
23 VS: Yeah.  
24  
25 AJ: That's incredible.  
26  
27 VS: Mhm.  
28  
29 AJ: Uh, thank you for being there and being supportive of, you know, the people in our community,  
30 I think mental health is, uhm, uhm, is absolutely real. And unfortunately in our communities I  
31 don't think it gets addressed enough.  
32  
33 VS: And to do that, to do mental health, to do behavioral health in a holistic way...  
34  
35 AJ: Mhm.  
36  
37 VS: ... uh, my preference is to do it in a spiritually integrative way...  
38  
39 AJ: Mm.  
40  
41 VS: ... where we do things like meditation and mindfulness and, uh, you know, I bring some of  
42 everything to the practice of the healing art of behavioral health. You know, little sister energy...  
43  
44 AJ: Right.  
45  
46 VS: ... a little moma, a little therapist, a little life couch.  
47

1 AJ: Yeah.  
2  
3 VS: Uh, I've worked with mommas.  
4  
5 AJ: Mhm.  
6  
7 VS: Uh.  
8  
9 AJ: [Laughs].  
10  
11 VS: Fun stuff. Fun stuff. Uh, and if I would have just showed up trans it might have been a little  
12 awkward but I'm older and I'm able to say, "You know, I'm old."  
13  
14 AJ: [Laughs].  
15  
16 VS: "You know, I'm old, honey. I'm old."  
17  
18 AJ: You are not old.  
19  
20 VS: And, uh, I'm cool with it.  
21  
22 AJ: You're older.  
23  
24 VS: I am older.  
25  
26 AJ: [Laughs].  
27  
28 VS: Uh, last week I was able to say to one of my clients whose mother was considering coming into  
29 session, but she was having some emotional issues around where he was going. Call your  
30 momma and tell your momma I said get up in here.  
31  
32 AJ: Okay. [Laughs].  
33  
34 VS: "Momma, my therapist is on the phone." "Oh, hi." "Girl, get yourself up in this thing and come  
35 on here now. Shoot."  
36  
37 AJ: Okay.  
38  
39 VS: "Well, I'm stuck in traffic, ma'am but I'm gonna..." "Girl, if you don't get up in here, you feel  
40 uncomfortable," "No I ain't uncomfortable." "Well, come on girl."  
41  
42 AJ: Okay. [Laughs].  
43  
44 VS: And once she got there we [makes noises].  
45  
46 AJ: So you got through some stuff.  
47

1 VS: And now I have another client. [Laughs].  
2  
3 AJ: Nice.  
4  
5 VS: Yeah. It's nice. Refreshing.  
6  
7 AJ: Mhm. Uhm, what would you tell these young baby trans children coming up today?  
8  
9 VS: Mm, honestly, honestly, honestly, very honestly, sounds controversial but work with me.  
10  
11 AJ: Mhm.  
12  
13 VS: Don't be trans.  
14  
15 AJ: Hm.  
16  
17 VS: Let trans be you.  
18  
19 AJ: Hm.  
20  
21 VS: Don't mold yourself to a category or mold yourself to a label that you had nothing to do with the  
22 shaping of that label...  
23  
24 AJ: Mhm.  
25  
26 VS: ... or the shaping of that category. Don't be trans. Be you. And be, be you completely. Be you  
27 skilled, be you educated, be you talented, be you free, and trans will catch up to you. Trans will  
28 catch up to you.  
29  
30 AJ: Yeah.  
31  
32 VS: Uh, let the trans label mold itself around you.  
33  
34 AJ: Hm.  
35  
36 VS: I love what these kids are doing calling themselves genderqueer.  
37  
38 AJ: Hm.  
39  
40 VS: You know, we thought they were trans.  
41  
42 AJ: Right.  
43  
44 VS: That, I thought they was trans.  
45  
46 AJ: Yeah.  
47



1 VS: I thought they was trans. No. They consider themselves genderclear— genderqueer and  
2 genderflip and all. I love it.  
3  
4 AJ: Genderclear, I like that.  
5  
6 VS: Oh, no well, I'm tired. It, it's late.  
7  
8 AJ: I think, I know, I think though that genderclear, that might be an identity too.  
9  
10 VS: Oh the next one. I love what they're doing. They're flipping it, and, you know, in my day we had  
11 to be unlockable, we had to pass...  
12  
13 AJ: Mhm.  
14  
15 VS: ...or you get your ass beating, you had to get out. But now these young kids are saying, "No, I  
16 don't want, nah-ah, I don't want to be part of the binary. I don't, we don't know anything about  
17 binary."  
18  
19 AJ: We're not trying and...  
20  
21 VS: I'm not trying to be...  
22  
23 AJ: [Laughs].  
24  
25 VS: ... you know heteronormative.  
26  
27 AJ: Right, exactly.  
28  
29 VS: Now for me heteronormative is fine because that's who I am.  
30  
31 AJ: That's who you are.  
32  
33 VS: That's who I am but for them it's, for many of them, it's not fine.  
34  
35 AJ: Yeah.  
36  
37 VS: If trans is who you are, it'll catch up to you.  
38  
39 AJ: Mhm.  
40  
41 VS: It'll catch up to you. Don't be trans. Be you because, you know, when you look up what is trans  
42 there's some definitions.  
43  
44 AJ: Mhm.  
45  
46 VS: Well, those may not fit who you are. So, and you had nothing to do with how they got on the  
47 page. So be you. Be you. Let trans be you instead of you trying to be as trans as you can be.

1  
2 AJ: Right.  
3  
4 VS: Flip that, flip that and be powerful.  
5  
6 AJ: Hm.  
7  
8 VS: You know, you come from a rich people, a rich and powerful very well internally resource, highly  
9 resilient lavish people. You're made of this elegant system called spirit. Be sickening. Take care  
10 of your skin and your posture.  
11  
12 AJ: Okay. [Laughs].  
13  
14 VS: Yeah, be yourself and be happy.  
15  
16 AJ: Very practical advice.  
17  
18 VS: Yeah, take care of your skin, mind your thighs, watch your posture.  
19  
20 AJ: Yeah.  
21  
22 VS: Uhm, get your education, uh, cause, you know, money, money is a part of our process.  
23  
24 AJ: Yes, it is.  
25  
26 VS: Money is a part of our transitioning process. And having, and have a cap. Like, what is  
27 transitioned look like?  
28  
29 AJ: Right. Mhm.  
30  
31 VS: What is a post-transitioned...  
32  
33 AJ: E.D.  
34  
35 VS: E.D. We often talk about transitioning...  
36  
37 AJ: Mhm.  
38  
39 VS: ... and my transition. When is it over?  
40  
41 AJ: Right.  
42  
43 VS: When do you deem yourself finished? Have a, have a finish. And, hey, have a rites of passage if  
44 you chose to and celebrate the fact that I'm good, right? And whatever post that looks like  
45 whether that be surgery or not. That's your body. You know, I'm not a medical professional. I  
46 don't need to tell you what to do with your body. But put an endgame on it. And then you can  
47 decide whether you want to engage in the gender identity politics and be trans.

1  
2 AJ: Mhm.  
3  
4 VS: Or if you just want to be Tom, Dick, Harry, Mary or them, they, other.  
5  
6 AJ: Mhm. [Laughs].  
7  
8 VS: You know, just, uhm, yeah.  
9  
10 AJ: Wow, Valerie, this has been so amazing, so, so, so amazing.  
11  
12 VS: We are well out tired. We are falling out tired in this hotel room.  
13  
14 AJ: [Laughs]. It is late so...  
15  
16 VS: It is late and we are exhausted but we rolling.  
17  
18 AJ: We rolling, we rolling.  
19  
20 VS: [Laughs].  
21  
22 AJ: Uhm, is there anything that you want to say that you feel compelled to add to this conversation  
23 that I have not had the foresight to ask you?  
24  
25 VS: [Yawns]. I'm grateful for the journey. I am. I'm so grateful to... I'm grateful that womanhood  
26 chose me.  
27  
28 AJ: Hm.  
29  
30 VS: I'm grateful that is chose me.  
31  
32 AJ: Mhm.  
33  
34 VS: I feel, I feel so honored to be a woman, uhm, to be a sister.  
35  
36 AJ: Yes. A black woman.  
37  
38 VS: To be a black woman. I feel so honored to be a black woman. Uhm, I feel so honored to be my  
39 mother's daughter. I, you know, my mother's aging now. She's elderly now.  
40  
41 AJ: Sure.  
42  
43 VS: And where others may see, you know, whipping her backside in the shower as a chore, I find it  
44 to be so noble.  
45  
46 AJ: Hm.  
47

- 1 VS: I find it to be... it is such a gracious delight to clean her when I must and to navigate her life even  
2 when this woman gets on my nerves. Make no mistake.  
3
- 4 AJ: Yeah. I had a momma, and I love her to death.  
5
- 6 VS: But she, she gave me whatever normal I have sitting on this spit, whatever normal I have it's  
7 because she did not put me out, and she did not know what the hell she was doing with this  
8 freaking ass child in here.  
9
- 10 AJ: Yeah. [Laughs].  
11
- 12 VS: Uh, you know, uh, flaming sissy now. The child is going to be a girl with hair.  
13
- 14 AJ: Oh. [Laughs].  
15
- 16 VS: And she had no, there was no man, no YouTube tutorials, no PFLAG groups for women of color.  
17 She was just a sister who was dedicated to loving her child long heart and strong. It is such an  
18 honor to be her daughter. It's such an honor. And at the time of this taping...  
19
- 20 AJ: Shout out Miss Lulu.  
21
- 22 VS: Shout out to my Lulu. And I'm trying to be available to her so when she takes her last breath and  
23 moves on to her next living experience I can say, you know, I, I, it was, it was pretty. It was  
24 beautiful.  
25
- 26 AJ: Hm.  
27
- 28 VS: Trying to organize it. Lastly, uhm, at the time of this taping I just turned fifty.  
29
- 30 AJ: Huh.  
31
- 32 VS: I love being older. Oh my god. The body is tired. The face is still pulled but the body is late.  
33
- 34 AJ: Okay. [Laughs].  
35
- 36 VS: The body is late. There's no...  
37
- 38 AJ: Yeah.  
39
- 40 VS: There's no more sexy body.  
41
- 42 AJ: I'm gonna say I've been over fifty for a little while now and it's, it's a change.  
43
- 44 VS: It's a change. The body is tired, and I'm not working out. And I'm not taking no spin classes and  
45 shit. I don't do none of that.  
46
- 47 AJ: [Laughs].

1  
2 VS: But oh god I just love being older. I love the, you know, most women find it offensive when you  
3 call them ma'am.  
4  
5 AJ: Mhm.  
6  
7 VS: I've been waiting to be ma'amed my whole life.  
8  
9 AJ: Ma'amed, right.  
10  
11 VS: My whole life I have been so sexually commodified...  
12  
13 AJ: Mm.  
14  
15 VS: ... and objectified and fetishized...  
16  
17 AJ: Mhm.  
18  
19 VS: ... that when a man opens the door for me and says, "Good morning, ma'am," it feels like finally  
20 you motherfuckers treat me exactly like I, you should did it, you feel... When young people listen  
21 to me...  
22  
23 AJ: Mhm.  
24  
25 VS: ... because I'm older...  
26  
27 AJ: Sure.  
28  
29 VS: ... oh I love— I'm able to, oh and I delight in the whole torch passing process.  
30  
31 AJ: Yes.  
32  
33 VS: I love being, I love being, no more miniskirts for me and high heels.  
34  
35 AJ: I'm done.  
36  
37 VS: I'm done.  
38  
39 AJ: The high heels are over.  
40  
41 VS: And if my dream husband comes down the street...  
42  
43 AJ: Mhm. [Laughs].  
44  
45 VS: ... we'll see daddy. I mean, you know, we'll talk cause I'm not looking for you to come down the  
46 street.  
47

1 AJ: Mhm.  
2  
3 VS: I'm really, you know, it's not, that's not my heaven anymore, and oh god, I just I love being  
4 older. Uhm, yeah. I'm, I'm cool about that journey, you know, trans people are so busy trying to  
5 get to somewhere, get to a body, get to an ideal identity. Let me let you know at this age in the  
6 journey at fifty I've been, I've been, I've been a complete being for a while now.  
7  
8 AJ: Right.  
9  
10 VS: I get to pick and chose where, when, and how I'm trans.  
11  
12 AJ: Wow, yeah.  
13  
14 VS: It feels good. Thank you for having me for this. This is wonderful.  
15  
16 AJ: Thank you for being a part of this.  
17  
18 VS: [Kissing noises].  
19  
20 AJ: I love you.  
21  
22 VS: I love you too.  
23  
24 AJ: Until we meet again.  
25  
26 VS: Until we meet again. Bye!  
27  
28 AJ: Bye! [Laughs].  
29  
30 VS: I'm worn out. Boo.