

Ani Koch
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

January 6, 2017



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

The Transgender Oral History Project will collect up to 400 hours of oral histories involving 200 to 300 individuals over the next three years. Major efforts will be the recruitment of individuals of all ages and experiences, and documenting the work of The Program in Human Sexuality. This project will be led by

Andrea Jenkins, poet, writer, and trans-activist. Andrea brings years of experience working in government, non-profits and LGBT organizations. If you are interested in being involved in this exciting project, please contact Andrea.

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

1 Andrea Jenkins -AJ
2 Ani Koch -AK
3
4 AJ: So, hello.
5 AK: Hi.
6 AJ: My name is Andrea Jenkins, and I am the oral historian for the Transgender Oral History Project
7 at the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota University. Today is January 6th, 2017. I
8 can't believe we're already into a new year. Today I'm sitting here with Ani Koch. Did I say that
9 right?
10 AK: You did.
11 AJ: Awesome.
12 AK: Surprising.
13 AJ: Yeah?
14 AK: Most people don't.
15 AJ: Okay.
16 AK: So I'll take it.
17 AJ: Ani, how are you today?
18 AK: I'm great. I'm happy to be here.
19 AJ: Yeah?
20 AK: Yeah.
21 AJ: Awesome. Thank you so much for being here. Can you state your name, spell your name, state
22 your gender identity as you describe it today, state your gender assigned at birth, and your
23 pronouns that you use.
24 AK: Okay. So Ani Koch, A-N-I K-O-C-H. And let's see. The other question was gender identity.
25 AJ: Yeah.
26 AK: Right?
27 AJ: Uh huh.
28 AK: So I think the term I've been using most recently is genderqueer.
29 AJ: Genderqueer.
30 AK: I don't think it's a hundred percent fit, but it's the best that I've got at the moment.
31 Transmasculine works, and sometimes I think gender nonconforming, but I'm really not that
32 nonconforming. I'm pretty conforming, actually, so that's a whole 'nother hour.

- 1 AJ: Wow. Okay.
- 2 AK: But - yeah, so that's where I'm at there. And then what was your other question?
- 3 AJ: And then what pronouns do you use?
- 4 AK: Oh, pronouns. I prefer neutral. They/them/their.
- 5 AJ: Okay.
- 6 AK: I always kind of tend to rank them for folks. If you can't do that -
- 7 AJ: Okay.
- 8 AK: - masculine are fine. But I - I don't like she/her.
- 9 AJ: Sure.
- 10 AK: Yeah. But -
- 11 AJ: So they/them -
- 12 AK: As long as folks are respectful, I'm usually pretty flexible. But yeah, the preference is neutral.
- 13 AJ: Right. Okay, awesome.
- 14 AK: Yup.
- 15 AJ: Wow, so Ani, can you just tell me - tell us what is your earliest memory in life?
- 16 AK: Earliest memory. I don't know if it's the earliest, but I actually just thought of it today.
- 17 AJ: Okay. Wow.
- 18 AK: So -
- 19 AJ: It's right off the top of your mind.
- 20 AK: I will just assume that this is the universe at work.
- 21 AJ: Okay.
- 22 AK: There might be an earlier one, but I was talking with my mom on the phone, and she said to me
- 23 - we were talking about when - what the year was when they bought the house that they're
- 24 currently living in. And she said, "Well, you would have been four." And I said, "But I remember
- 25 all - like, I remember everything about buying that house," and the - my dad, you know, they
- 26 bought it for like \$11,000.
- 27 AJ: Wow.
- 28 AK: Or something. And my dad took it apart piece by piece and put it back together. It - you know,
- 29 cockroaches in the kitchen. Just a mess, this place.
- 30 AJ: Oh, no. Wow.

- 1 AK: And he just rebuilt it, room by room. I was afraid to go in it because it was so scary looking.
- 2 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 3 AK: But I remember taking my play lawnmower, you know, the fake plastic ones?
- 4 AJ: Right, the Fisher-Price.
- 5 AK: Over to the house - yeah.
- 6 AJ: Yeah.
- 7 AK: And I said, "I'm going to help Dad, 'cause he's got a lot of work to do."
- 8 AJ: Right?
- 9 AK: So I go in this terri - this backyard that was in horrible shape, and push the lawnmower through,
10 thinking that I was doing something. And my mom said "Yeah, you were four - about four." I
11 thought, well, I can remember it so clearly that it's surprising to me that I was that young. Like, I
12 would have guessed maybe six, seven, eight.
- 13 AJ: Wow.
- 14 AK: Yeah. So...
- 15 AJ: That's incredible. That's a great story, great memory.
- 16 AK: Yeah. Yeah. I don't know if it's the earliest, but yeah, it came to mind earlier today, so I thought,
17 you know.
- 18 AJ: Wow, that - well, thanks for sharing. Where - where was this house? Where'd you grow up?
- 19 AK: Dubuque, Iowa, which I usually refer to as a small town.
- 20 AJ: Okay.
- 21 AK: But then there's all these folks in Minnesota who grew up in a town of, like, five people that
22 correct me when I say "small."
- 23 AJ: Okay, yeah.
- 24 AK: But, yeah, you know, like, sixty thousand people.
- 25 AJ: Yeah.
- 26 AK: So, Minneapolis feels like a big city in comparison, so yeah. Medium-ish town.
- 27 AJ: I grew up in Chicago, so I would - I would classify Dubuque as a small town.
- 28 AK: Yeah. Right. Yeah.
- 29 AJ: But that's just me.
- 30 AK: Yeah, for sure. So yeah, it's a gorgeous -

- 1 AJ: What was it like?
- 2 AK: Well, it's - it's a gorgeous river city. It's right where Wisconsin, Illinois, and Iowa meet.
- 3 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 4 AK: So my folks actually live, you know, two minutes from the Mississippi.
- 5 AJ: Wow.
- 6 AK: And basically five minutes in any direction, you can get on a bridge to go to Wisconsin or Illinois.
- 7 So -
- 8 AJ: Is that right?
- 9 AK: They call it the Tri-States area.
- 10 AJ: Yeah. So is it pretty close to like, Winona, and...?
- 11 AK: It's actually - it's much further south -
- 12 AJ: Oh, okay.
- 13 AK: - than Winona.
- 14 AJ: Okay.
- 15 AK: So it's about a five hour drive from here.
- 16 AJ: Oh, wow. Okay.
- 17 AK: Yeah. So. It's a - yeah. That's - I don't know.
- 18 AJ: Awesome.
- 19 AK: That's what it's like. Lots of churches. There's a church and a bar on every corner. You know, it's
- 20 a very hilly part of Iowa. And again, it's just - it's very much defined by its river -
- 21 AJ: Yeah.
- 22 AK: - the - the river going through it, and a lot of the history there.
- 23 AJ: Wow. I didn't - I didn't realize that it was a river town.
- 24 AK: Yeah.
- 25 AJ: So what's the industry there? Do you, like...?
- 26 AK: Yeah, so that's changing a lot. Like, right now, IBM just moved in a few years ago. So it's just like
- 27 - there was never anything like that there before. So you're seeing, like, these areas downtown.
- 28 The warehouse district is getting flipped into condos all of a sudden.
- 29 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 30 AK: And, like, they're trying to make videos about how they're walker and biker friendly, when like,

- 1 pretty sure I always got hit if I tried to ride a bike there.
- 2 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 3 AK: You know?
- 4 AJ: Yeah.
- 5 AK: Like, it's not - you know, it's very car-dependent city. Buses go on - when I was a kid, would go
6 on, like, one loop.
- 7 AJ: Is that right?
- 8 AK: Or that's what I remember of it. So yeah, I mean, one of the major industries there for a long
9 time was the meatpacking industry.
- 10 AJ: Okay.
- 11 AK: John Deere has a plant there. And then there's a lot of manufacturing plants, which is - I mean,
12 that's where my dad's worked his whole life, is in a - in a manufacturing heat treat facility,
13 factory work.
- 14 AJ: Yeah?
- 15 AK: So - yeah. Those are the - I think the main ones that come to mind.
- 16 AJ: So you grew up in a - in an intact family, a two-parent household?
- 17 AK: Yeah. Two-parent household. Mmhmm.
- 18 AJ: And siblings?
- 19 AK: Yeah. I have two brothers.
- 20 AJ: Really?
- 21 AK: They're both older than I am. Yeah.
- 22 AJ: Wow.
- 23 AK: So I am the baby.
- 24 AJ: You are the baby of the bunch. What was it like growing up? I mean, so I assume, Dubuque, you
25 went to grade school, you went to high school, and -
- 26 AK: Yup.
- 27 AJ: All of that stuff there.
- 28 AK: Yup. Yeah.
- 29 AJ: What was - what was - what was those experiences like for you?
- 30 AK: Yeah, so, I mean - first of all, I was, like, my mom's - like, I was the only daughter. At that point.

- 1 AJ: Okay.
- 2 AK: And so that was, you know - that was always pointed out. That was always a big deal.
- 3 AJ: Yeah?
- 4 AK: Yeah. I went through -
- 5 AJ: From your mom?
- 6 AK: Yeah. Yeah.
- 7 AJ: Particularly, like - ?
- 8 AK: Def - and just the - all the women in the family.
- 9 AJ: Oh, okay.
- 10 AK: It was like, "Oh, okay. You got a daughter."
- 11 AJ: Right.
- 12 AK: You know? So I ruined all of that for them. No. But yeah, I mean, I'd say growing up, yeah, I - I
- 13 played a lot of sports. That was always, like, central to my life.
- 14 AJ: Wow.
- 15 AK: In school and out. I was always out and about. So yeah. And - I actually played football for a long
- 16 time, on the - on the guys' team.
- 17 AJ: Is that right?
- 18 AK: Which - I had no idea that it was going to be that big of a deal, but I was like, I like this, so why
- 19 not do it? The gender thing was kind of lost on me.
- 20 AJ: In high school? Or...?
- 21 AK: Well, actually, I started in third grade.
- 22 AJ: Is that right?
- 23 AK: So, yeah, I did it in third grade -
- 24 AJ: So, like, Pop Warner football kind of, huh?
- 25 AK: It was - yeah, it was like the flag football.
- 26 AJ: Right.
- 27 AK: And then into middle school, I played on the tackle team, and then I tried out for the high school
- 28 team and it - it didn't work out.
- 29 AJ: Didn't?
- 30 AK: I mean, they were kind of gunning for me, you know?

- 1 AJ: Yeah.
- 2 AK: They were, like, "Okay. Let's take care of this."
- 3 AJ: This - this girl. Yeah.
- 4 AK: So. Yeah.
- 5 AJ: Wow.
- 6 AK: But yeah, so I went to a school called Dubuque Senior High School, a kind of - we joke that it
7 looks like a prison, 'cause it's all limestone.
- 8 AJ: Oh, wow, yeah.
- 9 AK: And it's - you know. And it's - you know - so it's just - it's a - it's a sight.
- 10 AJ: Yeah.
- 11 AK: When you come up to it.
- 12 AJ: That's a very stately building, very sturdy, sounds like.
- 13 AK: Yeah.
- 14 AJ: Yeah.
- 15 AK: And I did - I just - I always felt like I had, like, several lives. I had several different streams that I
16 was in at all times.
- 17 AJ: Like what?
- 18 AK: I was kind of, like, a athlete. Then I was also into my partying at that point.
- 19 AJ: Right. Yeah. Yeah.
- 20 AK: And then I was also on student council, and then, like, failing half my classes and getting A's in
21 the other half. I was all over the place.
- 22 AJ: Wow.
- 23 AK: All the time. So yeah.
- 24 AJ: Would you call yourself, like, a popular kid, a...a -
- 25 AK: Yeah. That- I don't know, that's -
- 26 AJ: I mean, you were kind of defying stereotypes in some ways, in terms of being a athlete, and -
- 27 AK: Yeah. I don't know about popular. I've always stru - I don't know. I think - I think everybody - I
28 knew everybody and everybody knew me. I didn't have a ton of, like, close friends. I had a
29 couple.
- 30 AJ: Okay.

- 1 AK: Close friends. But yeah. I - I mean, I started one of the first GSAs, Gay Straight Alliances, in Iowa.
- 2 AJ: Is that right?
- 3 AK: In my high school, yeah.
- 4 AJ: So in high school.
- 5 AK: Yeah. And then - again, like, it was very - very odd, 'cause then I was also the Homecoming
6 Queen. I was a senior.
- 7 AJ: What?
- 8 AK: Which is, like...oh, boy. It's a - again, it's a whole 'nother story.
- 9 AJ: Oh my goodness, this is getting better and better and better.
- 10 AK: But it's just, you know. It's kind of a - I felt like I had my foot in all these different worlds.
- 11 AJ: So let me - let me get this straight. You started the GSA.
- 12 AK: Yeah.
- 13 AJ: The Gay Straight Alliance.
- 14 AK: Yeah. Someone had tried to do it, and then when they graduated it went away.
- 15 AJ: Okay.
- 16 AK: You know? So then I started it back up with a friend of mine.
- 17 AJ: And you kind of picked it up. Yeah.
- 18 AK: Yeah. A couple years later.
- 19 AJ: Were you - were you lesbian? Queer-identified at that point in time? Or -
- 20 AK: I didn't know that I could be queer-identified yet.
- 21 AJ: Okay.
- 22 AK: I - so - I didn't really understand my own identity. Everyone had told me that I was a lesbian.
- 23 AJ: Okay.
- 24 AK: I mean, people had told me that, so I was like "All right, that's what I am, that's what I am." So I
25 kind of didn't really do a whole lot of thinking about that.
- 26 AJ: Sure.
- 27 AK: It was like, okay, I'm attracted to women, I'll be with women. I've always had - I've had a very - I
28 would say a very gender-variant life. If you look at the pictures of me every year in school, it's
29 super femme, butch. Super femme, butch. Like, back and forth, and back - it's all over the place.
- 30 AJ: Really?

- 1 AK: And again, this was way before I ever, like, thought about it. Definitely it - back into grade
2 school. You know, fifth grade I'm there with a football -
- 3 AJ: Right?
- 4 AK: - and the bowl haircut -
- 5 AJ: Oh my goodness.
- 6 AK: - and then sixth grade the locks, the curls are just hanging. It's just - it's kind of - it's actually
7 comforting to look back at. 'Cause I don't think I - I don't know. For some reason there's always
8 this idea that, did I consciously - did I manufacture this, or is this - is this just my reality.
- 9 AJ: Right.
- 10 AK: And I think I have, like, proof, that -
- 11 AJ: Yeah, you've got the visuals to kind of prove it.
- 12 AK: Yeah. It's like, whoa, I was so butch that year, that's amazing! So...
- 13 AJ: Oh man. So as an athlete, I mean, that's kind of defying gender norms. I mean, were you teased,
14 bullied, harassed at all for...?
- 15 AK: Oh, god yes.
- 16 AJ: Really? Okay.
- 17 AK: Yeah, for sure.
- 18 AJ: Wow.
- 19 AK: That's why I say, like, it would be hard for me to say, like, "Oh, I was popular."
- 20 AJ: Okay.
- 21 AK: "I was one of the cool kids."
- 22 AJ: Right.
- 23 AK: 'Cause it was - you know, I felt like, you know, especially the homecoming thing, it was like,
24 compared to the other people that you could vote for, I think I was probably just the nice one.
25 'Cause they were all kind of mean -
- 26 AJ: Oh, they were like -
- 27 AK: You know, like, mean pretty people -
- 28 AJ: Like, the mean girls. Yeah.
- 29 AK: Yeah, I was like, yeah, I would have voted for me too, in comparison!
- 30 AJ: Right?
- 31 AK: And I mean, that wasn't everybody.

- 1 AJ: Sure.
- 2 AK: There were nice people on the court and stuff, but - so, yeah, I mean, I definitely had a rough go
3 of it. I mean, especially around gender stuff, from a very young age, I remember, you know, in
4 grade school people telling me I was in the wrong bathroom.
- 5 AJ: Really?
- 6 AK: Yeah. Or telling me, "I saw you, you were standing up to pee. I saw it, you need to go in the
7 other bathroom," and not knowing what to do.
- 8 AJ: Oh, man.
- 9 AK: So that - I mean that was probably - I was ten, eleven years old at that point. I was like, "Why is -
10 " like, I could never understand why it was happening. So, yeah. I mean, I definitely had my fair
11 share of that.
- 12 AJ: How...when did you first realize that you were, sort of, not the gender you were assigned at
13 birth?
- 14 AK: Yeah. You know, I think I had inklings of it, but I didn't really land there until adulthood, until,
15 like, I moved up to Minnesota and got out of that environment. 'Cause again, I don't know that I
16 realized what was possible.
- 17 AJ: Right.
- 18 AK: So I know when I started to go through puberty, I just had this - this desire to not grow breasts. I
19 felt really - I felt just disgusted with the idea, and I did - and again, it wasn't really about identity,
20 it was just like, this inherent, like, what - "I hope this doesn't happen to me."
- 21 AJ: Right.
- 22 AK: And when it did, I wanted them gone.
- 23 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 24 AK: And I didn't care what it meant, it wasn't, like, "Oh, I want top surgery," or "I want a breast
25 reduction." I didn't care about those things, but I was like, "This isn't going to work for me."
- 26 AJ: This is just not me. Right?
- 27 AK: Right.
- 28 AJ: Yeah.
- 29 AK: And I don't really - I never really experienced a dysphoria around many other things, as far as
30 physical - or, being, you know, physical is concerned. But that was always just something that I
31 felt so strongly, from a pretty young age. From the point where I realized, "Oh, that's going to
32 happen - "
- 33 AJ: Right.
- 34 AK: It was like, a - a revolt, like, a, "I've got to figure this out."

- 1 AJ: Oh, man.
- 2 AK: I've got to figure out how to change that, 'cause it's not going to work.
- 3 AJ: Yeah.
- 4 AK: So I think that that's probably the one thing that's really strong. But there was always the - the
5 tendency to play with the boys, do what the boys did, and I feel in a lot of ways I was kind of
6 protected, or lucky, 'cause I could be just considered a tomboy, and it could be explained away
7 in that way. And a lot of ways that I don't see my, like, femme queer, like, sisters being able to
8 do.
- 9 AJ: Yeah. There's no word, like -
- 10 AK: Not a nice one. You know?
- 11 AJ: Yeah.
- 12 AK: And I mean - well, tom -
- 13 AJ: Tomgirl. I don't know.
- 14 AK: Yeah. They're not, like - tom - I mean, it's not like everybody was excited that I was a tomboy, it
15 was just - it was what it was.
- 16 AJ: Right.
- 17 AK: So there were some - there was some place for me.
- 18 AJ: Yeah. Tom - tomboy is sort of a judgment-neutral term -
- 19 AK: Sure. Yeah.
- 20 AJ: - kind of. It's not - like, there's no -
- 21 AK: Yeah.
- 22 AJ: - deep stigma around it until a person gets above a certain age.
- 23 AK: Right. Until you don't grow out of it, you know?
- 24 AJ: Right. Exactly.
- 25 AK: Or until you're, like, "Oh, this is - this isn't what I thought it was," you know?
- 26 AJ: So you were an adult. When - when in your adult life? You moved to Minnesota...
- 27 AK: Yeah. I think - so I would guess that - I'm trying to think of when I moved to Minnesota. I think
28 eight or nine years ago now. So I would have been about twenty-two - twenty-one, twenty-two.
29 In there. And I can't remember what it was, but I was at - no one had ever asked me what my
30 preferred pronoun was before.
- 31 AJ: Okay.

- 1 AK: And so the first time I was asked, I didn't know how to respond. Not because I didn't know what
2 a pronoun was.
- 3 AJ: Right.
- 4 AK: But I was like, "Oh, you're asking me? Oh, I get to - "
- 5 AJ: Yeah.
- 6 AK: You know, 'cause I had asked other people, and we - you know?
- 7 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 8 AK: But I - I was like, "Oh, I get to decide that. That's - what a nice thing." And I thought about it and
9 I was like, "Yeah, I really don't - I don't like being referred to as she/her." Like, that doesn't fit
10 for me. But it always felt like there wasn't necessarily a good alternative.
- 11 AJ: Sure.
- 12 AK: 'Cause I did - I didn't feel like I fully identified as male, either, so - so yeah. That's - I just started
13 going with gender neutral pronouns 'cause someone asked one day and I was like "That feels
14 better." And it turns out that that is - it, you know, it works a lot better for me.
- 15 AJ: Yeah. Wow. That's pretty cool. So what terms have you used to describe yourself, and how has
16 that changed and shifted over time?
- 17 AK: Yeah, I'd say I now really embrace the term butch.
- 18 AJ: Okay.
- 19 AK: And I really didn't before. I actually really - I - I like it in, like, a serious and a playful sense. I - I
20 would say, you know, probably, again, earlier on when I moved here, I had some older lesbian
21 women in my life that would use butch as in "not trans."
- 22 AJ: Right.
- 23 AK: Like - like they couldn't exist together. And, you know, had this narrative of "butches are dying"
24 and "you can't - you can't be transmasculine because then - where have all our butches gone"
25 type of thing.
- 26 AJ: Right. Yeah.
- 27 AK: And devaluing, you know, like, a transmasculine experience.
- 28 AJ: Wow.
- 29 AK: And so I - I feel like at that point in my life, I really was, like, don't - just, don't call me that. Like,
30 that's - I'm not - that's not what I am.
- 31 AJ: Right.
- 32 AK: But as far as now, me defining myself, I think it really fits. I think - yeah, transmasculine is
33 helpful. It fits better than transman, because again, I don't identify as male.

- 1 AJ: Sure.
- 2 AK: But I don't think I would have felt comfortable ten years ago using that term, because I had an
3 idea of what that was and it wasn't me. And also queer, I think. I've kind of let myself explore,
4 like, who am I attracted to, what does it mean? And not based on, like, what other people would
5 say fits in this box or that box.
- 6 AJ: Cool.
- 7 AK: But again, I think if you asked me ten years ago, probably I would just be like, "Eh, I'm a lesbian,"
8 or - I don't know.
- 9 AJ: Right.
- 10 AK: But again, nobody ever really asked me. I'm never asked that question. They'll just be like,
11 "You're this, and you're dating this, so you're that."
- 12 AJ: So they just - so you just had labels kind of bestowed -
- 13 AK: Yeah. Yeah, exactly. Yeah.
- 14 AJ: - upon you. And, yeah. I mean, that's a reality that - that absolutely happens. What sort of
15 challenges have you come up against as you have begun more and more to express your - your
16 true gender identity or this evolving gender identity -
- 17 AK: Yeah.
- 18 AJ: - as it were?
- 19 AK: Yeah. I mean, I think that there's a couple different kinds of challenges. I mean, the challenges
20 that I face interpersonally with other people. And then there's, like, the internal struggle -
- 21 AJ: Sure. Yeah.
- 22 AK: - that I feel. And I - I'm trying more and more to place more emphasis on the internal piece of it,
23 and to, like, to just be good with myself and kind of let the rest - like, whatever, I have no
24 control.
- 25 AJ: Right.
- 26 AK: But, you know, the - the daily stuff, the annoying little micro - whatever, if you want to call them
27 microaggressions, or just, like, experiences of otherness, marginalization. It's - you know, it is
28 the bathroom stuff that's - that's going to be a thing for the rest of my - as long as I look the way
29 I look, it's going to be a thing.
- 30 AJ: Yeah.
- 31 AK: As much as I would love to never talk about bathrooms again, it is what it is.
- 32 AJ: I know, but what's the bathroom stuff -
- 33 AK: What's the bathroom stuff?

- 1 AJ: - like, people watching us, they may not know.
- 2 AK: Yeah. The bathroom stuff is - literally regardless of what I choose, someone will be there nine
3 times out of ten to tell me I'm in the wrong place. Or to physically remove me, or to call security,
4 or -
- 5 AJ: Wow.
- 6 AK: - to - I mean, it - it just -
- 7 AJ: So what restrooms do you occupy, generally?
- 8 AK: I - most - most of the time will only use a gender-neutral restroom.
- 9 AJ: Okay.
- 10 AK: If that is not an option, then I kind of take stock of where I'm at.
- 11 AJ: Right.
- 12 AK: And what makes the most sense at the time.
- 13 AJ: Okay. Yeah.
- 14 AK: At work, I - I will only use gender neutral. I tried to use - so the men's room had a bunch of
15 traffic, so then I went to the women's room, right?
- 16 AJ: Right?
- 17 AK: This is one time I did this.
- 18 AJ: Okay.
- 19 AK: And I go to walk in and literally someone coming out started screaming. And I'm thinking, "I
20 don't need this at work."
- 21 AJ: Oh my god.
- 22 AK: Like, "I don't want to enter this kind of - like, I don't even want to go there here." So I just like -
23 "Okay. I'm just going to use gender neutral restrooms." Luckily the building I'm in is - it's pretty
24 big. My half of the building has two of those, single-stall gender-neutral.
- 25 AJ: Okay.
- 26 AK: As a part of some of the trans work we've been doing there. And then the other half of the
27 building has two. Unfortunately, they're extremely popular because, wouldn't you know it, lots
28 of people like privacy for lots of reasons!
- 29 AJ: Yeah.
- 30 AK: Shocking!
- 31 AJ: Shocking, right?

- 1 AK: So I often have to wait a long time -
- 2 AJ: Is that right?
- 3 AK: - to get in there. And, you know, it is what it is. But I'm very grateful to have access to that. But
4 yeah, if I'm in a gay bar, you know...Like, if I'm in drag, for example, I use the restroom of
5 whoever I'm in drag as.
- 6 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 7 AK: If I look masculine, I go in the men's; women's, you know. At the Townhouse, it's whatever line
8 is shorter.
- 9 AJ: Right.
- 10 AK: At the - you know, like, it just depends where I am.
- 11 AJ: So you're a drag performer?
- 12 AK: Yes.
- 13 AJ: What is that like? And -
- 14 AK: Well, now that I feel old - old in the drag community...
- 15 AJ: Yeah?
- 16 AK: It's - it's - you know, it's a little exhausting. But I love - I still love it. I still do it a few times a year,
17 yeah.
- 18 AJ: Do you - this is great. Do you consider drag as a part of the trans experience?
- 19 AK: That's a really good question.
- 20 AJ: And I really ask that question because there is a - I mean, a sort of a movement to sort of, I
21 think, invisibilize, or erase drag performance -
- 22 AK: Yeah.
- 23 AJ: - drag community, from the trans umbrella.
- 24 AK: Yeah.
- 25 AJ: What's your thoughts?
- 26 AK: Well, I mean, for me it is. But I think - I think it depends on the individual - you know, I mean, I
27 think that there's an identity, right, of the indiv - individual people who are performing. But to
28 say that it's not a part of our culture, in general, would - I - I - I don't have that experience. It's
29 been everywhere.
- 30 AJ: Sure.
- 31 AK: I mean, drag was the first thing - area that allowed me to even play with this idea of gender.

- 1 AJ: Sure.
- 2 AK: Way before I knew that being trans was possible. I have to say, like, as a teenager I fell in love
3 with trans women. I didn't know that they were trans women, but they were drag queens.
- 4 AJ: Right.
- 5 AK: You know, at our local gay bar that would perform every week.
- 6 AJ: Sure.
- 7 AK: We actually - this is, like, another, like, old timey story, but -
- 8 AJ: Cool, go for it.
- 9 AK: We had a - this little thing. My friends and I - I was probably fifteen years old at this point -
10 talked to the owner of the gay bar.
- 11 AJ: Right.
- 12 AK: We said, there's a lot of us who want to come watch the shows, but we can't get into the bar
13 because we're too young.
- 14 AJ: Yeah.
- 15 AK: So he let us open up the other side. So the gay bar was called "One Flight Up," and we opened
16 up the other side - it's called "The Other Side Up."
- 17 AJ: Oh, wow. Okay.
- 18 AK: Where it was - it was like a teen -
- 19 AJ: Teen hang -
- 20 AK: Teen dance club.
- 21 AJ: Oh, okay.
- 22 AK: And we literally cut a hole in the wall so we could look into the gay bar and watch the drag
23 shows.
- 24 AJ: Wow.
- 25 AK: At fifteen years old! And I'm thinking now, like, oh god, that makes so much sense. But I didn't
26 have a clue about identity or anything else.
- 27 AJ: Sure. Yeah.
- 28 AK: And I probably started doing drag when I was about eighteen, nineteen years old.
- 29 AJ: In Dubuque, or...?
- 30 AK: In Dubuque, yeah.
- 31 AJ: Okay.

- 1 AK: Yeah. And throughout college, it was - I mean, that was my - that was - I always say it's my
2 grocery money. I did it every week.
- 3 AJ: Yeah?
- 4 AK: And that's how I had extra spending cash, so.
- 5 AJ: Where'd you go to college?
- 6 AK: The University of Dubuque, Iowa.
- 7 AJ: Okay.
- 8 AK: Yeah. A small little Presbyterian school. I thought I was going to be a cop.
- 9 AJ: Really?
- 10 AK: Which is, like, hilarious now, but yeah.
- 11 AJ: No, but that's sort of a masculine-identified -
- 12 AK: Yeah. Yeah.
- 13 AJ: - occupation, right?
- 14 AK: I went for criminal justice. Yeah, exactly. Well, it was like, what am I interested in? And I was,
15 like, well this is interesting. And then I think I got a few classes in and I was like, "I'm not doing
16 that!"
- 17 AJ: Okay, yeah.
- 18 AK: You know. But I did like - I don't know. I liked some of the things, you know. I had this idea of
19 like, maybe I could be an investigator, or...you know, maybe I could do this, or that. There was -
20 yeah. Things about it that were interesting. Court proceedings, and...
- 21 AJ: Wow.
- 22 AK: Yeah.
- 23 AJ: So you - from - from what I hear you saying, I mean, for you, drag -
- 24 AK: Right.
- 25 AJ: - represented this entry point into exploration of -
- 26 AK: Yeah.
- 27 AJ: - identity. And - so, I mean, if you were to take a quiz, should - should drag performers be
28 included in the transgender spectrum of identity -
- 29 AK: Yeah, I mean, I think -
- 30 AJ: - yes or no, what would your answer be?
- 31 AK: I mean, I would say yes, if that's how folks identify. Individually. But again, if you look at it again

- 1 as a culture thing, of like, is this a part of the culture of being trans, absolutely. 'Cause there are
2 so many drag performers who would say "Well, I don't identify as trans."
- 3 AJ: Right. Yeah.
- 4 AK: "That's not who I - " And I think that's fine, but to suggest that, regardless of your reasoning, to
5 play with gender, that that has - that that's completely different from a transgender experience,
6 like, yeah. There are many things that are different about it.
- 7 AJ: Right.
- 8 AK: But they are absolutely related.
- 9 AJ: Yes.
- 10 AK: Plus - I don't know. Most of the performers that I know, especially lifelong performers, have
11 either - identify as trans currently, have a trans experience, have gone down that road and
12 decided it isn't - you know, whatever the -
- 13 AJ: Right.
- 14 AK: Most folks have some experience with questioning their gender identity.
- 15 AJ: Right.
- 16 AK: Which, one could argue - I don't know. I - I think it's about personal identity. So where would
17 someone put themselves. But I'm not one to distance that, obviously. 'Cause I'm a performer.
- 18 AJ: Yeah.
- 19 AK: But most - I mean, most of the drag kings I know in - in a lot of ways, can - they identify as male,
20 and they live as male every day.
- 21 AJ: Yeah.
- 22 AK: In the drag king community, I see there being a lot less about - to me, it's less about gender
23 performance than, you know, people who identify as, like, female impersonators or drag
24 queens.
- 25 AJ: Right.
- 26 AK: I know a lot more, you know, people who identify as male that dress as drag queens and do
27 shows, but live every day as male than I do of females dressing as male, you know, but living
28 their lives as female.
- 29 AJ: Yeah -
- 30 AK: Like, there's so many trans men -
- 31 AJ: It just seems like trans men, it's more of an extension of their life than it is a, sort of, random
32 thing that they do every weekend or something.
- 33 AK: Right. Right. Yeah. Yeah, and it's definitely like - like, I don't have data on that. Like, I don't

- 1 know.
- 2 AJ: No, it's just -
- 3 AK: But, like -
- 4 AJ: - anecdotal, right?
- 5 AK: - it's - yeah. It really seems that way. Even, you know, the communities I was a part of in Iowa to
6 here that - that remains true.
- 7 AJ: Wow. Thanks for - for addressing that.
- 8 AK: Sure.
- 9 AJ: I mean, that's kind of a big - sort of unspoken topic that -
- 10 AK: Yeah, it's...lot of tension around it. Yeah.
- 11 AJ: It's - creates a lot of tension in our community.
- 12 AK: You know, I feel - there was someone I met once. It was right when I moved to Minnesota, and I
13 thought "Oh, we're going to be friends, this is great." And so - it's, you know, he introduced
14 himself, and he told me pretty quick into the conversation "I'm trans."
- 15 AJ: Okay.
- 16 AK: I was like, "Oh, cool, that's great, yeah. Awesome." I said, "I do drag." And so, to me I was
17 saying, like, "Oh, I'm trans too, in this way."
- 18 AJ: Right.
- 19 AK: "This is my, you know, my - "
- 20 AJ: My expression.
- 21 AK: This is where I'm at with it. Not meaning that they're one in the same. He was so offended.
- 22 AJ: Oh my god.
- 23 AK: Because I think he took it as me saying "You're in drag, and I do that sometimes," and that -
- 24 AJ: Right. Yeah.
- 25 AK: You know, it was just - we missed each other. We ended up being very good friends.
- 26 AJ: Oh, good. So you came back around.
- 27 AK: Yeah. But initially, that was, like - you know, and I - that's, kind of - you know, the culture stuff
28 you get slapped on the hand, right? If you violate something.
- 29 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 30 AK: I had no idea it was a thing, but that's where it came up.

- 1 AJ: Who was the first trans person you met?
- 2 AK: It - to my knowledge?
- 3 AJ: Right, to your knowledge.
- 4 AK: I mean, 'cause - yeah, to my knowledge -
- 5 AJ: Yeah, 'cause you never know, right?
- 6 AK: You know, like I said, I fell in love with some women in Dubuque, Iowa.
- 7 AJ: Okay.
- 8 AK: That were on the stage, but - her name was Stella by Starlight.
- 9 AJ: Stella by Starlight. I love that.
- 10 AK: She lives right outside of Chicago. She's - I believe she still performs to this day.
- 11 AJ: Wow.
- 12 AK: And she would travel in - 'cause I believe she lives near Belvidere Oasis - is that right? It's, like,
13 the highway between Dubuque and Chicago.
- 14 AJ: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.
- 15 AK: You have to stop there right in the middle.
- 16 AJ: Right, right, right.
- 17 AK: She lives right around there. Anyways, Stella would travel in once a week, sometimes more, to
18 do shows at One Flight Up, and I just -
- 19 AJ: You'd -
- 20 AK: I would, like -
- 21 AJ: - just break your little heart, huh?
- 22 AK: I would run up to Stella and I would say "What can I get you? Do you need water?"
- 23 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 24 AK: "Do you need me to go get you a - " like, I was - you know, fifteen years old.
- 25 AJ: Oh, my goodness.
- 26 AK: Just, enamored. You know? But also just the courage it took to go out on stage, and the
27 costuming was just, like - so I don't know if it was a romantic thing or not. I'm not sure!
- 28 AJ: Yeah. Right.
- 29 AK: But I love - I just. Yeah. She's gorgeous. Wonderful.
- 30 AJ: Stella by Starlight.

- 1 AK: But again I didn't totally understand - I mean, she sat down and showed me - "This is what I look
2 like," you know.
- 3 AJ: When I'm not on stage, yeah.
- 4 AK: Yeah. Well, no, I mean, she - she lived fully female and everything, so.
- 5 AJ: Okay!
- 6 AK: So - and identified as a trans woman. So she showed me a picture of her like twenty years ago or
7 something.
- 8 AJ: Got it.
- 9 AK: When she was -
- 10 AJ: So she was a trans-identified woman.
- 11 AK: Yeah. Yeah.
- 12 AJ: Who, because probably couldn't find other kinds of work...
- 13 AK: Yeah. I don't know.
- 14 AJ: And enjoyed being on stage, was a - a performer.
- 15 AK: Yeah. Yeah.
- 16 AJ: Yeah.
- 17 AK: Yeah. And there were several women that performed there that were trans women that also did
18 drag.
- 19 AJ: Yeah.
- 20 AK: So. Yeah. So I would say Stella's probably the first person that I realized that that's - you know.
21 So she explained it to me, "Oh, this is what I used to look like," and I was like "Oh, okay, that's
22 great, I didn't - " you know, maybe I didn't even know at that point that that was a possibility.
- 23 AJ: Who are some of your trans heroes and sheroes?
- 24 AK: That's a really good question. I've got to say you're probably one.
- 25 AJ: Oh my goodness. Okay.
- 26 AK: Which I'm sure that you've heard before, but - I mean -
- 27 AJ: I don't ask this question very - in fact, this might be one of the few times I have asked it.
- 28 AK: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, but I would - I would say that I - I have legitimately always looked up to you.
- 29 AJ: Oh, thank you.
- 30 AK: Probably since, you know, the fellowship stuff.

- 1 AJ: Right.
- 2 AK: And -
- 3 AJ: Yeah. We did a fellowship with the LAAMPP, the -
- 4 AK: Yeah. Where you were literally my coach.
- 5 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 6 AK: So the idea was to look up to you.
- 7 AJ: Right, yeah.
- 8 AK: And to learn from you, and I - and I did.
- 9 AJ: Yeah. I mean, we had that relationship. Yeah.
- 10 AK: Yeah. Yeah. So, I mean, that's - that's real. I would also say - you know, I mean, I - I often think of
11 Stella.
- 12 AJ: Cool.
- 13 AK: As someone - just because, again, the impact of knowing someone at that age and being able to
14 see, "Okay, this is poss - " and start to flip that around for myself and - it almost gives you
15 permission to think about another way of being.
- 16 AJ: Sure.
- 17 AK: Another life. So otherwise -
- 18 AJ: Sort - sort of gets you exposure to it.
- 19 AK: Yeah. Yeah, exactly. You know, I also - I always looked up to Leslie Feinberg.
- 20 AJ: Yeah.
- 21 AK: I always appreciated Leslie's writing and, again, I think Leslie's identity over time, and the shifts,
22 and the -
- 23 AJ: Right.
- 24 AK: And again, gives permission, in a sense.
- 25 AJ: Certainly one of my zie-roes.
- 26 AK: Yeah.
- 27 AJ: That sounds kind of weird to say.
- 28 AK: Yeah, yeah.
- 29 AJ: But they go by zie, and -
- 30 AK: Yeah.

- 1 AJ: Yeah. So.
- 2 AK: Yeah, for sure. And then I would say - just had somebody else come - to my mind - you know,
3 Kate Bornstein, too.
- 4 AJ: Yeah.
- 5 AK: Again, I just think, 'cause of the early writing that I had access to was - like, I've always kind of -
6 I've never been, like, a big academic or a reader. Like, I don't sit down and just consume -
- 7 AJ: Books.
- 8 AK: Books, the way that - I always wanted to be able to do that. There's something about the way
9 that Kate wrote, not just what she was writing about, but of sort of all over the place, and in
10 these short little blurbs.
- 11 AJ: Right.
- 12 AK: There was one book in particular. I can't - I don't know, I can't remember.
- 13 AJ: Gender Outlaw?
- 14 AK: Maybe it was Gender Outlaw. But literally the text-size would change. And it was all - and I flew
15 through that thing. I mean, I could -
- 16 AJ: Oh, the workbook, I think.
- 17 AK: Oh, no, it wasn't the workbook. It was before that. It was, like, a little black and red copy. I can
18 see it in my head.
- 19 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 20 AK: Anyway, for some - that really stuck with me. And again, I felt very empowered by that writing. I
21 - I really looked up to her.
- 22 AJ: Well, interestingly enough, Kate Bornstein is a part of this video project.
- 23 AK: Oh, that's amazing.
- 24 AJ: Yeah. We interviewed her, and -
- 25 AK: Oh, that's great.
- 26 AJ: - and I've known Kate for a long time. I've been inspired by Kate for a long time.
- 27 AK: Yeah.
- 28 AJ: But I have been re-inspired by Kate.
- 29 AK: Really.
- 30 AJ: Since doing this interview with - with her. Because she is still on the front lines -
- 31 AK: Yeah.

- 1 AJ: - of thinking around the gender binary, and, you know, how it's exploding, and how - like, she's
2 still coming up with some of the most innovative ideas and thoughts around trans -
- 3 AK: Yeah.
- 4 AJ: - identity, trans politics, trans expression that I have come across.
- 5 AK: Yeah.
- 6 AJ: To date. Yeah, she's -
- 7 AK: She's -
- 8 AJ: - amazing.
- 9 AK: She is. And I had - I did get the opportunity to meet her one time. She came and spoke at
10 Augsburg College.
- 11 AJ: Yeah, yeah, yeah.
- 12 AK: And I wasn't a student there, but I somehow weaseled my way in.
- 13 AJ: Okay.
- 14 AK: Like - they had, like, a meet and greet before she went and gave her talk.
- 15 AJ: Right.
- 16 AK: And so I got to sit with, like, five other people in the Women's Resource Center up there, and -
- 17 AJ: Cool.
- 18 AK: You know, she was talking about something. And of course I had a copy of her book.
- 19 AJ: Right.
- 20 AK: And I'm sitting there, like, "What about when you said this," like -
- 21 AJ: Yeah.
- 22 AK: "Did this mean," you know?
- 23 AJ: Right.
- 24 AK: So I - I nerded out, big time.
- 25 AJ: And she's hilarious, too.
- 26 AK: Yeah.
- 27 AJ: That -
- 28 AK: Yeah.
- 29 AJ: That helps.

- 1 AK: For sure.
- 2 AJ: Ani, have you undergone any sort of physical or medical -
- 3 AK: Yeah.
- 4 AJ: - interventions as part of your -
- 5 AK: Oh, yeah.
- 6 AJ: - journey through this gender life?
- 7 AK: Yeah. I - yeah. I had to. I was just, like, this has got to happen. Which, I think, that's the
8 experience for most folks.
- 9 AJ: Yeah. It's true.
- 10 AK: Yeah. I - again, I had to - I had to do some personal work and give myself permission to - to look
11 into that, and to - to do that for me.
- 12 AJ: Right.
- 13 AK: 'Cause again, it was always something that was like, "Oh, this is great, everybody else, and - I'll
14 donate to this trans fundraiser!"
- 15 AJ: Right.
- 16 AK: "And this surgery, and this - " you know. But it - I think - so I actually just passed my five-year
17 anniversary for my top surgery.
- 18 AJ: Oh, wow. Okay.
- 19 AK: Yeah. So that was December.
- 20 AJ: Congrats.
- 21 AK: Thank you! Yeah.
- 22 AJ: Yeah.
- 23 AK: It was December 29th. I - and I realized that the other day. And that same year, I actually also
24 got a partial hysterectomy.
- 25 AJ: Okay.
- 26 AK: Earlier in that year, so coming up on six years for that.
- 27 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 28 AK: Which - I didn't - I considered it part of my gender transition, but there were other medical
29 things going on that it was necessary.
- 30 AJ: Sure. Yeah.
- 31 AK: Which actually was really lucky, 'cause then there were -

- 1 AJ: Yeah. Then -
- 2 AK: There were no insurance questions.
- 3 AJ: Right. No insurance questions.
- 4 AJ: So -
- 5 AK: No harassment.
- 6 AK: Yeah.
- 7 AJ: None of that.
- 8 AK: Yeah. Actually went really smooth. So - so yeah, I've done both those things, and I have - I have
- 9 not gone on testosterone. I have gone back and forth. I mean, sometimes daily, on whether or
- 10 not that's a good -
- 11 AJ: Okay.
- 12 AK: - step for me. So...that's probably - I mean, that's the one thing that I think that I would consider
- 13 doing that I haven't done.
- 14 AJ: Sure. Wow.
- 15 AK: So yeah.
- 16 AJ: Yeah, man, I can imagine testosterone hitting you like a...
- 17 AK: Yeah.
- 18 AJ: Like, pow!
- 19 AK: If you could pick -
- 20 AJ: I mean, already had a hysterectomy, no - you've already had top surgery, like -
- 21 AK: Right. Right.
- 22 AJ: - that would just be like, whoa.
- 23 AK: I know. And whoa good or whoa bad, I'm not sure.
- 24 AJ: No, good! I - well - I'm envisioning it as whoa good, but.
- 25 AK: Oh, that's - that's sweet.
- 26 AJ: Yeah.
- 27 AK: I'll take that as a compliment.
- 28 AJ: Yes.
- 29 AK: Yeah. I don't know. It's something that I -
- 30 AJ: Not that I'm any way suggesting you need it, like -

- 1 AK: No, no no no! No! I - yeah. I only take it as positive.
- 2 AJ: All right.
- 3 AK: Yeah, no, that's just the one thing that hasn't - again, top surgery has been clear since I was a
4 child. Like, I need that.
- 5 AJ: Right.
- 6 AK: I didn't - again, I didn't know to call it top surgery.
- 7 AJ: It wasn't even really around your gender, right?
- 8 AK: Right.
- 9 AJ: It was just, like, this is not for me.
- 10 AK: Or at least, I didn't realize it was.
- 11 AJ: Yeah.
- 12 AK: And, you know, also, like, I had been under a lot of pain for a long time before my hysterectomy.
13 I had a lot of stuff going on that, you know, I think because of the way our society treats women
14 and female-bodied people, you know, it was written off as me just needing to buck up and deal
15 with menstrual cramps, when -
- 16 AJ: Right.
- 17 AK: When I got a doctor who actually listened, they looked into it, I had, I don't know, two different
18 conditions that I can never remember the name of. And the only treatment was a hysterectomy.
- 19 AJ: Wow.
- 20 AK: And so since then I have not had any of that pain. My quality of life is just, like, radically
21 different. And I even say going back, if I had to choose between the hysterectomy and the top
22 surgery, I would have chosen the hysterectomy.
- 23 AJ: Really. Okay.
- 24 AK: Now that I know the - the pain, the relief. The relief from that - it's just - it's very freeing.
- 25 AJ: So children were not an -
- 26 AK: Not in this body.
- 27 AJ: - are not a part of this -
- 28 AK: No.
- 29 AJ: - journey for you, huh?
- 30 AK: Not in this body. If somebody else wants to do that, by all means.
- 31 AJ: Okay.

- 1 AK: I can't - oh, gosh. That always creeped me out, too. Like, the thought of, like - that never made
2 sense, so I never got this, like, desire -
- 3 AJ: Maternal.
- 4 AK: - for that - yeah, none of that.
- 5 AJ: Yeah.
- 6 AK: And that's - yeah. Again, much like the chest stuff, there was anything that was, like, a
7 suggestion of some gender dysphoria, or some - you know?
- 8 AJ: Right.
- 9 AK: Dissonance of any kind, it was that. Like - no.
- 10 AJ: Okay.
- 11 AK: But, you know, I do - I do still have a desire to be a parent.
- 12 AJ: Okay.
- 13 AK: That still kind of comes up.
- 14 AJ: All right. Yeah.
- 15 AK: But I always kind of envision myself adopting, or maybe my partner wants to carry - I don't
16 know.
- 17 AJ: Yeah. So, you just led me right into my next question.
- 18 AK: Okay. Cool.
- 19 AJ: About love, and relationships.
- 20 AK: Yeah.
- 21 AJ: And -
- 22 AK: Yeah.
- 23 AJ: Sexual orientation.
- 24 AK: Cool.
- 25 AJ: So, who do you date? Are you dating right now? Do you want to talk about your relationship -
- 26 AK: Sure.
- 27 AJ: - if that is a reality for you at this time?
- 28 AK: Yeah, for sure. I don't date anyone 'cause I'm married.
- 29 AJ: Oh! Wow! Congratulations. Okay.
- 30 AK: So I date my wife.

- 1 AJ: You date your wife. Yes. You should date your wife, Ani. I'm -
- 2 AK: And we're monogamous -
- 3 AJ: I'm going to make -
- 4 AK: - so I should make -
- 5 AJ: Yes.
- 6 AK: - some people have wives and they date people, but -
- 7 AJ: Yes.
- 8 AK: No. We're very much a monogamous couple. So.
- 9 AJ: Okay.
- 10 AK: Yeah. We've been married for just over three years.
- 11 AJ: Congratulations.
- 12 AK: And - yeah.
- 13 AJ: I'm sorry I didn't - I wasn't aware of that.
- 14 AK: Oh, it's okay. It was, like, a fifteen-person ceremony where we had dinner in the back of a
15 restaurant.
- 16 AJ: Okay.
- 17 AK: It was very low-key.
- 18 AJ: Yeah. That's so sweet. That's so sweet.
- 19 AK: Yeah. We've been together for about six years. So her name is Shawn Mason. Mental health
20 provider. Yeah.
- 21 AJ: Nice.
- 22 AK: So, yeah.
- 23 AJ: And...children?
- 24 AK: We don't have any human kids. We have two dogs.
- 25 AJ: Okay.
- 26 AK: Tito and Harriet.
- 27 AJ: Oh, fun.
- 28 AK: And Tito's a pit bull mix, and Harriet's a cocker spaniel mixed with a pug. So they're lovely.
- 29 AJ: Wow.

- 1 AK: I love my dogs.
- 2 AJ: Yeah.
- 3 AK: So - but yeah. I mean, we talk about kids. I think the older we get the more we - you know, when
4 we got married, just three years ago, we were like "No, probably not."
- 5 AJ: Yeah.
- 6 AK: And just the - we both have been "Okay, maybe we might do that," you know? So we'll see.
- 7 AJ: You guys live in a - in Minneapolis, or...?
- 8 AK: Yeah. Live in Minneapolis. Longfellow, now.
- 9 AJ: Okay.
- 10 AK: Yeah.
- 11 AJ: Nice.
- 12 AK: It's - it's nice, it's right by Blue Door Pub, and, like -
- 13 AJ: Oh, we just had dinner there the other night.
- 14 AK: Oh, really?
- 15 AJ: Yeah.
- 16 AK: Yeah. I go there a little bit more than I should.
- 17 AJ: Okay.
- 18 AK: So - yeah.
- 19 AJ: The blucys, they have some pretty good -
- 20 AK: Oh, yeah.
- 21 AJ: - burgers there.
- 22 AK: Oh, they have great beer on tap, too. That's what usually gets me.
- 23 AJ: Yeah, okay.
- 24 AK: Yeah.
- 25 AJ: All righty.
- 26 AK: Yeah.
- 27 AJ: Wow. Thanks for - for opening up.
- 28 AK: Sure.
- 29 AJ: Around your relationship stuff. What have been some of the more positive aspects of you

- 1 beginning to express your true - truer gender identity?
- 2 AK: Yeah. You know, the thing about it is - I like, I can actually - like, I love myself. And I can say that
3 I've done a lot of work to make sure that I love myself. And if it weren't for gender identity or
4 this fearing - or this feeling of marginalization or otherness that I, you know, feel in the world, I
5 just don't know if I would have known to take the time to do that. Or - yeah. I felt like I needed
6 to be more internal-looking, and - and make - and control that for myself. You know? To control
7 my world as much as I can.
- 8 AJ: Right.
- 9 AK: For myself. So that - that's something I'm really grateful for. I think about that a lot. I'm thankful
10 that I can be a mentor to other people. I think that that has also come out of this. Both formal
11 and informal, but that I can just be a person for someone else that can represent, you know,
12 whether it's being trans, or just queer, or a person that's openly LGBT. I mean, I've always - I've
13 always been out. Like, people have always looked at me and said, "Well, you're something!"
- 14 AJ: Right!
- 15 AK: "In that alphabet! We don't know what!"
- 16 AJ: Right.
- 17 AK: Before I even knew that there was an alphabet, right? So it's - I've - I take great pride now in
18 being able to be that for younger people that are coming up, and sometimes older people who
19 are just coming out. To be able to just be like, this is what it is. I'm not going to try and put all
20 this into a dress. It's not going to happen.
- 21 AJ: Right.
- 22 AK: You know? Like - this is just being real. It's a gift that I think a lot of people have to search a
23 really long time for and I feel like I had to figure out pretty quick.
- 24 AJ: Sure.
- 25 AK: Yeah.
- 26 AJ: So Ani, and - you know, I know and absolutely fully respect and would correct anybody who ever
27 did - said the wrong thing, that you don't identify as a man. Right? Like, you - you said that in
28 this interview.
- 29 AK: Yeah.
- 30 AJ: However, when you're out in the world, I would have to suspect that the perception of most
31 people are that you are male. And you're a white male. And so that comes with a lot of -
- 32 AK: Yeah.
- 33 AJ: - privilege. And so - you know, how do you navigate that?
- 34 AK: Yeah, that's a really good question.

- 1 AJ: What does that mean to you?
- 2 AK: Yeah. I mean, I actually - I - I appreciate you saying it that way. I - I would say that people
3 assume that I'm a white male until I talk.
- 4 AJ: Okay.
- 5 AK: The second I talk, that literally goes away. Something in our brains, with secondary sex
6 characteristics - I get called sir when I walk up to the counter. And they immediately correct it as
7 soon as I respond.
- 8 AJ: Is that right? Wow.
- 9 AK: Nine times out of ten.
- 10 AJ: I can't - I don't know -
- 11 AK: Again, until I go into - again, until I go into a gendered space. It's really interesting. It's like, you
12 know, at a - a table and sitting down ordering dinner, and it's ladies to - to me and my wife.
- 13 AJ: Right.
- 14 AK: And then if I try to go into the women's bathroom -
- 15 AJ: Then it's sir. Wow.
- 16 AK: It's sir. So it's - it's really - it's really interesting. But yeah, I mean, I think that I have done a lot of
17 thinking about those things individually, like gender, and race.
- 18 AJ: Right.
- 19 AK: Like, those separately, the privilege and the - you know, marginalization that comes -
- 20 AJ: Sure.
- 21 AK: - along with it. The gender stuff feels easier, just because - like, easier for me to wrap my head
22 around. 'Cause like, I can think of examples of, like...you know, someone needing to walk alone
23 to their car, and being like, "No, let me walk you." Like, I look like a dude at - especially at night,
24 bundled up in Minnesota.
- 25 AJ: Right.
- 26 AK: I'll just walk you and maybe, you know, that's going to help.
- 27 AJ: Yeah, will fend off something.
- 28 AK: Right. So those are ways that I feel like I can kind of use that privilege, right? In terms of race, I
29 mean, I look every single day in my work to figure out what I can do to advance racial equity.
30 Particularly when it comes to health in Minnesota. That - that is extremely complicated work to
31 do as a white person.
- 32 AJ: Yeah.
- 33 AK: And to try to do it well, and be authentic about it every day, and just be okay with not getting it
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- 1 right all the time. Like, that feels like the number one lesson that I have had to learn, is that I'm
2 just not going to get it right all the time, and I'm going to keep on trying and I'm going to keep
3 on growing.
- 4 AJ: Right.
- 5 AK: And keep doing my work with other people who are in similar positions. But yeah. I mean, this is
6 the first time that anybody's ever asked me about white male together. I've not even really
7 thought about that.
- 8 AJ: Yeah.
- 9 AK: 'Cause I don't think that people perceive me that way. But you would say contrary.
- 10 AJ: I - I would say contrary, but -
- 11 AK: Yeah.
- 12 AJ: - certainly you are in your own skin, and you are the one who -
- 13 AK: Yeah, no, no, but -
- 14 AJ: - is out there interacting with people -
- 15 AK: It's interesting, though.
- 16 AJ: - on a daily basis.
- 17 AK: Yeah. Yeah.
- 18 AJ: You know, and - and I - you know, like you - we noted earlier, you know, we've been in a lot of
19 spaces together.
- 20 AK: Yeah.
- 21 AJ: And so I've - I've seen people sort of not sure how to gender you.
- 22 AK: Yeah. Yeah.
- 23 AJ: I've seen people adamant about male and/or female.
- 24 AK: Oh, yeah.
- 25 AJ: Like, I've seen a -
- 26 AK: I call it the pronoun showdown.
- 27 AJ: Right? Exactly! Yes.
- 28 AK: That's what that is. You've got, like, ten people in a room and they're all certain -
- 29 AJ: Yes.
- 30 AK: - that they know who you are -

- 1 AJ: Exactly.
- 2 AK: - and what they should call you, and they're all using their own thing. I love to just -
- 3 AJ: The pronoun showdown! I love that.
- 4 AK: I love to, in those situations, just be like, "It was really nice to see you guys," and then just leave.
- 5 AJ: Okay!
- 6 AK: And let them sort it out -
- 7 AJ: Let them -
- 8 AK: - amongst themselves.
- 9 AJ: Let them keep going, battling at it, huh?
- 10 AK: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.
- 11 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 12 AK: But yeah -
- 13 AJ: Well, thanks for being really -
- 14 AK: Yeah.
- 15 AJ: Thoughtful about that question.
- 16 AK: Yeah. For sure.
- 17 AJ: I mean -
- 18 AK: I mean, I think - I think that we - we have a lot of work to do for white people in general to figure
19 out, like, what our role is in - I mean, especially with the election, and the results of that.
- 20 AJ: Yeah.
- 21 AK: With the disparities that we're seeing, specifically in the Twin Cities.
- 22 AJ: Right.
- 23 AK: To figure out, like - you know, because how we are perceived, that is powerful. And it can be
24 used, right, for - for good and to figure that out.
- 25 AJ: Yeah.
- 26 AK: How to work towards - again, I tend to focus on equity in terms of health. In terms of healthcare
27 access, but I think that that - I mean, that's encompassing a - I mean, we just - we have a huge
28 battle. Everybody has to be on deck.
- 29 AJ: Sure.
- 30 AK: You know? And I think that contemplating that exact thing, if I am being perceived as a white

- 1 male in this world, like, how does that change how I can approach it? As opposed to, like, a
2 white, you know, well-meaning genderqueer.
- 3 AJ: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I mean, just - unfortunately, you know, maybe we will get to this point in time,
4 but not very many people have genderqueer as a part of their -
- 5 AK: No, exactly.
- 6 AJ: - lexicon, and/or recognition -
- 7 AK: Yeah.
- 8 AJ: - just walking down the street and, like, "Oh, that person is genderqueer."
- 9 AK: Yeah.
- 10 AJ: You know? They're going to be like -
- 11 AK: Right. Well, and I feel -
- 12 AJ: "Oh, that person is male."
- 13 AK: Yeah.
- 14 AJ: Right? That's -
- 15 AK: Yeah - and - yeah, I guess I have this perception that most people pick me up as just a - a butch
16 woman.
- 17 AJ: Yeah.
- 18 AK: I don't know if that's real, or perceived, but that's, like, that's how I experience the world, is that
19 people usually put me in that category first.
- 20 AJ: Sure. That's interesting. And - and it's really - it - it - I mean, it really brings up a interesting point
21 about how we see ourselves, versus how people see us.
- 22 AK: Yeah. Yeah.
- 23 AJ: You know?
- 24 AK: Yeah.
- 25 AJ: And I think there - I think those are two different things.
- 26 AK: Yeah. No, they are.
- 27 AJ: In - in most - in most instances.
- 28 AK: Yeah.
- 29 AJ: You know? So. What's your relationship like with your family?
- 30 AK: So -

- 1 AJ: Your birth family.
- 2 AK: Yeah. It's - you know, it's pretty good. I - I feel like I often describe it as we both have had to do a
3 lot of work to accept one another. I've had to work just as hard to accept them as they have me.
- 4 AJ: Okay.
- 5 AK: I would say it's pretty positive. I'm pretty close with my parents now. It took a long time to get
6 there.
- 7 AJ: Yeah.
- 8 AK: When they found out that I was dating a woman, it did not go over well. Like, I was sixteen at
9 the time, and they caught me kissing her.
- 10 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 11 AK: In their kitchen.
- 12 AJ: Oh, no.
- 13 AK: So - it was a - yeah. It was a whole thing.
- 14 AJ: Was it just - the kid is having sex thing? Or was it -
- 15 AK: No, it -
- 16 AJ: - our daughter is kissing another girl.
- 17 AK: Yeah. It was that one.
- 18 AJ: Okay.
- 19 AK: Yeah. Yeah. It was - it was a pretty bad situation. You know, I went - I went for periods of time
20 where I, you know, wouldn't talk to my mother for months. I felt like I had to get out of the
21 house right away, and contemplated running away, and just, like, getting out of the situation. So
22 I feel like because of that, you know, we were able to - like, the - the hill was steeper, you know?
23 It took more work.
- 24 AJ: Right.
- 25 AK: And - but yeah. Now I'm pretty close to them. Yeah. And so -
- 26 AJ: And they respect your identity, and...?
- 27 AK: You know, yes and no. So I changed my name about...what was it? I don't even know, maybe
28 2012. I legally changed it to Ani.
- 29 AJ: Okay.
- 30 AK: Changed my middle name to Ryan. And they - I've been - I've - I mean, Ani has been a name that
31 I've been called probably since I graduated high school. They really struggle. It's really
32 interesting, because they can be, like, solid in the Ani zone, and then all of a sudden, they just,
33 like, forget one day.

- 1 AJ: Wow.
- 2 AK: And start calling me by my birth or deadname or whatever -
- 3 AJ: Sure.
- 4 AK: - you want to call it.
- 5 AJ: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.
- 6 AK: But I have very little tolerance for that. I have a really hard time with the name stuff.
- 7 AJ: Wow. Yeah.
- 8 AK: I really struggle with that. And - like, one of my brothers is trying to be super supportive. 'Cause
9 again, this has been really long time. Thirteen, fourteen years.
- 10 AJ: Yeah.
- 11 AK: With the name stuff. I think I really put a stake in the ground, like, "I need you to call me this."
- 12 AJ: Right.
- 13 AK: Probably more like, ten, eight years ago. So my brother has started to say that he has a name
14 jar, so if they screw up they have to put a dollar in it.
- 15 AJ: Oh, wow. Okay.
- 16 AK: Which is hilarious, because I didn't ask him to do that.
- 17 AJ: Right, no, that's pretty -
- 18 AK: It just came up.
- 19 AJ: Cool allyship.
- 20 AK: Yeah, yeah. He's trying really - it's really interesting.
- 21 AJ: Who gets to keep the money? That's what I want to know.
- 22 AK: Right, right. That's a real - that's a good -
- 23 AJ: Does he get to keep the money? Like...
- 24 AK: No, it's - it's a good question.
- 25 AJ: Yeah.
- 26 AK: Yeah, and, you know, he also has really been trying around my pronouns. I have to say, I have
27 not necessarily just straight up asked my parents to use different pronouns.
- 28 AJ: Okay.
- 29 AK: They know that I have a preference.
- 30 AJ: Yeah.

- 1 AK: It feels like we don't have the same language, almost. To talk about these things. Much like a lot
2 of folks, I didn't do, like, a "Hey guess what I'm trans."
- 3 AJ: Right.
- 4 AK: Like, I kind of feel like I've always been this way.
- 5 AJ: Sure.
- 6 AK: Like, I'm sort of - I sort of haven't changed. I mean...
- 7 AJ: Yeah.
- 8 AK: Like, I - I actually - I didn't even tell my folks when I had top surgery. Like, I told them two
9 months after.
- 10 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 11 AK: You know? Like, "Hey, this is a thing I needed to do."
- 12 AJ: Wow.
- 13 AK: "I did it." I've used the word trans with them. Like, I've described myself, you know. My parents
14 are on my facebook. They see, you know?
- 15 AJ: Right. Yeah.
- 16 AK: I'm open - but I - we haven't, like, had, you know, super in-depth - like, I just don't feel like I
17 have anything to tell them. Like -
- 18 AJ: Right.
- 19 AK: I just feel like it's me.
- 20 AJ: Yeah.
- 21 AK: And I'm still me. Yeah.
- 22 AJ: No, that's awesome.
- 23 AK: Yeah. But - yeah. And then my other brother, you know, we go back and forth between being
24 super close and I don't hear from him for a year. So - but I would consider all of them pretty
25 close.
- 26 AJ: Cool. Anybody - are you the only one in the Twin Cities area?
- 27 AK: Yeah. So my wife's brother lives here now. So that's the closest family that we have.
- 28 AJ: Okay.
- 29 AK: My brother-in-law lives up here.
- 30 AJ: Wow. Awesome. Ani, what do you think is sort of the - well, before I jump into that question, let
31 me ask you: have you ever worked in or volunteered for a LGBT-specific organization?

- 1 AK: Come on! Yes, of course.
- 2 AJ: And then which - and if so, which ones.
- 3 AK: Yeah. Oh, geez, which ones. So I worked for years at Rainbow Health Initiative.
- 4 AJ: Yeah.
- 5 AK: Just over four years, actually.
- 6 AJ: Which is a -
- 7 AK: Yeah.
- 8 AJ: - LGBT health -
- 9 AK: Research, education, and advocacy.
- 10 AJ: Yeah.
- 11 AK: To improve the health of the LGBT population.
- 12 AJ: Sure.
- 13 AK: So, yeah, I mean - I actually started there as a volunteer. And then I got hired on part time,
14 twenty hours a week to do some event, and research. Just basically helping out with their
15 projects. And then the community - community outreach manager opened, so I applied and I got
16 that. And then director of programs opened, and I got that.
- 17 AJ: Yeah.
- 18 AK: You know, so I just kind of - little by little, you know, after starting out as a volunteer, worked
19 my way up there, and then left after about - just over four years.
- 20 AJ: Okay.
- 21 AK: Of being there. So - yeah, so that's the - that's the main chunk of work that I have at an LGBT
22 org. I've - I've long volunteered, off and on, you know, at Aliveness Project.
- 23 AJ: Okay.
- 24 AK: Which, I don't know if they would consider themselves LGBT specific, but certainly there's -
- 25 AJ: Yeah.
- 26 AK: - an LGBT base -
- 27 AJ: Right. And -
- 28 AK: - of folks there.
- 29 AJ: - they service folks around HIV and AIDS -
- 30 AK: Yeah.

- 1 AJ: - right?
- 2 AK: Yeah. So - you know, on and off, I've done little things. But everything - data entry, to their
3 holiday basket program, to just trying to be around and throw money in the hat when I can and
4 stuff like that.
- 5 AJ: Wow. I always thought of Aliveness as a LGBT -
- 6 AK: Yeah.
- 7 AJ: - org.
- 8 AK: I don't know. I mean, I haven't been there - around there as much lately, but yeah. I guess -
- 9 AJ: I mean, I know they are open to non-LGBT -
- 10 AK: Yeah.
- 11 AJ: - people receiving services, but...
- 12 AK: Yeah. Yeah. So definitely there, and then RECLAIM. I don't do it - I wouldn't say that I necessarily
13 do a ton of volunteering, but I would just say that I'm, like, I'm one of their fans and
14 stakeholders.
- 15 AJ: Yeah?
- 16 AK: And donors, and - you know, like, I just try to be present.
- 17 AJ: Right.
- 18 AK: And be around. Go to a house party when I can.
- 19 AJ: Sure.
- 20 AK: Host a table at their - at their brunch, you know, when I can.
- 21 AJ: Fundraiser thing.
- 22 AK: Yeah. Yeah. Do that kind of stuff. Yeah. So those are - those are the main ones that come to
23 mind. I'm sure there's others.
- 24 AJ: Well, you started a GSA at your high school.
- 25 AK: Yeah.
- 26 AJ: That was -
- 27 AK: Yeah.
- 28 AJ: - pretty awesome.
- 29 AK: Yeah, that's true.
- 30 AJ: In Dubuque, I mean.

- 1 AK: Yeah. Yeah.
- 2 AJ: That's kinda -
- 3 AK: And actually, yeah. Related to that - see, I forget about all this stuff - so there is this thing, back
4 in the day it was called Iowa Pride Network, and when it first got started, I was one of their first
5 advocates.
- 6 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 7 AK: So they called us regional advocates, and they had us - they trained us in, you know, do - to do
8 media advocacy, to go into high schools and just say, like - you know, if there was a problem, to
9 be the one, you know, in northeast Iowa to go to that high school to talk to the principal. You
10 know, if a place needed a GSA, to go and start it. So yeah, I did that before it kind - now it's kind
11 of a bigger network. I did that in its first year, when I was leaving high school, going into college.
- 12 AJ: Cool.
- 13 AK: So. Yeah. I - you know, and then actually in college I - with a couple of friends, we opened up -
14 when The Other Side Up was no more, we opened up a gay and lesbian youth resource center.
- 15 AJ: What?
- 16 AK: Yeah. I know, it's like - it's wild, it's like it didn't even happen because it was so long ago.
- 17 AJ: Yeah.
- 18 AK: But at first we - that's how I started doing drag, actually, was actually in, like, a living room that
19 we had remodeled and put a stage in. We would charge people two dollars at the door. It was
20 this old abandoned house, and we just made it into a - like, there were a lot of LGBT youth that
21 needed a place to go.
- 22 AJ: Right.
- 23 AK: So we did that for a year, and then we actually rented a space and opened it up as a small
24 business. It was called The Center, and we would - again, we operated the entire thing based on
25 funds from drag shows. And it - we kept the doors open about ten months, which I thought was
26 pretty impressive.
- 27 AJ: That's pret - I'm impressed.
- 28 AK: For a group of eighteen year olds that just decided one day to open a small business. So.
- 29 AJ: I am super impressed.
- 30 AK: Yeah. So we - we did that.
- 31 AJ: A small business in a very small, sort of, Christian conservative -
- 32 AK: Yeah. Yeah. Like, ninety percent white.
- 33 AJ: Yeah.

- 1 AK: Ninety percent Catholic. Like -
- 2 AJ: Right.
- 3 AK: It's - yeah. But there's a huge - I don't know. It feels like there's a huge LGBT population there.
- 4 AJ: Is that right? Okay.
- 5 AK: It feels that way to me. I mean, I don't know. I certainly have dated a lot of people there.
- 6 AJ: All right!
- 7 AK: It's like - you know?
- 8 AJ: Well, that's good.
- 9 AK: Like, I don't - well, you know what I mean.
- 10 AJ: That's always a good sign.
- 11 AK: It's like, how are there so many - you know, and you're always meeting new people, and -
- 12 AJ: Yeah.
- 13 AK: I don't know.
- 14 AJ: No, that means there are.
- 15 AK: Yeah.
- 16 AJ: A lot of -
- 17 AK: Yeah. I don't know.
- 18 AJ: - queer-identified - what we would say today - people there, so.
- 19 AK: Yeah. So. I don't know.
- 20 AJ: That's - that's awesome. What do you think the relationship is between the L, the G, the B, and
21 the T.
- 22 AK: Oh, good question. So...the relationship. I mean -
- 23 AJ: Like, should we struggle together? Should we go off on our own path? You know...
- 24 AK: I mean, I always think that we should struggle together. Because I think that there's - there's
25 strength in numbers, and I think that if - you know, I don't know, this is going to sound cheesy.
26 I'm pretty sure it's somebody's famous quote, right? But like, if my oppression is tied up in
27 yours, like, we have a stake in one another's success or, like, survival. We can - we can do more.
- 28 AJ: Right.
- 29 AK: Together than we can apart.
- 30 AJ: Yeah.

- 1 AK: So I'm always going to say struggle together.
- 2 AJ: You're - you're - you're paraphrasing Audre Lorde.
- 3 AK: Yeah.
- 4 AJ: Just so you know.
- 5 AK: That's hilarious. Yes. So I - yeah. I mean, I feel like struggle together makes the most sense. But
6 that's - that's with the caveat that...again, when we start to address issues of privilege, and
7 issues of power, and if people aren't able to, like, look at that, and look at themselves and
8 address it, then there's not going to be a lot of unity there. And that's -
- 9 AJ: Excuse me.
- 10 AK: No, it's all good. That's one of the things that I think is one of our biggest barriers in community.
11 It is multiple communities. It's not like one big, you know -
- 12 AJ: Right.
- 13 AK: - melting pot of people. There's - there's a good deal of segregation. But yeah. I mean, I also
14 think of it as, you know, in a narrative of, you know, dominant culture versus a subculture, right,
15 like, who has defined it. And I - I assume that it's been assign - defined by the dominant culture
16 saying "These people are the ones, you know, that belong together, that are over there." So I
17 guess, you know, in that frame, it - it would be about, you know, whether or not it - it makes
18 sense for the people who are involved to kind of stay in it together. But I think - I think dominant
19 culture will continue to define it as, like, here's LGBT. Over here.
- 20 AJ: Wow. So...I just...kind of wrapping up a little bit here. Do you think - or what do you think the
21 agenda is for the trans-identified community.
- 22 AK: What - what it is, or what it should be, or...?
- 23 AJ: What it is -
- 24 AK: Yeah.
- 25 AJ: - and, slash, what it should be.
- 26 AK: Okay. So i mean, right now, I feel like what I see of people in my community and just in general,
27 is, like, folks are a little bit in panic mode. They're in survival mode, and I think we have good
28 reason for both of those things. I mean - and also it seems very individualistic. Like, you know,
29 folks need to get their documents in order. Have to have their protections in place. Now we
30 have to be thinking about immigration in a way that, you know, haven't previously, or - or it's
31 heightened.
- 32 AJ: Right.
- 33 AK: Right? All of these - all these things, I think, if they're not on the agenda, they should be. But
34 then there's the sustainability piece, and the, you know, beyond survival. That I think is going to
35 be necessary moving forward. Sometimes I worry that, in the communities that I've been a part

1 of, we choose perfection over progress. A lot. And again, I'm sure I'm paraphrasing someone,
2 'cause I did not come up with that.

3 AJ: Okay. I don't know who you're paraphrasing now.

4 AK: But -

5 AJ: But you're paraphrasing someone.

6 AK: Yeah. Well - what - I heard it, you know, it landed with me.

7 AJ: Yes.

8 AK: No, but, I mean - that is - I - I try to keep that in mind every day. Again, in especially thinking
9 about racial equity work, like, and how I can be contributing to that, I am just as much a part of
10 that as anybody else, and I have to have an eye on progress. Like, when I'm working with other
11 white allies, for example, rath - or, hell, about pronouns.

12 AJ: Sure.

13 AK: We have to be looking towards progress, not perfection. We can't expect people to just
14 understand new concepts in a day.

15 AJ: Right.

16 AK: We can't expect people just, you know, get that I'm - I identify the way I identify.

17 AJ: Yeah.

18 AK: When they have zero con - you know, zero context.

19 AJ: Around genderqueer, right?

20 AK: Mmhmm.

21 AJ: Yeah.

22 AK: So - so yeah. I mean, I think - and also, like, life's too short. We need to not take ourselves so
23 seriously all the time. And while there are life and death issues happening, like, we can - we can
24 afford to add some levity, and to, like, tolerate a little bit more of folks not getting us.

25 AJ: Yeah.

26 AK: I mean, not in all - you know, not where safety's concerned, but...I don't know.

27 AJ: Yeah. I mean, certainly around language and -

28 AK: Yeah.

29 AJ: - conversation. You know, people - if people are willing to learn, then I'm willing to be in that
30 space.

31 AK: Yeah.

- 1 AJ: Trying to help -
- 2 AK: Yeah.
- 3 AJ: - educate.
- 4 AK: And, like, don't get me wrong, it is exhausting. I mean, especially, you know, depending on, you
5 know, a number of different socioeconomic factors. It's exhausting. It's the things that you have
6 to explain, the way that you have to go and do it is, you know, again, actually - to quote you - a
7 couple weeks ago, you - you said "It's the double shotgun effect," right?
- 8 AJ: Right.
- 9 AK: Like, you're not just dealing with one, you're dealing with another. And in terms of overlapping
10 oppressions, like, that adds up.
- 11 AJ: Yeah.
- 12 AK: You know? And what you can survive and what you can't. I mean, it adds up.
- 13 AJ: Wow.
- 14 AK: So...yeah.
- 15 AJ: I don't think I've ever been quoted in an interview that I have done with other people before.
- 16 AK: Well, we've been talking about your - well, the interview that we did with you -
- 17 AJ: Right. Exactly. Yeah.
- 18 AK: - a few weeks ago. So we've been talking about that a lot in trying to - again, take what we learn
19 and explain to people who've never had to think about this before. Maybe have had - never had
20 to challenge their own worldview.
- 21 AJ: Sure.
- 22 AK: Around race, around class, around culture, around gender. Any of this stuff. And try to put these
23 things in a way that can be translatable. And, like, I think that that really captured -
- 24 AJ: Wow.
- 25 AK: - a way to do that. I think you compared, like, your, like, you know - a one - a gunshot wound
26 versus a - you know, is very graphic, too, which I think is very real.
- 27 AJ: Wow.
- 28 AK: So. Yeah.
- 29 AJ: I'm sorry for the violent -
- 30 AK: Oh! It's fine.
- 31 AJ: - analogy.

- 1 AK: No, but it's - you know, it's stuck with me, right? Like, yeah.
- 2 AJ: Yeah. Have you experienced any challenges accessing institutions in our society and culture?
3 Like -
- 4 AK: Oh, sure, yeah.
- 5 AJ: - medical care, and -
- 6 AK: Yeah.
- 7 AJ: - the criminal justice system -
- 8 AK: Yeah.
- 9 AJ: - universities, and - what - what has that experience been like for you?
- 10 AK: Yeah. I mean, I would say probably I have a - a good deal of privilege, so probably not as much as
11 a - a lot of folks. But I definitely have had instances of that. I mean, the - the thing I always tell
12 people, one of the reasons I get on my high horse about insurance and trying to figure out this
13 mess that is our healthcare system, is because I - I had my own claim for gender-related
14 transition care denied.
- 15 AJ: Oh, wow. Okay.
- 16 AK: Frankly, by the company I currently work at.
- 17 AJ: Is that right?
- 18 AK: Yeah.
- 19 AJ: Okay. So we're -
- 20 AK: So there is -
- 21 AJ: - are we not naming your company?
- 22 AK: Well, it's Blue Cross. Yeah.
- 23 AJ: Okay. All right.
- 24 AK: Yeah. That's fine. I'm okay with it. I mean, they know.
- 25 AJ: Yeah. Yeah.
- 26 AK: They know I'm there.
- 27 AJ: Right. Exactly.
- 28 AK: So yeah. I mean, and that is something - so yeah, I mean -
- 29 AJ: Was it a successful claim? I mean...
- 30 AK: No. No, I had it denied.

- 1 AJ: Right. You had the claim denied, but then - oh, okay. So I thought you'd pursued some other -
- 2 AK: No. I -
- 3 AJ: - remedies.
- 4 AK: Well, at the time - so I wrote an appeal, and I never went through with it.
- 5 AJ: Yeah.
- 6 AK: 'Cause I didn't understand how the system worked.
- 7 AJ: Sure.
- 8 AK: Now I wish I had.
- 9 AJ: Yeah.
- 10 AK: But, you know, all that said, I think that everything for me worked out the way it - it needed to
- 11 at the time. I ended up - I saved for probably two years to be able to afford about half of it, and
- 12 then I fundraised the other half.
- 13 AJ: Okay. Wow.
- 14 AK: But that's, like, major navigation of the system. And a lot of people aren't even privileged
- 15 enough to be able to do that. So...so yeah. I mean, that's one system. I've been fortunate
- 16 enough to not interact with the -
- 17 AJ: Wow,
- 18 AK: - healthcare - or the criminal justice system that much.
- 19 AJ: Yeah.
- 20 AK: I got in a little bit of trouble when I was younger, but it wasn't a factor that - as far as I know.
- 21 AJ: And were you, at that point, sort of gender nonconforming, or...?
- 22 AK: Yeah, I would say at that point - I don't know. I was - again, probaby looked like a - big old
- 23 tomboy. I got into a - just a fistfight, and I was asking for it. But...my friend - my friend was
- 24 actually bi, and out as bi. This woman, like, followed her and attacked her after school and beat
- 25 her up.
- 26 AJ: Oh wow.
- 27 AK: So the next day, after school, I went over there, and I just whaled on this woman.
- 28 AJ: Oh my goodness. Wow.
- 29 AK: And of course she called the cops, and then I got in trouble, so...but yeah.
- 30 AJ: Yeah.
- 31 AK: It was related to the LGBT stuff, so. But yeah, I mean, I ended up - I got off pretty easy. I mean, I

- 1 got probation, and I had to do some community service. I had to do drug testing, I had to anger
2 management - that kind of stuff.
- 3 AJ: Yeah. Yeah.
- 4 AK: You know. So.
- 5 AJ: Wow.
- 6 AK: But yeah.
- 7 AJ: Man. Ani, this has just been a fascinating conversation so far, and usually, you know, it's about
8 an hour, and we are actually ten minutes over that.
- 9 AK: Oh, wow.
- 10 AJ: So, I'm - I'm just really grateful for your willingness to share. Last question.
- 11 AK: Okay.
- 12 AJ: Where do you see the trans community and the transgender movement in fifty years? Just off
13 your crystal ball, and kind of...
- 14 AK: Yeah. I mean, ag - again, like, the, like, super hopeful part of me is that it's, you know, it's similar
15 - like, we remember what it was, almost like it was - it's unneeded. You know, we joke around in
16 public health that, again, very nerdy joke around, but that we're working ourselves out of a job.
17 Like, if we do it well.
- 18 AJ: Right.
- 19 AK: And I think - you know, so much about the trans movement is - is about that as well. Just getting
20 to a place where we can just focus on the things that everybody else focuses on. That we're not
21 scraping by to survive, that people aren't fearing for their lives every day, that we're able to just
22 be. So I mean, that would be my - my hope. Seeing how - again, like, history has a lot to tell us
23 about the future, so seeing how the - you know, gay and lesbian movement has gone. You know,
24 I - I wouldn't say that we are, you know, free of that as a movement. There are still things that
25 need to be done. There's still work to do, right? And - because of that, I would - I would say that
26 we're still going to be working on things. I just really hope it's not bathrooms.
- 27 AJ: Yeah.
- 28 AK: Like, I hope we can figure that out pretty quick.
- 29 AJ: Right.
- 30 AK: You know. And I don't think we're the ones that need to figure it out, unfortunately.
- 31 AJ: Right. Yeah.
- 32 AK: And I think that's what a lot of movements are about. It's - you know, other people need to kind
33 of wise up to what's really going on. And also to the wool that's being pulled over their eyes. I
34 mean, the bathroom thing's a perfect example. There's all these civil rights things, right, that are

- 1 tucked in.
- 2 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 3 AK: To that - that - we're like, let's focus on trans people in the restroom so I can distract you from
4 what I'm really doing over here.
- 5 AJ: Right. Exactly. Taking away all your rights.
- 6 AK: Yeah.
- 7 AJ: Everybody's rights.
- 8 AK: Yeah.
- 9 AJ: Right? Yeah.
- 10 AK: Yeah. And so, I mean, also just the - I hope that we're to a place where people understand, you
11 know, the concept of universalism, right. That if we make things better for trans-identified folks,
12 it's not actually about them, it's about everybody, right?
- 13 AJ: Right.
- 14 AK: Everybody rises, so...
- 15 AJ: That's my message.
- 16 AK: I mean...
- 17 AJ: Every day.
- 18 AK: Yeah. So I mean, that would be my hope in fifty years, that we're there. Oh, fifty years, though.
19 If it takes that long, you know?
- 20 AJ: Yeah.
- 21 AK: It's - yeah. So.
- 22 AJ: Wow. Ani, is there anything that I didn't have the presence of mind to ask you that you have a
23 burning desire to get off your chest?
- 24 AK: No, I don't think so.
- 25 AJ: Yeah?
- 26 AK: I think I'm good. I really - I appreciate you inviting me to be part of this.
- 27 AJ: Absolutely.
- 28 AK: Yeah.
- 29 AJ: Absolutely. Wow. Thank you so much.
- 30 AK: Yeah. Thank you.

- 1 AJ: This was really great.
- 2 AK: Cool.
- 3 AJ: 'Til we meet again, my friend.
- 4 AK: Until we meet again. Cool.
- 5
- 6
- 7