

JAC Stringer
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

February 25, 2016



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

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

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

Andrea Jenkins

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1 Andrea Jenkins -AJ

2 JAC Stringer -JACS

3

4 AJ: So hello. My name is Andrea Jenkins, and I am the oral historian with The Transgender Oral
5 History Project at the University of Minnesota. Today is February 25th, 2016, and I am here with
6 JAC Stringer. And, uhm, looking forward to a great conversation. JAC if you could just, uh, state
7 your name, how do you spell it, uhm, your preferred pronouns, your gender identity currently
8 today, and your gender assigned at birth.

9

10 JACS: Okay, uhm, so JAC Stringer. J.A.C. All caps cause it's my initials. S.T.R.I.N.G.E.R. He/him/his. And,
11 uhm, gender identity, right. Uhm, I identify as genderqueer on the trans masculine spectrum.

12

13 AJ: Okay.

14

15 JACS: Uhm, and I was designated female at birth.

16

17 AJ: Okay, alrighty. J.A.C. tell me what was your earliest memory in life.

18

19 JACS: Oh, uhm, oh, that's a hard one. Let me think. One of them, I know I was very, very young when
20 this happened. Uhm, I was in the bathroom crawling up on the sink to get into my mother's
21 makeup.

22

23 AJ: Mhm.

24

25 JACS: And I accidentally sprayed perfume in my eye [laughs], and I started screaming and crying.

26

27 AJ: [Laughs].

28

29 JACS: And, uh, my mom, like, ran in— uh, my parents once told me— when I told them that I
30 remembered that they were like, "There's no way you could remember that." I also remember
31 once crawling out of my crib...

32

33 AJ: Uhuh.

34

35 JACS: ... and my mom said that she always— she put me down for a nap, and she'd just hear this
36 thump [hear thump in background to mimic thump in past] like upstairs and she like went
37 running upstairs and that's when she realized I could crawl out of my crib.

38

39 AJ: Oh wow.

40

41 JACS: And from that day on she's like, "I could never put you down for a nap."

42

43 AJ: [Laughs].

44

45 JACS: "You're always getting out of your crib."

46

47 AJ: Right.

1
2 JACS: And so she's like, "I couldn't tie you down. What was I going to do?" So yeah, so I do remember
3 crawling out of my crib. Uhm, and, uh, yeah, I think those are—
4
5 AJ: So those are pretty early.
6
7 JACS: Yeah.
8
9 AJ: You were in a crib. What? Maybe eighteen months...
10
11 JACS: I was probably a toddler.
12
13 AJ: two years old? Something like that?
14
15 JACS: Yeah. Little kid.
16
17 AJ: Wow.
18
19 JACS: Super tiny.
20
21 AJ: Where did you go to elementary school?
22
23 JACS: I went to a small Catholic school a couple of blocks from my house, uhm, called Annunciation
24 Catholic School.
25
26 AJ: Annunciation.
27
28 JACS: Yes. Uhm, and, uh, my family is not Catholic, uh, but it was really close to our house. And so I
29 had to wear a little plaid jumper. [Laughs].
30
31 AJ: Oh, okay. [Laughs]. Where's your house? Where did you grow up?
32
33 JACS: Uh, Cincinnati, Ohio.
34
35 AJ: Cincinnati, Ohio.
36
37 JACS: Yeah. My parents are not from there. Uhm, my parents are from the west coast.
38
39 AJ: Mhm.
40
41 JACS: And my sister was born on the east coast, and then my parents got, uh, jobs in Cincinnati. And
42 so midwestern baby.
43
44 AJ: Wow.
45
46 JACS: Yeah.
47

1 AJ: Yeah. What was it like growing up in Cincinnati?

2

3 JACS: Uhm, you know, it was difficult. Cincinnati is a very conservative place, fiscally, socially, uh, it's
4 mired in racism and homophobia and classist values. Has a lot of old white money. And growing
5 up it was really apparent to me I didn't have a language to describe it about the separations
6 between people. Uhm, I grew up in a city neighborhood pretty close to downtown near the
7 university and it was very— it was well known that there was only five black families in the area.
8 Like everyone knew the number.

9

10 AJ: Wow.

11

12 JACS: And I thought it was very strange that everyone knew how many black families there were. And
13 my school was, uhm, had lots of different types of kids, lots of different races and class
14 backgrounds. And, so, because that's what I was used to, and my pre-school and my
15 kindergarten were also like that. And, so, when I became old enough to hear this like, "Oh,
16 yeah." I think it was my parents talking about the issue, right. Uhm, it was an international
17 neighborhood because it was so near the school so there were people from many different
18 areas but when it came to black versus white in Cincinnati, like most cities, especially
19 midwestern cities, right, there's the black neighborhoods and then there's everybody else,
20 right? And, uhm, and despite that also there was always conversations about the history of area
21 we lived in, how it used to be about keeping Jews out, you know, keeping any person of color
22 out, a lot of class separation. And both my parents coming from, you know, a poor working class
23 background, you know, they weren't sitting around the table debating class issues. That's not
24 really who they are but they did talk about it in ways that I think I got a perception, like, "Oh,
25 okay. There's, there's problems with people grouping together and, you know, everyone
26 concerned about how much money you have and, uhm, or what color your skin is. And growing
27 up with a best friend, who is still my best friend today, uhm, is Jewish. And so that was
28 something that was continually a part of the conversation about why she and her family were
29 somehow different in the neighborhood.

30

31 AJ: Mhm.

32

33 JACS: Uh, and so from that being different period was really not, like anywhere else, it was not
34 something that was acceptable. And I was a weird, frumpy, androgynous kid.

35

36 AJ: Okay.

37

38 JACS: And I didn't— I related better to girls but I didn't look or act or relate to the girls like the way
39 they related to each other.

40

41 AJ: Mhm.

42

43 JACS: Uhm, and so it's wasn't the easiest thing for me to have friends, and I was picked on a lot. Uhm,
44 I felt like I had a lot of friends. I wasn't really aware of how unpopular I was cause I was very
45 naive and trusting.

46

47 AJ: Okay.

1
2 JACS: So I didn't realize that a lot of the things that were happening were actually pranks. Like when
3 I'd be told to run and hide, right, and wait for someone to find me, and then hours would go by
4 [laughs] and nobody would find me.

5
6 AJ: Awe.

7
8 JACS: Or, uh, you know taking my stuff and telling it was lost and then I would get all upset and I'd be
9 looking for it and things like that that I just didn't register it as a problem because like, "Well
10 they're my friends. They wouldn't be mean to me, right?"

11
12 AJ: Sure.

13
14 JACS: And, uhm, so by the time I got to high school I kind of had this strange mindset of not knowing
15 how to trust people. Uhm, and really, really, really wanting friends and believing that I deserved
16 to have friends. At the same time it was like, "Well, I want people to like me. Do people like me
17 if they act like they like me?" Uhm, and lots of continual teasing about why I looked the way that
18 I did. In elementary school the theme was like, "Why do you cut your hair like a boy?" cause I
19 always had short hair.

20
21 AJ: Okay.

22
23 JACS: And it's like, "Why do you look like a boy? Why do you want to look like a boy?" And it wasn't
24 that I wanted to look like a boy, but I did want to look like a boy. I was very internally aware. I
25 remember asking my mom for a very long time if I could get a boy's haircut, and, finally, from
26 what my parents told me— cause I had short hair sometimes as a child, uhm, cause it was easier
27 for my parents. But I remember being around six or seven years old and asking to have a boy's
28 haircut, to have short hair. And, apparently after some time of consistently asking for my
29 parents were like, "Okay."

30
31 AJ: Okay.

32
33 JACS: "You keep asking for this so it's not a phase. We'll just, we'll let you cut your hair short.

34
35 AJ: Mhm.

36
37 JACS: And before that I used to put it in pigtails cause I thought that pigtails were more masculine...

38
39 AJ: Oh, wow. Interesting. Okay.

40
41 JACS: ... than a ponytail because, yeah, all the girls had ponytails so I was like, "Well I'll wear pigtails
42 because that's, like, a more masculine look." Like, all the girls have ponytails.

43
44 AJ: So you have this sort of desire for, towards masculinity.

45
46 JACS: Yeah. Yeah. And at the same time loved baby dolls, ah. I still love playing with dolls. Those are
47 great. Uhm, and had this continual back and forth about wanting to be pretty, like feeling, you

1 know, sort of almost in like a stereotyped softer than like the boys and wanting to boys to like
2 me. And then crushing on all of these girls and wanting to be like the boy for them. And always
3 being the boy when we played pretend, I was always the dad, I was always the guy, the hero,
4 whatever.

5
6 AJ: Mhm.

7
8 JACS: And the heroine and I would go on these adventures. I just could not put myself as the feminine
9 or female character in playing pretend. I just, it's like, it was very rare that I would do that. And if
10 I did, it would be we were princesses. You know, we would have these huge ball gowns.

11
12 AJ: Oh wow.

13
14 JACS: If I was going to go femme, I was going all out.

15
16 AJ: [Laughs].

17
18 JACS: I was gonna make it worth my time when I was playing pretend. And, uhm, so by the time I was
19 a teenager, my, I was kind of like, "Yeah, this is how I look. I'm kind of over it. I'm not pretty.
20 Like, I know I'm ugly. I know I'm weird. And continuing to be teased. People asking me if I was a
21 lesbian and not knowing an answer cause I had never thought about it, and I was like, "Well I
22 don't know." Finally I was like, "Well, I'm not a woman who wants to be with women." I don't
23 know if I can even— like what is a woman? I'm not a woman. Like, what is this? Like, but I don't
24 want to be with other women. I can't imagine myself being with women as a woman so I can't
25 be a lesbian. That's gotta be it. And so from that point on I was like, "I gotta be straight cause
26 there's no other option." Uhm, and so I just had a very tumultuous teenage period of feeling
27 very torn between who I felt I was and who I felt I was. So I didn't feel like I wasn't being myself
28 but there was so many parts of me that weren't allowed to exist, and feasibly couldn't exist
29 cause they weren't supposedly real. And, uhm, trying to figure out like how I don't know how to
30 talk about that so I'll just call myself crazy.

31
32 AJ: Hm, wow.

33
34 JACS: That's the only way I can think about it, and I was struggling with a lot of mental health issues at
35 the time. Lots of depression and anxiety. Uhm, so when you have all that mixed in with this
36 thing that you have no idea is gender identity and you're processing and you're trying to find
37 positive things to cope, all I had was trying to separate myself into, "Well, okay, I have these
38 really masculine parts of me and I'm going to internalize them. And I'm not really going to tell
39 very many people about them. And maybe I'll create a name for myself, which I did." And so I
40 had, you know, a male, masculine name that I liked to use. I had these perceptions of my
41 experiences that I often felt were more through a masculine perception.

42
43 AJ: Hm.

44
45 JACS: But they couldn't totally exist. They were real to me but they couldn't exist to anyone else so
46 they were completely hidden. And I had no idea what it was. So I just felt, in addition to being
47 very depressed, very anxious, and struggling a lot with self harm and suicidality...

1
2 AJ: Mhm.

3
4 JACS: ... I had this other thing here that actually, despite it making me feel really sad and very
5 separated from everyone and very isolated, was actually a major positive coping mechanism for
6 me where I was like, "Well, at least I have this and I can relate to it and I can connect with this
7 masculinity, which I didn't call masculinity, I don't know what I called it.

8
9 AJ: Uhuh.

10
11 JACS: I just called it another extension of myself. And I held onto that as a way of coping with all of
12 these other really difficult things and created this relationship with my inner self as a support
13 person. So it was like, "Hey, you know what? You're not ugly. You know, you're not so terrible.
14 It's not that everyone hates you. Like, you're a good person. Like, you're nice and there's people
15 who like you, and, you know, it doesn't have to be so bad all the time, like you can, you can
16 handle this. You can address it. So actually my perception of gender identity turned into sort of
17 like a cheerleader situation.

18
19 AJ: Wow.

20
21 JACS: I was clinging to this concept of, "What now?" I could call, uh, atypical gender identity or
22 difference in gender to help me cope with the isolation and the bullying as we call it now. I was
23 just so used to people being mean to me, right. [Laughs].

24
25 AJ: Yeah. [Laughs].

26
27 JACS: And feeling different. And not being able to relate to people wholeheartedly. Always feeling
28 slightly separated or talking to people and feeling like they can't see you. Like you're right in
29 front of them.

30
31 AJ: Right.

32
33 JACS: And I remember being about fourteen or fifteen years old and talking to a friend of mine who I
34 had known since infancy. We like grew up in the same neighborhood. And we're talking and
35 having a perfectly fine interesting conversation but the entire time it's like I was talking to her
36 from like back here, from like back behind my head and felt like, that there was this separation
37 between us. And she couldn't see me for who I was, that she was talking to someone else, which
38 was me but a different way of conceiving myself. And the loneliness that it— that it was such a
39 pervasive feeling of loneliness and I often felt like I was on the outside looking in on people
40 whether it was because I was so depressed or because my identity was so, in some way different
41 and I had no way to talk about it. So that made living in Cincinnati difficult in addition to this, the
42 confusion of living in an extremely racist environment, being a person who's part Native
43 American and not having any tribal relation anywhere.

44
45 AJ: Mhm.

1 JACS: And any time trying to talk to people about it they're just like, "Oh yeah, I'm Native American
2 too." And like, "Oh really? Well let's talk about it. You're six years old, you don't know what to
3 say to people. And they're just like, "Oh, well we don't, I mean I don't know, like, they don't
4 know anything about their tribe. And I learned very quickly that you're not supposed to talk to
5 white skinned people about being Native, that you would get kind of like weird looks and very
6 negative responses, especially from adults trying to talk about, "Yeah, actually, like my family is
7 Cherokee." And they'd just be like, "Oh, well whatever," you know. And so it was another thing,
8 plus the white washing within my own family where it's like, "Yeah, don't forget this. This is
9 important, and these are points of our family's history that you need to know about but you
10 don't need to tell anybody else about it," you know. And so it was this unspoken thing that we
11 will talk about at home. My mother will say this or this here and there about it but it never went
12 outside the house and so by the time I was a teenager it was something that I would
13 occasionally acknowledge to people but I never spoke about.

14
15 AJ: Hm.

16
17 JACS: So yeah.

18
19 AJ: Did you, uhm— so, you know, we talked about some of the mental health issues and, and the
20 self-harm and suicidal idealization. Did you ever seek therapy or treatment?

21
22 JACS: Uhm, when I was about fourteen, my parents sent me to see someone to chat. Uhm, I think that
23 it scared my parents a lot. They weren't really sure what to do with, you know, the mood swings
24 and being an extremely stubborn, strong-willed child.

25
26 AJ: Mhm.

27
28 JACS: Uhm, my parents really had their hands full. [Laughs]. Uhm, I have very loving parents. Any
29 parent is going to go through a period where they're adjusting to learning how to parent, right,
30 which doesn't always have the most positive impact on their children, right? Uhm, and so there
31 wasn't always, like, "We don't know what to do with this." And so it wasn't always handled in
32 the best ways. Uhm, though my parents tried their best and so finally there're like, "We need to
33 send this kid to talk to somebody because we don't know what to do." Uhm, and I actually
34 consider myself very lucky in that the therapist that I was talking to when I talked about what
35 we now know as gender...

36
37 AJ: Mhm.

38
39 JACS: ... uh, he just said, "Oh well, it sounds like you just have an alter ego because this is really real to
40 you but I don't think this is a split personality," because that's what I thought I had, dissociative
41 identity.

42
43 AJ: Okay.

44
45 JACS: And, I was like, "Yeah, I have this split personality and he hangs out all the time and I'm just kind
46 of crazy and all of this stuff."

47

- 1 AJ: Oh wow.
2
- 3 JACS: You know, and he's just like, "Mm, yeah, I think that's what you have." Luck— if he had been a
4 counselor, this is one of the only times where I ever was grateful I saw a counselor who had zero
5 competency in trans issues because if I had been diagnosed with gender identity disorder at
6 fourteen years old, I honestly don't think I would have been able to handle it.
7
- 8 AJ: Hmm.
9
- 10 JACS: I was not in a mental place to be able to cope with that type of difference at that time. I already
11 felt so isolated.
12
- 13 AJ: That's really insightful.
14
- 15 JACS: Yeah, so I kind of consider myself lucky [laughs] that I didn't come out as a teenager cause I
16 don't know if I would have made it out with that so, uh, yeah but it was one of those things
17 where mental health is a very difficult area and a lot of people just don't know what to do for it.
18
- 19 AJ: Sure.
20
- 21 JACS: And so, uhm, my parents did their best to try and give me what resources they, you know, were
22 able to give me but it's like what do you do, you know?
23
- 24 AJ: Yeah.
25
- 26 JACS: Uhm, so yeah, and also because for whatever reason, uhm, my mother especially she's like,
27 "You're smart. You'll figure it out."
28
- 29 AJ: Mmm.
30
- 31 JACS: You know, and that's how my parents grew up too. They're just like, "Well, we figured it out."
32 And so they would send me to like counselors' offices like at school, and I would talk to them
33 and if I was on a good day, especially if I was manic, I mean, I was bubbly and talkative and like
34 in a good mood and I talked about how much I like my friends. And there's, no one is going to
35 see a sick kid...
36
- 37 AJ: Sure.
38
- 39 JACS: ... like when they see that. And I struggled with chronic ill— I've been chronically ill my whole
40 life, and so a lot of my physical illness, actually, was not perceived strictly as— so I'll rephrase
41 that. So being chronically ill all the time, it was just sort of, like, you know there's things wrong
42 with you and so mental health stuff is just another thing. So you don't really have to fix it. You
43 just deal with it because there's no solution to being in pain all the time. I mean the amount of
44 pain I was in, especially by the time I was a teenager, was so extreme I just— it was so
45 normalized to be suffering all the time and to be at degrees of pain where you just can't really
46 function that much but you just have to and I would miss a lot of school. And my privilege as a
47 white skinned person with parents who were educated really is what got me through because

1 when I was in sixth grade, for example, and the school told my parents, “Well she hasn’t gone to
2 enough classes so she’s going to get held back,” my mom just stormed down there and was like,
3 “Listen, you’re going to pass my kid to the next grade. You don’t have a choice,” like, “You’re
4 just going to do it.”

5
6 AJ: Wow. [Laughs].

7
8 JACS: And if she was a brown skinned person they just would have completely written her off. If she
9 didn’t have an education to know that— plus my mom, you know, is just a force of nature to
10 begin with, right?

11
12 AJ: Okay.

13
14 JACS: So, but that never would have happened. You know, like so my privilege as a white skinned
15 person enabled me to move forward at, like, in school and in life, despite the fact that I had a
16 very serious chronic illness and was coping with a lot of social anxiety that would make me, like,
17 not go to school and all these things, and I would— I felt like I was sick but I wasn’t physically ill.
18 It was my anxiety but I couldn’t tell the difference as a kid and then by the time I was a teenager
19 I was, like, “I’m sick all the time, and I’m just going to feel these things. I guess this is depression.
20 By the time I was sixteen I had figured out that I was bipolar. Nobody believed me. And so,
21 nobody believed me when I told you how—told them how I was feeling physically. They’d— my
22 parents were trying to get me medical health care and all the physicians would just give me all
23 of these medications.

24
25 AJ: Mhm.

26
27 JACS: And it would just be a disaster. Like I just got all kinds of side effects. Uhm, I sustained some
28 neurological damage by being overdosed anti-seizure meds and things that are used for chronic
29 headache and chronic pain. And my parents are scientists, you know, they were involved. They
30 were just like, “Okay, yeah, like medicine.” They trusted the system as any parent would right?

31
32 AJ: Mhm.

33
34 JACS: And, but that was why also why by the time I became an adult I became a health care advocate
35 because I had so little power as a kid in the health care system. Asking for help, telling people
36 how I was feeling, either psychologically or physically, and telling people that the medicine they
37 were giving me wasn’t helping and that it was making me sick or making me feel crazier or
38 whatever else and nobody listened because I wasn’t a person. I was a child. You know, and so of
39 course I wasn’t going to talk to people about other things cause once I talked to a counselor
40 about hallucinations, I went to the GP, my General Practitioner, about hallucinating about he
41 told my parents that they needed to lock me up. And my parents flipped out and were just like,
42 “Don’t talk about our kid that way.”

43
44 AJ: Mhm.

45
46 JACS: And then we never talked about it ever again cause they weren’t willing to institutionalize me or
47 put me on a bunch of psychiatric drugs. At the same time, they weren’t sure what to do about it

1 right? So they're just like, "Our kid is fine. We see them right here. They're alive and they're
2 functioning, and we know they have a hard time but it's fine," like, "Don't tell us to lock up our
3 kid." Like things like that.

4
5 AJ: uhuh.

6
7 JACS: So, uhm, so getting help as a physically ill person who was coping with mental health conditions,
8 it was just a disastrous situation because providers, they don't know what the hell they're doing
9 a lot of the time.

10
11 AJ: Oh wow.

12
13 JACS: You know? So, it's like what can you do except, again, you know, you negotiate it in the best way
14 you can. There's people telling you to take medicine even if it's making you sick, you keep taking
15 it.

16
17 AJ: Hm.

18
19 JACS: You know? So it was in my twenty's before I realized I didn't have to do what doctors told me to
20 do. So, so yeah. It was, uhm— but it was a normalized part of my life, you know? You have to
21 think about ability, like when your ability is not up to par for society, you don't think about it
22 that way. You just keep doing it. You can't see that other people aren't in the same amount of
23 pain as you.

24
25 AJ: Sure.

26
27 JACS: So you just keep living. So it wasn't— it was something that definitely made my childhood and
28 teenage years very hard and maybe not able to play and participate, especially as a little kid, but
29 I just tried to do it anyway.

30
31 AJ: When did you— you sort of had these internal feelings and this sort of alter ego or whatever
32 your therapist called it, but when did you realize that this or accept that this is a gender identity
33 issue?

34
35 JACS: Hm. Well I didn't even know what gender was until I was an adult. Uhm, so I didn't start thinking
36 about gender identity until the moment I learned what gender identity was. And I was—

37
38 AJ: And you're saying as an adult? Eighteen?

39
40 JACS: Yeah, I was twenty-one.

41
42 AJ: Twenty-one. Okay.

43
44 JACS: Twenty-one years old. Yeah so, I was twenty-one, and I had been starting to go—

45
46 AJ: People looking at this video right now are gonna think you're twenty-one right now.

1 JACS: I know [Laughs].
2
3 AJ: [Laughs].
4
5 JACS: Oh man. Well you know, I try to, try to stay cute. [Laughs].
6
7 AJ: Okay.
8
9 JACS: Uhm, yeah, so I was twenty-one, and I had been going on a pretty sustained downward spiral
10 where for a couple of years I, I was being a femme woman. I went to college and no one knew
11 me, like I'm gonna stop being that ugly androgynous freakish girl that people kind of tease or
12 think is ugly.
13
14 AJ: Mhm.
15
16 JACS: Uhm, I'm gonna carry a purse.
17
18 AJ: Mhm. [Laughs].
19
20 JACS: And I'm gonna try this makeup thing.
21
22 AJ: Oh, okay. [Laughs].
23
24 JACS: I had fun with it, you know, it was interesting.
25
26 AJ: Where did you go to college?
27
28 JACS: Uhm, I started at Kent State up by Cleveland...
29
30 AJ: Okay.
31
32 JACS: ... uhm, Ohio. Uhm, failed miserably.
33
34 AJ: Mhm.
35
36 JACS: Uh, you know, my depression completely overtook me and so I came back to Cincinnati and I
37 finished my degree at University of Cincinnati.
38
39 AJ: Okay.
40
41 JACS: Uhm, which was, you know, in the end, like better.
42
43 AJ: Mhm.
44
45 JACS: Like it was— it's— I didn't do well going off into the world my first try. It was a false start. And,
46 uh, so, yeah, but by about two years I was really starting to get burned out on it, and I started

1 thinking more critically, like when I— and my makeup, I took eyeliner and I just drew it on my
2 eyes and that's what counted as makeup for me. I didn't really use it properly.
3

4 AJ: Okay. [Laughs].
5

6 JACS: Like I kind of used it as eyeshadow because I was so lazy about it.
7

8 AJ: Oh wow.
9

10 JACS: I was just like, "Well I guess so." And then I realized I wasn't really doing it because I wanted to
11 anymore. I realized I was doing it because I thought I had to otherwise I wouldn't be pretty. And
12 I had grown my hair out all the way down past my shoulders. Wouldn't get it sculpted or
13 anything. I just had this long mop of hair that I was getting food stuck in [Laughs].
14

15 AJ: Oh wow.
16

17 JACS: Once I chewed gum into my hair cause I lived twenty-one years with short hair.
18

19 AJ: Uhuh.
20

21 JACS: I had never— I didn't know how to wash it.
22

23 AJ: Oh wow.
24

25 JACS: I was just like, "What is happening with my hair right now. And so slowly, slowly but surely I
26 started feeling less and less satisfied and these feelings that I recognized from high school of
27 this, you know, maleness started creeping back in.
28

29 AJ: Mhm.
30

31 JACS: And then being, unlike in high school, where I could look in the mirror and I could see androgyny
32 and I could see a little more masculinity, I couldn't see that anymore because I had feminized
33 myself so much.
34

35 AJ: Sure.
36

37 JACS: And so— I don't think that necessarily contributed. I think it was just timing...
38

39 AJ: Mhm.
40

41 JACS: ... that I had, you know, I played for a little while, and I was like, "This is fun. Okay, now I'm tired.
42 I wanna go home."
43

44 AJ: Mhm.
45

- 1 JACS: Uhm, and by chance, uh, a queer professor who soon got fired, uhm, for talking about queer
2 stuff at the university, uhm, got off topic one day and started talking about gender identity. And
3 I was sitting there in class, and she actually was referencing, uhm, Kate Bornstein's work.
4
- 5 AJ: Okay.
6
- 7 JACS: And, by that point, I was dressing much more masculine-ly. I was dressing in the closest thing to
8 boy's clothes that I had in my apartment. Every time I was at home, I changed into clothes that
9 were more masculine and then I would, slowly but surely, stop dressing more feminine-ly as I
10 went out of the house. And, uhm, so I was sitting there in this awk— probably super awkward
11 looking, you know, collage of clothes [laughs], and I was like, wait a minute, your identity can be
12 different than your body? What? And it was so overwhelming. I was sitting there, and it was just
13 like the entire world just, like, crashed down, and I was, like— it was everything I could do to
14 keep from crying.
15
- 16 AJ: Mhm.
17
- 18 JACS: I was panicking. I felt like everybody was looking at me and I felt, like, oh, and thought I was just
19 such a freak.
20
- 21 AJ: Mhm.
22
- 23 JACS: I just couldn't believe it. And I remember the professor saying very clearly, she said, "And I know
24 that all of y'all might think that, like, how can anyone love a person like this? How can anyone
25 understand a person this way, but you try dating an alcoholic and knowing a trans person will
26 seem like cake."
27
- 28 AJ: Hm.
29
- 30 JACS: And, so making this comparison, about, like, you know, it's not about the person's identity. It's
31 about a person's participation and functionality. Like, it's not about being trans makes you weird
32 or a freak or broken. It's about difference in humanity, and just because someone is trans
33 doesn't mean that they have to be a mess or have to be someone who is difficult to know or
34 unlovable.
35
- 36 AJ: Mhm.
37
- 38 JACS: Uhm, and so, yeah, that, that kind of pulled me our just a little bit. Uhm, and from there I just
39 started processing it, and within a couple of months, uhm, you know, I had come to understand
40 what trans was. I just poured over the computer all the time. I didn't know anyone gay let alone
41 trans. There was no one to talk to about it. I didn't want to tell my friends what was going on,
42 and so I just tried to figure it out until I had a language to talk about it, uhm, and then I came
43 out.
44
- 45 AJ: Wow.
46
- 47 JACS: Yeah.

1
2 AJ: Did you, did you use the internet?...

3
4 JACS: Yeah.

5
6 AJ: ... I'm assuming you were coming of age in the world, in the age of the world wide web.

7
8 JACS: Yeah. Right, yeah. It was, uh, there were a lot of much more things that I'm sure if someone
9 coming out two or three years before me had access to. It was still at the point where if you
10 Googled "trans" most of what you found was porn.

11
12 AJ: Yeah, oh yeah. [Laughs].

13
14 JACS: But there were things, like, uhm, some trans focused sites I found. gidreform.org...

15
16 AJ: Mhm.

17
18 JACS: ... because I could not sign on to the fact that— I was just, like, you know, I was so heartbroken
19 to figure out that I was trans. I was not happy about it.

20
21 AJ: Sure.

22
23 JACS: And I really wanted to reject it but I knew I had no choice, which was lucky. You know, a lot of us
24 go back and forth a lot trying to deny it, and it's a very painful thing. And, for whatever reason, I
25 was just like, once I realized what it was, I was like, "Oh, this sucks so much." But there was no
26 going back.

27
28 AJ: Mhm.

29
30 JACS: And I mark my ownership of my identity when I finally was willing to tell myself this separation
31 you made as a child is the same thing as you. Like, you're one person. You're not two people.
32 You know, you're not split. You're not separated. Like, this is you. And, especially because there
33 was so much binarism in the visible trans world at the time, it was extremely difficult for me,
34 someone who's just like, "Well, if I'm trans and this is real, which okay, I can own that. What's all
35 this girl stuff? Like, what is that?"

36
37 AJ: Define binarism. Binarism, you, I think you said.

38
39 JACS: Yeah, so this is the idea that the gender binary where you're either a woman trapped in a man's
40 body or you're a man trapped in a woman's body.

41
42 AJ: Mhm.

43
44 JACS: And, even though I was very unhappy, and was experiencing what many people may call, you
45 know, levels of dysphoria, I didn't feel trapped in my body. Uhm, I had spent two years trying to
46 own my body as a female body and trying to love it and to recognize that it could be beautiful.
47 And then all of a sudden, I was out as trans and I was supposed to hate it. And there was maybe,

1 there were a lot of things that I maybe didn't like or I wanted to be different but I didn't hate my
2 body.
3
4 AJ: Sure.
5
6 JACS: And so the politic of the trans community at the time was so aggressively set on maleness and
7 femaleness and that in order to be a trans person who was designated female at birth, you had
8 to be hyper masculine, you had to hate everything about your body, you had to be misogynistic,
9 you had to be rooted in privilege. There were these lists about what you were supposed to do.
10 Take up more room on the bus. Don't smile at people. Don't smile in pictures. If you bump into
11 someone don't ever apologize, you know, if—
12
13 AJ: Where did this list exist? [Laughs].
14
15 JACS: Uhm, on trans masculine run websites.
16
17 AJ: Is that right? Wow.
18
19 JACS: Yeah. It's trans men telling other trans folks like here's what you need to do, but really what
20 they were saying is here's what you need to do to survive. But it was rooted in oppression.
21
22 AJ: Cause I thought you were speaking of some unwritten rules, which do exist and we know.
23
24 JACS: Oh yeah, they were written down.
25
26 AJ: But these were expressly written rules.
27
28 JACS: Bulleted lists. Yeah, what you need to do. I know the people who wrote them for survival but
29 they were writing them from an oppressed place.
30
31 AJ: Mhm.
32
33 JACS: Like here's how you be a real man cause this is what real men do.
34
35 AJ: Mhm.
36
37 JACS: AKA here's how you be sexist and privileged and start to alienate others around you. Here's how
38 you— and, you know, I think that in general the majority of trans men even at the time were,
39 you know, fully embodying that, right? But the fact is that if you're on the bus you notice if a
40 man is sitting with his legs apart whereas if a man is sitting like this [moves legs] which is how I
41 sit, right? And I remember taking the bus and waiting for it and standing there, and I remember
42 thinking to myself, "So I've been told that I'm trans and that's real and that who I am is not
43 wrong and I'm just, I'm a person and I can be male just by being myself."
44
45 AJ: Mhm.
46

- 1 JACS: So why do I have to follow all these rules? Why do I have to change the way that I speak? Why
2 do I have to keep my hands to my side and not, cause I gesticulate a lot? Why can't I do that?
3
- 4 AJ: Mhm.
5
- 6 JACS: Why can't I smile at people? Aren't there men that do that? And it was such a difficult
7 conversation to have when you have no one to have the conversation with.
8
- 9 AJ: Yeah. It's kinda tough.
10
- 11 JACS: So, yeah. So I just like, like I'm doing this wrong still but I'm just so stubborn and so righteous I'm
12 just like, "I guess I'm just going to do it wrong because that is not possible for me."
13
- 14 AJ: Good.
15
- 16 JACS: So, I mean, and genderqueerism wasn't a word that existed at the time. It didn't seem like a lot
17 of people were calling themselves genderqueer, but I didn't know anyone so like all I had was
18 the internet. And you had all this language floating around, polygender, omnigender, bigender.
19 And I used bigender briefly. Uhm, and then, you know, girly boys and, you know, all these live
20 journal communities that had all this— it was just sheets and sheets of language. Everyone had
21 different words for themselves and that was okay. It was just like we all knew we were fucking
22 freaks so like might as well have a freakish language to go with it.
23
- 24 AJ: [Laughs].
25
- 26 JACS: Uhm, but I just couldn't get over the fact that I couldn't figure out why I was trans, and that's
27 what— I needed that legitimacy. I wanted it for a long time because I wanted a reason for me to
28 be different, like I didn't want to just be different. Uhm, and so the language wasn't enough.
29 Like I wanted proof that I was a real person.
30
- 31 AJ: Have you figured out why you're trans? [Laughs].
32
- 33 JACS: Yeah. No, have not still to this day, I have not figured out why I'm trans. You know there's all
34 these theories about, you know, brains and androgen development and things like that, which,
35 you know, I feel is legit and that helped me once I found— I was like, "Okay, biology."
36
- 37 AJ: Mhm.
38
- 39 JACS: Biology I understand. Biology I can sign onto. Okay, yes, biology. Uhm, but one of my friends
40 actually helped me, once I was out for a little while and I finally found some community, most of
41 which was actually through drag...
42
- 43 AJ: Okay.
44
- 45 JACS: ... uhm, one of my friends who— she was not trans or is not t—, she's not trans but she really
46 helped me in those early times of transition. Uhm, I remember once calling her on the phone
47 having some kind of, like, nervous attack. I was so upset about trans stuff. Uhm, and binding and

1 how painful binding was and the isolation and walking around, just like when I was in high
2 school and nobody could see me.
3
4 AJ: Mhm.
5
6 JACS: And I had that two years were for the first time I was normal, like men interacted with me
7 differently. They would open the door for me when I passed.
8
9 AJ: Mhm.
10
11 JACS: Like I would order stuff and they would smile at me. Like, I think to some capacity men even
12 flirted with me. I didn't really know if that was what was happening...
13
14 AJ: Okay. [Laughs].
15
16 JACS: ... but I think that's what was happening, right? I got asked on dates. I was a woman.
17
18 AJ: Sure.
19
20 JACS: I had no idea, like, what was happening with my life, and I just remember perceiving these
21 things, like, "Has that ever happened to me before?" And then all of a sudden after a year and a
22 half of this normalcy it just all got ripped out of my life to the point where I was even less normal
23 than I had ever been. I was the most freakish that I had ever been in my whole freakish
24 experience, and it was so excruciatingly painful. And so I just remember being on the phone
25 crying about this and screaming, like, "I don't want to be this way. Why am I this way?" And my
26 friend said, "Does it matter? This is how you are. Like, you just have to get over it," which at the
27 time did not help...
28
29 AJ: [Laughs].
30
31 JACS: ... but, at the same time, I was just, like, "Oh fuck, I guess I don't have to have a reason." I didn't
32 stop wanting a reason but after that point I seemed to want a reason less...
33
34 AJ: Hm. Mhm.
35
36 JACS: ... because she was just like, "It doesn't matter why you're this way." Like, "This is how you are."
37 Like, "That's it." And so I had to start letting go of that need to control or define why I was the
38 way I was especially because I didn't look and act like other trans people, at least the ones on
39 that were on the internet, right? [Laughs].
40
41 AJ: So what have been some of the challenges that you have faced since you have began to express
42 your truer gender identity?
43
44 JACS: Mh. Uhm, once I got passed the initial shock of being trans, uhm, and started to come into my
45 own, uh, and understand myself... Uhm, so after that initial hurdle, one of the biggest challenges
46 was accessing health care.
47

1 AJ: Mh. Mhm.

2

3 JACS: As someone who is both physically disabled and has mental health conditions, I didn't have the
4 ability to not go to the doctor. I was very aware of how many trans people did not go to the
5 doctor, especially by the time I had been out for about a year, I dove into trans activism head
6 first.

7

8 AJ: Really?

9

10 JACS: Yeah, I didn't know anyone who was trans, uhm, I had no connection to community so the first
11 thing I— I was working as, uhm, a community organizer primarily in anti-war work and, uh, the
12 labor movement.

13

14 AJ: Mhm.

15

16 JACS: And so I was, I was already an activist and I was, like, "Well, maybe I should work on this. I don't
17 know anyone. I'm really miserable. Maybe if I start addressing the fact that I have no protections
18 at school and there's no spaces for me. There's no places for trans people to go. Maybe if I make
19 one, other trans people will find me."

20

21 AJ: Mhm.

22

23 JACS: And I could describe that as an initial hurdle but it was such a survival tool that, even though it
24 was extremely hard, I just loved every minute of it because I just had something to do.

25

26 AJ: Mhm.

27

28 JACS: So it would take my mind off just my coming out, my transition. Uhm, but in that, I started,
29 when I finally did start meeting other trans people, I realized that health care was a big issue for
30 all of us.

31

32 AJ: Hm.

33

34 JACS: Uhm, and I needed a doctor, and my doctors didn't know how to interact with me anymore. I
35 was always afraid to go to the doctor. I didn't want to tell them I was trans. Uhm, doctors that I
36 had in the past I was afraid to come out to. Uhm, I was really terrified about taking testosterone
37 because I didn't know what it was going to do to my health. Uhm, and I knew it was something
38 that I wanted, and this idea that I couldn't get access to it because of my mental health
39 conditions or because of my physical health conditions, uhm, and then just the way the doctors
40 had treated me in the past. I was very aware that the medical system was not set up for
41 patients.

42

43 AJ: Hm.

44

45 JACS: And so I very quickly started trying to figure out some way to handle this in a better way. Uhm,
46 but— and I would refuse to be pathologized.

47

1 AJ: Mhm.
2
3 JACS: The pathologization issue since day one was a problem for me. And, since I wasn't willing to go
4 through a year worth of the real life test and go to therapy to people who were just gonna tell
5 me how terrible I was and I just wasn't willing to do it. And so it was the desperate search trying
6 to find, uhm, care providers that weren't going to pathologize me or that weren't going to treat
7 me badly because I couldn't be without a doctor. And when I was without a doctor I was
8 suffering a lot.
9
10 AJ: Mh.
11
12 JACS: And so it was this back and forth of trying to negotiate health care and then when I started T the
13 first doctor that was willing to give it to me I—
14
15 AJ: T being testosterone.
16
17 JACS: Testosterone, yeah.
18
19 AJ: Okay.
20
21 JACS: I like called her, I called up several doctors asking if— there was two. The two doctors in the
22 entire southern Ohio area who were willing to see trans people.
23
24 AJ: Oh wow, okay.
25
26 JACS: And, uhm, one of them was just like, I called and the nurse was so rude to me. I was like, "Do
27 you see people without a letter?" Like, and then she's like, "No. Of course we don't do that. Like,
28 you need to be psychiatrically evaluated," you know...
29
30 AJ: Mhm.
31
32 JACS: ... and just said some really messed up stuff. And then the second person I called, and I left a
33 message. And she called me back, and I, like, gave her the big spiel about heteronormativity and
34 pathologization, trans empowerment, and blada, blada, blada.
35
36 AJ: [Laughs].
37
38 JACS: And I was in a car with three of my fellow friends slash fellow performers cause we were driving
39 up to Columbus to perform. Uhm, so I'm in the car talking to this doctor with these three queers
40 sitting there, like, trying not to listen.
41
42 AJ: [Laughs].
43
44 JACS: And she's just, like, "Okay, you can come in," after, like, forty-five minutes, she said I could come
45 in. And I hung up the phone, and I just, like, started, like, crying. And my friends were just like,
46 "Yay!" Like they pulled over...
47

- 1 AJ: Mhm.
2
- 3 JACS: ... on the highway, and we, like, were celebrating that I was going to get an appointment for T
4 but unfortunately what ended up happening was, uhm, I went, you know, dealt with it, got the
5 prescription. I was willing to do an evaluation to try and meet this person halfway.
6
- 7 AJ: Mhm.
8
- 9 JACS: And the evaluation pulled me back far because I made the mistake of not doing what most trans
10 people were doing at the time which was, again, following the list. When you go to the doctor,
11 here's what you say.
12
- 13 AJ: Yes.
14
- 15 JACS: And I did not do that. I was worried that if I did that something was going to get missed and I
16 was going to die. [Laughs].
17
- 18 AJ: Mm.
19
- 20 JACS: I was like, "I have to tell them these things. What if something happens to me? Like, it was a
21 mistake. Like, I think I was too trusting of the system and too self-righteous. I was just, like, "I'm
22 just gonna tell them," and it completely backfired on me. And the doctor, when I went to go get
23 my shot for the first time to learn how to do it, the doctor wasn't even there. Uhm, she had
24 already decided that it wasn't going to happen. And so she wasn't there and the nurse came
25 out, and I'm sitting in the waiting room, like, I already checked in. And she's just, like, "Yeah,
26 actually, so we're not doing this today." And I couldn't even ask why cause, you know, you're so
27 built up, you're so ready for it.
28
- 29 AJ: Mhm. Yeah.
30
- 31 JACS: And I just started bawling, like, in the waiting room. And I was just, like, "What's going on?
32 Where's the doctor?" And she's, like, "Oh, well the doctor is not here. She left a couple of hours
33 ago." And I was just, like, "Get the doctor on the phone." Like, "Why is this happening?" And it
34 was because I wasn't in therapy.
35
- 36 AJ: Mhm.
37
- 38 JACS: And the doctor spent all this time trying to convince me. And I was just, like, "I'm an anti-GID
39 activist." Like, "I spend all of my time talking about how trans people are legitimate people and
40 the stigma of mental health and how it impacts us, like, I'm not going to go into therapy to
41 access hormones. I'm just not going to do it."
42
- 43 AJ: Right.
44
- 45 JACS: And she's, like, "Well, can't you just do it without telling anyone?" I'm like, "You realize that
46 you're asking me to compromise both my ethics and my personal values and also to lie to my
47 support system."

1
2 AJ: Mhm.
3
4 JACS: Like, that's not healthy.
5
6 AJ: Right.
7
8 JACS: And after an— almost an hour, I said to her, "You realize that I have this prescription and these
9 needles in my hand right now. I can go out into the parking garage, and I can inject. You won't
10 know how much I'm putting in. You won't know if I'm doing it correctly. It sure as hell won't be
11 safely, and you're saying you'd rather me do that than to let me do it here in your office when I
12 have signed an informed consent form and I'm not legally able to sue you. You'd rather me put
13 myself at risk than to do it here in your office cause you're so concerned about this guideline
14 that was just arbitrarily invented?" And she said, "Yes."
15
16 AJ: Wow.
17
18 JACS: So, you know, it just, and after that I had to drive five hours, uh, one way, and then five hours
19 back for a couple of years to access trans health care in Chicago, and I started taking people with
20 me. Just carloads of trans people.
21
22 AJ: Oh wow.
23
24 JACS: We just, I learned how to make the system work up there and just, like, "Here's what you gotta
25 do to get an appointment in the same day."
26
27 AJ: Uhuh.
28
29 JACS: Cause up there they had informed consent and so there was just hoards of trans people from
30 Ohio going to Chicago for health care, and it sucked cause when I was at home I didn't have a
31 doctor so if stuff went wrong, if I was having issues with pain, there was— I just had to deal with
32 it cause I didn't have a doctor. And so health care was— it loomed over my life. Not just for me
33 but because I had no way to help other people. Every person who came to me, being like, "I
34 want this this. I need this." All I could do was like, "Can you get to Chicago?..."
35
36 AJ: Mhm.
37
38 JACS: ... cause here are your options. You can go into therapy and you can go to these two providers
39 which soon became one provider cause the other one left. So there was one doctor in the whole
40 area. And I was like, "You can go to this one provider, and these are the things you have to do.
41 These are the things you are likely going to have to say or you can go to Chicago. And continually
42 having people ask for resources and having nothing to give them and so that was the other big
43 issue which shows my codependent activist nature in that the major, one of the major life issues
44 for me as a trans person has been the inability to help other trans people. Like, I couldn't do
45 anything for them, and I internalized it a lot and just made it my mission trying to create
46 something. Uhm, and so that, when I look back at, like, the times of my transition and I try to
47 think about my personal experience and where I was and how I was feeling and remembering,

1 like, okay, yeah I was really lonely at that time, yeah, I was really angry, you know? Oh, yeah, by
2 this point, you know, I was doing okay about this but I was really struggling about that. Uhm, so
3 much of it is overlapped with this huge blanket of activism which both kept me alive and also
4 took a lot of my life. So it's like that back and forth of this struggle of trying to build a resource
5 which you want for yourself but by the time it was built I had— it was too far gone to use it.

6
7 AJ: Mhm.

8
9 JACS: Cause I don't even need this anymore but here it is. And that's what kept me going was making
10 it for other people. Uhm, so I don't regret any of that.

11
12 AJ: Sure.

13
14 JACS: Like, I'm glad that I did it. It kept me alive, but it can be hard sometimes to think about what my
15 struggle was because at the time I was focused so much on other people but I was still able to,
16 like, process. I was very good at compartmentalizing. I didn't erase my own experience.

17
18 AJ: Mhm.

19
20 JACS: I didn't deny myself processing time. It's just I used my activism to help me get through so that I
21 could process. Uhm, so yeah.

22
23 AJ: What have been some of the positive aspects of your gender revelation?

24
25 JACS: Uhm, I think the first initial positive of coming out was it felt like there was some weight that
26 had been lifted from my life.

27
28 AJ: [Breathes out].

29
30 JACS: Yeah, I just— and I couldn't even at the time, it's like, I couldn't even describe it let alone
31 describe it now. Uhm, this amazing sensation that I was more real of a person than I had ever
32 imagined.

33
34 AJ: Mhm.

35
36 JACS: That I wasn't such a freak. I wasn't so strange after all. That yeah, like, I was crazy.

37
38 AJ: [Laughs].

39
40 JACS: I was disabled and I was sick and I was all these things but here was one thing that I thought was
41 wrong with me that actually wasn't. That it was real and that there was nothing wrong with it.
42 And it was such a critical moment to be, like, "Wow, I feel so much better about myself and my
43 life..."

44
45 AJ: Hm.

46
47 JACS: "... despite the fact that I'm fucking miserable." [Laughs].

1
2 AJ: Oh, oh, oh. [Laughs].
3

4 JACS: You know, like, just the power of coming out, that you can be so miserable about coming out
5 and yet the action of coming out can make it all better still. Like, you can be suffering but still
6 better than not knowing and not being out. And so, I feel, like, so much of my self-concept,
7 despite it being very painful when I came out cause I thought I could know myself better, I didn't
8 feel separated by these stigmas placed on me by mental health. Uhm, and from that, you know,
9 I still struggle with depression and anxiety and all those kind of things. Those things didn't go
10 away.
11

12 AJ: Right.
13

14 JACS: You know, but I think the combination of where I was, you know, I was entering my mid-
15 twenties. I was finally starting to mature and get my life together a little bit. I found community,
16 and, uhm, my first community was through drag. And I got really luck in that I met, you know,
17 the handful of people in Cincinnati who didn't care that I was trans and that when people picked
18 on me at the bar and said shitty things to me I could walk twenty feet and be with friends. Like, I
19 didn't have to be stuck by myself. And as I was trying to work things out, you know, whether it
20 was trying to get hormones or trying to figure out how to, like, stand to pee.
21

22 AJ: [Laughs].
23

24 JACS: Like, all this shit that I was trying to do, they just, you know, they laughed at it about it with me.
25 You know, and they're just, like, "Yeah, sure you're trying to pee in a urinal. We don't know
26 anything about that but that's cool."
27

28 AJ: [Laughs]. Wow.
29

30 JACS: You know, like, it was just, it made things so much better, and, oh, it was so amazing.
31

32 AJ: Yeah.
33

34 JACS: Like, the adventures we had and the friends I was able to make and, from that, being able, you
35 know, starting to think about traveling to meet other people like me cause I was finally realizing
36 that I wasn't the only one and that the people on the internet were actually people.
37

38 AJ: Mhm.
39

40 JACS: Like, it wasn't just text, like there were people on the other side of that website and that I could
41 maybe find them. Uhm, and I could better understand, like, how to do my work for the trans
42 community and maybe, I never thought about meeting people who would be my friends. I never
43 thought about that as an option but it turned out to be, like, the quintessential reason for travel
44 was to find community. And I was starting to teach more. I started teaching because I was so
45 angry at cis people for treating me badly and for cis society for treating our community badly.
46 And then it turned into this activist act more than just anger.
47

1 AJ: Mhm.
2
3 JACS: You know, and so traveling and trying to teach and finding community and meeting people and
4 realizing, like, "Wow there's all these people who think like me and, like, like me and can talk
5 about these things and have so many things that I could learn from. And I never would have
6 imagined that that's what my life was going to be like, that I would move around so much
7 meeting people. And I'm so grateful for the relationships that I've been able to get from that.
8 And, you know, especially with— like, if I hadn't come out and I hadn't started working on both
9 myself and on trans activism, so many people that I value and that I love most, like, wouldn't be
10 in my life.
11
12 AJ: Hm.
13
14 JACS: And when I was first coming out I remember very early on... I had this moment where I was like,
15 "Oh, well, if I had been born a boy, which is something I had thought about as a lot as a child...
16
17 AJ: Mhm.
18
19 JACS: ... but then when I was presented with the fact that I was actually internally not female, I
20 stopped wishing I had been born a boy because I realized that if I had all the relationships I had
21 had up to that point wouldn't have existed. The way that I interacted with the world, it would
22 have been completely different, and everyone that I love and cherished wouldn't be in my life in
23 the same capacity or at all.
24
25 AJ: Hm.
26
27 JACS: And that wasn't something that I was willing to sacrifice just for having a boyhood.
28
29 AJ: Yeah.
30
31 JACS: Like, I— it's just not worth it. And so, as a trans adult, I carried that on where I was was just, like,
32 "Yeah, I'm a trans person but look at all these people that I am honored to have in my life
33 because of that."
34
35 AJ: Mhm.
36
37 JACS: And if I hadn't come out and struggled with that stuff in the beginning I never would have met
38 my kid, you know? Like, he wouldn't have had anybody. And he may not be here.
39
40 AJ: So you have a kid?
41
42 JACS: Yeah, Jason.
43
44 AJ: Yeah, well we're on camera so...
45
46 JACS: Oh that's right.
47

1 AJ: ... you gotta talk about him...

2

3 JACS: Oh yeah. I gotta talk about him.

4

5 AJ: ... this Jason person.

6

7 JACS: Uhm, yeah he, so when he... I met him because he was, uh, he went to the same high school I

8 did, and we were at, uh, community event. And he was talking on a panel.

9

10 AJ: Mhm.

11

12 JACS: And he was the only trans person [laughs], uhm, and he was so, like, he's such an asshole, I love

13 it.

14

15 AJ: [Laughs].

16

17 JACS: He was just, like, not willing to, like, tell the pretty story. He was, like, "I'm trans and it sucks and

18 here's what I have to deal with," you know? And at the same time he was so soft spoken but he

19 was, like, saying the tough stuff. And I was all the way in the back of this room, and I'm, like, at

20 this table, I'm tabling for trans resources, and, uh, all my, like, homemade awkward pamphlets

21 and things.

22

23 AJ: [Laughs].

24

25 JACS: And, uh, watching this kid, and I was, like, "Holy shit, like, that kid is me, like ten, twelve years

26 ago." And so being able to start working with him and helping him with his GSA, he did, like, all

27 the work. I was just there for him to talk to.

28

29 AJ: Sure.

30

31 JACS: And be, like, "Oh, you want to do this? Here's an idea." Like, "Here's this. Or this exists. You

32 could try that."

33

34 AJ: Right.

35

36 JACS: You know, but it was all him. He's such a leader, and he said once there was a youth group that I

37 was, uh, that community folks were working on getting together. And it wasn't coming out the

38 way the youth wanted it, which was very frustrating. Uh, and he was talking to me about it, and

39 I was trying to help him strategize, "Okay, how do you get what you want from these adults?"

40

41 AJ: Mhm.

42

43 JACS: And he's, like, "Well, at this point, you know, I could just leave cause I don't really need the

44 youth group anymore, but then anyone else who needs the youth group isn't going to have a

45 resource. And I was, like, "Oh my god."

46

47 AJ: [laughs].

1
2 JACS: And he was fifteen when he said that, you know? You have this fifteen year old kid who's
3 already aware of the fact that if trans folks are not creating our own resources nobody is going
4 to.
5
6 AJ: Sure.
7
8 JACS: And, yeah, I— being in his life and being able to support him has been the greatest joy.
9
10 AJ: Mhm.
11
12 JACS: And I'm so grateful to be able to be in his life, and it was, it's just one of those things, like, how
13 can anyone not want him?
14
15 AJ: Hm.
16
17 JACS: Like, it's amazing what parents will throw away.
18
19 AJ: Yeah.
20
21 JACS: And, uh, so if nothing else, even with all the other positives that came with my transition and
22 with coming out and how much better it made me feel about myself and my life...
23
24 AJ: Mhm.
25
26 JACS: ... uhm, getting— being able to be in his life is the greatest gift.
27
28 AJ: Awe, that's so sweet.
29
30 JACS: It's amazing.
31
32 AJ: That's so sweet.
33
34 JACS: Yeah.
35
36 AJ: Uh, to the extent that you feel comfortable JAC...
37
38 JACS: I'm probably gonna look all puffy now.
39
40 AJ: Awe, you look beautiful honey.
41
42 JACS: Awe.
43
44 AJ: uhm, tell me about what, uhm, medical interventions you have undergone. And you've talked
45 about hormone therapy.
46
47 JACS: Hm. That's pretty much it.

1
2 AJ: Yeah? Any thoughts about future medical intervention?
3
4 JACS: No, you know, when I was coming out initially, oh, I used to be so angry when I would watch cis
5 boys walk with no shirts on.
6
7 AJ: Mhm.
8
9 JACS: I mean, it was such an intense feeling. It's one of those feelings that I feel, like, only trans people
10 understand, like, the feeling of seeing someone else's body...
11
12 AJ: Mhm.
13
14 JACS: ... and just wanting to have it.
15
16 AJ: I can relate.
17
18 JACS: Yeah. Yeah.
19
20 AJ: [Laughs].
21
22 JACS: And it was so overwhelming and, especially when you're just, like, "What is this feeling?" You
23 know, it's so distracting and, you know, I can look back at when I was, like, I remember being in,
24 you know, elementary school and sitting behind a boy in class. And he was doing something,
25 like, he had his hand, like, up on his face and I couldn't see him and just looking at him and
26 looking at his body and just, like, wondering what it was like to be in it...
27
28 AJ: Mmm. Wow.
29
30 JACS: ... and how much I wanted to be in it and I had no, you know, idea what the hell I was thinking
31 about, you know, and then being an adult now, so I really thought about things like top surgery
32 and even, you know, bottom surgery and what that would mean, and the things I would like to
33 have from it, but as time went on, you know, it's not, like, it's something that I never think about
34 anymore when it comes to something, like, you know, especially top surgery. But, at this point,
35 I'm just, like, I think I was able to come to a point where I really like where my body is...
36
37 AJ: Mhm.
38
39 JACS: ... and, even if certain days it's not exactly what I would like and a lot of days, it's, I don't, I
40 definitely don't consider it to be perfect or the ideal, like, it's my body...
41
42 AJ: Mhm.
43
44 JACS: and I think that every person has the right to decorate their house, you know...
45
46 AJ: [Laughs]. Absolutely.
47

- 1 JACS: ... like, our bodies are our houses. And I'm also kind of terrified of being, of, uh, being, of going
2 through surgery, right?
3
- 4 AJ: That's real.
5
- 6 JACS: That's intense. Yeah. And I helped a couple of people recover from it so I know it's not that
7 terrifying, right? But, uhm, I've come to the point where I really like the in-between-ness of my
8 body because I think it represents me well.
9
- 10 AJ: Hm.
11
- 12 JACS: And, while there may be a thing that I would want to change, it's just not how my body is
13 shaped, and, unless I am willing and able to take a much higher dose of testosterone, which in
14 that case I would lose some other things that I would probably want to keep. Uhm, it's sort of
15 like many of us have to come to a point of compromise, you know, or adjustment or acceptance
16 or whatever level we're at...
17
- 18 AJ: Mhm.
19
- 20 JACS: ... to be, like, "Yeah, this is my body." Uhm, so yeah, like, for the most part I'm just, like, "Oh, I
21 like these things." And it's only, it only becomes an inconvenience when I think about how I'm
22 trying to negotiate public spaces, like, I don't want to have to bind all the time.
23
- 24 AJ: Mhm.
25
- 26 JACS: And at a point in my life and have been for some time where I won't. I'm just not willing to do it.
27 Like, fuck everybody. And then moving to a more liberal environment, uh, for the first time ever,
28 living somewhere where supposedly it's not as big of a concern to be visibly androgynous, uhm,
29 I had this moment where I was, like, "You know what? It is not my responsibility to teach you
30 through visual gender who I am."
31
- 32 AJ: Mhm.
33
- 34 JACS: Like, it's not my responsibility whether or not you perceive my identity correctly. I'm just gonna
35 do what I'm going to do and I'm going to be comfortable and I'm not going to be, like, wearing a
36 binder and I'm not going to be trying to be more masculine cause I don't have to do that to
37 survive anymore. So I'm not going to do it. And, you know, doesn't mean it doesn't hurt when
38 you get misgendered, like, it does.
39
- 40 AJ: Mhm.
41
- 42 JACS: But, uh, I got so used to it at this point, I mean I had, like, four days in my entire trans
43 experience of ten years that, like, I'll get the right pronoun, right, from strangers.
44
- 45 AJ: [Laughs]. Oh wow.
46

1 JACS: So I'll be she at grocery store and I'll be he from behind by the time I'm at Target and as soon as
2 I turn around it's, like, "Oh, I'm so sorry." Or, you know, I mean, some days are better than
3 others but for the most part you just cope with it. And you're just, like, "Yeah, if I took a higher
4 dose of T maybe if I had top surgery, maybe if I did these things, I would pass, you know, better
5 and my life would be a little improved. You know, but I told myself from the start that when I—
6 if I was going to take T, if I was going to do anything physical, I was gonna do it for me and not to
7 prove anything to anybody else.

8
9 AJ: Hm.

10
11 JACS: And, which was not a popular decision at the time. A lot of people would harass me quite a bit. I
12 got anonymous texts messages from people and, like, emails and things being, like, "You're
13 doing this wrong." Like, "You're not a real trans person." Like, "Why are you trying to be like
14 that?" You know, once I, a year or two in, I stopped binding so tight. I mean I wore a binder that
15 was a quarter of my body.

16
17 AJ: Hm.

18
19 JACS: Like, it was so painful, like, to wear it all the time and I just started very slowly, but surely,
20 binding less tight and started to wear things I liked a little bit more. I liked wearing those
21 masculine clothes for a moment but after, like, a year, "This is kinda old. I think I kind of
22 wanna..." you know, and sort of like I went to femme and then I went to being, to trying out the
23 super masculine thing as much as I could.

24
25 AJ: Mhm.

26
27 JACS: Right? I thought I was so butch. I was...

28
29 AJ: [Laughs].

30
31 JACS: And then coming back to where I really am and who I really am, you know, cause sometimes you
32 just gotta try.

33
34 AJ: Sure.

35
36 JACS: You gotta realize...

37
38 AJ: You have to experiment.

39
40 JACS: Yeah, in order to know where you are and who you are. And so, but yeah, it was very unpopular.
41 A lot of people also they stopped gendering me correctly people who had. They're just, like,
42 "Oh, okay, so your phase is over." These are people in the gay community, right?

43
44 AJ: Oh wow.

45
46 JACS: So, like, drag shows and stuff didn't— were not always fun anymore because people were just
47 so judgey and I started doing gender bending performance, like, stuff where I showed my body

- 1 more, stuff where I wore, like, dresses and did, like, tap routines, and flapper dresses and things
2 like that. I was doing that for almost two years, uhm, before I ever did it in Cincinnati because I
3 was so worried about losing my pronoun.
4
- 5 AJ: Hm.
6
- 7 JACS: Just that one thing, it's, like, "I'm going to lose my pronoun." It's, like, where did— it just, like,
8 you're just going to lose it. It's just going to disappear.
9
- 10 AJ: [Laughs].
11
- 12 JACS: Like, my pronoun is gone! Uhm, you know, so, uh, a lot of elements about physical transition,
13 right, like, and the legitimacy attached to that have shaped some of the ways that I've
14 negotiated, uhm, the world. But it's never been enough of an incentive for me to do more
15 physical stuff. I'm just, like, yeah, it's just not where I am. And I try to help folks understand that
16 they don't have to make, like, that rigid choice. It's not like you take a full dose of T and then
17 you gotta have, like, a beard and all this kind of stuff. And then you have to have top surgery.
18 And then you have to have bottom surgery. And you have to do these things cause that's what
19 the narrative used to be, like, you had to do that, and the reality is that you don't.
20
- 21 AJ: I mean, if that's your choice.
22
- 23 JACS: Right. Yeah.
24
- 25 AJ: Yeah, absolutely.
26
- 27 JACS: It's about what feels good to you. And if you do need, for whatever reason, like for yourself, for
28 your life, you ought to be able to access those things.
29
- 30 AJ: Right.
31
- 32 JACS: You know, and about it not being about whether it's about being a legitimate trans person, it's
33 about being a person and having access to things that you need to have a good life.
34
- 35 AJ: Mhm.
36
- 37 JACS: You know, and so, cause a lot of times the whole, like, "Oh, just take more hormones because
38 you're not supposed to conform and the binary is evil." It's just the same goddamn problem as
39 the essentialists go all the way argument, right?
40
- 41 AJ: Mhm. Mhm.
42
- 43 JACS: And so it's just do what feels good to you. You have a lot of options.
44
- 45 AJ: [Laughs].
46
- 47 JACS: It would have been nice if I had had someone to tell me that when I was younger.

1
2 AJ: Yeah.
3
4 JACS: So that's why I like to tell people now. I'm, like, "Hey, you can do this or you could do that. You
5 could do all the things."
6
7 AJ: Talk to me about love and relationships.
8
9 JACS: Oh my god, girl, uh.
10
11 AJ: Romance.
12
13 JACS: Uh, or the lack thereof.
14
15 AJ: What's your sexual orientation?
16
17 JACS: Uhm, I'm queer as hell, man. Oh my god. Uhm, partnering is something that is such a trail and
18 tribulation for me because, especially since in Cincinnati there's, like, eight trans people, right?
19 Uhm.
20
21 AJ: Mhm. [Laughs].
22
23 JACS: No, not really, but at the time when I was first coming out there was three of us. Three of us.
24
25 AJ: That's how you felt about it.
26
27 JACS: I was— well I should say there was three visible people. There was much more. It was just there
28 was three of us in the gay scene.
29
30 AJ: Mhm.
31
32 JACS: Agale and myself and another trans masculine person. Uhm, and of course we all, like, talked to
33 each other. Uhm, uhm, anyway, yeah, so, at this point in my life, I found pretty private about my
34 personal life when it comes to partnering and things like that. So, uhm, I'm going to be speaking
35 primarily in generalities but, uhm...
36
37 AJ: Okay, that's fine.
38
39 JACS: ... It's very difficult to find partners in general especially if you tend to partner with queer and
40 trans people, which is what I do.
41
42 AJ: Mhm.
43
44 JACS: Uhm, a lot of times I will think to myself, "Man, how nice would it have been—" The only time I
45 think about what I would have rather have been is usually partnering. It's this, like, "Man, if I
46 was, like, a straight woman, like, you'd just like marry some dude, you know, like, whether they

1 were trans or cis. Like, just marry some dude and be, like, this pretty housewife. I'd be so good
2 at that.
3
4 AJ: Mhm.
5
6 JACS: Like, I'm very domestic.
7
8 AJ: [Laughs].
9
10 JACS: It would be great, really. I'd be, like, "Yeah, I made you dinner and in-between cooking the roast
11 and making this pie, you know, I solved the system of oppression issue," you know. That's what
12 I'd be doing, like, in the house!"
13
14 AJ: [Laughs].
15
16 JACS: Uhm, you know, or the complexities of being someone who's a little more masculine presenting,
17 like butch, I use he pronoun, and— but if I'm going to date men, like, what does that mean for
18 them? And the frustration of having people walk up to you and being, like, "I'm so into you, and
19 I don't know what that means for me." Or, "I'm so concerned about— I don't know what to do.
20 I'm attracted to you." I'm just like, "That's not sexy." Like, don't try to pick me up by telling me
21 how confused you are.
22
23 AJ: [Laughs].
24
25 JACS: Like, that's not a benefit to me. Don't try to take me on a date and ask me to explain your sexual
26 orientation to you.
27
28 AJ: Right.
29
30 JACS: Like, because I'm in the middle and so, you know, it's like well, "I don't have the body parts you
31 might want me to have. I don't have the personality traits you might be looking for. I don't know
32 if I have anything you're actually looking for because you are so confused about your attraction
33 to me, I think I'm just going to leave you alone." You know, and so, uhm, and then the
34 exotification of it where people are just so fascinated by, like, what you are. It's like I don't want
35 to partner like that. Like, I don't want a partner I have to teach about myself or my body, like,
36 beyond what's reasonable and understandable.
37
38 AJ: Mhm.
39
40 JACS: Right? And so, yeah, uh, and then when you're living in an environment where you're— I was
41 responsible for one-hundred percent of the trans community's resources and a lot of the queer
42 ones as well. So it's like I'm not going to date people in the groups that I run. Like, it's unethical.
43 You know, I'm not going to date someone who calls my helpline for support on a regular basis
44 cause that's me on the other end of the line telling them how to find a doctor or telling them
45 how to cope with depression. Like, I'm not going to date that person. Like, there's a power
46 dynamic there, and so when you're the provider for a very small community, I mean it is a

1 million and a half or so people, you know, locally. And then the people who are outside of the
2 state wasn't as much of an issue, right, because they don't live where I live.

3
4 AJ: Mhm.

5
6 JACS: But, even going to conferences, like, it's like, well you're attending my workshops, wait, can I ask
7 you on a date? How old are you? Oh, you're seventeen. Okay, this is awkward.

8
9 AJ: [Laughs].

10
11 JACS: You know, so, my desperate search for privacy and peace, you know, behind the veil of feeling
12 like I always have to be talking about trans stuff, and, you know, I feel this need to be working all
13 of the time and trying to carve out a personal life and that is something I've been thinking a lot
14 more, uhm, about the last couple of years. Like, "Hey, you deserve a life too." Like, "You don't
15 have to work all the time."

16
17 AJ: Mhm.

18
19 JACS: And you deserve to find a partner and it's not, like, a terrible thing if you are in a social space
20 with someone who has attended one of your workshops. Like, this doesn't mean you're a bad
21 organizer.

22
23 AJ: Right.

24
25 JACS: You know, and so, uhm, so yeah, trying to negotiate that because I think there is an expectation
26 for anyone who is a leader in the community that you're either entirely accessible in every single
27 way physically, emotionally, psychologically, or you are completely inaccessible and no one can
28 ever touch you. Like, there's not like an in-between where you get to be a person. And that's my
29 perception of it, right, like, I know that there's plenty of people who in the community are, are
30 not conceiving it in that way, it's just that's how I have often felt, especially because working in,
31 you know, my entire career has been in the southern Midwest until this point. If I went outside
32 of those things the backlash I would receive. Like, if I was out having a personal life, there came
33 a point where I had to provide services to so many people in the community. There wasn't a
34 sense of privacy, and people would try to be like, people would be getting resources from me at,
35 like, the bar. And of course I'm going to do it because that's how— I'm not going to be like, "It's
36 my personal time right now. Stop having a crisis."

37
38 AJ: [Laughs]. Right.

39
40 JACS: Like, you're not going to say that, you know.

41
42 AJ: Uhuh.

43
44 JACS: And— or this idea, is like, if you date someone and it doesn't work out, like, the judgements that
45 come at you, which, I mean, I'm best friends with the majority of my former partners. And so
46 the frustration is just like, "We're having coffee right now like hanging out being friends, like,
47 and you're there judging us, like pretending that I'm this monster for breaking this person's

1 heart or this person's whatever." Uhm, and so it's like when you date people it's like well who is
2 going to find out about it? What are people going to say? And how does that come back to your
3 work. It's like, "Oh well, you know, like, JAC Stringer, did you hear about what happened with his
4 last partner?" Like, "Don't go to him for healthcare." Like, "Don't ask him for healthcare
5 resources." Uhm, cause that happens. You know, and so, then you're like balancing your
6 responsibility to the community with, you know, this— the older I got, the harder it became to
7 have a personal life.

8
9 AJ: Mhm.

10
11 JACS: Like once I hit twenty-five it became very difficult. Before that it was, like, so much easier. And
12 then dating people within the trans community, uhm, that I'm serving with all of those
13 boundaries and the rare case you actually get to meet someone and you can connect and you
14 want to have a relationship, the anger that comes from other trans people and it's like why are
15 you so angry? Like, I'm a person too.

16
17 AJ: Yeah.

18
19 JACS: I want relationships and I deserve love. I can't work for you all of the time. It doesn't mean that,
20 yeah, I mean, yeah, I like this person better than you clearly because I'm dating them but we
21 have a different relationship. You know, things like that. And I've experienced uh, a very, uhm, a
22 lot of violence as a result. Like, uh, a person from one of the trans groups started stalking me
23 really aggressively like four years ago. And it caused a lot of issues where it's like people have
24 this expectation that you belong to them because you're their organizer.

25
26 AJ: Mhm.

27
28 JACS: And your personal relationships then automatically have belong to them too.

29
30 AJ: Hm.

31
32 JACS: And your partners have to belong to them and, even with my kid, like, people come up to my kid
33 at community events and things like that and know who he is cause they've seen him on my
34 facebook.

35
36 AJ: Right.

37
38 JACS: And he is an organizer in his own right, right?

39
40 AJ: Mhm.

41
42 JACS: So, uhm, but it's like this weird thing where it's just like the public doesn't own us. It's like— and
43 we're not celebrities. We're not famous.

44
45 AJ: Right. [Laughs].

46
47 JACS: Like, we're just organizers like anybody else.

1
2 AJ: Yeah.
3
4 JACS: But the way that people will interact with you is very frustrating sometimes so that's kind of...
5 I'm trying to negotiate like how to have a personal life and a private life, uhm, and partnering
6 and being able to find partners.
7
8 AJ: Mhm.
9
10 JACS: Because when you live somewhere where there's no one to date you just don't date. And so I
11 then I also have this reputation where I just never date anyone. And they're just like, "Oh JAC
12 just doesn't date." And it's like, "I would date!"
13
14 AJ: [Laughs].
15
16 JACS: If I could find someone to date. Oh man. So, yeah, I sometimes wonder how, like, trans people
17 do it. Like, "How do you find dates? Where do you find people?"
18
19 AJ: Yeah, well, back to that world wide web thing where we talked a little bit about— uhm, what do
20 you think the relationship is like between the L, the G, and the B... and the T...
21
22 JACS: Like—
23
24 AJ: ... in your own experience.
25
26 JACS: those three with us?
27
28 AJ: LGB. Yes.
29
30 JACS: Okay. Uhm, a little messy. A lot of ingratitude. You know, say it. Uhm, I feel like a lot of, like a lot
31 of trans people, I put a lot of emphasis on the fact that gender non-conforming people, whether
32 they be trans or existing before the word trans existed, like we get the brunt of it because we
33 are the most visible.
34
35 AJ: Mhm.
36
37 JACS: As a result we're usually the ones who get pushed farthest first. So we're the ones who do a lot
38 of activism first. You know, and so, I mean, that's the gay movement. You know, like, and a lot of
39 people even historically forget that that was trans people because at the time there was no
40 word for trans. Everybody was gay.
41
42 AJ: Right.
43
44 JACS: Like, whether you were trans or not, like gender non-conforming, gender conforming,
45 everybody was gay. There was no difference. And, you know, lesbianism did come in at that
46 time so then there was gays and lesbians, but it was just this like, so, no, yeah, there's nothing
47 about, like, trans activists, like, early on because there was no such thing as trans. Everybody

1 was gay. And so, uhm, that erasure then coupled with this systematic push for normalcy, like,
2 just completely pushes people who aren't normal, a.k.a. people who are gender non-conforming
3 out. Uhm, it's the reason why we struggle so much. We have been strategically abandoned by
4 our movement for decades, and a lot of people have a lot of great intentions like good for them.
5 You know, like, I know it sounds very dismissive.

6
7 AJ: Mhm.

8
9 JACS: I have a lot of cis people in my life who are extremely valuable to me...

10
11 AJ: Yes.

12
13 JACS: and I love them and they do great stuff, like including, I have many straight identified people
14 who are cis in my life as well. It doesn't change the fact that systematically, historically trans
15 people have been at the bottom. We've been walked on. Our work gets fucking stolen from us.
16 We will run people's projects and then as soon as it's a success, like, the gay movement takes it.

17
18 AJ: Mhm.

19
20 JACS: You know, or we're doing all of this work to usually to meet our own community's needs
21 because none of us have anything and then you have these large organizations, especially now
22 that trans is becoming more popular, you have large organizations putting in funding specifically
23 for trans services. Not doing the work for trans people but then being able to, you know, by
24 being side by side, by being nearby, by being in the same community as trans organizers doing
25 the work claiming back work.

26
27 AJ: Hm.

28
29 JACS: It's like, yeah we have more trans people showing up to our programs. We're not going to
30 mention the fact that it's because there's a trans support group they opened up six blocks away
31 and now there's more trans people coming out who feel more able to access resources. They
32 wouldn't be at our office if they weren't already over there.

33
34 AJ: Sure.

35
36 JACS: You know, and so, and I can't— you know, asking us to do things for free or for every little
37 money, and we will do it because we're desperate. I'll take any paycheck somebody is willing to
38 give me.

39
40 AJ: Mhm.

41
42 JACS: And I have many friends and colleagues especially who are coastal, I mean all of them are
43 coastal who are able to get paid more, and they're just like, "Just don't, just don't do the work if
44 they don't pay you." It's like, "That's easy for you to say because you live in a city that has six
45 different trans inclusive shelters."

46
47 AJ: Mhm.

1
2 JACS: "You live in a city that has a trans youth group for, like, every three neighborhoods."
3

4 AJ: Right.
5

6 JACS: I don't have that where I live. Either I do this work or people die. So I'm going to get fed or I'm
7 not going to get fed but either way the work is going to get done. You know and so you don't
8 have the flexibility to not do the work. So if someone is not going to pay you, you just do the
9 work, and then people know that you'll do the work without paying you. And so, then when you
10 ask to be paid, you're— it's like an insult.
11

12 AJ: Mhm.
13

14 JACS: They're like, "How dare you ask us to pay you. I'm a volunteer." "Yeah, you also have a full-time
15 job. You work in an office. You run your own business. Yeah, you volunteer. I don't volunteer.
16 Like, this is my job that I don't get paid for. You know, and so, I think there's a major issue of
17 exploitation by LGBT people or trans people, and they're not necessarily doing it on purpose. I
18 use the word necessarily because I don't think that some of these people can possibly *not* see
19 what they're doing.
20

21 AJ: Mhm.
22

23 JACS: I just can't believe it. And I believe the best out of people for better or worse in a lot of
24 situations, like, I'm so trusting and I've become so jaded and yet I don't know how I'm so
25 trusting and then becoming more jaded. Like, just stop being trusting. Maybe you should do
26 that, right? Uhm, but it's like, "How do these people not know when you have trans people
27 coming up to you saying, "You're taking our shit. Please give it back." You know, of course, you
28 know, as a native person also, like, it's kind of the same attitude. It's just like, "You took our shit.
29 Give it back." You know, and nobody gives us our shit back. So, you know, I often think about
30 that, especially when I was coming out as trans, and thinking about, "Man, people are taking a
31 lot of my shit. Why does this sound familiar?" [Laughs]. So this idea that, you know, we are, now
32 we're a commodity, actually, you know. We used to be invisible, and then we became
33 disposable, and now we're a commodity but we're exchangeable. So, you know, organizations
34 will hire a trans person, usually someone who is super green, you know, young...
35

36 AJ: Mhm.
37

38 JACS: usually a person of color if they can get one...
39

40 AJ: Mhm.
41

42 JACS: ... they will use them up, tot them around, put them on their grant application that— that this
43 trans activist didn't get to write, didn't get to have a lot of input on.
44

45 AJ: Right.
46

1 JACS: But they are on the application. They're in the picture on the website. And then they get
2 completely burnt out and then they just get tossed and then the person just gives up on activism
3 because they're burnt out and they had no coping skills and no professional development to be
4 able to know, "What do I do when I get burnt out?" cause they're isolated from other trans
5 people because, as they got adopted, if you will, you know, coopted, like, plucked out of the
6 community by this cis LGB organization, all the trans people who are in the trenches get mad at
7 them cause, like, what are you doing with that organization, like, they suck.

8
9 AJ: Right.

10
11 JACS: Like, why are you working for them?

12
13 AJ: I know.

14
15 JACS: Like, shame on you. At the same time, that person is like, "Well, I, I thought it was a good
16 opportunity or real. I needed to get paid."

17
18 AJ: "I like food." Yeah. [Laughs].

19
20 JACS: Yeah, like, "I needed a job. So I thought that maybe— and it's always the same. You know, we
21 get hired. We think we can make a difference in that organization. And the system ends up
22 being too strong, and they just end up beating the shit out of us until we either quit or we get
23 fired, you know, and then we'll still apply to these jobs because we're desperate for housing and
24 for food, basic resources, and they'll tow us along through, like, six interviews and then in the
25 end they'll hire someone cis. And they'll tell us the same thing, which is, "We found another
26 candidate, you know, we really were seriously consid— we were really considering you but we
27 found someone who just had a little more experience. And recently that happened to me cause
28 I— I mean, I've been self-employed for almost ten years, like, running my own organization.

29
30 AJ: Oh. Okay.

31
32 JACS: And it completely gutted me financially and physically and emotionally, and so I'm just like, "I
33 don't have a choice. I gotta apply to some of these organizations and try and get a job..."

34
35 AJ: Mhm.

36
37 JACS: "... because I'm, without any exaggeration, living hungry to the point where might start starving,
38 like, I need to make money." Like, I have to, and, you know, you go through these ordeals with
39 these people who are so impressed with your work, so impressed.

40
41 AJ: Mhm.

42
43 JACS: It's really amazing. "Can you tell us about how you did all of this? Like, you did it by yourself?
44 Like, did you have a board?"

45
46 "Nope."
47

1 "Well who are your funders?"

2

3 "I didn't have any."

4

5 "So how did you do it?"

6

7 "Is this about the job or are you asking about me?"

8

9 AJ: Right. [Laughs].

10

11 JACS: You know, and they're just so fascinated and so I got put through the ringer for two different
12 positions at the same agency and afterwards I was just like, "I got nothing to lose. I'm just going
13 to tell you what just happened." And I was just like, "Look, I'm sure that you feel that your new
14 candidate has, you know, is maybe more qualified than me. Maybe I sound presumptuous that
15 they're probably not." Because I actually was overqualified for the position in the first place. I
16 was like, "This is entry. I've been doing this ten years. Like, ten years. And I'm doing an entry
17 level position that I am, that I have done this job before. I invented the job in my town. Like I
18 made the job into a job."

19

20 AJ: Right. [Laughs].

21

22 JACS: "And you don't think that I qualify to do this job in your agency that has had this position for two
23 years, and I've been doing it for ten." And, like, the thing is that with trans activists and trans
24 people in general, people are willing to tell us that we are skilled, that we are brave, you know,
25 that we're accomplished...

26

27 AJ: Mhm.

28

29 JACS: ... and how impressive we are and how empowering our work is but we are not hireable...

30

31 AJ: Hm.

32

33 JACS: ... because we have too much to say. They don't want someone who is going to talk back. They
34 want someone who is going to mimic their organization.

35

36 AJ: Mhm.

37

38 JACS: And so, I know that this is a very extreme portrait of the LGBT movement but the thing is that
39 it's easy to see the good things that the LGB movement is doing. Like, and that's great. Let's see
40 them, but if we don't keep talking about the shitty things the movement is doing, we're going to
41 start thinking that it isn't happening because the more and more and more trans people that get
42 visibility, the more popular our movement becomes, the less likely people are going to want to
43 rock the boat.

44

45 AJ: Mhm.

46

1 JACS: And so sometimes you just gotta be unpopular. It's the same thing as when the movement was
2 first getting momentum. People wanted to be so accommodating. "Sure, we'll take this
3 diagnosis. Sure, you know, we'll take this backseat." Like, we'll take these things because we are
4 so desperate just to survive. And we're in the same place now. The only difference is that there
5 is even more at stake because more of us are out. Like, we just have, we have to do better. So I
6 think that it's worth it for some of us to be really unpopular with LGB people and to be
7 considered to be mean or radical.

8
9 AJ: Mhm.

10
11 JACS: My nickname in Cincinnati is the Bulldog.

12
13 AJ: The Bulldog? [Laughs].

14
15 JACS: Yeah. I was so hurt when I first heard it. My feeling were so hurt. And I was just like, "You know
16 what? Maybe I need to use this. If they think I'm going to bit on to something and not let go,
17 they already expect it. I'm just going to throw a couple of loops."

18
19 AJ: [Laughs.]

20
21 JACS: Like, I'm— you know, cause the thing that is so funny is on the national circuit, I'm considered to
22 be so nice and so cautious...

23
24 AJ: [Laughs].

25
26 JACS: ... like, anyone I work with, especially cis people, they're just like, "Wow, you know, you're a
27 little more approachable than your colleagues," which in my head I'm just like, "You are such a
28 fucking asshole."

29
30 AJ: [Laughs]. I know, right?

31
32 JACS: I'm equally approachable. It's just you haven't spoken to me before. Oh and also I have white
33 skin. There's a reason why you think I'm more approachable. Uhm, now there's like only one cis
34 person who has ever told me that I'm more approachable, to be honest. It doesn't happen very
35 often but, it's like, still when you're in a conservative environment and you're saying things
36 people don't want to hear, like, no matter where you are, it's gonna suck, but especially for
37 people who are, like, so tight fisted. They're so rooted in their systems. Whereas here when I
38 said that to the agency, I was shocked that one person got back to me. And they were like,
39 "Yeah, you are absolutely right." And I sent all of this to the board, and I sent this to the director
40 and I really hope they are going to do something, but they didn't.

41
42 AJ: Hm.

43
44 JACS: You know, but at least— there was one employee at that agency who flat out was like, "You are
45 right." And I was like, "What?" So there are cis people out there in the LGB movement who are
46 really wanting to listen to trans people and working on learning how to do it but it's not enough
47 of them. Like, they aren't— they aren't usually the ones in power.

1
2 AJ: Hm.
3
4 JACS: You know, so, yeah.
5
6 AJ: Uhm, last question.
7
8 JACS: Yeah.
9
10 AJ: Where do you see the, the trans community in fifty years?
11
12 JACS: Oh, wow. When I think about the trans community in fifty years, I think about what I want to
13 see. And then I try and pick out what I'm likely to see.
14
15 AJ: Mhm, okay.
16
17 JACS: You know?
18
19 AJ: Good, good way to process that.
20
21 JACS: Right, yeah. You know, cause we have so much disappointment all the time. And I try to keep in
22 mind that in the ten years that I've been out, which is not very long. Now that the ten years
23 have come I really realize how it really hasn't been very long.
24
25 AJ: Ten years is ten years.
26
27 JACS: Yeah, that's true.
28
29 AJ: It's a decade.
30
31 JACS: Yeah, it's a decade. It's weird.
32
33 AJ: It's, it's, it's something. Don't discount it.
34
35 JACS: Oh, thank you. Thank you for— thanks for bumping me up from that self-deprecation, right?
36
37 AJ: Absolutely. Yeah.
38
39 JACS: Uhm, I— the difference, even, from when I first came out to like five years later, how many
40 trans people were around— how many people were using words like genderqueer, you know,
41 how many people were talking about stuff like de-pathologization. Just in a very short time
42 where there was no conversation except in dark corners and, like, tiny pockets of the internet.
43
44 AJ: Mhm.
45
46 JACS: Or pockets on the coast. I mean I was in the Midwest. I don't know what the coast was talking
47 about but I assume they were talking about it right?

1
2 AJ: Mhm.
3
4 JACS: Cause otherwise it wouldn't have trickled into the Midwest if the coasts weren't talking about it.
5 And so if what could happen in four years, if what could happen in ten years, in fifty years, it's
6 like, well, like, will we have a world where we don't care about bathroom policy? I would hope
7 so.
8
9 AJ: Mhm.
10
11 JACS: I mean there's a lot of places in Europe where that's already normalized to have all gender
12 bathrooms. Theoretically, that could exist, right? Theoretically we could have school systems
13 that youth don't have to worry about their pronouns and their names.
14
15 AJ: Mhm.
16
17 JACS: We'll have human resources that are, that are trained to address trans needs. I think that that's
18 probably realistic to expect in fifty years that agencies are no longer going to be completely
19 incompetent with trans stuff but the thing is that Stonewall was a long ass time ago and your
20 average agencies still have shaky, at best, competency when it comes to LGB stuff.
21
22 AJ: Right. [Laughs].
23
24 JACS: Or I should just say G stuff, right?
25
26 AJ: Yeah.
27
28 JACS: So, but you're like, "Oh, well it's a different time and things are more progressive and now
29 people are really trying to do better, which is true. You know, now people are doing the work
30 that they should have done, you know, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years ago, right? So, right now
31 is not the same as, like, the seventies and the eighties. I recognize that culturally, but I— I think
32 it shows that while I believe wholeheartedly that in fifty years more trans people are going to be
33 making it, whether or not that's because society is doing better or our community is stronger,
34 it's hard for me to pick. I have so little faith, I think, in the system.
35
36 AJ: Mhm.
37
38 JACS: But I have so much undying faith in the trans community.
39
40 AJ: Mmm.
41
42 JACS: So I think that any changes that are going to happen we're going to make happen.
43
44 AJ: Wow.
45
46 JACS: And we're going to push for them, and we're going to be like, "Look, we're not going to let you
47 do these things anymore. You have to do them. You have to have a gender policy in your school.

1 You have to give us access to these bathrooms. You have to make it so people are not murdering
2 us every single day.
3
4 AJ: Yes.
5
6 JACS: And the only reason why our movement has gotten to where it is because somehow, and I
7 don't think it's because of liberalism of the society, I think it's through the hard work and sweat
8 and tears of trans people, particularly, like, trans women of color...
9
10 AJ: Mhm.
11
12 JACS: ... that trans people have been able to do things like access education and talk about what's
13 going on in our communities and how it relates to what's going on in the rest of the world. Yeah,
14 you've got more middle-class kids going to college and come out and, therefore, you have white
15 middle class people who can get jobs and they can talk about trans stuff and sound academic
16 and educated. And the people legitimize that...
17
18 AJ: Mhm.
19
20 JACS: ... but none of that shit would happen if there weren't angry people yelling in the streets first.
21
22 AJ: Absolutely.
23
24 JACS: Right? So I think that, still, as things go on there's still going to be issues about people not being
25 trans enough, about people being too visible, about people being too gender nonconforming,
26 about people not being satisfied with the bones that they throw to us, about trans people still
27 needing some kind of psychological evaluation to get basic medical care. Uhm, I think that those
28 are likely still going to be looming in fifty years, but I'm hoping that trans people will have gotten
29 enough momentum and enough of us will be surviving by that point that it's really going to be
30 on the outs in a real way.
31
32 AJ: Hm.
33
34 JACS: Because, part of the reason why our movement has taken so long is because none of us were
35 making it. You know, the AIDs crisis had a huge impact on the trans community but nobody ever
36 talks about that.
37
38 AJ: That's very true.
39
40 JACS: So now, we're looking at a point where more young trans people are surviving to kind of fill that
41 huge gap that particularly trans women were lost in.
42
43 AJ: Mhm.
44
45 JACS: You know, they just all died, and so we're just like, we're trying to refill that giant hole that our
46 community has and I'm hoping that means in fifty years a lot more stuff will be done and a lot
47 more of us will exist and people will just kind of fall in line because they don't have a choice.

1 There's just so many of us cause that's kind of what's happening now. Human services aren't
2 becoming more trans competent because they want to. It's because they got a lot of trans
3 clients, and they're worried about getting sued.

4
5 AJ: People are coming out.

6
7 JACS: It's not, like, out of the goodness of their hearts so I think in fifty years it's not going to be, you
8 know, a charitable altruistic thing that society gets better. I think trans people are just gonna
9 keep pushing harder and harder, and I hope, I hope that this trend of trans normalization where
10 trans people being bright, shiny, white-toothed, you know, corporate people isn't going to put a
11 dent in that cause that's the biggest threat to our community right now is trans people who
12 have more privilege and more access to resources deciding they don't have to give a damn
13 about anybody except themselves. They don't have to lobby about healthcare. They don't have
14 to vote for representatives who are going to be inclusive of trans people or even something they
15 don't connect to themselves like Planned Parenthood, which provides healthcare to hundreds
16 and hundreds of trans people across the country every day, right?

17
18 AJ: Mhm.

19
20 JACS: Our biggest enemy, in a lot of ways, is ourselves. You know, and it's not the same case as back in
21 the day we had to sign onto a pathologization. We had to sign on to being hidden, to being
22 erased because we were gonna die. The people were murdering us, like, systematically. Putting
23 us in jail and in mental health institutions. We're still being murdered now but it's, like, not
24 necessarily societally, uhm, supported in the same way. It's like this, sort of like racism. It's like
25 technically you're not supposed to be racist.

26
27 AJ: Mhm.

28
29 JACS: But everybody is. Technically you're not supposed to be transphobic. We recognize this now.
30 We understand it. Doesn't mean people aren't still murdering trans people with no
31 accountability all of the time.

32
33 AJ: Right.

34
35 JACS: So if we have trans folks who participate in that system then these trans folks who are being
36 murdered or who are being kicked out of their houses or continuing to be unable to find
37 employment or can't get healthcare and are dying of basic, like, health concerns, if these trans
38 people are not willing to see that and change their lives and challenge the system they're in and
39 getting privilege from, it's not going to change for those people either. Like, we're still going to
40 be where we are. It's just there's gonna be more trans people with more privilege. And that's
41 what I don't want to see in fifty years. So yeah.

42
43 AJ: Alright. And JAC drops the mic. Bam!

44
45 JACS: [Laughs].

46
47 AJ: [Laughs]. Thank you.

1

2 JACS: Thank you! I'm so honored to have been invited to do this. Like, when you emailed me, I was
3 like, this is not exaggeration, I was like, "What?! Yes!"

4

5 AJ: [Laughs.] Alright. Thank you.

6

7 JACS: Thank you.

8

9 AJ: Thank you, JAC.