

André Pérez  
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins  
Interviewer

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

October 20, 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 André Pérez -RA

3

4 AJ: So, hello again. My name is Andrea Jenkins. I am the oral historian with the Transgender Oral  
5 History Project for the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota. Today, is October 20,  
6 2016, and I'm here today with André Pérez, who himself is an oral historian. So, it's really an  
7 honor and pleasure to be with you today. How are you?

8 AP: I'm excellent. I'm excited to be here with you too. This is a first for me, so . . .

9 AJ: Yeah, absolutely, thank you. Can you, André, state your name and pronunciation, and spell it, so  
10 that we make sure we have it properly spelled in our transcripts, and state your gender identity  
11 as it is today, your gender assigned at birth, and your pronouns that you use.

12 AP: My name is André Pérez, that is A-n-d-r-é P-é-r-e-z with an accent on the last "e" of the first  
13 name and an accent on the first "e" in my last name. My pronouns are he or they and I identify  
14 as transgender or trans. I was assigned female at birth . . . and I feel like there's something I'm  
15 missing.

16 AJ: Pronouns, did you say? You said your pronouns – I think you're there, you got it all. Nailed it.

17 AP: Got it.

18 AJ: Can you tell me about your earliest memory in life? And just, (a) it does not have to be anything  
19 about trans identity, and whatever your earliest memory is – if it was last week, then that's your  
20 earliest memory. Just trying to get your memory bank open, that's what we're trying to do.

21 AP: OK. My first memory was being 11 and . . . I think often when I remember things I remember  
22 just sort of a fleeting moment as opposed to really having a narrative arc, that's also how I  
23 dream, which is kind of interesting. But, I just remember being at a friend's house and it was  
24 Halloween and we were getting ready to leave and I remember her coming around the corner  
25 and I hadn't seen her yet. She was wearing this sort of pleated skirt and this cheerleader outfit  
26 and she had this hatchet sticking out of the side of her head. It had this blood, this gory looking  
27 thing – there's blood that was dripping down into her face. I just remember it because I was not  
28 allowed to have props as part of my Halloween costume and so I was jealous and I was like, "Oh,  
29 man, that's so cool."

30 AJ: Oh, wow. So, that was your first memory, huh? Halloween is coming up again pretty soon here.  
31 What are you going to do . . . do you get into Halloween? Do you go to parties nowadays?

32 AP: No, not really. Well, for this Halloween, I'm going to be on tour so I'm actually going to be in  
33 Atlanta, Georgia, and . . . yeah.

34 AJ: When you say "on tour" what does that mean? What kind of tour?

35 AP: I guess I started the Trans Oral History Project about eight years ago, but in the last couple of  
36 years I've really started to focus more in terms of documentary work and really still wanting to  
37 focus on trans people and trans lives and how do we share that in a way that's educational but

1       also that really values people's individuals experiences and storytelling. So, I'm working on a  
2       web series called, "America in Transition," and the idea was really wanting to flip the script and  
3       say that for so many years we've focused on trans people's stories as this individual experience  
4       and this internal struggle with someone's own body and that I really think that that is a terrible  
5       way to tell the story of trans people – or it's a very small and myopic way to tell the story of  
6       trans people. I think that really the story that people need to hear and need to be attuned to is  
7       this social story – like what is the social experience of transness, how people exist in the world  
8       as part of culture, and also how society is changing. So, that's where the name comes from –  
9       recognizing that we're in this moment in which America is really changing and what does that  
10      look like, and all the messiness that that entails. I think that is something that I really love about  
11      history and oral histories, I think that when we look . . . I just remember learning history in this  
12      very linear way and I think that it inhibits us from actually being able to understand the world  
13      around us. So, it's like when we say, "Martin Luther King, there were slaves and then Abraham  
14      Lincoln freed the slaves and then some Black people didn't have rights, and then Martin Luther  
15      King came and now Black people have rights." We arrive in this moment, we arrive at Ferguson,  
16      and we have 80% of Black America who says this is about race and 80% of white America says  
17      this has nothing to do with race, "Race is done, Martin Luther King came, we have the story."

18    AJ:     Yeah.

19    AP:     So, I think that . . . that's why I'm really excited about this moment and really getting into the  
20      heart of it because actually there is so much . . . there's tension and everything doesn't change  
21      for everyone all at once. And then, I think, actually when you start to explore like why are  
22      people's lives different within a community, I think you really start to understand a lot more  
23      about how our society operates and, I think, lessons that you can go from community to  
24      community and you can understand like, "Oh, look at this class thing," and how does class  
25      impact people in the trans community. I think that that has lessons for lots of other  
26      communities about how class impacts those communities also. Sorry, I just totally got into the  
27      theory thing.

28    AJ:     That's perfect, thank you.

29    AP:     But that's to say I'm working on this web series and we first started it about two years ago. I  
30      had this idea like what if we did interviews with trans people but more so focused on social  
31      issues and each episode focuses on a different person in a different place – and what if we did  
32      that and that was a way of telling the story of our country in this moment.

33    AJ:     Wow.

34    AP:     And so, I started seeking funding and stuff and, of course, that took forever, but we actually just  
35      got a grant from Sundance and the Arcus Foundation in order to do the next three episodes.

36    AJ:     Nice, very nice.

37    AP:     And so, I feel really excited to have the opportunity to do that. And so, right now I'm getting  
38      ready to go. I've finished one episode. The first one is about Tiommi Luckett. It focuses on a  
39      trans woman living in Arkansas and about HIV criminalization.

- 1 AJ: Yeah, she's a HIV/AIDS activist.
- 2 AP: Yeah, and she's great. She's beautiful, she's smart, she's so poignant. I feel like . . . her words  
3 just cut me all the time. I just feel like she goes to the heart of it. So, we're going to be going on  
4 tour with . . . I'm going to be going on tour with her and with this series and so we're going to be  
5 doing screening, doing workshops, going to colleges and universities, and stopping with  
6 community members.
- 7 AJ: So, she was in the first episode?
- 8 AP: Yes. Yeah, it centers around her and her struggle. And, so yeah, I'm going to be going  
9 tomorrow, in fact. I'm going to be waking up early and going to North Carolina Trans Pride  
10 where we're going to be shooting the second episode which is about legislating hate, it's about  
11 HB2, but generally about civil rights – the civil rights moment for trans people in the south.
- 12 AJ: Is the Pride celebration tomorrow or . . .?
- 13 AP: It's on Friday . . . or, it's on Saturday.
- 14 AJ: On Saturday, OK. So, you're giving yourself enough time to get into town, get set-up, get your  
15 crew all set-up and everything.
- 16 AP: Yeah.
- 17 AJ: That's awesome. How long is this tour?
- 18 AP: It's going to be two weeks. So, I'm going to start . . . we're going to shoot for three days in North  
19 Carolina and then we're going to be heading out to Memphis, the Rhodes College in Memphis.  
20 I'm going to be speaking there. Basically, you know, we're going to go through each state, we're  
21 going to be spending some time . . . I wanted to have both a combination of sparking dialogue  
22 and also being able to present this thing that I've been working on. For me, I'm really interested  
23 in short form because I think that after eight years of doing the oral history project, I wanted to  
24 kind of take it to the next level and I was like, "What does that mean?"
- 25 AJ: Yeah, what does that mean?
- 26 AP: I felt this push of a lot of people – like, "Oh, you should make a feature length documentary." I  
27 was like maybe, but at the same time there are a lot of really amazing feature length  
28 documentaries, but at the same time I feel more excited about short content because I feel like  
29 it's more modern, it's more of how people live their lives, more people consume it. I think  
30 there's also a very particular cultural context of the feature length documentary, which is to say  
31 a lot of liberal people watch them and a lot of people don't. There's very particular people who  
32 watch them – people who are educated, people who are predominantly white, people who are  
33 not part of the communities that the documentary is about – ever. And, this is also informed by  
34 having worked at Story Corps, which is an amazing organization in so many ways, but I think the  
35 predominant way that Story Corps reaches audiences is through NPR.
- 36 AJ: And those are the five-minute segments? Or, are they even that long?

1 AP: They are not that long. They are three to three-and-a-half minutes long. It's like Story Corps  
2 does something that I really admire, which is popularizing oral history, right, and they have this  
3 scale that is incredible in terms of how they can record. I've recorded with over 500 people,  
4 that's amazing.

5 AJ: Yeah, that's incredible.

6 AP: And when I think about Story Corps as an entity, I think that there will be a million stories  
7 recorded by the time I die as part of Story Corps, that the fabric of our society will be so much  
8 better documented because of it – and a lot of different aspects of our society, like the API  
9 community and the Black community and the trans community, the queer community . . . all  
10 these other communities. But, at the same time I think that when your predominant venue for  
11 showing that work and reaching people in terms of your product, I guess, or your outcome, is an  
12 institution that is already so narrow, then it makes you start . . . I just reached a point where I  
13 was like, "My mom will never watch NPR." My mom is a poor white uneducated person. She  
14 doesn't listen to radio, she never has, she never wants to – it sounds boring to her. My partner  
15 is a Black woman who is like, "I do not want a white man to narrate the world to me and that's  
16 what NPR is."

17 AJ: Right.

18 AP: Right? So, the people who are actually . . . my neighbors are all these little old ladies who are  
19 Puerto Rican and I'm like, "The abuelitas are not listening to NPR." So, I'm like, "Who am I  
20 making this for?" And so, that's why I'm excited about doing something that kind of breaks  
21 some of the conventions of documentary. In my ideal world, I'd like to bring the best together  
22 of like journalism, which is very in the moment and does a great job. I think of being current, a  
23 lot of different kinds of people watch news and journalism, but at the same time it can lack a lot  
24 of context. It's not in-depth – like investigative journalism is getting more and more rare. And  
25 so, to do something that is as thoughtful and insightful and in-depth as documentary can be, but  
26 then also something that can try to also be current. I'm in a community that is changing, the  
27 world is different for trans people today than it was yesterday, it will be different tomorrow.  
28 When I try to think about the average documentary, especially independent documentaries, it  
29 takes five years – three years, four years, five years.

30 AJ: Right.

31 AP: And I think about where the trans community will be in five years – I can't imagine that. That is  
32 just . . . I can't make media that will matter in that moment because I can only really imagine  
33 this moment and maybe a couple moments ahead.

34 AJ: So, these shorts will be available online?

35 AP: Yes. So, the idea is to get . . .

36 AJ: So, will your mom watch it online? Will the abuelitas watch it online? That's a very particular  
37 audience too, right, that uses computers and, I would say, it's a very growing and young  
38 audience, but it's a very particular group of people who you are targeting.

1 AP: It's true, and that's why . . . so part of the idea is to do this web series . . . there's kind of three  
2 parts. There's the web series and then there's an interactive documentary and so that's kind of  
3 its own field – it's wanting to create stories that you kind of self-navigate through online. I think  
4 there could be installation component to that – like in my ideal world there will be an  
5 installation component to that and people would go and see it, like maybe in a museum or a  
6 community center and people would be able to record stories and pin them to the map – like  
7 create a map as sort of my trans story map and then have people be able to pin their own  
8 stories to the map and then that could be user-generated content either recorded on a cell  
9 phone or in this installation space. And then the third aspect of it is a community engagement  
10 campaign and that is events. You're right, the abuelitas are not going to go out and seek this  
11 probably, right? So, it's like how do you have events that really speak to people's cultural  
12 context and I think most of us . . . like, I think the old way – like the old way of media is this  
13 sense of broadcast, that there would be this small group of people who all happen to be white  
14 men who are in a group, in a room, and they get to make the decisions – they decide what  
15 America is going to watch tonight. So, then they send that out to everyone and their sense of  
16 priority, their sense of what's good and what's not good, what's relevant and what's important –  
17 all of that is what gets sent out, and anything that matters to anybody else is just not . . . people  
18 are trying to hot mix CDs or something. But I'm excited about online because online is a place  
19 where you can cultivate this niche audiences and where people can speak to one another kind  
20 of directly. So, you have so much space for people to be able to make media who haven't been  
21 heard from before and to consume media that really matters to them, and it doesn't matter if  
22 some old white guy in some board room decided that they should be watching this, they're  
23 watching it because they want to see it. And so, I think the power of this democratization is  
24 really beautiful and amazing for lots of different communities. But, I also think it can be  
25 overwhelming. I think the future of media is figuring out ways to kind of aggregate stories and  
26 curate them. So, it's like yeah, if you want to go to YouTube and type in trans and sort of see  
27 what's there, you can do that. But, maybe this is something that it's a curated conversation and  
28 there's intentionality behind how it's put together and the kind of art that is . . .

29 AJ: Yeah, because if you do that on YouTube, you're going to get a wide variety of imagery, voices –  
30 which the trans community is wide, but I mean there's porn, and not to say that that is not . . . I  
31 mean, there is all these different how to put on make-up . . . sometimes you might want a little  
32 more directed imagery or research that you're trying to do or entertainment that you're  
33 seeking, as opposed to the water spout of trans that comes out on YouTube. So, no, that's  
34 awesome.

35 AP: So, yeah, the idea is . . . I guess I'm interested in this idea of what does it mean to make a  
36 platform for people to engage in conversations. So, that's why as I'm traveling I'm going to be  
37 doing something . . . so, I'm going to be doing this kind of fishbowl conversation, so having  
38 people answer questions. Like, as I'm traveling through the south, having trans southerners  
39 answer questions and then pose questions to other trans southerners and then kind of go  
40 through and record each of those and kind of edit them together in some way – or collect them  
41 together in a way that kind of creates more of a sense of the conversation and the vibe and feel  
42 of what is it like to be trans in the south right now. And yeah, I'm interesting in this idea of how  
43 do you communicate people's experiences and how do you think about the experiences of

1 groups of people – but navigating that line of we really all want to . . . we want an individual  
2 story, you have to tell individual stories in order to make an emotional impact. But, I’m also like  
3 if you only tell . . . I also think that there is something that is very . . . I don’t know, I guess in  
4 some ways elitist, but I feel like it’s hard to not be tokenizing, I think, as a documentarian, and to  
5 say - oh, right, like even if you have a feature-length documentary and you have . . . five people  
6 is a lot of people to focus on, but still you’re like, “Here’s my Black character, this is my Latino  
7 character, this is my trans feminine character, that’s my gender-queer character,” then you still  
8 end up in a position where one person is standing in for a whole group of people that you can’t  
9 represent. That’s why I’m kind of curious about this alternative way of presenting stories and  
10 communities that says, “There is a limitless pool, there could be 50,000 trans stories,” and I  
11 would love there to be 50,000 trans stories. And so, like how do you . . . how do you create a  
12 space for that for people to say, “That is like me,” or, “That’s not like me.” And I’m always  
13 interested in how do we show the diversity within a community. I think for so long we’ve been .  
14 . . we’ve been so narrowly pigeon-holed. There’s lots of different white characters on TV, but  
15 then there’s like three Black characters, there’s two gay characters. There’s the gay person  
16 that’s married and the gay slut.

17 AJ: Exactly, right.

18 AP: And it’s just like how do we create more space for more kinds of characterizations and  
19 portrayals – and things that people connect with. And that’s the other thing, I’m like I think that  
20 we are told in media . . . I remember I started the Trans Oral History Project when I was going to  
21 be a film student. My film teacher was really not interested, he was very like, “Oh, well, how are  
22 you going to get normal people to relate?” And, I just feel like that was just such a profoundly  
23 insulting question and I’m like, “Well, I’d relate to them, I don’t care if you don’t relate to it –  
24 maybe you’re not my audience.” I guess now I’d have the words to say, “Maybe you’re not my  
25 audience.” But, I think that . . . yeah, there’s just so much around like the structures that are  
26 built in media – like many things. We look at the product, the outcome, and we’re like, “Oh, we  
27 wish we didn’t have stereotypes in media.” But then it’s like, “Well, how did we get there? It’s  
28 because we have this whole system and all these structures that are set-up that incentivize the  
29 creation of that thing.” So, I’m excited about just exploring . . . I don’t know, do I want a show  
30 on Netflix? Maybe, what kinds of opportunities and limitations are there? Do I want something  
31 that’s for free online? Maybe. What kinds of opportunities are there, right? Is this something  
32 on cable? Probably not. I’ve never had a cable television since I’ve been an adult so that  
33 doesn’t seem like a very appealing medium to me. But yeah, I’m interested in . . .

34 AJ: It’s pretty broad, though, I’m just trying to tell you. There’s a lot of Netflix accounts out there,  
35 André, I’m just saying. But, so why is it important to tell these stories? I just want to sort of  
36 hear you talk about it – or to create this tapestry across the United States? Why do you think  
37 this is important, valuable work to do?

38 AP: That’s a funny question. Why is it important work? I think people relate to stories and I think  
39 stories really move people. When I think of the moments in my life where I’ve come to some  
40 kind of new insider revelation or something, has kind of shock me and made me realize  
41 something about my world view is incomplete or skewed. I think about those moments always  
42 talking to someone who came from somewhere that I didn’t come from, who had some kind of



1 experience in the world that I didn't have, and that it lead them to a really different conclusion  
2 than where I had arrived. And so, I feel like I want to share that with other people. I think that  
3 when we sit down and spend time together and we kind of come to different understandings of  
4 the world and come to different understandings of our relationships. So, I think that's a huge  
5 aspect of it. I also feel like compassion and empathy are so important and I think stories really  
6 inspire compassion and empathy and they're kind of how people begin to bridge difference  
7 often. So, yeah, I guess that's why . . . this whole relatability thing, I guess I just feel like that's  
8 why that's . . . it's so offensive to me, the idea that you can only . . . the idea that we should only  
9 expect . . . like, for instance, I don't know what it's called right now, but there's a new television  
10 show on Netflix that features a Black super hero and that's the first time that's ever happened.

11 AJ: Right. I do know what it's called . . . I just watched it. Is it Ace or . . . Case? I don't remember.  
12 I'm not a huge super hero fan, but I know the story that you're talking about – yeah.

13 AP: But, I feel like that's getting a lot of negative reviews right now from white audiences who are  
14 like . . . because the super hero is Black but also lives in a Black universe. There's one white  
15 person who is a very peripheral character or something, and white people are up in arms. "I  
16 can't relate to this, how do you expect me blah, blah, blah." And that's just . . . I feel like that's  
17 kind of the thing that we've been told – I guess as media makers, I was told over and over,  
18 "People want something they can relate to, people don't want something that's too different  
19 from what they are." And I'm like, "Well, then we need to change. People need to get used to it  
20 – people need to get use to the fact that people are different than them." And if you are  
21 someone who is so short-sited that you can't see value in someone's story that is different than  
22 you or has some different experience, then I don't want you to be my audience. And, I think  
23 that's different from being like . . . like I said, these liberal audiences where . . . I think there are  
24 abuelitas who want to understand things that they don't understand, who are like, "Oh, why  
25 does that person have tattoos? That's weird?"

26 AJ: Right.

27 AP: "Why do people want to put holes in their nose? Why are people reading books about beating  
28 each other and it's for fun? That's weird, why do they do that?"

29 AJ: Right.

30 AP: I think that there are people who are constantly seeking to expand their world and those are the  
31 people that I want in my life, in general – personally. But, I also feel like those are the people  
32 that I want to connect with – in every community. I think those people serve a really important  
33 role because those people open up their community to things . . . like they often bring . . .  
34 maybe bring new information and new people into their communities and I think that is such an  
35 important role.

36 AJ: Was there a moment in your life, André, where you thought, "Wow, I am not the gender that I  
37 was assigned at birth?" And can you tell me when that happened?

38 AP: Hmm. I don't know, it's funny. I don't feel like I have any dramatic "ah-ha" moments. I was a  
39 tomboy, I guess, as a kid, but it's funny because my mom was in the military, she was a jet-  
40 engine mechanic. She was one of the only women in a shop of 1,000 people. She would go live

- 1 on a boat with men and she'd be like one of five women on a boat with like 700 men. And so,  
2 she was super butch – she's way butcher than I'll ever be.
- 3 AJ: OK.
- 4 AP: So, it's funny because I can say, "Oh, I was a tomboy as a kid," but then did that even have to do  
5 with my gender? My mom wasn't going to teach me how to put on make-up, my mom doesn't  
6 wear make-up. And so, yeah – I definitely remember getting . . . like, as a kid, I liked sports, I  
7 was very aggressive. I also have a really messed up family life. I think I had a lot of anger and I  
8 was seeing people that were really violent and reactive all the time. I had a lot of anger and was  
9 sort of reactive and I was very competitive – I'm still very competitive. And so, I would play  
10 football with the guys, but then I would win or be good at it and then there would always be a  
11 thing where some guy would run over and I would tackle him and then everybody would be like,  
12 "You got tackled by a girl." And then he'd come over and he'd want to fight, so he'd start a  
13 fight. And I'd be like, "All right, you want to fight?" So, I guess in some ways, I guess I display  
14 these sort of male aggressive qualities, but yeah, I'm not even sure that had to do with gender. I  
15 wouldn't particularly call myself an aggressive person now, so how is that my gender. But, yeah,  
16 I don't know. I guess there was just a certain point when my behaviors became not OK, right.  
17 So, it's like a tomboy is cute, we have a word for that – it's not the same as a cissy. A cissy is  
18 always despised, but a tomboy is like, "Oh, she'll grow out of it."
- 19 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 20 AP: And then, I didn't, and I think that somewhere around when I was like 15 or so, my mom started  
21 being like, "OK, you're not . . ." We were shopping for clothes and I wanted these cargo pants  
22 and I was like, "All my friends . . ." and all my friends are guys, "All my friends have cargo pants, I  
23 want cargo pants." And my mom is like, "No, we need to go in the girl's section." I was like,  
24 "They don't have pockets." I was very concerned about carrying around crap in my pockets.  
25 And she was like, "No, we're not." And she just refused to . . . that was the moment she drew  
26 the line. I was like, "But, I'm wearing cargo pants mom, why can't I buy new cargo pants?" She  
27 was like, "Because you need to grow up." I was like, "What?" She made me try on these girls  
28 pants and I go into the changing room and I come out and I remember her being like, "Stop it." I  
29 was like, "What?" And she's like, "Just . . . just . . . you know what I mean?" I'm like, "No,  
30 what?" And then she's like, "You're walking like a tranny, stop it."
- 31 AJ: Wow.
- 32 AP: And I was like, "What?" And she was like, "Ahh, should I just start saving up for the operation  
33 now? I might as well not even buy pants."
- 34 AJ: Wow, your mom said this?
- 35 AP: My mom said this. She will never . . . she will never . . . she has sublimated this, or it's probably  
36 just not important to her.
- 37 AJ: Right.
- 38 AP: But, on some level it was very important to me. I didn't know that, but it was very important to  
39 me. And so, yeah, that's part of why it's hard for me . . . I think parents often are like, "Oh, I

- 1            never knew," or, "I wouldn't have guessed." And it's like, "How would you never have guessed,  
2            you literally . . . you broke out the "t" word."
- 3    AJ:     Right.
- 4    AP:     But, in general, I don't know. I was just kind of gender ambiguous and people didn't . . . people  
5            kind of held me in a separate class. I didn't have to do a lot of things girls had to do and so I  
6            think there was some kind of tacit acknowledgement and that made it comfortable for me so I  
7            never felt the need to identify as a man, but I was just like, "Well . . ." I didn't have to wear the  
8            girl's uniform at PE. I don't know, there were all these things that people intuitively got, I guess.  
9            And, it wasn't until I went to college and then was in classes with all these people who were  
10           using all these high-falutin words, these gender theory words, and I'm very much the feminist  
11           and I put on the *Vagina Monologues*. The first thing I ever organized was being the producer for  
12           the *Vagina Monologues*. And, I was like . . . but also very much feeling sort of distance from  
13           that, right? I feel like my co-director, who became my best friend, she was very into women's  
14           rights and stuff and I was like, "Yeah, that's important." But, I wasn't . . . it didn't particularly  
15           feel, like I didn't think . . . I guess I've never thought about it this way but was just so many  
16           things that women had experienced up until that point and those things just didn't really relate  
17           to me. People were talking about being cat called and I never got cat called when I was a  
18           woman. I guess I was butch enough that I wasn't attractive or . . . people often assumed I was a  
19           dyke, from a very young age. I was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade when I got called a dyke.
- 20    AJ:     Really?
- 21    AP:     Actually, no – I got called a lesbian. I went home and I was like, "Mom . . ." I remember being  
22           upset. "I'm not," and they're like, "Yeah, you are." I'm like, "No, I'm not, you don't know." And  
23           we'd get in this fight and the teacher breaks it up and then I get a note home and then my mom  
24           was like, "Why were you fighting?" Because I had been fighting a lot, we went through my story  
25           already – I was a fighter. "She said I was a lesbian – I don't even know what kind of bean is a  
26           lesbian, but I'm not it."
- 27    AJ:     Right. Lesbian.
- 28    AP:     I didn't even know what was but I definitely got the message.
- 29    AJ:     Right – it's not cool because they're trying to disparage me. Yeah. Wow.
- 30    AP:     So, yeah. And I'd say the first time I ever self-consciously identified as something was I went to  
31           Puerto Rico for the first time, that's a whole other story, but I went to Puerto Rico and I'm  
32           waiting in the airport and I go to the bathroom and I'm very overwhelmed as I land and things  
33           are in Spanish, there's all these people, I was there to meet my family for the first time ever.
- 34    AJ:     Oh, wow.
- 35    AP:     I was 20 and I was just generally nervous and overwhelmed and I go to the bathroom and  
36           someone is kind of yelling, but I don't register it. She's like, "Damas, damas, damas." I turn  
37           around and she's yelling at me and she's yelling like, "Women, you're going into the women's  
38           bathroom." And she like grabs me and she's like, "No, no, no – women, women, this is the  
39           women's bathroom." And she's like . . . so she kind of gestures that I need to go over to the

- 1 other place. She was like a janitor and I was just like, “Ahh, OK.” And, so then I go into the  
2 men’s bathroom but I’m just like, “I don’t understand – why? Why would I go to the men’s  
3 bathroom? But, I guess I have to” And then, so I guess yeah – even at that point, even though I  
4 had been reading about trans stuff and I was kind of interested, like intellectually, in trans stuff –  
5 yeah, it didn’t occur to me that I would be trans.
- 6 AJ: Right, wow. Have you ever . . . OK, let me phrase this question the right way. Are there any  
7 medical interventions that you have undergone as a part of your journey? And, feel free to  
8 answer that question to whatever extent you would like to – and that could be, “No, I don’t  
9 really want to answer that at all.”
- 10 AP: Hmm, I mean, it’s funny because I did end up sort of ultimately identifying as gender queer  
11 when I was in college because the idea of manhood was scary to me, I guess – honestly. The  
12 idea of . . . maybe part of it is I didn’t have good men in my life. The men who had been in my  
13 life had been like my stepfather who was super abusive and sort of emotionally and physically  
14 and just was not someone that I wanted to be like. And so, yeah, I was like, “Well, I don’t know,  
15 I’m not really a woman but I don’t know about that man thing.” So, it felt more comfortable to  
16 me and I guess, just progressively, at each step of my transition, I’ve not known if that was the  
17 right thing for me and then being like, “Well, I’ll try it. I’ll try it, I’ll see what it’s like, if it’s not for  
18 me then I’ll know.”
- 19 AJ: Yeah.
- 20 AP: And so, I guess . . . my partner, the first person I ever dated, her name was Dayne, and she was a  
21 women and gender studies major . . . women and gender studies major and Jewish studies  
22 major. She was super identity politics-y. She went to a women’s only college and she met me in  
23 a queer youth space and then she kind of took a liking to me and I was still very . . . I was kind of  
24 just very guarded. I’d never had sex, I’d never dated anyone, I’d never been interested in dating  
25 anyone. I was 19 years old and it . . . I sort of gave her a chance. I was like, “Well, I don’t know if  
26 I want to go on a date.” And she was like, “Well, do you want to just go to dinner and talk?” I  
27 was like, “OK, I like food, I like talking.”
- 28 AJ: Yeah, you like talking, food is good.
- 29 AP: And so, it’s funny, because I feel like I approached lots of things in my life at that stage in that  
30 way and she was like, “You know, if you ever want to be called something different, let me know  
31 and we could try something out.” And, I was like, “Why would I want to be called something  
32 different?” And, so I would say that she knew I was trans before I did. And so, fast forward a  
33 couple of months and I’m like, “You know what? I’ve been thinking about names.” I tried Riley,  
34 I tried Sasha. I really liked the name Sasha – Sasha Pérez, yeah, which sounded very much like a  
35 porn star and I was like, “That’s weird.” And, so similarly she was the one who was like, “You  
36 should bind, I think it would be hot if you would bind.” And I’m like, “Oh, I’ve never thought of  
37 that but maybe just for Pride I’ll just try binding.” And then, you know, I bought a binder and  
38 then I’m binding on a daily basis. So, when it came to starting hormones, that was something  
39 that I was definitely interested in. I’m online, I was living in rural Vermont, I went to college in  
40 Vermont.

- 1 AJ: OK.
- 2 AP: So, I'm at a tiny college of 300 people.
- 3 AJ: What school, can you say?
- 4 AP: Yeah, it's called Marlboro College.
- 5 AJ: OK.
- 6 AP: So, I'm at a tiny college with 300 people, so I didn't know any trans people and I wanted to be  
7 able to talk to someone about this idea but I had no connections to the trans community. And  
8 so, I was researching online and I think that I ultimately came to a recognition of the fact . . .  
9 there were things I wanted. I was like, "I want my voice to be lower," that was the main thing  
10 that I wanted. But then I was like, "Oh, I don't know, my hair is kind of weird and I don't want to  
11 have to shave," and I don't know, just other things. "Oh, your genitals get funny, I don't know  
12 about that – that seems weird." And so, yeah, there was just other things I was uncertain about  
13 but that was the thing that I wanted. Then I ultimately came to a recognition that . . . like, was  
14 do I ever foresee a moment where I will regret making that decision? Like, if I start them, I can  
15 stop first of all. The idea that it's a decision I make every day and that was really empowering to  
16 me, but then also the idea that I could stop whenever I wanted and I was like, "Will there ever  
17 be a time, if I start now and I choose to stop later, will there ever be a time when I regret having  
18 made that decision?" And, the answer was, "Obviously, no." I think that what it was for me was  
19 this idea of letting go of . . . I guess it's like letting go of something perfect that you never  
20 wanted. This idea of, "Oh, you're such a pretty girl." Or, I would always hear growing up, "You'd  
21 be such a pretty girl if you just wore better clothes," or, "If you just took better care of yourself,"  
22 "If you would just wear make-up."
- 23 AJ: Right.
- 24 AP: And, I think I realized I had totally internalized this idea of like, "Oh, I have access to this perfect  
25 thing, which is womanhood," I guess. I don't know. But this I could be this pretty girl one day  
26 and what if one day I'm going to want that and I'm not going to have it because I've fucked it all  
27 up with this. And then, I realized that that was absurd. I never wanted to be the pretty girl, why  
28 will I ever want that in the future? I was like, "What if I go off of it and then I'm a little more  
29 butch? That's kind of cool, that's kind of hot."
- 30 AJ: Yeah, no problems there.
- 31 AP: So, yeah. So, then I did ultimately have top surgery recently – well, about a year ago.
- 32 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 33 AP: After, I don't know, being out for eight years. And, it's funny because I never would have  
34 thought I would have wanted it but I guess I had a good friend who had it – there was a whole  
35 rash of top surgeries happening in Chicago.
- 36 AJ: Everywhere – I mean, GoFundMe top surgery parties are . . .

- 1 AP: Because a lot of people were starting to get surgery access, that was a big thing that changed. A  
2 lot of people . . . Medicaid changed, Medicaid started allowing people to have surgery. I was  
3 doing kind of social work around a lot of people who were on Medicaid and so then I'm seeing  
4 these poor trans people having surgeries. And then . . .
- 5 AJ: Thanks, Obama. Right, the American Care Act. I mean, I think that's a big part of it.
- 6 AP: As one trans woman I interviewed put it, "I heard Obama was handing out pussies so I thought  
7 I'd walk out on Belmont and go get me some."
- 8 AJ: OK – oh, my goodness.
- 9 AP: But it is true. So, once I had people in my social network starting to have surgery . . . I helped  
10 care for someone who was healing, I went to his appointments with him. So, I became a lot  
11 more aware of what the process was and it became less scary and I realized that . . . I'm a very  
12 pragmatic person and so I think that I don't let myself want something I can't have, there's no  
13 point in wanting something you can't have.
- 14 AJ: Yeah.
- 15 AP: And, I started to realize that maybe that was part of why, a big part of why I couldn't see myself  
16 having surgery was because . . . or why I didn't want surgery, because I couldn't see myself  
17 having it. And then once . . . it just kind of happened quickly from there. It was like then . . .  
18 like, I was watching my friend heal and I was kind of really excited for him and a little bit envious  
19 in some way and then I was like, "Well, what . . .?" And going through, in my mind, like well  
20 what would I look like? How would that look on me? What would I do in that situation? And,  
21 then, like I said, it was just access. The perfect storm happened and I realized it was very . . . it  
22 was a very unique circumstance, or it felt very unique to me. I had been at Story Corps for two  
23 years, it was the longest I'd been at any job, it was a job that I had a lot of benefits. I was very  
24 stably employed, I was very beloved – I was very good at my job, so the idea of taking off two or  
25 three weeks was actually totally feasible. I had vacation days. It was like, "Wow, how amazing  
26 to have this opportunity." And then the last thing was that my surgery . . . someone had surgery  
27 who had the same insurance plan as I did. I was like, "Wow, they could pay for it." And so, it  
28 was like, "How many times . . .?" I also had this sense of eagerness around it, because I was like,  
29 "I need to get it before it's gone." Like before Obama hands out all the pussies . . .
- 30 AJ: Sorry, no pussy for you.
- 31 AP: And the conservatives come and they want to take them away, no one could take it away once  
32 you have it so I was like, "I need to get this surgery before cataclysmic events happen and the  
33 stars are not aligned." So, I kind of, in some ways, rushed into it. But, yeah, I could not imagine  
34 how I feel about it now. It's great.
- 35 AJ: Yeah.
- 36 AP: There is no doubt in my mind that that was the right thing.
- 37 AJ: That you made the right decision.
- 38 AP: Yeah, and it's wild to me that there was a doubt that that would be the right thing now.

- 1 AJ: Wow, that's interesting.
- 2 AP: But just immediately . . . just all the things that I realized that I'd been carrying around with me –  
3 these limitations. I love water, I'm a Pisces. I hadn't swam in eight years. You can't swim when  
4 you're binding, you literally can't breathe. You're gasping for air – like running to the bus, you  
5 gasp for air like you're going to die. I'm 23 years old and I was like . . . I stopped binding at that  
6 point. I was like, "I'm 23 years old, I can't feel like I'm going to die when I run a block."
- 7 AJ: When you run a block, yeah.
- 8 AP: So, yes, so after I had top surgery . . . the day I went to the thrift store and it was summer and it  
9 was Chicago and it's hot and it's humid and I'm sweating and I'm in the thrift store and I'm  
10 looking and I see a tank top and I was like, "Oh, you know, I don't wear tank tops." And I was  
11 like, "Oh, I could wear tank tops, I could be a person who wears tank tops." I was like, "I'm  
12 going to do it." I was starting to feel myself, "I'm going to buy a tank top and I'm going to wear  
13 it." I go outside, I put it on, I'm biking home and the air just like billowed through my shirt and it  
14 was amazing. Nothing had ever felt that amazing before in my life. And it was just like wow. I  
15 had just dreaded summer for years upon years because I'm just hot and sticky and I'm wearing  
16 four shirts so that way I can be flat and I'm like sucking it in . . . just everything – like how I  
17 stood, how I interacted, how I moved my arms, how I sat. There were so many . . .
- 18 AJ: How you breathe, which is the most important thing that we do, right, on a daily basis. Wow.
- 19 AP: So, yeah. I feel so much more free now than I could ever imagine.
- 20 AJ: Toxic masculinity. Go. Talk about it.
- 21 AP: That's a great questioning technique. Go. Oh, my gosh – let me tell you.
- 22 AJ: Do you want me to pull it in?
- 23 AP: It's terrible.
- 24 AJ: How do you deal with it as a person who has not chosen male-hood, but who has created a life  
25 that is around masculine identity?
- 26 AP: I mean, toxic masculinity is just . . . one thing I will say is that I have a lot of trans people in my  
27 life. I love trans people. I've built community, I've worked for a trans organization, and I've  
28 dated and fucked trans people. There are so many trans people in my life in so many capacities.  
29 And, one of the things that makes me the saddest is young trans men who are just coming out  
30 and feel this sense of having something to prove. That's the first thing that comes to my mind  
31 when I think of toxic masculinity is like all these folks – and often people will chill out after a bit,  
32 hopefully – like many times. But just this sense of feeling the need to like be a man's man and  
33 needing to prove yourself in a man's world. It's just so . . . I guess I just . . . maybe when I say  
34 there was a point where I identified as gender queer and I was afraid of manhood and the idea  
35 of being a man was very unappealing to me, that's because of toxic masculinity – that the men  
36 in my life had been these gross characters who were violent and drinking a lot and very . . . but,  
37 also while I was in college I was exposed to very different kind of men. And so, men who were  
38 very much thinkers and who were thoughtful and artists and activists and the people who were

- 1 really instrumental in my coming to understand myself. I was an anarchist and we'd go to these  
2 big conferences and we'd go protest and we'd sleep on the floors of churches and they were  
3 very much like fighters for justice and very impassioned about that idea. That was something  
4 that was really beautiful to me and that was a kind of masculinity and I was like, "Oh, being a  
5 man isn't that bad. If being a man is being a man like Charlie, then that would be cool, that  
6 wouldn't be so bad." And then men in my life were also very much feminists because of the  
7 circles that I ran in. And that, I think, makes a huge difference.
- 8 AJ: So, they had a critique around . . . ?
- 9 AP: Yeah, so they very much had a critique around masculinity, they were very thoughtful about it.  
10 And so, yeah, that was when I started to be more excited about the idea of manhood and . . .  
11 yeah, I just still . . . I'm very choosey, I find, I'm very picky about men in my life. I have so many  
12 really amazing women in my life that are strong and thoughtful and mamas and caretakers and  
13 are going to tell you about yourself kind of women. There are so many different kinds of  
14 women in my life who are amazing and I don't have a lot of men in my life. I'm not here for the  
15 bullshit, to be frank. If you aren't someone who is really thoughtful and caring, then I'm not  
16 interested. And, so yeah – my short answer is I just don't put up with toxic masculinity. That's  
17 the quickest way to become someone I'm not interested in spending time with. But, I also  
18 would say I feel intimately aware of toxic masculinity because I now mostly have sex with men,  
19 that most of my sexual experiences in the last . . . I don't know, four or five years, are with men  
20 – gay men in men spaces. I don't know, I have a lot of thoughts about that, but yeah, I think  
21 toxic masculinity is alive and well in the gay community. We're very much in a moment that is  
22 very much mask for mask and so there's whether people are posting on apps or whatever,  
23 people feel very entitled to be very explicit around what they're not looking for and around the  
24 top of that list is effeminate femmes, effeminate men, faggots, cissy bottoms.
- 25 AJ: People are not into that?
- 26 AP: People are not into that in Chicago, in 2016 – October 20<sup>th</sup>, people are not into that.
- 27 AJ: Really? Wow.
- 28 AP: And it's just like . . .
- 29 AJ: Wow, what kind of . . . yeah, that puts a lot of pressure on effeminate or twinkie twinks as . . .  
30 wow, that's interesting. I just was not aware of that. Do you find yourself checking people  
31 around that? I know you said you kind of just check out if somebody is really obnoxious, but do  
32 you try to take time to educate people or check them on that sort of male privilege?
- 33 AP: I guess it kind of depends on the context. I feel like when it comes to interacting with me, I'm  
34 like . . . I just feel very much like . . . like yeah, disengage or move on. It's hard, it really just  
35 depends on the context. I would say I also feel lucky, like I've never had a male boss. In my life,  
36 I've only had women bosses.
- 37 AJ: That's pretty cool and interesting. How does that happen?
- 38 AP: Non-profits.



- 1 AJ: Yeah.
- 2 AP: My bosses are underpaid social workers.
- 3 AJ: And overworked.
- 4 AP: Overworked caretakers.
- 5 AJ: Right.
- 6 AP: So, yeah. I would say that if I was in a . . . like when I'm in a context where I feel like a man is  
7 being kind of like out of place or whatever, then I feel like . . . if I have power to potentially  
8 influence that for someone else – a woman is getting sexually harassed on a train, that's a great  
9 example, right. "Man, she said no, leave her alone, we all just want to have a good night."
- 10 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 11 AP: Or whatever – these moments where I can kind of intervene and be this man-to-man, "Let's not  
12 be dicks to women," conversations. But, I rarely find myself in a context in which that is  
13 applicable. I mean, part of that is, I think, that I have a very intentionally constructed universe  
14 and I have the incredible privilege of being able to intentionally construct a lot of relationships  
15 and context in my universe. I work from home, I work for a transgender organization.
- 16 AJ: Which one?
- 17 AP: The Trans Lifeline.
- 18 AJ: The Trans Lifeline? What is that all about?
- 19 AP: Actually, can I change this card real quick? Can we pause?
- 20 (pause)
- 21 AP: I feel like I got so much more legitimate overnight.
- 22 AJ: All right. So, we're back and you were telling us about the Trans Lifeline. What work do you  
23 guys do there?
- 24 AP: So, we are a transgender resource and support line. We're entirely peer to peer, so kind of like  
25 AA where people would talk to someone or go into a group of people who are alcohols but  
26 aren't necessarily professionals. We have all trans operators who are answering the phones and  
27 they're all volunteers. So, someone calls in, they can ask anything from . . . you know, asking  
28 about how to access health care if they're in a rural place, to being at a 5. So, we have different  
29 numbers. If they're at a 5 and maybe standing on the edge of the Golden Gate Bridge. So, the  
30 idea is that it's really . . . that 41% of trans people attempt suicide and so it's just so pervasive in  
31 the community. The mainstream suicide hotline . . . this is fun, I never talk about the Trans  
32 Lifeline, but the mainstream suicide hotlines . . . we were founded by Greta Martela and Nina  
33 Chaubal and . . .
- 34 AJ: Who?
- 35 AP: Nina Chaubal and Greta Martela.

1 AJ: How do you spell Nina's last name, do you know?

2 AP: I do not know that off the top of my head.

3 AJ: Chaubal, we'll have to look that up. It's probably on the trans website, right?

4 AP: It is on the Trans Lifeline website. So, Greta had been suicidal and she tried calling a nationally-  
5 known hotline and the person on the other side of the line, they didn't . . . she was sort of  
6 deciding should I come out, she was sort of weighing all that she had to lose. She's older so she  
7 had built an entire career, she had a wife and kids and she was deciding, "Is it worth it to give up  
8 everything I have to be who I am?" The person on the other side of the line was kind of  
9 dismissive and kind of pushed her off the line, was very uncomfortable, when she told him that  
10 she was transgender he was like, "What's that?" So, she had just had a number of experiences.  
11 Also, she had been admitted to psychiatric wards on a number of occasions and people were  
12 just so ill-equipped to handle trans folks and that was when she was living in the Bay. If people  
13 were ill-equipped to handle trans people who are suicidal in the Bay Area, then where can  
14 people find the help that they need? And so, she and her partner left the companies they  
15 worked for – they were software engineers, and they decided to start the Trans Lifeline. That  
16 was about two years ago and over the last two years we've trained over 500 operators who  
17 have answered over 15,000 calls. We are almost entirely grass roots funded, people give like \$5,  
18 \$10, \$20 donations online. It's been the most incredible experience to work for the Trans  
19 Lifeline. I had worked at a number of LGBT organizations in the past and felt terrible about it. I  
20 felt utterly disrespected, I had co-workers who wouldn't call me by the right pronoun, wouldn't  
21 call me by the right name, who just demeaned me in front of other co-workers. I had the  
22 second-in-command of my organization tell me, "What are you?" In a meeting. I'm asking a  
23 question about a grant and she's like, "What are you?" And she just kept saying it, "What are  
24 you? What are you? What are you?" I just froze. That's, first of all, just such a violent question.

25 AJ: Right.

26 AP: And also, like as a mixed-race person, I very much grew up with this question, "What are you?"  
27 all the time. People would look at my name and be like, "Pérez, what are you? Are you  
28 Mexican? Are you a citizen? Are you illegal?" And, so she's just like, "What are you?" I'm like,  
29 "Ahhhh." It was an intern, a social work intern, who intervened in the situation and he was like,  
30 "He doesn't have to answer that, you're way over your bounds." So, yes, I had worked at these  
31 LGBT organizations where I just wasn't treated well, I experienced harassment and  
32 discrimination. I was like, "If I'm in an LGBT center, if someone is going to call me Pinocchio and  
33 call me Mr. I Want to be a Real Man when they get upset at me, then where can I go?" I think I  
34 had it engrained in my mind this idea that if I can't respect here, I can't get respect anywhere.  
35 So, it's funny – then I went to Story Corps and it was a great experience. People were so much  
36 more thoughtful, sensitive. Sometimes they were uncertain about how to navigate something,  
37 but they just were very compassionate and understanding and would ask questions when they  
38 needed to ask questions. And when there was something that came up, which wasn't even  
39 related to people in my office, but was related to the general security in the building where one  
40 of the people I invited in, who was trans, to record their story, someone spoke to her in a  
41 disrespectful way. Story Corps took that very seriously. They were like, "Who do we need to

1 have meetings with? What do we need to do?” That was amazing. And so, after that  
2 experience I was like, “I never want to work for an LGBT organization again.”

3 AJ: Wow.

4 AP: I was like, “That is not where it’s at.” And so, it was funny, when Trans Lifeline kind of  
5 approached me, I was initially a little bit skeptical, but then I was like, “Well, I’ve never worked  
6 for a trans organization. What would that be like?” It’s been really amazing. I feel like they care  
7 about my wellbeing and care about who I am and what I aspire to and my dreams and my goals.  
8 They’re very supportive of me in so many ways. But also, it’s just very different to work for an  
9 organization – like I just believe in it so much and it’s like I think every other organization I’ve  
10 worked for, especially in non-profits – the non-profit industrial complex is so real, and it’s like  
11 after a year you’re like, “Ahh, the sausage.” It doesn’t even take a year some places, you’re like,  
12 “Oh, what . . .” I’ve had a co-worker sexually assault a volunteer and my organization hid it.  
13 There’s been all these cases of just being like, “Wow, the non-profit world is full of . . .” A lot of  
14 people want to do really great work and also full of some people who are very willing to get  
15 ahead in their community, even if it’s at the expense of other people in their community. You  
16 know, just to recognize that there is a lot of things that are rewarded, a lot of behaviors that are  
17 rewarded, that aren’t really the things that I want in my leaders. And so, I think that the Trans  
18 Lifeline operates just really differently than any non-profit I’ve ever worked with or volunteered  
19 for. And, yeah, I just . . . we’re definitely struggling, we’re tiny, we’re only two years old and like  
20 I said we just got our first major grant. But, I think that the spirit of togetherness and cohesion  
21 is amazing, but when I think of just like our volunteers, it’s moving to me. We have volunteers  
22 that . . . we have a volunteer who is homeless, a homeless mother of two and we pay for her cell  
23 phone bill and she answers calls four or five hours a week, every week. That’s amazing. And,  
24 it’s just like it really connects me to what’s real and it’s like what’s real is that trans people have  
25 been taking care of each other, with and without structures and without funding – without  
26 funding, without structure, without resources, people have been sharing the nothing that they  
27 have since the beginning of our community and that’s the foundation of our community. And,  
28 when I think about the people that I really admire as leaders, I think of the Sylvia Rivera’s and  
29 they’re liberating food from the grocery store.

30 AJ: Right, exactly.

31 AP: It wasn’t until I got a little bit older where I was like, “Oh, you all were liberating food from the  
32 grocery store.” People who were really willing to go to bat who were going to . . . willing to go  
33 to bat for each other, right. And, I think . . . that’s amazing to me and I think that as we . . . I just  
34 hope that we don’t have to continue making tremendous sacrifices so that our community can  
35 have the most basic necessities. I don’t want to valorize that and say that’s what we should  
36 aspire to now, but I think that it’s so important that that is where we’ve come from and I think  
37 that that’s at the heart of a trans community that I want to be a part of – it’s a sense of really  
38 taking care of each other. And Trans Lifeline is very much built on that ethos.

39 AJ: Wow. So, what do you think the relationship is between the LGB and T communities, André?

40 AP: We don’t have enough time in the world. Yeah, I mean it’s very much, to say the least, strained.  
41 I mean, I just . . . I go back and forth. On one hand, I am . . . I’m pretty faggy. I look like a fag,

- 1 people read me as a fag, people call me a fag on the train. I'm going to North Carolina  
2 tomorrow and if someone comes after me, they are going to want to beat me down because I  
3 am a faggot. They'll later find out that they want to beat me down because I'm a transsexual,  
4 but the first thing . . .
- 5 AJ: The first perception is . . .
- 6 AP: They're going to be like . . .
- 7 AJ: It's a gay dude.
- 8 AP: So, yeah, I guess what you said – but I think you're right. And, in terms of political  
9 identifications, it's important for LGBT to be together because . . . well, partially because that is  
10 how this movement sort of started and the fact that trans women of color were the ones who  
11 were fighting at Stonewall or the ones who were fighting and that gay men and other middle  
12 class people, middle class white people, are the people who have gotten to reap a lot of benefits  
13 of this struggle and them being on the front lines and so I feel like it would absolutely be a  
14 disservice for them, for that community, to walk away from us.
- 15 AJ: Right.
- 16 AP: When we have been waiting our turn this whole time and we need something, and when it's our  
17 moment to actually be able to . . . you know, step forward and make progress in terms of civil  
18 rights and financially . . . equity in all these ways. So, I think it's really important that we stick  
19 together. And, because from the outside we don't look so different. I guess the fact that a gay  
20 man isn't actually . . . like, the reason why men are going to persecute a gay man is because he's  
21 effeminate, right.
- 22 AJ: Right.
- 23 AP: And that is about misogyny, it's about femmephobia, but that is the central unit – someone's  
24 gender . . . the way that someone expresses their gender is often assumed to be the same thing  
25 as sexual orientation.
- 26 AJ: If he likes baseball and he goes to NASCAR and he . . . you know, goes out and drinks until he  
27 pukes, but he sleeps with guys, the guys will be like, "Hey, he's cool." "As long as he doesn't hit  
28 on me . . .," that weird notion that all gay people hit on everybody they see. But, as long as he is  
29 observing gender norms, whatever those are in that community – he's good. But, once he steps  
30 across that boundary then it becomes a problem.
- 31 AP: So, yeah, that's why I think politically it's so important to stick together and to advocate  
32 because, yeah, our enemies still don't see us as very different and so then we need to be  
33 unified, I feel like that's a sticky word, but we need to have each other's backs. I think socially . .  
34 . it's hard. It's hard because socially we have these very different communities that are brought  
35 together and we have very different values as communities and the reality . . . there's all this  
36 privilege and power that's operating that comes to bear on how we form communities and who  
37 has access to what space and I think specifically has a lot of . . . in Chicago, I see this all the time.  
38 There's a lot of access – who has access to space, concrete space. I want to have a meeting, I  
39 want to have a party, I want to have sex with people, I want to have a sex party – whatever kind

- 1 of space that is, white gay men own it. It's called Boystown in Chicago, it's the Castro in San  
2 Francisco.
- 3 AJ: Right.
- 4 AP: So, the fact that certain people have had more access to capital over a long period of time, and  
5 that people have a higher income capacity because there's a gendered pay gap, there's a lot of  
6 different things that culminate in this idea that actually gay men own these restaurants, bars,  
7 establishments, are the major donors for every major LGBT organization that we have, and so  
8 then the question is how do these spaces that are owned literally and culturally and symbolically  
9 by a very narrow portion of our community, like how do those spaces become useful, accessible,  
10 and relatable to everybody else? And, I think that we're only beginning to start to talk more  
11 about that. And, it's frustrating. I feel very disillusioned, often . . . I don't even want to go to  
12 Boystown. When I go to Boystown, I think . . . I guess in some ways it's trauma, personal  
13 trauma, it's also like cultural trauma. I think about every friend I've had who has been kicked  
14 out of the bathroom in a gay club, I think about all the homeless young people that I've worked  
15 with who have had the cops called on them for drinking in the alley outside of a bar on a  
16 Saturday night and they're getting drunk just like everybody else.
- 17 AJ: Yeah, exactly.
- 18 AP: I think about all these ways, these really violent ways that gay men guard their space – literally,  
19 and I've worked with homeless young people, they would call the cops two or three times a  
20 week. They're calling the cops on homeless trans women and that just makes me angry right  
21 now.
- 22 AJ: Right, yeah.
- 23 AP: And so, it's like how do I walk past this LGBT center where I'm supposed to feel included or how  
24 do I go to this film festival at this LGBT center where I'm supposed to feel good about this trans  
25 film festival, and yet I'm still like, "Well, I know people who are banned from this center and I'd  
26 like to bring them." Or, "I know people who won't set foot in here because this institution has  
27 exploited them so much over so many years and demeans them and now they never would  
28 choose to go back." And it's just like the reality is that these spaces are so contested. So, I think  
29 that's a big thing when I think about . . . I think we're in a moment where a lot of trans people  
30 are sick of being mistreated by the LGB community and that . . .
- 31 AJ: Rightfully so.
- 32 AP: Yeah. And yet, it's like well . . . I don't know, we also are in a moment that is very difficult for  
33 trans people right now – in particular places. Sure, in some ways we have a lot of progress or a  
34 lot of things are amazing, that are possible right now that have never been possible. I wake up  
35 every day and I think, "It's an amazing day to be trans, it's an amazing day for the trans  
36 movement, and what can I do with this day that makes tomorrow even better and that will  
37 make a generation from now . . . what can I do that will last?" I feel like we're in a moment . . . I  
38 think in the next five years is going to define the kind of progress we can make, the issues we  
39 focus on, is going to define what life looks like for the trans community for generations. And, if  
40 we miss this moment somehow, like if we're too caught up even within our community – with

1 people who have privilege defining the agenda and saying, “This is what is a trans issue,” we’re  
2 going to miss what we crucially need and what we maybe need the most and what this moment  
3 could represent. And so, I just think a lot about that and that’s why the web series I’m working  
4 on is about trans people of color and trans people in the south – before it was trendy. No, but  
5 before there was a lot of media attention on the south – because that’s where I’m from, and the  
6 reality is that I’m . . . yeah, I knew that life was still the same even though we’re talking about  
7 this mainstream narrative where, “Oh, everything is so much better.” And then it’s like, “Yeah,  
8 but . . .” I think that’s really showed its ugly head this year. 2015 was the transgender tipping  
9 point and yet more trans women of color were murdered in 2015 than any other year on record.  
10 How does . . . we live in such a moment of profound contradiction. It’s like this is . . . it’s better  
11 than it’s ever been for trans people and yet there are eight states that introduced specific  
12 legislation specifically to keep trans people from getting rights. North Carolina, I think the HB2 is  
13 just so . . . it’s profoundly shaped my perception of the world for trans people because I’m like  
14 the fact that (1) that the government would proactively go out to create civil rights legislation  
15 that prevented anyone from getting rights – that’s crazy, that’s so backwards. It’s so  
16 aggressively backwards.

17 AJ: I mean, laws should be made to give people rights, right? Not take rights away.

18 AP: Exactly. How many laws in the history of this country have ever specifically been passed to  
19 prevent people from getting rights? And, so it just feels so aggressive.

20 AJ: Actually, quite a few, André – unfortunately.

21 AP: I think there’s a lot of social policies. That’s right . . . Jim Crowe – that’s true.

22 AJ: There were laws that were designated specifically to keep rights away, but I don’t want to  
23 debate that at all.

24 AP: You are right, that is true. I rescind my statement.

25 AJ: There have been quite a few but it’s still unfortunate and why are we still doing it in 2016 – like  
26 that is insane to me. And, unconstitutional, I believe, not being a constitutional scholar but I just  
27 can’t imagine that our laws allow for legislators to . . . in fact, I know that you cannot make a law  
28 to specifically harm one group of people. That is unconstitutional.

29 AP: That’s the definition of discrimination and injustice.

30 AJ: Yeah.

31 AP: It’s not just North Carolina. Well, one thing is North Carolina is so extreme – they’re drowning  
32 their local economy, all these people are not doing . . . there’s like a boycott in North Carolina  
33 and they’re powering forward with it. They took over \$100,000 out of their federal emergency  
34 response fund in order to fight a court case against the federal government. The fact that we’re  
35 in this moment where . . . I mean, it’s kind of just inherently offensive that we are in a moment  
36 where my rights are a public discourse item and it’s like should or shouldn’t we have trans  
37 people in bathrooms.

38 AJ: MPR is narrating your life, André.

- 1 AP: It's everything – trans women in immigrant detention facilities and what kind of treatment are  
2 they going to get and what kind of access to medications are you going to get? What about  
3 people who are in prisons and how are they going to be held? Are they going to be in solitary  
4 confinement for a decade? Which is inhumane in every sensible way. And so, it's just like . . .  
5 and then all these laws in the south right now – Tennessee passed a law that said that mental  
6 health providers don't have to provide mental health care on the basis of religious objection to a  
7 transgender client, or an LGBT client. So, there are just all of these . . .
- 8 AJ: Specifically . . . which really is targeting trans people, but I think it's more broadly LGBT.
- 9 AP: I think it's LGBT. And, Texas refuses to implement the federal government's mandate around  
10 school bathrooms and then Texas is like, "And, let me do you one more, we're going to also let  
11 medical doctors be able to refuse transgender patients." That's not a law yet, but we're in a  
12 climate.
- 13 AJ: Doctors take an oath to do no harm, right? That's the oath they swear that they will not do  
14 harm to patients. So, if you don't treat them, isn't that doing harm? I mean, I don't know.
- 15 AP: Exactly. I just feel like we're in a climate that is so hostile and adversarial that anything is  
16 possible. It's the first time in my life that I've ever felt embattled in that way. I have this  
17 growing sense every day of that and part of it is that I'm doing this work and so I'm speaking to  
18 people, like people who . . . like Z's wife is fired the day after HB2 was passed because she was  
19 featured on the news as part of a protest rally that was protesting HB2.
- 20 AJ: Wow.
- 21 AP: So, I'm speaking to people . . . Tiommi was sexually assaulted and afraid of being prosecuted for  
22 not disclosing her HIV status to her attacker. So, there are all of these ways . . . I think that there  
23 has been this grumbling, there's been this social hostility, but I think there's been all these ways  
24 that that's being made so much more . . . like people are just being galvanized around this  
25 hatred and are being just motivated to act out in these ways, and then also to create this lasting  
26 legislation. So, I do have faith in the Martin Luther King quote, the idea of the arc of history is  
27 long but it bends towards justice.
- 28 AJ: It bends towards justice – that's a true statement. We're witnessing it, right? Like you've said,  
29 tipping point. There have been a lot of gains that have been made in social justice but . . .
- 30 AP: But I also feel like we're in this deeply . . . I don't know, I guess it's weird. In this moment, I feel  
31 so sad. I feel so frustrated . . . I feel more angry and embittered than I've ever felt and that's  
32 hard.
- 33 AJ: You said the term around feeling embattled and it struck me because . . . as a Black person, I feel  
34 like there's been this struggle . . . I've had a struggle, and you identify as a person of color as  
35 well, but as a Black person there's always been this struggle but . . . and I've been out as a trans  
36 person for almost 25 years, I've never felt more under attack for my gender identity than I have  
37 in the last two years – ever. I mean, that's through all the trauma of coming out on my job and  
38 family and all of those kinds of things. Yeah, it's the last two years that I've really been . . .  
39 they're talking about my life on the front page of the newspapers. When I do talks, I use this

1 image of the front page of a newspaper that says, “Transgender students report feeling super  
2 discriminated against,” and then right underneath there’s an article, “Minnesota unemployment  
3 rate at its lowest point ever and Blacks still are rising in unemployment.” That’s my life on the  
4 front page – Black and trans on the front page, negative experiences for Black and trans people.  
5 And, I don’t think I’ve ever felt like that before – like I’m afraid to go into the bathroom, I’m  
6 afraid that when I go to the airport somebody is going to harass me, or when I walk into a  
7 convenience store in some small town. As an oral historian, I’m going to small towns talking to  
8 people and it’s scary sometimes. Let me ask you this, André, and maybe I can join you on  
9 camera for this and we can just talk a little bit about what it means to be an oral historian and  
10 how, in fact, we as some people who are deeply privileged to be able to do this – what it means.  
11 So, hi. I’m usually not on camera, but I’m thrilled to have this unique experience and  
12 opportunity to talk with you about oral histories and why this is important to document these  
13 stories at this point in time.

14 AP: Why do you think it’s important?

15 AJ: Why do I think it’s important? You know, here’s my thing. Recently I’ve been asking myself why  
16 is it important and I think every time that I either go out and speak to a group of people or I do  
17 another interview, those are 200 people, five people, 16 people, who can no longer say, “I don’t  
18 know a transgender person.” Right? When you think about the LGBT movement and the  
19 movement for same-sex marriage, there was a point in time where people said they didn’t know  
20 anybody who was gay or lesbian. And then, 10 years later, 90% of Americans polled said they  
21 knew somebody in their family, their cousin, their co-worker, the couple down the street, and  
22 that has made a difference in how people relate to gay and lesbian people over time. It’s just  
23 the knowledge that those people exist. I think every little interview breaks down that barrier to  
24 people saying, “What is transgender?” And, I do think that documenting stories generally . . . I  
25 was a poet long before I was an “oral historian” in the formal sense, but I was documenting oral  
26 histories since I’ve been 14 years old. So, the power of the narrative, the power of telling stories  
27 and sharing stories is as old as the flow of human blood through human veins, right? I think  
28 stories of transgender people who may just be some of the most resilient people on the planet  
29 and who come from this unique perspective of being able to see and walk through life in  
30 multiple genders, not just two genders, because we’re exploding the binary. So, that’s my  
31 reason, what’s yours?

32 AP: The reason for collecting oral histories in the modern moment . . . I was kind of getting into this  
33 idea that I believe we’re in a historically transformative moment. I think that things are  
34 changing really rapidly and I think it’s an important moment to capture just because I think how  
35 change happens is so important. It’s so important to our understanding of ourselves as a  
36 country or a people or whatever – my interest in history is because I’m interested in how things  
37 change and then why they change. And, that’s whether it’s a human, like a person and oh,  
38 “How did you become this? What were the milestones? What was the turning point?” And so,  
39 I think of those as these small histories, these small arcs, and then I think that all of our small  
40 arcs create this larger arc and that’s what I think of as history. But, I think that we’re very much  
41 in a historical moment and so the more we can understand how people experience this  
42 moment, I think it will be something that I think future generations will look back on and will be  
43 interested in and it will matter to them and it matters to their sense of identity. I often think of



- 1 trans people, particularly when I started the project, I think of trans people as my audience. I  
2 think that I started it and I was like, “Oh, I want for people who are isolated and alone and have  
3 never met a trans person like them, I want them to be able to meet someone through this  
4 virtual experience and come to understand things.” I was young and I wanted to talk to older  
5 trans people and there weren’t older trans people around. So, I was like, “Oh, what would it be  
6 like to go through these stages in life and what does it mean to have an adult child and come  
7 out to them?” I don’t know, there’s so many things that I wanted to know about my own life  
8 and so I think that’s still very much . . . that still remains true. I think that culture, trans culture,  
9 there is a trans culture.
- 10 AJ: There is a trans culture.
- 11 AP: The trans culture is changing. More people are making more stuff and that definitely changes . .  
12 . I think at first I was a little hurt by that. I was like, “Well, what do I do? What do I do if there’s  
13 this other trans oral history project? Then I’m the original trans oral history project?” Part of  
14 me felt some kind of way about that, but then part of me is so . . . you just have to recognize  
15 that we’re entering into these new moments and I think it’s so beautiful to be able to be among  
16 a colleague – this is my fellow transgender oral historian.
- 17 AJ: Yeah. Here’s the thing, I bow down – you were the founder and originator. But a big part of  
18 this, for me, is . . . like you said, to be able to create that sort of support and culture for another  
19 trans person, but actually empowering trans people and just telling their stories. Sitting down  
20 with some of the folks who have been involved in this project and just seeing their eyes and  
21 seeing their sort of happiness around being acknowledged and being asked to share their story,  
22 which is, in a way, building community and building just within that process. Just the act of  
23 sitting down and telling your story is an empowering process – if no one sees it. But, I do think  
24 that when people see it, it then becomes this inspiring thing for other people and this awareness  
25 thing that I talked about the first time. There’s multiple layers to this. What was one of your  
26 most memorable interviews?
- 27 AP: Oh, yeah – turning it around on me. Let’s see . . . what was one of my most . . . I mean I think  
28 the most memorable interview was the first.
- 29 AJ: Yeah, you’ve got me thinking about my first interview.
- 30 AP: It was three hours long. It was with this man named Bet Power and he’s in western  
31 Massachusetts, Northampton. He founded a sexual minorities archives and it was in his house  
32 and he had been an activist . . . I think he was in his 50s and he had been an activist since he was  
33 a teenager or young adult. So, here I am – I’m 19 years old and to meet someone . . . you have  
34 to remember, I didn’t grow up around activist adults – that just blew my mind in general.
- 35 AJ: Wow.
- 36 AP: I grew up around extraordinarily conservative Southern Baptists, military – very conservative  
37 people. So, the idea that somebody had been doing this for so long was really impressive to me.  
38 And then, also he had just been through so much. I just remember I cried multiple times during  
39 that interview. He had been committed to a psychiatric ward when he came out when he was  
40 young and then they shocked him until he forgot or said that he wasn’t. He had ended up

- 1           having a drinking problem because he had had all this internalized shame and guilt and so  
2           working through that. He also had met . . . like he told me about the first time he had ever met  
3           a trans man and that he flew all the way across the country, right, and it was back in the day  
4           when there were these magazines and people . . . that is the genesis of trans culture.
- 5   AJ:     Right, exactly.
- 6   AP:     And so, people are sending in these letters and . . .
- 7   AJ:     Yeah, the classifieds and . . .
- 8   AP:     Yes, so these classifieds, these magazines. He had ended up getting . . . he had sent in a letter  
9           and kind of was like, "People should send stuff to my archive." He was very young at the time,  
10          which I identified with. I was like, "You're so weird, you started an archive when you were like  
11          20; well, I started an oral history project when I was 19."
- 12   AJ:     19 – wow.
- 13   AP:     So, this man sends him this thing and it's called, "Resources for the FTM transsexual," and that's  
14          Louis Sullivan.
- 15   AJ:     Wow.
- 16   AP:     Do you know of Louis Sullivan?
- 17   AJ:     Yes, Lou Sullivan – yes, I know who he is.
- 18   AP:     And so, that . . . I still have . . . I've edited a clip from this video and so it sticks . . . I just  
19          remember it word for word and he's just . . . he just describes meeting Lou and how he goes to  
20          San Francisco and Lou is very life-style gay and he lives in this apartment. He's just so different  
21          and Bet is very . . . he's kind of homophobic sounding in his story. He's like, "No homo bro." He  
22          totally wants to meet this man, he's never met anyone like him – ever. He never imagined  
23          someone else felt the way he felt. And then he realized, as they were talking – they talked for  
24          like eight hours, and the person's alarm went off and he said, "Oh, I have to go take my AZT."  
25          And he realized he was going to die, he realized he was making this life-affirming connection and  
26          that this person was going to be gone soon. And he was – because it was the 1980s.
- 27   AJ:     Yeah – HIV/AIDS.
- 28   AP:     And so, it was just hearing him recount . . . I don't know, I'd just met him but hearing him  
29          recount this moment of making this connection and how much that meant – that meant the  
30          world to him and that propelled him on to this journey in which he would later transition and he  
31          would continue to seek out community and make that his life's mission – even though he was  
32          doing other work, that wasn't what he was getting paid for.
- 33   AJ:     Right.
- 34   AP:     We were talking about that; those resources weren't there. He was like, "I'm going to fill my  
35          house up with cultural items of this community because I think it's so important that we know  
36          where we come from."

- 1 AJ: Bet Power.
- 2 AP: Bet Power. That's what I think, I think of this idea of like where do you come from and how do  
3 you know who you are if you don't know where you come from. And that's . . . I think it's so  
4 important. One of the other most important interviews I did was with Reina Valentina who was  
5 the first Cacica Queen. So, the Cacica Queen is a beauty pageant for trans women in the  
6 Humboldt Park neighborhood
- 7 AJ: Here in Chicago – oh my goodness.
- 8 AP: Which is a super Puerto Rican neighborhood. And, she was one of the first winners and so she is  
9 like feisty and she's just everything. She's . . . I don't know what she was like in her heyday; at  
10 the point I met her she was in her 40s and she just had been homeless, had been a street queen,  
11 had been a stripper, had been a sex worker, had been everything. But she's one of the most  
12 generous and giving souls. She just is willing . . . like I said, that is the foundation of our  
13 community. I think interviewing her stood out to me because it was definitely that moment of .  
14 . . she was so . . . I think it meant so much to her that I cared and that I wanted to know and that  
15 I was there to ask her these questions.
- 16 AJ: Exactly.
- 17 AP: And I was like, "Well, why wouldn't I? You're a legend."
- 18 AJ: Right.
- 19 AP: "You did this amazing thing, why wouldn't I want to know and want to share that with other  
20 people." And then I guess my third is Miss Major.
- 21 AJ: Yeah, you interviewed Miss Major.
- 22 AP: One of the most . . . she's so spit and vinegar, she's all feisty.
- 23 AJ: Yes, I've met her multiple times.
- 24 AP: And so, take no bullshit kind of person. And yet, is also deeply a caretaker – like absolutely to  
25 her core.
- 26 AJ: She will get you whatever you need when you need it – like that's who she is.
- 27 AP: Yeah, so I feel like that's . . . I feel inspired. This work is . . .
- 28 AJ: I'm so glad you captured that interview. I can only hope and pray that I'm able to interview her  
29 one of these days. It might happen, I'm never giving up.
- 30 AP: Yeah, you should – totally.
- 31 AJ: If she's going to be around.
- 32 AP: I was going to say, if I know about her coming to Chicago . . . we're trying to get her to come to  
33 Chicago.
- 34 AJ: Is that right?

- 1 AP: Because, you know, she's from here.
- 2 AJ: I do know that. Yeah, I do know that very well. Just . . . yeah. I occasionally get out to the Bay,  
3 so it could happen. It could happen – I'll just keep my fingers crossed. But, I don't have to worry  
4 that no one . . . because you've done it, and there's a movie now, *Major*. I think the reason why  
5 this stuff is important is because we are at this historical moment, right, as you pointed out.  
6 And, yes, we're creating our content and our own images, but trust and believe, other people  
7 are going to want to do this work too. So, we need to be telling our own stories so we control  
8 the narrative, so that we shape how people view our individual lives and this community as a  
9 whole and not continue to let people speculate or fictionalize our lives in some ways that suit  
10 their own toxic masculine fantasies.
- 11 AP: Yeah, and I mean I think that . . . what do you . . . do you think about who will watch your work  
12 or who will . . .? When you think about who will watch or consume your work or who is  
13 interested in it, who do you think of?
- 14 AJ: You know, because this project is in a university setting, the language I kind of use, and I think  
15 primarily it's going to be researchers, educators, students who are writing papers or working on  
16 projects. I think potentially novelists and filmmakers will look back on some of these  
17 documentaries. I think, hopefully, trans community will consume the interviews and images  
18 that we're able to collect. But, I don't really think about the end user, per se. I am really deeply  
19 into that connection that is being made in the interview process. For me, and I think we talked  
20 about this a little bit before we started the tapes rolling, but for me the joy is in the connection  
21 and the conversation with the person I'm interviewing. And so, I don't think a lot about where  
22 this is going to be or who is going to watch it. And not to say it's not important or I don't think  
23 about it at all, but it's not the first thing on my mind – it is sort of the back end, like, "Oh yeah,  
24 somebody is actually going to watch this." But, I think to have the conversations and really what  
25 I see in so many instances is people's sheer joy in being able to share their story. That's the  
26 important part for me.
- 27 AP: I think it goes to this idea . . . I'm very much reminded and humbled . . . I think of story  
28 collecting, in a way, to be kind of sacred. I feel like the fact that someone who I've never met  
29 before, often, is so open and so willing to just be so open and share intimate details of their life,  
30 answer questions. I ask really personal questions.
- 31 AJ: I do too.
- 32 AP: And the fact that someone is willing to be open is such a gift and it's amazing. I think about  
33 what it means to provide that space to someone and how to hold that responsibility and to  
34 honor them in that sense. – particularly when I'm thinking about documentaries, or more edited  
35 kind of content. You could manipulate someone for your own needs, and many people do.
- 36 AJ: Yes, absolutely.
- 37 AP: And so, that's definitely a . . .
- 38 AJ: It's a huge responsibility, right. Yeah, you talk about . . . just this past weekend, I was in Fargo  
39 and I interviewed a person who I had only communicated with via email maybe three or four

1 times to set up the interview. I go to their house and I'm a Black trans person . . . people don't  
2 trust . . . in the general population, right. But this person trusted me to come into their home  
3 and then shared their whole life story with me – that's a huge responsibility and a huge thing to  
4 carry. And so, it's interesting to meet someone else because just the care that we take with the  
5 footage itself – like you have a case with eight little things and you use two cameras. I use an  
6 audio recorder and a camera because I want to make sure that if one doesn't work, at least the  
7 other one is going to capture the voice and the stories. It's a sacred responsibility, I think you're  
8 right.

9 AP: And it's also something I've realized, kind of only recently, this has been my coming of age.

10 AJ: Wow.

11 AP: I have been recording trans people's stories since I was 19.

12 AJ: How old are you now?

13 AP: 28.

14 AJ: Wow, so almost a decade.

15 AP: Almost a decade. So, this very much marks a period of my life. And like so many firsts – the first  
16 time I went on a road trip was for the Trans Oral History Project and the first time I went on a  
17 plane was for the Trans Oral History Project and the first time I've been to many different places  
18 and interacted with . . . the first time I met a person who is two spirit was because of the Trans  
19 Oral History Project. When I think of the kind of opportunities that I have had to meet different  
20 people and interact with people in all these different settings that I just never would have  
21 otherwise had or . . . I don't know, it's just such an important part of my life story. Yeah, that's  
22 something that's kind of wild to me – to be like . . . I can't imagine it being any other way, but I  
23 think that the . . . yeah, that it just has very much personally and profoundly shaped me, this  
24 opportunity to speak with so many different people on such an intimate level and I just feel very  
25 grateful for that.

26 AJ: Well, I know, André, that you're about to embark on a whole new sort of leg of this journey that  
27 you started at 19, and you talked a little bit about it earlier, and I just want to just say thank you  
28 for this work that you're doing. It's extremely important to be able to capture and document  
29 these voices from all over our community. I've looked at some of the people who you've  
30 interviewed – religious leaders, I think you shared that you even interviewed a Trump supporter.  
31 But, that voice is important too, and we need to be able to capture that just so we can know  
32 who we're fighting against – who the enemy is. So, I just want to say thank you for the work  
33 that you're doing, thank you for being a part of this oral history project, and thank you for  
34 interviewing me to be a part of your oral history project.

35 AP: Yeah, I feel very honored. Thank you for being the one to interview me after all of this. Like I  
36 said, I think that I'm really excited about this moment where our numbers are strong. I'm seeing  
37 more trans people taking on lots of different kinds of projects, moving in lots of different ways,  
38 and I think it is exciting to have someone else – especially as I'm like, "I don't know, do I want to

- 1           continue being an oral historian if I'm going to transition into this different phase of my life?" I  
2           think it's exciting to feel this sense of the time passing away.
- 3   AJ:     Wow, that's incredible.
- 4   AP:     You know, like . . .
- 5   AJ:     And we're both wearing purple shirts, I love it.
- 6   AP:     To know that it matters to someone else is incredibly important, right? Sometimes I can think,  
7           "Am I just crazy? Am I just doing something compulsively and obsessively and am I just doing  
8           something really weird and will it ever even matter to anyone?"
- 9   AJ:     No, it matters.
- 10   AP:    So, I think it's been really great to hear your reflections about this work because I think that  
11           makes it worth it. It's like . . . for me, I measure myself against people's opinion in my own  
12           community and people who I respect.
- 13   AJ:     Absolutely.
- 14   AP:     Yeah, so thank you so much for honoring me in this way.
- 15   AJ:     Can I give you a hug? Oh, thank you so much.
- 16   AP:     And looking great with me on camera.
- 17   AJ:     Woo hoo. Peace.
- 18   AP:     Trans Oral History forever.
- 19   AJ:     Forever, baby.