

Andrea Jenkins  
Narrator

Roxanne Anderson  
Interviewer

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

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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.

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1 Roxanne Anderson -RA  
2 Andrea Jenkins -AJ  
3

4 RA: Hello, this is Roxanne Anderson interviewing Andrea Jenkins for the Oral History Project. Can  
5 you tell me your name, your preferred pronouns, your gender identity, and your gender  
6 assigned at birth?

7 AJ: I certain can. I do just want to . . . I'll just add a little bit. Today is July 20, 2017, and it's the  
8 University of Minnesota Transgender Oral History Project, and we're here in Minneapolis. So,  
9 yeah, my name is Andrea Jenkins, A-n-d-r-e-a J-e-n-k-i-n-s. My gender identity today is  
10 transgender female and I was assigned male at birth and my pronouns are she, her, and hers.

11 RA: Thanks. I want to say thank you for giving me this honor, it's a great pleasure to be sitting on  
12 this side of the camera to interview you. I think you're #178.

13 AJ: Yeah.

14 RA: That's amazing – good job, and I'm so excited about this project.

15 AJ: Well, I couldn't think of a better person to interview me and that I would be willing to sit down  
16 and sort of share some of the really intimate details of my life and my journey, my gender  
17 journey, with. So, thank you for being willing to do this today, Roxanne. I appreciate it.

18 RA: Well, let's just jump in because you're fascinating and I'm sure there's going to be a lot in this  
19 interview. Let's start with your earliest memory. Can you tell us a little bit about what your  
20 earliest memory is?

21 AJ: Well, I think about this a lot because I've asked this question 177 times. My earliest memory in  
22 life is . . . I was about two and a half years old and the night before my dad had given my sister  
23 and I chewing gum, but absolutely said, "Don't fall asleep with the gum." And, of course, I feel  
24 asleep with the gum and . . . fell asleep, the gum came out of my mouth, got all into my hair and  
25 my father, who was a hair stylist and a barber and a hairdresser, as they called them back in the  
26 day, gave me my first haircut. I had this huge 'fro. I remember my mom telling me that I had  
27 been just born with hair all over my face and so I had this really beautiful afro and . . . yeah. He  
28 cut all my hair off because I fell asleep with gum in my hair. I think it was Wrigley's chewing  
29 gum. Yeah, I'm pretty sure it was Wrigley's growing up in Chicago, that's pretty much all they  
30 sold.

31 RA: What was the impact on that? Do you remember that affecting your sense of self?

32 AJ: You know, I don't think it really impacted me at the time, certainly not my idea of self, but it's  
33 one of my few memories of my father. My mother and father were separated by the time I was  
34 about five and wasn't necessarily by choice. My father went to prison and was in prison for a  
35 very long time. My mom was like, "I've got to move on with my life." So, it's one of the few  
36 memories I have of my dad even though growing up my grandparents, his parents, would take  
37 us to visit him in Statesville Penitentiary in Joliet, Illinois, which was really a blessing that they  
38 would do that. We did get to have a relationship, albeit behind very thick glass and bars, but we  
39 did get to have some connection and some relationship with my dad. So, I deeply appreciate

- 1           them for doing that. So, yeah, it didn't impact me in terms of my identity that much, at least not  
2           that I can recall. But, it's one of my earliest memories of my father.
- 3   RA:    You mentioned growing up in Chicago. Tell me about where you went to elementary school.
- 4   AJ:    Wow. So, we lived on the west side of town, which is a pretty rough part of Chicago. It was  
5           where all the Blacks who had immigrated from the north to the south, and I do use that term  
6           deliberately, immigrated, because . . . and some people say migrated, but it was a very . . . my  
7           family is from the south and it was deeply oppressive and dangerous for Black people to live in  
8           the south. And so, when Blacks would come to Chicago, really the only place that you could get  
9           housing was on the west side. So, I grew up on the west side and went to grade school there –  
10          inner-city Chicago Public Schools. It was pretty rough and tumble. I was a pretty average kid. I  
11          was a pretty smart kid. I remember being in 1<sup>st</sup> grade and my teacher telling my mom, like  
12          literally your son is very smart, and just kind of happy go lucky – they just kind of get it without  
13          even studying it; if they applied themselves more, they would be a much better student. But, I  
14          was a good student all through grade school – A's and B's. But, not to the point where I was sort  
15          of disconnected from the other kids. I wasn't a loner – in fact, I was a pretty social kid. I was  
16          pretty popular in grade school. I had a few fights, but it was just kind of kid's stuff. I do  
17          remember, though, always trying to fit in with the boys because I really did feel like a girl, but I  
18          knew that that really wasn't going to influence people and win friends – or, at least, I felt that  
19          way anyway. And so, I played sports in grade school, I loved baseball as a kid. I loved baseball  
20          and basketball. I wasn't a great basketball player, just because in Chicago – man, the kids are so  
21          good at such an early age because everybody was trying to get out of the ghetto.
- 22   RA:    Right.
- 23   AJ:    But, I could hold my own. I was pretty athletic, I was a big strong kid. But then, when I was  
24           about 10, I got hit by a car – by a truck, actually. I was in the hospital for a very long time. It was  
25           one of the . . . a big huge snowstorm in Chicago, like 20 inches of snow or something. I don't  
26           even know why they didn't close school that day, it was like a blizzard. But, me and my sister  
27           were on our way to school and there was this bus that was stalled on the corner and we had to  
28           cross the street to get to our cousin's house and then we would walk to school with our cousins.  
29           And, I peeked around the bus with my younger sister and as soon as I sort of walked out to see if  
30           any cars were coming, bam – I got hit by a truck.
- 31   RA:    Wow.
- 32   AJ:    So, I was in the hospital for a very, very long time – the accident happened in January and I  
33           didn't go back to school until the next fall.
- 34   RA:    Wow.
- 35   AJ:    And I probably stayed in the hospital until April or something. A lot of it had to do with the  
36           injuries that I sustained, but I also . . . so, I was born with an undescended testicle, which, in  
37           biology, really, testicles are just ovaries.
- 38   RA:    Sure are.

- 1 AJ: And so, my body apparently wanted to . . . couldn't decide whether they were going to be  
2 ovaries or testicles. I think, fortunately, the doctors didn't make that choice early, like when I  
3 was born. They sort of left it . . . I think hoping that it would sort of come down on its own, but  
4 it never did. And so, when I was in the hospital, they decided that, and my mom consented, that  
5 they should go ahead and remove it. So, I had that surgery as well – like a hernia surgery. And  
6 so, yeah, I was in the hospital for quite a long time, in rehab learning how to walk again and all  
7 of that kind of stuff. So, yeah, that was kind of a part of my early childhood. And, like I said, I  
8 always knew deep inside that I was what I thought was a girl but I just really, like everybody,  
9 wanted love, wanted attention, wanted respect of my family and friends. So, I tried to conceal  
10 that to the best of my ability, and I did a pretty good job at it too.
- 11 RA: You talked a little bit about your dad and your mom and your sister. Can you tell us a little bit  
12 about your home environment and what it was like growing up for you?
- 13 AJ: We were . . . you know, we were a low-income family, even though my broader family I would  
14 probably classify as working class. I came from very much a working-class family, all of my  
15 relatives worked in factories and steel mills so were able to earn some pretty decent wages and  
16 buy a home and that kind of stuff. My immediate family was definitely impacted by my dad not  
17 being there and so . . . in fact, my father went to jail for robbing a bank so clearly he felt like he  
18 didn't have enough money and was trying to get money to support our family.
- 19 RA: Right.
- 20 AJ: But, it was a pretty low-income upbringing for the most part. My mom had a very strong work  
21 ethic and always worked. She worked in factories for a little while but then she became more  
22 into administrative work and so, she was a telephone operator for Illinois Bell. I remember she  
23 used to work the evening shift so she would be home during the day and we would come home  
24 from school for lunch and that kind of stuff. But then, in the evenings, she'd have to go to work  
25 and we'd be at home by ourselves, for the most part. Sometimes we would go to our cousin's  
26 house or something, but for the most part we were home by ourselves. This was when I was  
27 maybe about 10 . . . 9 or 10, and since then she's always had administrative-type jobs. But, she  
28 always sort of strived to give us the best that she could. I remember we would always shop at  
29 Carson-Pirie-Scott or . . . you know, she wanted us to have a strong sense of our value and our  
30 place in the world. She was pretty strict. We had to be home before the street lights, we had to  
31 do our chores every Saturday before we could go outside and play. Chores include mopping and  
32 sweeping the entire house, doing the dishes, cleaning down the hallway stairs – I don't even  
33 think people do that anymore, or a lot of people don't, but we did it every weekend.
- 34 RA: Yes, we did too.
- 35 AJ: And, cut the grass in the summertime, shovel snow. She really instilled in us a pretty strong  
36 work ethic and the things that she had been taught as a kid – to help out around the house and  
37 make sure we had a clean house and that kind of thing. We always had a place to stay, we  
38 never were homeless. There was a few times when we would go and stay with my grandmother  
39 because my mom remarried and the person she married was really abusive and so we would  
40 leave and go stay with my grandmother and that kind of stuff. She eventually got out of that

1 relationship. For the majority of my childhood, I grew up in homes that we owned, that my  
2 mother owned. I know that home ownership is really low in the Black community.

3 RA: It is.

4 AJ: So, to think about in the 1960s and 1970s, a single Black mom buying a house was almost  
5 unheard of but she did that and that really impacted my sense of self in terms of hard work can  
6 bring rewards and sort of . . . you know, you've got to be able to maintain your own well-being.  
7 That's been something that I've been carrying with me all of my life. But, yeah, my home  
8 environment was sometimes rocky with the abuse that was going on, but it was a very loving  
9 family. We always support each other. I grew up in a very large family on both sides, and even  
10 though my father was in penitentiary, like I said, my grandparents would always come and pick  
11 us up and bring us to their house. My dad had nine brothers and sisters, so it was a very large  
12 family. My mother had four brothers and sisters, which is a relatively large family as well. So, I  
13 grew up with lots of cousins and lots of aunts and uncles always around, always in our lives –  
14 very close-knit family. Most of my friends growing up were family – cousins and stuff.

15 RA: You mentioned your sister when you were talking about the accident. Can you share a little bit  
16 about your siblings?

17 AJ: So, I have one biological sister and then my mom actually raised two of my first cousins, her  
18 sister's children, from the time that they were about seven and four, maybe. And, so, the early  
19 part of my life it was just my sister and we would fight all the time, but we really loved each  
20 other. I remember just going places and we would knock on the door and they'd be like, "Who  
21 is it?" It was like . . . ahh, should I out my name? I don't know. But, we were always together –  
22 like always. And, that can create friction – I mean, brother and sister. And, it's so funny. I was  
23 the oldest . . . so, I'm the oldest in my immediate nuclear family and I am the oldest of all of my  
24 cousins on both sides of the family.

25 RA: Oh, yeah, that's a big title.

26 AJ: I was the first grandchild for my mom's mother and father as I was for my dad's mother and  
27 father. So, the eldest is definitely a title and I think there is a lot of validity to the studies around  
28 position in the family and responsibility and all of that kind of stuff. So, I had a lot of  
29 responsibility early on for taking care of my sister and brothers . . . my sister is only 13 months  
30 younger than me though. We're very close – I think they call that Irish twins.

31 RA: Right.

32 AJ: And, then for the younger children once they came into our household, so that instilled in me a  
33 sense of responsibility. But, I was just going to mention that it's kind of funny because my sister  
34 would always try to take up for me if people were sort of picking on me or bullying me or  
35 whatever. She would be the one to jump in and be like, "No, you can't mess with him," and  
36 literally get in fights. And I would be like, "No, you don't need to do this, I can handle this." But,  
37 she would take that on and I think, in many ways, subconsciously she could maybe sense that I  
38 was sort of vulnerable in some ways. I was a pretty emotional kid and sensitive, I would say.  
39 And, in fact, I started probably crossdressing when I was about six years old. I don't know if  
40 people in my family knew, but you all live in the same house together. I think people could

1 sense things. So, I don't know if that was her sensibility, but my sister would always try to take  
2 up for me and be sort of my protector, if you will. She's still like that today, in fact.

3 RA: Yes, she's fierce – like your momma.

4 AJ: Yeah, like my mom. She still is very much super supportive since I came out. My sister was one  
5 of the first people I told in my family and she never left – like it was just, “OK, we're going to  
6 deal with this and I love you, you're my sister and that's the bottom line.” It was . . . our life was  
7 cool, it was great.

8 RA: You mentioned that about six is when you feel like maybe you cross-dressed, but can you tell  
9 maybe about the first time that you realized that you weren't aligning with the gender that you  
10 were assigned?

11 AJ: Yeah. And, when I say crossdressing, I would wear my grandmother's nightgown at night and  
12 just sleep in it and then wake up before everybody else and put on my pajamas or whatever.  
13 So, I mean, that's probably the beginning of when I knew. Interestingly enough, in your  
14 interview you talked about wanting to be the dad when you were playing house and that kind of  
15 stuff. Many, many times I was the mom or the girlfriend. I would play feminine roles in playing  
16 house and I always wanted to. There were times when other folks would sort of force me into  
17 playing a more masculine role, but I always wanted to. I remember one time we were playing  
18 hide and go seek and I was at my grandmother's house, my dad's side of the family, and so  
19 playing hide and go seek there was like 15 kids. And so, one of my cousins, he's a little bit older  
20 than me, and he's like . . . he's a cousin but he wasn't any of my aunts or uncle's children. His  
21 parents were my grandmother's sister and her husband.

22 RA: Right, right.

23 AJ: But, he kissed me and . . . I think we had been playing hide and go seek . . . well, house first and I  
24 was his wife and then . . . but when he found me behind the car or wherever I was hiding, he  
25 kissed me and I was like, “Whoa, what is this?” I mean, I knew it was weird but I knew that I  
26 liked it and it opened up some ideas about my gender identity. I don't think I've ever told  
27 anybody this story before. But it's interesting though, when I came out to my broader family,  
28 one of my aunts told me that my dad told her when I was three that, “My son has a lot of girl in  
29 him.” My dad recognized that and verbalized it. She's pretty adamant about it – he never said  
30 that to me, but she's told me that multiple times throughout the years that my dad sort of  
31 knew. Interestingly enough, my mom says she had no idea when I came out to her. And, I get it,  
32 just because I really consciously, all my life growing up, tried to be conformative to societal and  
33 family norms even though, in the back of my mind, I knew that at some point in my life I would  
34 be a woman – I didn't know how. When I was 12, I used to . . . when nobody was home, I would  
35 stuff pillows under my shirt and pretend like I was going to have a baby, pregnant, just knew I  
36 was going to be a woman. I didn't know how that would happen or when. So, to answer your  
37 question, from a very, very early age – even probably about four I was thinking about, “I'm a  
38 girl.” I always liked playing with the girls even though, like I said, I knew I couldn't express that.  
39 And so, I was definitely on the basketball court, I was definitely shooting marbles, I was  
40 definitely talking smack with the guys. I did all the little boy things. I was in Boy Scouts, the  
41 Webelo's and all that stuff. “On my honor, I do my duty to serve my country.” That kind of

- 1 thing. But, always in the back of my mind and in my head and even when the lights went out, I  
2 was feeling and expressing myself as a girl. When I would masturbate . . . when I became of age  
3 and began to masturbate, I would fantasize that I was a girl. Whenever I was home alone, I  
4 would put on my mother's clothes, put on make-up – something . . . something to express my  
5 femininity – like all the time. I remember once in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, I . . . it was Halloween, so there's a  
6 couple stories. I was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, Mrs. Johnson's class, and it was Halloween. I went to school  
7 completely dressed as a woman – make-up, wig, hair, heels. She didn't know who I was.
- 8 RA: Amazing.
- 9 AJ: But, she said I was beautiful and I remember not wanting to take off my costume – we went  
10 trick or treating in it, everything, and I didn't want to take it off. I think I did, I didn't sleep in it  
11 or whatever, but I know I didn't want to. And then another instance that same year, I actually . .  
12 . I was sick or not feeling well or whatever. I'm in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, so I just stayed home and my sister  
13 and everybody was going to school, my mom was going to work, my stepdad was going to work,  
14 and I got dressed, put on a wig, make-up, heels, and I walked all around the neighborhood on  
15 the west side. Dudes were hitting on me. I wouldn't say anything and I didn't stop, but it just  
16 felt so good and so freeing and so much like myself.
- 17 RA: Oh, yeah – validation.
- 18 AJ: Right, it was like, "Oh, this is who I'm supposed to be and this is why I feel so uncomfortable  
19 when I'm trying to fit in with the boys." I felt so good. I stayed out all day, I should have  
20 brought my ass home because when I got home, my stepdad was home.
- 21 RA: Oh.
- 22 AJ: And, I had left the back door open so I could get back in and he didn't lock the back door, but  
23 when I got home, he was there. So, I couldn't go back in the house. So, I went and just sat  
24 under the porch until he left. He left about an hour or so later. He knew I was supposed to be  
25 home, he knew that I was sick and was at home, but didn't know where I was. And then he left  
26 and I was finally able to get in the house and change back. I did sort of . . . I mean, I got in  
27 trouble because he knew I was supposed to be home, told my mom I wasn't blah, blah, blah,  
28 blah. I'm not quite sure if he saw me or not, but it's possible. I don't know. But, yeah, that was  
29 a day . . . I actually write about that in this poem called, "Black Pearl".
- 30 RA: Yeah, you do.
- 31 AJ: That was a real experience.
- 32 RA: What about terminology, what are the terms that you use to describe yourself and has that  
33 changed over time?
- 34 AJ: Yeah, it has changed over time. I think the first time I came out about my identity, I was about  
35 19 years old. I had been away at college here in Minnesota and, by that time, I really knew that I  
36 was definitely trans. I had already . . . when I was 14, I read the story of Christine Jorgensen, but  
37 I still felt like it was an unrealistic goal to pursue. But, again, whenever I was alone or whenever  
38 I had opportunities, I would express myself, my feminine self. And sometimes, that just meant



1 having sex with men, right. And, one day I came . . . well, one day I didn't go to school, I went to  
2 a bookstore on Lake Street and met this older white dude and brought him back to my  
3 apartment and we had sex. While we were having sex, my roommate/fraternity brother came  
4 home and busted us, busted me, and he went berserk and kicked me out. I remember my frat  
5 brothers, they all wanted to beat me up and they were yelling at me, "How could you do this?"  
6 and calling me names and all of this stuff. They kicked me out, I'm 19 years old, I didn't have  
7 any place to go. I ended up just packing up my car and driving back to Chicago. My mom was  
8 like, "Why are you here? Why aren't you in school?" It was the middle of a semester, and so I  
9 had to tell her something. So, I told her the story and I told her that I'm bi. So, there's the first  
10 sort of sexual identity I came out as, is bi. And then, I got into a pretty long-term relationship  
11 with a guy, we were together for about three years and so, I was identifying as gay. I had really  
12 started to sort of live and sort of be indoctrinated into the gay community, if you will, even  
13 though I knew in my heart that I wasn't a gay male but I felt like that was probably the closest  
14 identity that I could get to being my true self without outing myself. And even . . . I know that I  
15 wasn't gay because . . . our relationship was amazing, like we had amazing sex and an amazing  
16 life, we traveled and did all of this stuff, but as I began to express my more feminine self more  
17 and more because I felt that that could be a reality – like, "This is my husband." We were using  
18 that kind of language. He was like, "No, this is not what I'm about – you're wearing make-up  
19 and . . . no, this is not working for me." And so, we broke up. And then, I actually went back  
20 into the closet after that. I was still sort of . . . when I would meet women, I would be really  
21 honest and be like, "You know, I'm bi, you need to know that." But, I thought getting married  
22 would solve or resolve my gender identity issues. And, so, I did it, and even though I was  
23 identifying as bi within the context of my relationship, most of the world saw me as straight.

24 RA: Right.

25 AJ: And then, even after my divorce, I got involved with another woman and we were together for  
26 almost five years and finally the desire, the reality, the urges just became overwhelming. As I  
27 mentioned, every time I would be alone, I would cross-dress and I would go out and be in the  
28 world. It was just beginning to get to be too much and so . . . I would research and learn about  
29 trans identity and ways to come and I came across the Program in Human Sexuality and it  
30 happened to be within walking distance of where we lived.

31 RA: Hmmm, yes.

32 AJ: I mean, it was a long walk, but it was very close – in a car it would take me five minutes to get  
33 there; walking was probably 30 minutes.

34 RA: Right.

35 AJ: So, I started going to the Program in Human Sexuality and started learning and understanding  
36 that what I was feeling was not isolated just to me, there were other people who had these  
37 kinds of feelings and actually were able to realize those things from various stages – from  
38 crossdressing to drag queens to transsexuals. I really started to work on myself and come to the  
39 understanding that this is who I am. And so, I came out to my partner as trans. And, it was  
40 really interesting - it was beautiful in many ways. It's amazing because I'm just now . . . I saw on  
41 Facebook that her and her husband just celebrated their 20<sup>th</sup> year anniversary and she really

- 1 wanted to get married and have babies. She never had the baby, but I'm really glad she was  
2 able to get married. I was just like, "I can't do that." I've done that, it would be unfair . . . and  
3 she wanted to stay together, she was like, "Can't you just cross-dress at home?" I'm like, "No,  
4 that's what I've been doing my entire life, this has to stop – I have to be authentic with you, I  
5 have to be authentic with myself, I have to be authentic with the people I love, I have to be my  
6 true self and I can't do it within the context of a relationship, I can't do it just hiding it anymore.  
7 It's killing me inside." And, so, we broke up but . . . so, bisexual, gay, back in the closet as  
8 straight, trans, and probably the hardest coming out for me, at least at this point in time it feels  
9 like the hardest, has been sort of coming out as lesbian.
- 10 RA: Yes.
- 11 AJ: And that's because, I think, the expectations are that OK, you're trans – you're a trans woman,  
12 so you should be automatically attracted to guys and want to be heterosexual.
- 13 RA: Even gay people have that assumption sometimes.
- 14 AJ: Absolutely, yes. They do, right. Because there's been a lot of gay guys that I would have liked to  
15 kick it with, but they . . . I mean, in some ways it's a compliment. They're like, "You're a  
16 woman." But, I'm like, "But, I'm feeling you dude." So, yes, absolutely gay people make those  
17 same assumptions as well. And, even within the Black trans feminine community, being a  
18 lesbian is super taboo. I think it has changed somewhat over time, but early on it was . . . all the  
19 girls were like, "I'm strictly dickly, I'm looking for trade, I've got a man." And, I get it because in  
20 expressing a female identity, what validates that is to be with a man and to be perceived  
21 attractive by men, that really sort of validates a lot of trans women's experience – and, a lot of  
22 time, to their detriment. Guys take advantage of that and use you for your money, don't want  
23 to be seen with you out in public, don't want to . . . they can be abusive and all of these things  
24 because they feel like as a trans woman you're vulnerable and you should be lucky that I'm even  
25 coming over here at 3am in the morning.
- 26 RA: Right.
- 27 AJ: Right. But, so many women, trans women, that's like . . . they put up with that. It's interesting  
28 that a lot of times, though, in the white trans feminine community, they tend to stay married . . .  
29 or, not always stay married, but have relationships with women and it's less taboo, less frowned  
30 upon, which I've always thought was kind of an interesting phenomenon.
- 31 RA: It might be an access point. So, hopefully, you're setting a great example for other trans women  
32 who are interested in being in a relationship with other women because now they can see that  
33 that is possible.
- 34 AJ: Yeah, well – hopefully. I don't know, maybe. If you like guys, that's fine. I'm not trying to shape  
35 anybody's sexual identity, but I know, for me, when I've recognized . . . I love being with guys,  
36 particularly sexually, but in terms of a relationship, it's just so challenging because of all the  
37 things I mentioned – the lack of respect for trans identity and trans women. I just don't have  
38 time for that anymore.
- 39 RA: Right.

- 1 AJ: If you can't love and appreciate me for who I am and treat me with the respect that I deserve,  
2 then I've got to move on. I feel like women are more willing, able, capable of doing that.
- 3 RA: You've spoken about some of the challenges, are there any challenges that stick out that you've  
4 faced as you express your true gender identity?
- 5 AJ: Yeah, some much more blatant than others. Right? I think there is what we have come to call  
6 microaggressions now that I experience on a regular basis. Women are perceived to be less  
7 intelligent, less capable, and so I've certainly experienced that, particularly in the work place. I  
8 remember when I first came out at work, and I transitioned on my job. I worked for Hennepin  
9 County for 10 years and the first five years I worked as a male-identified person and then the  
10 last five years as a female-identified person. When I first came out, there was a woman who  
11 claimed she was uncomfortable with me being able to have access to the restrooms. So, they  
12 gave me my own bathroom on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. I don't know if you remember this, Roxanne, but I  
13 used to work as a . . . my first job with Hennepin County, I was an employment counselor on GA.  
14 So, this was all the hardcore people who didn't have kids, GA was General Assistance – they  
15 don't even do it anymore.
- 16 RA: Right – no, they don't.
- 17 AJ: But, you used to get \$203 and some food stamps, but in order to get that you had to look for  
18 work and I was the employment counselor that would sort of train people how to fill out their  
19 resumes and all of this. So, these were really hardcore sort of . . . a lot of street people,  
20 homeless people, some really cool people who just didn't have, you know, the resources – or,  
21 they were maybe scamming, I don't know. But, a very tough environment to come out as  
22 transgender in.
- 23 RA: Yes.
- 24 AJ: But, when I did, man, I got so much love and respect from my clients and from most of my co-  
25 workers. But, I did have that bathroom thing on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. But, we moved out of that  
26 building into Century Plaza after about . . . maybe six months after I came out. And so, when we  
27 moved, there were multiple bathrooms that people could use all over the building. So, the  
28 bathroom issue went away and nobody ever complained about that again. In the medical . . .  
29 you know, access to medical care, early on in my transition it was . . . I told you I went to PHS  
30 and did talk therapy and all of this stuff for two years in order to really . . . at that point in time,  
31 they were still using the Harry Benjamin Standards of Care, which required you to live in the  
32 opposite gender for a year and go to therapy for two years and then you've got to sit before a  
33 panel of people and they decide whether or not you can go on hormones. And so, I had already  
34 been through that process and looking for an endocrinologist to start on hormones and they  
35 had referred me to this person and the person was like, "Oh, I can't give you hormones, you  
36 need to go to therapy." I'm like, "Hmmm, no, my therapist referred me here. I'm not crazy – I  
37 know what I want, I know what I need for my body." So, there was that sort of early on in my  
38 transition where people just wouldn't believe. I would go to the doctor and they would be like,  
39 "Why are you taking so much estrogen?" Because they ask you what medications are you on.
- 40 RA: Right.

1 AJ: And, I'd be like, "Well, I'm transgender and this is what I take to help me to become the woman  
 2 that I am." And so, I would call those microaggressions for the most part. The biggest  
 3 challenges for me has been sort of finding love and relationship and fortunately for me now, I've  
 4 been in a relationship for six years. And, prior to that, I had a lot of sort of "down-low"  
 5 relationships with guys, but like I said, after . . . I had actually two sort of clandestine  
 6 relationships with two different guys and both of them for almost a nine-year period. "If you  
 7 like me enough to come around, hang out, have sex after dark for nine years, why aren't we  
 8 together? Why aren't we doing things out in the world?" But, they couldn't come to that place  
 9 of authenticity for themselves. I was just no longer wanting to deal with that. So, that was a  
 10 challenge, right. I really haven't had much challenge with the police. I guess, Black women are  
 11 non-threatening. I don't know – that's not really the reality but . . . I had many more sort of  
 12 negative experiences with police prior to coming out than I have since coming out, which I guess  
 13 is a positive.

14 RA: So, what are some of the other positives that you've experienced becoming your true gender  
 15 identity?

16 AJ: The biggest thing is that . . . like you can set a goal for yourself, and you can achieve it. That is . .  
 17 . it blows my mind. I don't know about other people, but to be able to start out in the world in  
 18 one place and throughout the course of your life change to another place, which is a whole  
 19 different gender, that's some hilarious shit, Roxanne. That's why I'm so thrilled to be doing this  
 20 project. I think trans people are fucking amazing.

21 RA: We are.

22 AJ: And that is like the biggest thing. But, you know, being myself – being true to myself, being true  
 23 to other people, that feels really, really, really good. There was so much shame around the  
 24 crossdressing and knowing that I am a woman, but only being able to express that in the dark,  
 25 after midnight. It was deeply shameful and caring that kind of shame has significant impacts on  
 26 people. So, to be able to be myself and, you know, I guess the positive thing is that . . .  
 27 particularly my own personal situation, people have responded to that authenticity, respect it,  
 28 and actually look at me as a leader, and that feels really, really good and really amazing. To  
 29 think that something that, for so many people, they get denigrated for, they get ostracized for,  
 30 they get pushed deeply to the margins of society, to be recognized and appreciated for that  
 31 authenticity, it's amazing. And, I guess the last thing I will say, is that it has given me an  
 32 opportunity to really speak up and speak on behalf of other people like myself and people who  
 33 are transgressing gender norms and try to make positive change in their lives. It's a beautiful  
 34 thing.

35 RA: You've talked a little bit about your current relationship with your birth family and/or chosen  
 36 family. Is there anything else that you want folks to know about that?

37 AJ: You know, it hasn't always been easy. I mean I mentioned my sister was open and accepting,  
 38 but she was real clear that she didn't necessarily understand, and I still don't think that she fully  
 39 understands and that's OK because I don't fully understand why I am who I am. I don't know if  
 40 there is an explanation. My mom was really . . . I think she was really hurt, initially. She felt like  
 41 there was something that she did wrong or could have done better. Parents . . . I am a parent, I

1 didn't mention that in my marriage we had a daughter who is now 28 years old, but as parents,  
2 you do have expectations for your children and you want them to succeed in life and be safe  
3 and be productive and be able to accomplish their goals. I think my mom was really, really  
4 worried that if I came out as trans that I wouldn't be safe, that I wouldn't have access to  
5 employment, that I wouldn't have access to housing, that I wouldn't have love in my life, and all  
6 of those things came into play for her. If you remember, I mentioned, I was her first child, I was  
7 her parent's first grandchild, I was my dad's first child, and his parents first grandchild, so there  
8 was a lot of expectations for me. And, I think, over time my mom has come to realize that all of  
9 the things that she has feared were pretty much unfounded, at least in my own particular  
10 situation. The reality is that a lot of trans people do face some of the challenges that she was  
11 deeply concerned about; so far this year, 17 trans women of color have been murdered. We  
12 don't even know the number of homeless or housing insecure trans people are out there. We  
13 know that transgender people are double the unemployment rate of the broader population.  
14 So, she wasn't far off base with her concern, but what she didn't recognize or didn't realize at  
15 the time, was that she had instilled a lot of really positive values in me in terms of work ethic  
16 and in terms of responsibility, in terms of making sure to figure out a way to take care of myself  
17 – all of that comes from my mom. But today, we're best friends and have been for a very long  
18 time. She loves me.

19 RA: Yes, she does.

20 AJ: She's my biggest fan.

21 RA: She beams when you get on stage.

22 AJ: Yeah, she's not embarrassed to tell her friends that this is my child and yes, my child is trans so  
23 don't even fix your mouth to say anything negative about my daughter. One of the things that  
24 really . . . I don't know, makes me get teary and sentimental is for my birthday or Christmas,  
25 when my mom sends me cards, they're like, "To my daughter, Andrea, blah, blah, blah. I love  
26 you." Like, that is amazing.

27 RA: Yes, it is.

28 AJ: I even wrote a poem called, "My Momma Calls Me Anna." It's a very short poem, but so many  
29 people love that little poem.

30 RA: Because it's so confirming.

31 AJ: Yeah, it is – it is, deeply.

32 RA: To the extent that you're comfortable, will you please tell me about medical interventions that  
33 you've undergone as part of your transition?

34 AJ: Hmmm, medical interventions. You know, I want to state real clearly that medical interventions  
35 and surgeries and hormones and all of those things don't make you a trans person. I know that  
36 there are many, many people out there who have access to that type of transition – the Caitlyn  
37 Jenners of the world. And, there are many people who really want that for themselves, but I  
38 think the social transition is really the most important aspect. I mean, I know some trans people

- 1 who have gotten all the gender confirmation surgery that you can possibly get and are still  
2 depressed, are still sort of operating from a sense of isolation and loneliness because they  
3 haven't been able to make that social transition.
- 4 RA: Yes.
- 5 AJ: And, it's sad and unfortunate, but it is a reality. So, I just kind of . . . and there are so many trans  
6 and gender non-conforming people who don't have access to medical care to be able to do that.  
7 And, a lot of people who are now like, "I don't desire to do that." I remember when I first came  
8 out, it was probably 1994, and I met this Black trans woman and she had had full surgery and  
9 she's beautiful. She was like, "Girl, most dudes like trans women because they didn't have  
10 surgery. You have surgery, you're just going to be just another average woman out here that  
11 can't find a husband – like there's nothing unique about you." And that, that hit me, man. Up  
12 until that point, I was like, "I've got to have surgery, I've got to have a pussy," right. That was  
13 the holy grail.
- 14 RA: Right.
- 15 AJ: And, even then, even when she first told me, I was like, "Pfft, I know what I want." But, again, it  
16 is extremely difficult to access, it's complicated, it's invasive and it does not, in my opinion,  
17 determine your quality of life. And so, to answer your question, I've had some medical  
18 interventions. I have been on hormones, I've had top surgery, went to therapy and did all of  
19 those things. There may still be a reality that I will pursue gender confirmation surgery at some  
20 point in time, but it's not at the top of my bucket list.
- 21 RA: I want to ask you what's on the top, but I won't. Looking back over your decision to express  
22 your true gender identity, what are the pivotal moments that defined your life and are there  
23 things that you would have done differently?
- 24 AJ: Well, what I would have done differently, I would have come out earlier. I wish I would have  
25 come out much earlier. I just think that for so many reasons . . . because I didn't come out until I  
26 was 30 years old, which in Black trans community, that's old age almost. Whereas, I know in the  
27 white community, coming out at 45 and up is kind of the norm. So, that being said, the only  
28 thing I would do differently is come out earlier. You know, defining moments, I think I talked  
29 about being outed in college, that was one really sort of big moment that helped me to start to  
30 think, "OK, I've got to start being honest with myself and with other people." And, even though  
31 I wasn't fully honest, but I was starting on that trail and 11 years later, I finally got it right.
- 32 RA: It's a journey.
- 33 AJ: It is.
- 34 RA: Do you think that there is . . . you talked about that kind of pivotal moment in college, but are  
35 there other people or organizations that have had a significant impact on you related to your  
36 gender identity? You also mentioned PHS.
- 37 AJ: Yeah, so PHS was definitely one and that experience . . . so, I went through the gender program  
38 there, but then I became a trainer for this project called All Gender Health. I was on the

1 advisory board from its inception and became one of the trainers for that, and that lasted for 10  
 2 years. During that time, I met people like Leslie Feinberg, Kate Bornstein. I was already good  
 3 friends with CeCe Russell, who was a drag performer at the 90s, and Susan Kimberly, who was  
 4 one of the first public officials to come out as transgender in the Twin Cities. So, I think that  
 5 organization and that experience, that broad, long experience, has had a really significant  
 6 impact on my life. I'm still involved with them, to this day. We talked about the Center for  
 7 Gender Spectrum Health, which is the latest sort of program that they're trying to do and myself  
 8 and you are both on the advisory planning group for that. We haven't even put together an  
 9 advisory committee yet.

10 RA: Right.

11 AJ: So, clearly that place has had a really significant impact. I talked about the young woman who  
 12 gave me this idea about . . . that surgery is not necessarily the end all, be all. That had an impact  
 13 on my life. There was this woman, Valerie Spencer, who I'm still in friendship with today. I was  
 14 probably . . . I don't know, 10 years . . . pretty close to 10 years into my transition at that point,  
 15 but I hadn't had breast augmentation yet. We were talking, we were in Atlanta doing HIV/AIDS  
 16 work, actually, at the CDC. We did the first Transgender Consultation at the CDC about how  
 17 they should work to help trans people and separate them out from men having sex with men,  
 18 which they still haven't really done yet – even though they have started some specific funding  
 19 for transgender people, but they're still in that population as MSMs or men who have sex with  
 20 men. But, at any rate, Valerie was like, "When you get your breasts, your life is going to  
 21 change." And, that just set me on a goal to really try to make that happen. And, I did it. That  
 22 was in 2004 when I met Valerie and in 2006 is when I did surgery. Yeah, it has made a huge  
 23 impact. That's the commitment, right. When you alter your body to the point where there's no  
 24 really going back. But, I knew it was the right thing for me to do.

25 RA: Right. What about, in that same kind of vein, romance or relationships that have that kind of  
 26 impact?

27 AJ: Yeah, you know, I mean I've talked about it a lot. I'm currently in one of the longest  
 28 relationships I've ever been in – six years now and I think most of my relationships . . . well, I  
 29 guess, I don't know . . . do the guys that do the down-low relationships count?

30 RA: Well, you get to count your relationships however you want.

31 AJ: So, those were longer but were they really full-time relationships? No. You know, I guess I will  
 32 just say that I'm blessed and fortunate to be in relationship with a beautiful woman who I think  
 33 responds to the fact that I'm open and honest about who I am and that's attractive to her.

34 RA: Yeah. Have there been times when someone has been really helpful or really insensitive related  
 35 to medical personnel, criminal justice, education – those kinds of institutions?

36 AJ: Yeah, I mean I've talked about that a little bit. I think about . . . there have been some pretty  
 37 helpful people in terms of changing my name on my records and that kind of thing. I came out  
 38 on my job, as I mentioned, and I got an assist from a woman, Debra Davis, who came to my  
 39 office and answered all the questions about trans identity and transsexuals and transgender  
 40 people so that I did not have to. My company paid for it, or Hennepin County, paid for it. That

1 was something that was really, really helpful and made a huge difference. I think there are  
2 insensitive people out there. A lot of times people do things that you don't even know about, so  
3 I can't really speak on them and I don't really want to give that much energy either.

4 RA: Beautiful. Tell me about the first time you met a trans person, gender-queer person, and what  
5 that impact was on you.

6 AJ: Woo-hoo! Wow. I was about . . . so, I didn't meet these people, but I was maybe . . . I don't  
7 know 9, 11, somewhere in there. But, I remember me and my mom and my sister, we got on  
8 the bus, we were headed to Oak Park. I know we were going west. There were these two . . .  
9 they were probably drag queens, but probably hookers too, and they were clearly guys, or at  
10 least that's the only description I had at the time. But, they had blonde hair and perms and  
11 haircuts and you could kind of tell that they had on make-up, but it was gone for the day. They  
12 looked like they were going home from working wherever they worked, which was probably sex  
13 work. Right? But, I was enamored by these two people and I'm like, "Ahh, that's who I am."  
14 And, that just stuck in the back of my mind for a long time. Then, when I was about 16, I met  
15 this little dark-skinned trans girl. She was a little bit older than I was and, you know . . . we had a  
16 relationship for, I don't know, maybe two or three years . . . maybe I'm making it a little bit  
17 longer, maybe it wasn't quite that long, but it was definitely over time. We would hook up and  
18 make out, have sex, and I was into her not because of who she was but because of who I wanted  
19 to be. She was into me, because I was treating her like a woman like I knew she wanted to be  
20 treated like. So, that had a pretty significant impact.

21 RA: I'm guessing.

22 AJ: Yeah, even though I was that down-low, we can't be seen in public kind of . . . I mean, in my  
23 circle of friends . . . we would go up on the north side and hang out, but I couldn't really kick it  
24 with her like, "Hey, you should come over to my house and have dinner with my family."

25 RA: Right. You've talked a little bit about coming out to your family and friends, is there anything  
26 that you'd like to share about your coming out process or story?

27 AJ: No, not any more than I've already talked about. I think I covered it pretty much.

28 RA: I figured these final questions might be like that. Do you think that the relationship between the  
29 GLB and the T is like . . . in your own experience, what do you think the relationship . . .?

30 AJ: It is tenuous at best, it's necessary, I think, because we are "sexual minorities" and so, in many  
31 instances, I get that many people are like, "Trans people should just do their own thing and not  
32 necessarily be concerned about the broader movement." But, my point is that trans people  
33 started the gay liberation movement, right? And, much of the harassment that happens to "gay  
34 and lesbian" people happens not necessarily because of who they sleep with but because of  
35 how they present themselves in public. So, gender and sexuality is really hard to separate out,  
36 even though yes, it is two separate things, but they are so fluid and so conjoined that it's hard to  
37 separate out. I think the broader LGB community has been sort of unfairly harsh on the trans  
38 community over time and has really created many obstacles. I think as a Black trans woman, the  
39 recognition that racism and sexism and transphobia are definitely prevalent in the LGB  
40 community, and I think things are sort of slowly changing, that there is more recognition that



- 1           our struggles are intertwined and/or intersecting, as people are fond of saying these days. But,  
2           by the same token, gay, white men who really have the more resources and power within this  
3           movement, have still yet to fully recognize trans identities and fully embrace and include into  
4           the things that support and uplift the broader LGBT community. However, that being said, as I  
5           said earlier, trans people are amazing and awesome and we are doing shit for ourselves and we  
6           are creating space for ourselves and making space in those communities that don't want us or  
7           didn't know that they needed us to be there.
- 8    RA:    Well said. Do you think that the trans community needs an agenda or a manifesto and, if so,  
9           what would it be?
- 10   AJ:    You know, if it's not about access to trans medical care, trans-specific medical care, access to  
11           employment, access to safety in public spaces, access to bathrooms and locker rooms and things  
12           in schools, if it doesn't include a recognition that trans women and trans people are women and  
13           men, then I can't get with that agenda.
- 14   RA:    This is obvious, but let's just get it for the record, have you ever worked or volunteered for a  
15           trans or LGBT organization?
- 16   AJ:    You know, this is . . . so, I've done a lot of volunteering.
- 17   RA:    Yes, you have.
- 18   AJ:    This is actually my first paid . . . well, no, at the Program in Human Sexuality I was getting paid  
19           but it was part-time, so it wasn't full-time. This is my first full-time job as the oral historian for  
20           the Transgender Oral History Project. That being said, I have volunteered at District 202, PFund,  
21           TYSN, Rainbow Health Coalition.
- 22   RA:    PFLAG.
- 23   AJ:    PFLAG, yeah. I was a part of a national group called the OUT Fund and the Trans Justice Funding  
24           Project, which is one of the most amazing things I've ever been involved with. It's trans people  
25           raising money and giving it to other trans groups regardless of whether they have a 501c3 or a  
26           budget or fiscal . . . they're just like, "Here's \$3000, go do your thing." And, I'm currently a  
27           facilitator for the Transgender Leadership Fellowship through the Sojourner Truth Leadership  
28           Council, which is a part of Auburn Seminary.
- 29   RA:    Beautiful.
- 30   AJ:    Yeah, it's pretty amazing – ten trans women in leadership development over a year period,  
31           around self-care.
- 32   RA:    Wow.
- 33   AJ:    So, it's all about creating a self-care plan and then we give all the women resources to try to  
34           make that plan a reality.
- 35   RA:    So, some real resiliency building and skill sharing – wow, that's beautiful.
- 36   AJ:    Yeah.

- 1 RA: I'm glad you're there.
- 2 AJ: Yeah.
- 3 RA: What do you think has been the impact of your trans identity in your professional life?
- 4 AJ: Well, interestingly, I mean it's been positive, I guess. That's all I can say. Since I came out, I got  
5 promoted on my job three times at Hennepin County. I don't know if it's because they wanted  
6 to get rid of me and they kept moving me to a different department or they really appreciated  
7 my work. I like to think they really appreciated my work. Since I came out, I was able to finish  
8 my college degree, get a masters degree in community economic development and get a second  
9 masters degree in fine arts. I got a job as a policy aide in City Hall and worked in City Hall for 12  
10 years and now I'm running for City Council and I am very likely going to win. I don't think any of  
11 that would be a reality if I were still hiding in the closet.
- 12 RA: So well said. I'm still reeling a little bit about this is your gay for pay job. Is there anything else  
13 you want to share for the record? For the archive? For the history?
- 14 AJ: The gender revolution is here. I think in 50 years from now, the general concept of gender that  
15 we hold today, meaning binary male/female, I think, is going to be completely obliterated and  
16 shifted to include so many other ideas around gender and gender expression. And, I'm just  
17 happy to be a part of bringing that to fruition.
- 18 RA: Thank you. Thank you for all the work that you do, Andrea.
- 19 AJ: Thank you.
- 20 RA: I just want to state it for the record.
- 21 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 22 RA: You're brilliant and beautiful. Thank you for letting me be the one to interview you.
- 23 AJ: Oh, my goodness, Roxanne. I could say all the same things about you and I'm glad you were the  
24 one to interview me. Thank you very much.