

Naiymah Sanchez  
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins  
Interviewer

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

January 21, 2017



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

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

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

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- 1    Andrea Jenkins            -AJ  
2    Naiymah Sanchez        -NS  
3
- 4    AJ:      So, good morning.
- 5    NS:      Good morning.
- 6    AJ:      My name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian with the Transgender Oral History Project  
7            at the University of Minnesota.
- 8    NS:      OK.
- 9    AJ:      Today is January 21, 2017. I'm at the Creating Change Conference in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
10           and today I get to interview Naiymah Sanchez.
- 11   NS:      Yes, yes.
- 12   AJ:      What's up Nay-Nay?
- 13   NS:      Hey, how are you?
- 14   AJ:      How are you doing?
- 15   NS:      I'm doing really good. It's the second to the last day of the conference, so I'm ready to go home  
16           and be with my kids, my pets.
- 17   AJ:      You're ready to go home.
- 18   NS:      But, yeah.
- 19   AJ:      So, I should just mention, and we'll talk a little bit more about this, but you are the co-chair,  
20           you're one of the co-chairs of the conference, which means you hold a lot of responsibility for  
21           making things work behind the scenes and making sure people are having a good time. So, I just  
22           want to thank you and honor you for stepping up and being of service to our community, being  
23           a positive representative for the trans community, and really just holding space for everybody  
24           that's here at the conference. So, thank you.
- 25   NS:      Thank you, I try.
- 26   AJ:      So, can you do this for me? State your name.
- 27   NS:      OK.
- 28   AJ:      How you prefer it to be pronounced, spell your name, and then state your gender identity  
29           today, your gender assigned at birth, and your pronouns that you use?
- 30   NS:      OK. So, my name is Naiymah Ariana Sanchez. It's N-a-i-y-m-a-h, Ariana is A-r-i-a-n-a, last name  
31           is Sanchez, S-a-n-c-h-e-z. I am a transgender female; I was born male.
- 32   AJ:      And pronouns?
- 33   NS:      Pronouns are she, her, hers, goddess, diva, sometimes . . . yeah. We'll leave that one off.

- 1 AJ: You can say whatever you need to say, it's all good. So, wow. Naiymah, I'm so thrilled that we  
2 get to just sit here and talk for a little bit. What's your earliest memory in life? Like the first  
3 thing you remember. It does not have to be about your gender identity, although if it is that's  
4 perfectly fine.
- 5 NS: Yeah, I mean my first . . . like to go back as a child, the first thing that pops in my head is sitting  
6 on my great grandma's lap. She is, or was, an amazing woman who had a lot of things to say,  
7 unapologetically her. So, that's the earliest thing that I can remember.
- 8 AJ: Just sitting on great grandma's lap.
- 9 NS: Sitting on her lap and watching her bake pies. She was a pie baker, so – yeah. My grandfather  
10 was the cook of the family, which was her daughter's husband, but yeah – she was the pie lady.
- 11 AJ: Wow. That's sweet. Where did you grow up?
- 12 NS: So, I grew up in The Bronx and we transitioned to Philadelphia. I was a teenager when we came  
13 here. So, I grew up in The Bronx.
- 14 AJ: Wow, so born and raised in The Bronx.
- 15 NS: Born and raised partially in The Bronx, Philadelphia half raised me.
- 16 AJ: OK. So, Naiymah, how do you identify ethnically?
- 17 NS: So, I am Afro-Latina. I have three mixtures of . . . people like to say I'm like a mutt, but I'm  
18 Puerto Rican, I am Cuban, and I'm Ethiopian.
- 19 AJ: Oh, wow. OK – cool. How does that . . . how do those three sort of familial threads inform or  
20 impact your life?
- 21 NS: Being a Latina, I am a documented . . . well, I'm a citizen of the United States.
- 22 AJ: You were born here?
- 23 NS: Yes, but I am descendants of immigrants and the work that I do, it focuses on being transgender  
24 but also to raise awareness around citizenship, being documented, the barriers to getting  
25 documented or becoming documented as citizens to the United States. Culturally, as a Puerto  
26 Rican, I'm spicy. A lot of people will say that a lot of Latinas are spicy, so that's where the  
27 impact is. I don't have a great connection with the Ethiopian part of my ancestors because I just  
28 don't know any Ethiopian ancestors, I just know that in my line there is Ethiopian descendants. I  
29 know both sides of my mother and my father's side and I've been raised to be proud of who I  
30 am and . . . yeah, just making sure that I know how to be vocal about any injustices that I face.
- 31 AJ: Wow, that's incredible. I know you did half in The Bronx, half in Philly, but what was it like as a  
32 young person in The Bronx and was your gender identity ever a challenge for you – like going to  
33 school or just hanging out in the hood, in the neighborhood?
- 34 NS: Well, so my family knew and there is a story that I was told by my grandfather, was has passed  
35 on, that when my mother became pregnant with me that my grandmother told my mom that,  
36 "You have a goddess in your belly."

- 1 AJ: Oh, really?
- 2 NS: And I was born in . . .
- 3 AJ: And she was right.
- 4 NS: Yeah, I mean I was born in 1983 so I don't know how savvy the ultrasounds were back then, but  
5 they did not know the gender of me until I was born. My mom and my father, because of not  
6 knowing the gender, they took both of their names and created my name that was given to me  
7 at birth. I'm not ashamed of my name – my father's name is Otha and my mother's name is  
8 Sandra and what they did was they took the "O" from my father and the "san" from my mother  
9 and they made Osan.
- 10 AJ: Osan.
- 11 NS: Yeah, so they knew pre-birth that . . .
- 12 AJ: That you were a goddess.
- 13 NS: That I was a goddess, thanks to my grandma.
- 14 AJ: Oshun.
- 15 NS: Yes. Thank you.
- 16 AJ: Osan, Oshun. I mean.
- 17 NS: Thank you. And when I was born, they had already developed a name for me and when the  
18 doctor, this is what my mom said, is that when the doctor told her, "Congratulations, you have a  
19 boy, or a son," she stood in shock because she felt as through her daughter . . . that her  
20 daughter was in her belly. I have sisters, a lot of sisters that are before me, so when she got the  
21 boy she was excited, but shocked because she felt as though the same spirit she had with my  
22 sisters birth was the same spirit that she was feeling. I didn't come out as trans because I did  
23 not know what trans was. Everyone has this misconception that New York is like openly . . .  
24 you're able to be openly gay or trans in New York.
- 25 AJ: To some extent.
- 26 NS: To some extent, but we're thinking about the 1980s and there wasn't a lot of individuals around  
27 the neighborhood that was out as trans or gay, a lot of people lived stealth. So, I didn't know. I  
28 did have a gay uncle who would show me friends or pictures of friends that were transitioned or  
29 what they considered "up in drags" and they were performers, and I was like, "OK, that's cool."  
30 I'm 7 years old, 8 years old, and I'm seeing these pictures and I'm like, "This used to be a guy?"
- 31 AJ: Right.
- 32 NS: And, "she's so beautiful." I remember, and this was at . . . you asked me about my earliest  
33 memory, but my earliest memory of identifying that something was wrong was we lived in a  
34 small apartment and we sometimes had to take baths together. So, to eliminate time and get us  
35 to bed for school, so I was in the bath with my sister and I realized . . . I didn't know nothing  
36 about anatomy, I knew I had something down there and didn't know what it was for.

- 1 AJ: You went to the bathroom, right?
- 2 NS: But I'm in the tub with my sister and I'm looking and I'm like, "Why is yours stuck in? What's  
3 going on?" So, it was in my mind and it played in my mind so much so I told my sister to sneeze  
4 and she's like, "Why?" I'm like, "Because your innie needs to come out, it needs to look like  
5 mine."
- 6 AJ: Right.
- 7 NS: And then that was the way I led to asking my parents like, "What's up? Why do I look different  
8 down here than my sister?" And that's where they were like, "Oh, crap, they're questioning  
9 now what's going on."
- 10 AJ: You have all sisters, no brothers?
- 11 NS: I do have brothers, I have seven brothers and six sisters.
- 12 AJ: Oh, wow. OK.
- 13 NS: I have a big family. They're all not from my mother and father together, my father has other  
14 children with other women.
- 15 AJ: Sure, you didn't all grow up together.
- 16 NS: We all did not, but I do know them all and everything like that. So, when I raised the question  
17 of, "What's up? Why do I have a worm or why is my innie like my sisters out, what's wrong with  
18 me?" They initially took me to counseling and the sad part about that was, I was diagnosed with  
19 ADHD, bi-polar disorder, schizophrenia and that wasn't the case. What they were doing was  
20 they had conversion therapy and one of those, how I consider it is conversion therapy through  
21 medication.
- 22 AJ: Right.
- 23 NS: So the providers may not have been trained or educated on transgenderism because this was  
24 the 1980s, so they were given me medication and zombie-ing me up, and that was from seven  
25 up until . . . say 11, when I started more understanding what was going on with me or that I was  
26 totally different. I was very effeminate. A lot of people would say to my mom if they seen us in  
27 the grocery store, "Your daughter is very beautiful, she's got beautiful hair." I used to have this  
28 curly, curly thick hair – before I started processing it. And my mom used to tell them, "No, this is  
29 my son," and a lot of people used to be shocked.
- 30 AJ: Think she was crazy, huh?
- 31 NS: Oh, wow. And then it was one doctor, in particular, who was like . . . because even through the  
32 medication I was still having these anger spats and being mad/angry and didn't know why I was  
33 mad/angry or going like not wanting to eat and I'm 11 years old. She was like, "Why don't you  
34 want to eat?" "I just don't feel like eating." She took me to another doctor that said, "Your  
35 child is . . ." Well, they had these cards in front of me and was like, "What is this?" And, "What  
36 is this?" And then they'd show me a picture of a guy and then they'd show me a picture of a girl  
37 and they were asking my thoughts on a guy and a female or a guy and a woman. I gave my

- 1 thoughts and the findings from that psychiatrist was that, “Your child is facing gender  
2 dysphoria,” and that was hard because my mother was not truly 100% supportive about it but  
3 my father was and I use this a lot when I . . .
- 4 AJ: Which sometimes is opposite, right?
- 5 NS: It is opposite, yeah. I use this a lot when I do speeches is that when a parent gives birth to their  
6 child, they have a preconceived notion of what that life is going to be like. So, their son is going  
7 to be a football player, a doctor, he’s going to marry this beautiful woman and have many, many  
8 children. And then when their son says . . . or a doctor tells them that their child is facing this  
9 disorder . . .
- 10 AJ: Air quotes.
- 11 NS: Right – yeah, air quotes because I don’t understand how . . . yeah.
- 12 AJ: Speak your mind.
- 13 NS: I don’t think it’s a disorder.
- 14 AJ: Right.
- 15 NS: I don’t think it’s a mental health issue.
- 16 AJ: Absolutely.
- 17 NS: Things happen in the womb and the conception of a child, you know, and sometimes people are  
18 born with different body parts but my mother was just like, “No, I’m not accepting that,” and  
19 “No, my child is not,” and she didn’t even know what it was. But my father, being a Cuban, they  
20 believe in Santeria and one saint, I would say, is Chango. And Chango has a wife that is Oshun  
21 and they are to believe that Chango turns into Oshun and this is where the goddess comes from,  
22 and my father understanding what his mother told my mom back when she was pregnant was  
23 that, “You have a goddess in your stomach.” So, my grandmother knew what was going on and  
24 identified me before I was born.
- 25 AJ: That’s deep.
- 26 NS: It is. It’s really deep – it’s really deep.
- 27 AJ: And they even named you close to that.
- 28 NS: Yeah, it was . . . and I think about it, and even after I did a legal name change, like why did I do  
29 that because that is my name and I’m proud of my family, no matter what issues we may go  
30 through – I’m truly proud to be part of my family.
- 31 AJ: Absolutely.
- 32 NS: But I just needed something to make me feel more comfortable and identify.
- 33 AJ: Do you have relationship with your family now?

- 1 NS: Oh, yeah – oh, yes. My mom just called me this morning like, “I’m about to order you  
2 something to eat,” and I was like, “Well, how do you know that I’m hungry?” And she’s like,  
3 “Because I seen you put a post that says, ‘Oh, I’m hungry.’”
- 4 AJ: Right.
- 5 NS: OK, no – don’t order me nothing to eat, I’ll figure something out with one of the sweets here.
- 6 AJ: Yes.
- 7 NS: But, there was no clinics in New York that treated youth that are dealing with identity issues.  
8 When we came to Philadelphia, which was a troubling transition but an amazing transition  
9 because there was a facility here that worked with transgender communities or LGBTQ and T  
10 individuals, which . . . I can say their name?
- 11 AJ: You can, absolutely.
- 12 NS: Which is the Mazzoni Center.
- 13 AJ: Yeah.
- 14 NS: They amazingly helped me through my transition. They not only helped me through my  
15 transitioning, they helped my family through the transition.
- 16 AJ: To deal.
- 17 NS: Yeah.
- 18 AJ: Because it’s a transition for everybody.
- 19 NS: Yes, it is. And, as I said, when a mother births her child they have this vision of what that child’s  
20 life is going to be like and it’s more . . . it’s traumatic for the child because the child has to deal  
21 with this, but it’s also traumatic for the parents that also have to see what the child is going  
22 through. In New York when I identified who I was, I didn’t have issues because nobody really  
23 knew that I was male because I came off as female.
- 24 AJ: Really? As female.
- 25 NS: I was so feminine and I looked just like my mother and . . . so, my mother and my father’s  
26 mother, my grandmother, they look alike but they’re not related, and I look like my mother and  
27 I look what my grandmother looked like when she was my age.
- 28 AJ: Wow.
- 29 NS: And I can actually send you a picture of my grandmother when I get home.
- 30 AJ: Oh, my God, that would be amazing.
- 31 NS: I’ll share it to you on Facebook, but I look just like both of them. I didn’t have issues.
- 32 AJ: So, there were no problems in NYC?



- 1 NS: There wasn't. The only issue was, and this is before we moved to Philadelphia and I'm sorry I'm  
2 jumping around but . . .
- 3 AJ: No, that's cool.
- 4 NS: One year, and this is how I actually went – we called this get up in gesch, in drags – whatever the  
5 case may be. So, one . . .
- 6 AJ: I've never heard that phrase – gesch.
- 7 NS: Gesch – get up in gesch.
- 8 AJ: G-e-s-c-h, that's how we're going to spell it.
- 9 NS: Probably, well we can make it . . .
- 10 AJ: That's how it sounds anyway. But it's basically like painting up and being up in drag.
- 11 NS: Getting your hair done, putting opposite clothes on that you wouldn't normally use – or more  
12 feminine clothes because, as a child – I mean, jeans and a t-shirt was the kids go-to.
- 13 AJ: Basically, yeah.
- 14 NS: I didn't think about genderizing clothes back then, we shared clothes in my family so it didn't  
15 matter. My mom said, "What do you want to be for Halloween?" And I said . . . at this time, Lil'  
16 Kim was the thing and there was this song called, "Crush on You," and back then they had this  
17 TV show that you could call and order videos to play on your TV or whoever orders videos, you  
18 can see the videos that they ordered, so there was this video called, "Crush on You," and I used  
19 to watch this TV show all the time just to wait for the show. So, when mom said, "Well, what do  
20 you want to be for Halloween?" I said, "Lil' Kim." And she was like, "Ahhh, OK." We'd done  
21 been to the psychiatrist or the therapist and she now knows that I'm battling something and  
22 then like, "Listen, OK – my child wants to go and be Lil' Kim, so let's go make you Lil' Kim." And  
23 we went down to the secondhand store and we got this rabbit fur, fake fur – like plastic furry  
24 jacket. We got a \$10 wig that was . . .
- 25 AJ: Blonde.
- 26 NS: . . . a bob that was a bluish/greenish color.
- 27 AJ: Oh, OK.
- 28 NS: So, we did that and we went out for Halloween and that night I felt like . . . I felt so complete.  
29 Yeah, I felt so complete. I don't know if it was the color of the clothes or just knowing that I was  
30 accepted enough to . . . I'm sorry. That my mother accepted that I wanted to dress up like that,  
31 but when I went out it wasn't, "Oh, I'm going to get a lot of candy," it was, "Oh, I can go out and  
32 I'm feeling . . ."
- 33 AJ: And be myself.
- 34 NS: Yeah, I'm being who I idolize even though I idolize my parents and my . . . so that was a time that  
35 was just like, "OK, yes." Now the issue was the following day . . . the following day I went to

1 school and the outfit I wore for Halloween that night, I put it in my book bag. So, I get to school  
2 and I take off my uniform and I put on my outfit that I wore for Halloween the night before and  
3 I'm walking through the hallway and one of the hall monitors took me to the counselor and was  
4 like, "We need to call your parents." So, instead of them calling my mother, they called my  
5 father because they thought that my father was going to be the one to yell at me and everything  
6 like that. So, they called my father and they told him, well they called the house and my father  
7 came up to the school and they told him, "Your son is in here with a wig on and female attire." I  
8 was sent into the counselor's office, so they told him at the principal's office and then they  
9 brought him to me. I don't know what they expected for him to say or do, but my father just  
10 hugged me.

11 AJ: Ohhh.

12 NS: And we went home. Yeah, that was the only issue in school up there. I wasn't able to go to  
13 school anymore with that outfit on. Right there I knew that it didn't matter no more to . . . it  
14 probably never mattered to him because he always loved me.

15 AJ: So, it sounds like things got hard when you came to . . . or harder when you go to Philly.

16 NS: No, actually when I got to Philadelphia it was pretty easy. High school, I didn't have a problem.  
17 Of course, they didn't know. The only issue was that in high school you understand – like you  
18 have girlfriends, you have friends, and a lot of girls in high school they started to experiment in  
19 sexual things. And I couldn't be open and tell anybody, like, "I'm a trans female," or anything. I  
20 tried to keep it quiet because I already knew what I had previously experienced as school.

21 AJ: So, you were out in high school when you came here?

22 NS: Yeah, I was out.

23 AJ: I mean, not out – like, "I am a trans girl," but you were transitioned, you were . . .

24 NS: I had blossomed, I was taking my testosterone suppression medication. I was not able to take  
25 injectables or pills yet because it wasn't legal, but . . .

26 AJ: Sure, for your age.

27 NS: Yeah, for the age.

28 AJ: But you could suppress.

29 NS: I was able to suppress. So, I just lived like . . . I knew I was different but I just didn't want to  
30 expose that especially when I seen that gay guys were being bullied in school and, at that time,  
31 gender identity and sexuality was combined into one.

32 AJ: And people still don't really make the distinction.

33 NS: Yeah, yeah. I just experienced that too last night when I was talking to a detective when he said  
34 . . . an altercation happened with a trans woman here at the conference and she was physically  
35 assaulted, not bad but she was physically assaulted . . .

36 AJ: And she was very shaken up.

- 1 NS: She was, and they were doing an interview with her just to get the . . .
- 2 AJ: The details.
- 3 NS: . . . of what happened in the ten minutes of this assault, and he said, "Oh, he made homophobic  
4 slurs?" I was like, "Well, pause here – she identifies as a transgender female, she doesn't  
5 identify as a gay male. So, what he did was make transgender phobic slurs by calling her a  
6 faggot, by saying she will never be a full woman and all these things." But, back to the schooling  
7 situation, I was scared. I didn't want to tell anybody so I wasn't able to experience what my  
8 girlfriends were experiencing. And then I was able, finally, I met a guy who was a young guy in  
9 my school who was on varsity football and I really liked him a lot and he was questioning, "Why  
10 you don't want to kiss me? Why you don't want . . .? I want to see you?" And I was like, "No,  
11 my parents don't allow me to do stuff like that, they're real religious." And then I also was  
12 scared to bring him around the family because I knew that they would refer to me sometimes as  
13 "he".
- 14 AJ: Right, right. Yes.
- 15 NS: So, I didn't want that to happen. I eventually told him because he met one of my cousins who  
16 was gay and my cousin liked him so my cousin felt like, "Let me disclose this to him so maybe I  
17 can get him."
- 18 AJ: Oh, trying to be shady.
- 19 NS: Yeah. It didn't work. We actually went to prom together and it was really, really nice. That was  
20 the first person that . . .
- 21 AJ: Did you guys ever make out?
- 22 NS: So, we did. It was amazing, it was really amazing. It was scary because I knew that it would hurt  
23 because it would hurt just if I had to go to the bathroom if it was a big stool.
- 24 AJ: Oh, my goodness.
- 25 NS: You know, but it was amazing. And it was totally different than how my girlfriends would  
26 explain it because they're cis gender females who are talking about having a cherry popped and  
27 I didn't have a cherry pop experience . . . I mean, I had a cherry pop experience but I didn't have  
28 the blood and running to the bathroom and . . .
- 29 AJ: Sure, exactly.
- 30 NS: . . . like cleaning it up and coming back. I was so insecure because I don't really like the front of  
31 my private area and I was just holding it all the time and making sure that he didn't see it so he  
32 didn't feel uncomfortable and also that I didn't feel uncomfortable.
- 33 AJ: Right.
- 34 NS: But Philadelphia was amazing to me for transition – it really was.
- 35 AJ: That's awesome.

- 1 NS: I know I'm rambling on, I'm sorry.
- 2 AJ: No, no – that's cool. So, man, one of my questions is how has your identity changed over time?  
3 Your identity hasn't really shifted very much.
- 4 NS: I think the only thing that has changed is the expression. I have learned throughout the years  
5 that just because I identify as female doesn't mean that I have to express all the time as female.  
6 I say that, but I'll also take it back because, like I said in a previous statement, gender identity  
7 and sexuality has always been combined – but gender expression does not identify who they . . .  
8 what gender they identify as. So, I'm a jeans/sneaker/jersey kind of girl. I don't really like make-  
9 up, I don't really like being real girly, but I do like being a girl. I'm attracted to men, I'm  
10 heterosexual because I'm a female who loves men, but my expression sometimes comes off as  
11 what they call as butchy.
- 12 AJ: Right.
- 13 NS: And a lot of people think that . . . if they don't know that I'm trans, they think that I'm a lesbian  
14 or a butch female. So, yeah. That's the only thing that has changed is that I have learned now  
15 that I don't have to live in a binary of, "You're a female – you have to dress as a female, you  
16 have to wear lipstick, you have to wear make-up, you have to always have your hair done, you  
17 have to wear heels, you have to smell this way and you have to look this way." I'm able to be  
18 fluid with my expression.
- 19 AJ: I'm about to put on my Adidas sneakers and warm up right now – today.
- 20 NS: I wear Timberlands, I mean . . . yeah.
- 21 AJ: Because, yeah – keep it real. You've got to be who you are in that moment.
- 22 NS: Yes.
- 23 AJ: What challenges have you faced as a transgender woman, Naiymah? Of color.
- 24 NS: So, as a transgender female of color, I have . . . oh, man. This is a life that is stigmatized. A lot of  
25 . . . if I can't get an appointment at my medical facility and I have some emergency needs or I  
26 have an issue and I go to the hospital, when they find out I'm trans, they treat me like . . .  
27 especially a transgender woman of color, they treat me like I'm positive. I've never, and this  
28 was an experience I had – even though the hospital has shut down and sold, whatever –  
29 reopened, I went to the hospital one time and I had a stomach ache. They found out that I was  
30 transgender and the next physician that came in there, came in with a face mask and gloves and  
31 a full lab coat and I was like, "OK, what is going on here? Maybe I have something that is  
32 contagious."
- 33 AJ: Right.
- 34 NS: But I only had a stomach bug that was the issue. And then learning later that my community is  
35 stigmatized by HIV because we are in survival mode so much. I did have the privilege of having  
36 an accepting family. A lot of trans women of color, a lot of transgender people of color, persons  
37 of color or folks of color, don't have supportive families. I had that privilege, but the issues that I

1 face is in community or general population. I was able to graduate high school, I was able to go  
2 to college even though I have to pay back those loans, the workforce has really been hard on  
3 me. I applied and I worked for a home improvement store and I worked there for four years.  
4 When I applied there, I filled out the information and my name was not changed, but what I did  
5 check was that I was female and my gender marker wasn't changed yet. So, they took a copy of  
6 my ID, they had a copy of my social security card – so they seen that my application said female  
7 but my driver's license said male. Four years later, I was terminated because I falsified  
8 information on my application, which was my gender identity or my gender, period.

9 AJ: Even though you were doing the job for four years.

10 NS: Effectively – actually I had so many . . . they recognized me so many times at work . . .

11 AJ: Commendations and awards and stuff.

12 NS: I got promotions and I was the head cashier and I was doing really good work and they just said,  
13 “Because you falsified information we have to let you go,” which was . . . it made me feel . . .  
14 especially when I knew that there was another transgender person that was working there and  
15 they were out as trans, but they were white experience. So, I questioned that - well, if I was  
16 white would it have been different? If I just would have put that I was male would it have been  
17 different? So, I've faced that. Also, health care issues. My family is not rich and to pay for  
18 hormonal replacement therapy out of pocket is really expensive - \$267-\$380/month or every  
19 two months, that's expensive. And, if you don't get a job that has health insurance, then nine  
20 times out of ten you won't get it and nine times out of ten that insurance company does not  
21 have trans-inclusive health care. Or, if you are a male, they don't pay for this medication for  
22 males, this medication is only made for females. But, if you are a female and at a certain age  
23 you don't apply for this medication because what is a 22-year-old female doing with a hormonal  
24 imbalance where she needs 1 ml of estrogen a week, what's going on here? So, I've faced that  
25 as well. I've also faced, as a woman of color, a lot of issues in LGBTQ and T orgs. I was recently  
26 with an organization that is Latino, Latina, Latinx based and I was their transgender coordinator  
27 for the health department of that organization. And, I was tokenized a lot – it was like you  
28 either do this work . . . it wasn't that I was lacking in work because anything that I do, I give  
29 1000%. If you tell me I need three clients or three members, I'll get you 12. It's like let me go up  
30 and beyond. I was ultimately fired and the excuse that they used first was that I'm not a good fit  
31 and you think if you've been with somebody four and a half or five years and they're not a good  
32 fit, how did it take all this time to realize that?

33 AJ: Right.

34 NS: And then unemployment was like, “That don't cut it, we need a more in-depth explanation.”  
35 And then it was, “Lack of work performance.” I was the only person from that particular org  
36 that was providing services to transgender inmates inside the prison, I was the only person  
37 getting scholarships to go to conferences, I was the only one being called for meetings and  
38 things like that when it came to transgender issues or policies and things like that. So, as a  
39 transgender woman I've faced discrimination on a level that is . . . I don't want to say  
40 embarrassing but it's troubling. I watch . . . when I say about health care, I watch the  
41 transgender white-experienced person able to get re-assignment surgery as I am still struggling

- 1 to get my re-assignment surgery. I put a GoFundMe page up maybe in March of 2013, we're in  
2 2017, and I've only raised \$1700 towards my affirmation surgery, but I had a white trans man  
3 who wanted top surgery and he wanted \$7000 . . .
- 4 AJ: And did it in two weeks, I'm sure.
- 5 NS: A whole day, he raised \$10,000.
- 6 AJ: One day, wow.
- 7 NS: And I seen right there like . . . or I felt like I'm not important enough for people to want to help  
8 me feel complete with who I am. I'm happy, I'm beautiful, I'm free and I love the skin that I'm  
9 in, and I would not change being a transgender female, but sometimes I do think that if I was  
10 white that my life would be totally different – I would be more happier. Yeah.
- 11 AJ: It would be different, that's for sure.
- 12 NS: Indeed.
- 13 AJ: So, let's flip a little bit. What have been some of the joys?
- 14 NS: So, some of the joys have been . . . with being transgender?
- 15 AJ: Yeah, absolutely – with being who you are.
- 16 NS: I explained that my family culture is to like be proud of who you are and being proud, I'm able to  
17 be more vocal. I'm able to advocate for people who are not openly trans, I'm able to bring  
18 visibility to the issues that we face, I'm able to work with mayors and Congress people to help  
19 change policies or add to ordinances that pertain to gender identity – that makes me proud.
- 20 AJ: Right.
- 21 NS: Again, I have the privilege of having an accepting family but I'm proud that my family - my  
22 brothers and sisters, do not discriminate against any other trans or lesbian, gay, bisexual or  
23 queer person.
- 24 AJ: That's beautiful.
- 25 NS: And it's because of me that they are able to accept everyone else because they have a family  
26 member that one, is living her truth; and two, is proud to be who they are. So, I'm proud of  
27 that. I'm proud of me being in Philadelphia and the miles that we've came, or overcome, to get  
28 some kind of equality in this city especially when it comes to resources like housing or education  
29 where gender identity is protected now in that ordinance.
- 30 AJ: Yeah, I happen to know that every building, every new building in Philadelphia now has to have  
31 gender . . .
- 32 NS: Inclusiveness.
- 33 AJ: . . . inclusive bathrooms.
- 34 NS: Yes.

- 1 AJ: I was going to say gender neutral but then I just learned something this weekend – gender  
2 inclusive, I love that phrasing too.
- 3 NS: Yes, even at the airports, even though they have male bathrooms and female bathrooms, they  
4 have family bathrooms which does not particularly say, “Oh, if you’re female you can’t come in  
5 here,” or, “You’re male, you can’t come in here.” I’m proud of that.
- 6 AJ: Yeah, you should be.
- 7 NS: And, it’s not just myself, I’m proud of my ancestors who have made it easier for me to fight and  
8 I’m proud of myself for wanting to pass the torch to the next generation to keep fighting. I’m  
9 proud that everything that I do is not for me, it’s for the next generation. I mean, I have had a  
10 terrible experience with transition, I have faced some issues, but where I’m proud is that the  
11 young person that’s coming after me, is going to have it a little bit more easier.
- 12 AJ: Absolutely, because of you.
- 13 NS: Because of me and because of my ancestors. Here in Philadelphia we had Jaci Adams, we had . .  
14 . Charlene Arcilia. Jaci Adams worked with the police to make sure that they understood who  
15 we were and that it was illegal to . . . not illegal, but it’s not right to do what they do to us.
- 16 AJ: Do you know how to spell her name?
- 17 NS: Which one, Jaci Adams?
- 18 AJ: Oh, Jaci Adams – OK.
- 19 NS: And Charlene Arcilia is C-h-a-r-l-e-n-e A-r-c-i-l-i-a.
- 20 AJ: OK, thank you.
- 21 NS: I’m proud to have been a part of organizing the Philly Trans March for the last three years.
- 22 AJ: Wow.
- 23 NS: Christian Lovehall is the founder of the march here in Philadelphia and it came about when  
24 Stacy Blahnik who was a transgender female who was murdered in her house. He initiated this  
25 march to bring visibility to the murders and to what happened to Stacy and how her murder is  
26 still unsolved. I’m proud of being part of that organizing and knowing where the history starts  
27 with that march, but where we’ve taken it – we’re not just focusing on the injustices that we’ve  
28 faced but we are co-powering and empowering the youth to take a step. We honor people  
29 every year at the march – we honor youth, we honor elders. I’m proud of that. I’m proud to be  
30 an advocate and activist for transgender individuals, I’m proud to be an advocate and activist for  
31 myself – yeah.
- 32 AJ: Oh, wow, that’s a beautiful thing. Man, a lot of the questions that I typically ask you’ve  
33 answered, but was there one particular person who really inspired you or mentored you or  
34 helped you realize your inner truth?
- 35 NS: So, I did drop out of school for a little bit and I was going to this youth center that didn’t have a  
36 lot of trans Latinas there, or young trans Latinas there. There were a lot of Black trans women,

- 1 Black kids there and I'm a woman of color and I love hanging around all people, but the things  
2 that they were into – like voguing and things like that, I wasn't into. I'm into rapping, I'm into  
3 writing poetry, I'm into chilling and cooking and things like that, and they were not into that.
- 4 AJ: Sure.
- 5 NS: Which pushed me out of that center and sent me straight . . . like if I didn't have no place to  
6 network or have support because I didn't feel supported in that space, so I went into the streets.  
7 What we consider our gay family, which was previously, but my trans family – my trans mother,  
8 we have the same name so that's why I chose my name, her name is Naiymah N-a-i-y-m-a. I  
9 added the "h"; I'm the "l" too. I got involved in sex work and I was a teenager. I'm 17-years-old  
10 and I'm just getting experience with sex, period. I see everybody else doing it so I'm like, "OK,  
11 let me make money. I know I don't need it but freak it, just let me make it." She stopped me in  
12 that. Her goals for me were so much more than the goals I had for myself. She taught me that,  
13 and my family did as well, but she instilled in me as a transgender female that I can be the best  
14 at whatever I wanted to be and that I didn't have to live the stigmatized issues that kept my  
15 community oppressed. She passed away from systematic cancer lymphoma, when they have a  
16 cancer of the lymph nodes and it traveled throughout her whole body. But, while she was alive  
17 she made sure that I knew that I was loved and even though I knew I was loved by my family,  
18 you always fill that void when you're the ugly duckling or the odd ball, the odd side one in the  
19 family.
- 20 AJ: Yeah, true.
- 21 NS: She made me feel like I was included and I was welcome and I was loved and that I could be the  
22 best at whatever I wanted to be and not to live by the stigmas that are attached to my  
23 communities but to help eliminate barriers and help reduce those stigmas that keeps my  
24 community oppressed. That was a person that had an impact on me.
- 25 AJ: That's a beautiful story, thank you Naiyma – rest in peace.
- 26 NS: Yes, rest in peace.
- 27 AJ: So, you've sort of talked about this a little bit and I want you to feel comfortable saying, "No,  
28 Andrea – I don't want to talk about that shit anymore," but you talked about doing hormones  
29 blockers as a young person and estrogen as a medical intervention, have you done other  
30 medical interventions and do you have plans to do more? And even more importantly, what are  
31 your thoughts about gender confirmation surgery?
- 32 NS: So, I've been involved with prep before but even though I'm a trans woman of color and I know  
33 that we are at high risk of acquiring HIV and other STDs, but prep to help eliminate the infection.
- 34 AJ: It's like an inoculation almost – kind of like, right?
- 35 NS: What do they call it, a protease inhibitor?
- 36 AJ: Yeah.



- 1 NS: That's the only medical intervention that I've been through. I haven't had any surgeries; the  
2 hormones really did me good. As far as confirmation surgery, or affirmation surgery, I think for  
3 each person that's up to you. I am not comfortable with having a penis attached to me, it keeps  
4 me depressed. I take a shower with panties on. I'm not able to have healthy relationships  
5 because I'm so insecure with that part. The affirmation surgery, to me, means a lot. The  
6 unfortunate part is that being as though Pennsylvania is not a non-discrimination . . . they do not  
7 have a non-discrimination law that protects gender identity as well. Trans-inclusive health care  
8 is the only way to me and they don't have to honor it and that's really, really sad. So, it's a  
9 struggle to have it but they will pay for depression medication because now they deem me as a .  
10 . . I don't want to say a manic depressed person, but I am depressed. The question that I have  
11 for the insurance company is, "You'll pay 30 years for depression medication that ultimately will  
12 have effects on my kidney, my liver, body organ functions, but you won't pay for the procedure  
13 that will keep me . . ."
- 14 AJ: Help you not be depressed.
- 15 NS: " . . . keep me from being depressed."
- 16 AJ: Wow.
- 17 NS: And ultimately you spend more money on the secondary issues that come along with that  
18 depression medication than you would if you would just pay for my surgery or assisted with the  
19 surgery. Everyone's affirmation surgery or not choosing affirmation surgery, that's up to them.  
20 I don't feel like if you identify as transgender female that you need to have bottom surgery or  
21 vaginoplasty, that is up to you. That is up to you – if you feel complete with who you are, if you  
22 feel comfortable in your skin, more power to you. For me, I need it. I didn't need breast  
23 implants because the hormones gave me nice breasts, I didn't . . . well, I probably do need facial  
24 rejuvenation . . .
- 25 AJ: No, you do not need facial reconstruction. Child, you are beautiful, honey – please.
- 26 NS: It's like every time you look in the mirror, thank you – even though I look tired right now, the  
27 conference has me going like this . . .
- 28 AJ: You've been here for two weeks almost.
- 29 NS: Yeah, yeah.
- 30 AJ: That leads me to my next question. What is the connection to the LGBT community, how does  
31 the T fit in that? Should we stay as a part of this whole "LGBT" movement or do we need to go  
32 do our own thing? What's your thoughts?
- 33 NS: So, I think that, paying homage to our ancestors, the movement needs to continue as a unit, but  
34 I have made it a point that every time that I talk, when I speak up, that those acronyms LGBQ  
35 and T, that I always put LGBQ and T because I want to separate that sexuality and that gender  
36 identity from each other. We are oppressed communities, we are stigmatized communities, and  
37 we need to fight together. But I do think that for in order for people to understand that being

- 1 transgender does not make you a homosexual male or a lesbian female, that we should . . . I  
2 don't know, see . . .
- 3 AJ: But trans people can be lesbians though, or gay men – that's a reality.
- 4 NS: Yes, yes. I do know some trans men out here who are gay men and I know some trans women  
5 out here who love other trans women and other cis gender women. You identify as female and  
6 you like females, and even if it's not my choice – you can still identify yourself as heterosexual,  
7 that is your self-identifying factors, your right to self-identify. As far as the movement, I think  
8 that we are, especially in this time, we are in an administration for the next four years of  
9 someone who, literally, once he took oath eliminated the LGBTQ on the whitehouse.org,  
10 eliminated the Affordable Care Act on the whitehouse.org, and I don't know if you seen it . . .
- 11 AJ: I've heard about it, I haven't seen it.
- 12 NS: I actually went to the whitehouse.org and typed in LBGQ and T and "page not found" as well.
- 13 AJ: Wow – 404, page not found, huh?
- 14 NS: Yup. I do think that we need to continue to fight together. Yeah. But, I understand that a lot of  
15 the oppressed situations or stigmas that we face as trans individuals, especially trans women of  
16 color or transgender people of color, LGBTQ people face as well.
- 17 AJ: LGBTQ.
- 18 NS: LBGQ and T.
- 19 AJ: Oh, Q and T, that's . . .
- 20 NS: That's how I see it.
- 21 AJ: That's how you phrase it, OK.
- 22 NS: Now, the task force and a lot of people still say LGBTQ. I say LBGQ and T.
- 23 AJ: Why? What's the distinction for you?
- 24 NS: Because we've been so long identified as . . . and even with grants and stuff, trans women being  
25 gay men or MSM. I want to separate us, our gender identity, from the sexuality part.
- 26 AJ: Got it.
- 27 NS: This is where the community members, this is why what happened with the young lady last  
28 night, ignorance. Ignorance oppresses the community and not just our community but the  
29 general community. If people knew or understood that being transgender does not make you . .  
30 . being a transgender female does not make you a gay man, they would not call us faggots or  
31 homie or things like that. They wouldn't, they would respect us more if they . . . what's the  
32 word? Differentiate.
- 33 AJ: Yes, differentiated.

- 1 NS: . . . our sexual orientation from how we identify. I've kissed a girl in college. I never slept with a  
2 female, but I kissed a girl in college. That was my experience, does that make me bi? No, I'm  
3 heterosexual. That was my one experience. But that's why I do it like that.
- 4 AJ: Yeah. Ahh. Where do you see this movement, transgender movement, going in the next 25-50  
5 years?
- 6 NS: I see this movement as getting bigger as more younger folks are feeling comfortable with being  
7 who they are. A lot more people are wanting to advocate for themselves and each other, so I  
8 see the movement as getting bigger. I think, again, with the new administration that we are  
9 going to . . . I'm praying, and I have hopes, that we will unify more to fight these injustices. I do  
10 hope, and I do have hope, that in 25 years we will not be fighting for inclusive health care or for  
11 me to be respected as she and her or having issues with birth certificate changes or affirmation  
12 surgeries or things like that. I have hopes that hopefully in the next 5-10 years that this will be  
13 squashed. But I do know that people are prejudiced – prejudiced to race, prejudiced to gender,  
14 prejudiced to sexual orientation. So, I do know that the fight continues. In order for us to really  
15 make an impactful change, we need to unify.
- 16 AJ: Hmm, wow.
- 17 NS: Sorry,
- 18 AJ: Naiymah Ariana Sanchez, you make me so happy.
- 19 NS: No, you make me happy. It's because of folks like you . . . I mean, I'm not against Caitlyn Jenner,  
20 but I do know that she . . . I've been identified, when I tell someone that I'm transgender, they  
21 refer to me as a Caitlyn Jenner.
- 22 AJ: Really? That's like an insult. What is up with that?
- 23 NS: It is. I am proud of people who are taking seats such as yourself and taking positions that brings  
24 more visibility and saying that, "I am more than stigma, I can be a Congress woman, I can be  
25 President, I can be a doctor, I can be a teacher, I am a mother."
- 26 AJ: I am. I am a mother – there's my baby right there.
- 27 NS: I'm just saying it's because of woman like you, myself, that it makes it more acceptable and  
28 people are now understanding that we're just not these sex workers, we're not these people  
29 who are walking around "dying" of HIV, that we are not these . . . we're oppressed and we're  
30 financially struggling.
- 31 AJ: But there's a lot of people on the planet that are.
- 32 NS: I'm just saying, everybody has struggles and it's because of you, myself, and a lot of other  
33 activists or visible people, transgender people, and the media or the transgender people, period,  
34 that we are being accepted a little bit more.
- 35 AJ: Well, I'm just trying to do my part. I'm so happy that you are doing your work and I'm so proud  
36 of you. I really appreciate this opportunity to sit and talk with you. I just love you and until we  
37 meet again, my friend. Peace.

- 1    NS:    I love you as well. Yes, peace.