

Ethan O'Brien
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

January 9, 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 Ethan O'Brien -EO
3

4 AJ: So, hello.

5 EO: Hello.

6 AJ: My name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian for the Transgender Oral History Project
7 at the University Libraries at the University of Minnesota's Tretter Collection. Today is January
8 9, 2017, and I am here at the University of Minnesota but at the West Bank Office Building, and
9 I'm here today with Ethan O'Brien. How are you doing today, Ethan?

10 EO: I'm pretty good.

11 AJ: Yeah.

12 EO: Yes, doing all right.

13 AJ: Super. Hey listen, can you state your name, spell your name just so we make sure we have it all
14 spelled correctly, then, if you don't mind, stating your gender identity as you claim it today, your
15 gender assigned at birth, and the pronouns that you use.

16 EO: Sure. So, my name is Ethan O'Brien, E-t-h-a-n, O'Brien is O-apostrophe-B-r-i-e-n. And . . . what
17 was the second question? I already forgot?

18 AJ: Gender today?

19 EO: My gender identity today is male, the sex I was assigned at birth is female and . . .

20 AJ: Pronouns?

21 EO: My pronouns are he/him/his. I have a very short memory.

22 AJ: Apparently. No, it's all good, Ethan, and I'm here to help.

23 EO: Thank you.

24 AJ: So, just to kind of get your memory juices rolling a little bit, what's the first thing you remember
25 in life?

26 EO: My very first memory?

27 AJ: Your very first memory.

28 EO: I was being potty trained and I was trying to make it to the bathroom in time, and I didn't, and I
29 peed on the kitchen floor, right in front of the bathroom door.

30 AJ: Oh, wow.

31 EO: And my sister laughed at me – my older sister laughed at me. That's my first memory.

32 AJ: Oh, really? You were just a baby.

- 1 EO: That's what happened.
- 2 AJ: Yeah, that's your first memory, huh?
- 3 EO: Yes.
- 4 AJ: Cool. Where did this happen? Where did you grow up?
- 5 EO: I grew up in a small suburban area outside of Boston, it's called Holliston, Massachusetts. A lot
6 of people don't know where it is.
- 7 AJ: Holliston. How do you spell that?
- 8 EO: H-o-l-l-i-s-t-o-n.
- 9 AJ: Because just in Massachusetts they have weird spellings for different . . . for things that don't
10 sound like they're spelled so I just wanted to . . .
- 11 EO: Exactly.
- 12 AJ: So, it's a town that not very many know about, you were saying?
- 13 EO: I feel like they don't really. We're really close to the start of the Boston Marathon so sometimes
14 when you say that, then people are like, "Oh, I kind of know that area." It's like 35 or 40
15 minutes west of Boston, so not quite the middle of the state – it's between the middle and the
16 coast.
- 17 AJ: OK, cool. What was that community like?
- 18 EO: I grew up in a . . . it started out to be a white working class neighborhood and then the town sort
19 of built up around my parents. They bought their house in 1971, my mom will correct me on
20 that, but for \$20,000. It was really tiny and they saved and saved and ended up paying it off.
21 They actually put an addition on when I was 10, just because us kids were getting really too big
22 for it. But, the town sort of grew up around them and so I felt like a working-class family
23 growing up in a more affluent area.
- 24 AJ: Yeah, because Boston – man, that's pretty expensive.
- 25 EO: Boston is expensive, yeah. And as you go out, those suburbs are pretty expensive too.
- 26 AJ: They get more expensive . . . yeah.
- 27 EO: Yeah, because people want to commute into Boston to work and that kind of thing. Yeah, so
28 hand-me-down clothes and no vacations and no college and that kind of stuff. But the kids
29 around me were like playing lacrosse and their parents bought them clothes from Guess and
30 that kind of stuff.
- 31 AJ: And they had cars when they were 16.
- 32 EO: Yeah, totally. We were within walking distance to the high school, so we had to walk – which
33 wasn't terrible but . . .

- 1 AJ: But given the sort of people around, it may have been a little bit of a challenge. You said, “us
2 kids”, how many siblings?
- 3 EO: I just have one older sister, she’s three years older than me.
- 4 AJ: OK, cool. You guys were pretty close growing up?
- 5 EO: We fought a lot when we were a lot younger and then in high school we got a bit closer, and
6 then when she went off to college it was really tough because I was the only kid then in the
7 house and it was really hard on me, I cried a lot when she left. But then after I came out as
8 queer and then later as trans, our relationship just really . . .
- 9 AJ: Tanked.
- 10 EO: Yeah, really tanked.
- 11 AJ: I noticed your downward motions.
- 12 EO: Yeah, it just got worse and worse and now it’s pretty much . . . she still lives in Massachusetts
13 and it’s mostly cards on our birthday. I send presents to my two nephews and that’s about it.
- 14 AJ: What do you think that’s all about?
- 15 EO: Well, that’s kind of probably a longer conversation than this interview. Definitely when I came
16 out as queer, she had a hard time with it and that’s when I was 17 and she was 21. I remember
17 saying, “Well, you have queer friends.” And she was like, “Well, it’s different when it’s your
18 sibling, it’s just different.” I don’t know what that really meant. My family we’re also not really
19 big talkers about our feelings and stuff and so I never really found out what the issue was.
20 Things weren’t great but they were OK after that, it especially helped when we both moved out
21 of the house and became adults in our way and kind of found our own way. And then when I
22 came out as trans, I think that that sort of brought up a lot of other things that maybe hadn’t
23 been dealt with. That was really, really tough. She said a lot of really hurtful things like . . . she
24 said once, “I just want to know if you’re going to try to talk to the boys about this when you
25 come home to visit – like for Thanksgiving or something.” I was saying I didn’t want to talk to
26 them about it, they’re never going to know me as their aunt. I think they were a year and three
27 years old at the time. They’ll have no memory of me. I said, “I just want you guys to use my
28 Ethan name and my pronouns that I’m using now so that we don’t have to have a conversation
29 about it – they’ll just always know me as their uncle.” And she was like, “Well, I just want to
30 know, I need to protect my family.” I was like, “I’m your family.”
- 31 AJ: Right.
- 32 EO: It was really tough for me because I was like, “Protect my nephews from me.” You know?
- 33 AJ: Boy.
- 34 EO: So, that was really tough, I just never forgot that. So, probably the only reason why we still are
35 in contact is because of the boys, I want to know them growing up and stuff.
- 36 AJ: Sure.

- 1 EO: But yeah, she's come around a little bit. She uses my name and pronouns, but it also has been
2 10 years, it's about time. If she didn't, she's the one who kind of looks weird at restaurants or . .
3 .
- 4 AJ: Right, exactly. I know that's what I tell family – like, you know, people are going to think you're
5 crazy.
- 6 EO: Yeah. But, yeah.
- 7 AJ: Well, that's tough, but it's good to hear that there's some movement.
- 8 EO: Yeah, sometimes we each kind of try a little bit. It's also hard not living close to each other.
- 9 AJ: Yeah, people have lives – she's got a family, you've got a family. Sure, I mean. What was school
10 like in Holliston?
- 11 EO: Holliston, yeah.
- 12 AJ: And I assume you went to grade school and high school and all of that.
- 13 EO: I did. I actually went up until sophomore year and then I transferred to a regional school where
14 there were kids from all over. I was skipping school, I wasn't doing very well and so I went to
15 this regional school just for junior and senior year. School was OK. I had some attention
16 problems when I was younger, but I made friends fairly easily. I do remember just in terms of
17 gender kind of not . . . we were all the same up until kind of the early beginnings of puberty and
18 then I remember just feeling like really out of place. I didn't feel like the girls, but I wasn't
19 feeling like the boys either. It was definitely a hard time – puberty was pretty challenging, just
20 feeling like I didn't really fit in. But it was just kind of a basic middle class suburban upbringing.
- 21 AJ: Not a lot of bullying or harassment or anything around your identity?
- 22 EO: Not really.
- 23 AJ: Or people thinking you were . . .
- 24 EO: No, I mean kids picked on me but it was more, I think, because I was quiet rather than gender
25 identity stuff. There were definitely other tomboys in school and so . . . and I played sports so it
26 was more like I felt like maybe I was seen as a jock than . . .
- 27 AJ: So, you were an athlete, huh? What sports did you play?
- 28 EO: Not now, but I grew up playing soccer. I have my black belt in karate, I did track and cross
29 country in high school. I like to do most anything. I have a paddle board now; I like to kayak and
30 hike. Yeah.
- 31 AJ: Wow, so pretty physically active.
- 32 EO: Not as much as I would like but I try to get out there.
- 33 AJ: Yeah. So, you said you came out as queer in high school – to your family? To school
34 classmates?

- 1 EO: Well, I had graduated – it was sort of the summer . . .
- 2 AJ: So, you were 17.
- 3 EO: I graduated early, I graduated when I was 17 and then I came out, it was probably six months
4 later and it wasn't planned like that. It was more, I feel, like once I graduated I had the capacity
5 to really reflect on my life and not really think about classmates or anything else like that. I
6 wasn't going to college so I was an adult with a car and a job and that sort of stuff. Yeah, I was
7 just really paying more attention to my sexuality and really looking over boyfriends I had had
8 and not understanding why it wasn't working out. It's hard to remember that time, it was so
9 long ago. I came out as lesbian but I say queer now because it just feels weird to say that I came
10 out as lesbian. It was the most articulate thing that made sense to me at the time. If I had
11 known anything else at that time I probably would have said queer or something, but I didn't
12 know about it.
- 13 AJ: Wow. So, when did you first realize that there was something going on around your gender
14 identity?
- 15 EO: I don't even know if I realized it but when I was a kid, I would steal my dad's underwear and
16 wear it to school.
- 17 AJ: Yeah.
- 18 EO: And as I got older and when the 1990s was a grunge thing, I would steal his flannel and I'd wear
19 his flannel to school. The underwear I don't know what reason I had told myself in my mind:
20 just liked it better, it made me feel tough, it made me feel better going to school. The flannel
21 was like was like, "Oh, I like Pearl Jam and I like Nirvana, I'll just wear this grunge." But also it
22 was a pretty easy way to wear boy's clothing and get away with it – like specific boy's clothing.
- 23 AJ: Right.
- 24 EO: Yeah. What was the question again? That was probably . . .
- 25 AJ: When did you come to this realization around . . . or when were your first inklings around
26 gender . . .?
- 27 EO: Around specific trans stuff?
- 28 AJ: Yeah.
- 29 EO: I mean I've always . . . my sexuality helped, I think, bridge to my gender because they're
30 obviously separate but they're also intertwined.
- 31 AJ: Very much so.
- 32 EO: We express our gender through our sexuality and I was definitely always more butch presenting
33 and more masculine presenting and the women I dated were mostly feminine presenting and
34 femme presenting. I didn't subscribe to the fact that butch meant male and femme meant
35 female because there's factions of the lesbian community that are like, "You're just recreating
36 heterosexuality," and I never felt that way. I didn't take on that interpretation of it. That was

1 probably when I first realized that I was really expressing my gender through my sexuality. I
2 liked to be the one opening doors, I liked to pick up my person for our dates, I liked to plan the
3 dates, I liked to kind of . . . I don't know, I guess play a more traditional masculine role in dating
4 and stuff. The time that it really hit me over the head was this brief period when I was single
5 and I was reading about butch femme stuff and it talked about these butches who were "soft
6 packing," and I was like, "What is that?" I read about it and was like, "Well, maybe I want to get
7 one of those," and so I bought one and used it and it was really . . . I didn't tell anybody, and I
8 used it for a little while and I felt like a real connection to what it brought up in me. And then I
9 dated a woman, I don't even know why we dated to this day, but she said she didn't understand
10 butch women, she used those lines like, "If I wanted to date a man, I would date a man so why
11 do I want to date a butch woman?" I remember, it just seemed so symbolic now, but cutting up
12 my packer and throwing it away and being like, "Well, I'll just put this away."

13 AJ: So, you've got to explain, what is soft packing?

14 EO: Oh, soft packing is like when you . . . well, they make them now, they're sort of like a mold of a
15 male-born . . . a male's biological penis. It can come with . . .

16 AJ: Anatomically correct?

17 EO: Anatomically correct.

18 AJ: But flaccid, not erect?

19 EO: Flaccid, yeah. Right. And so, you would just either have an elastic harness you can put it
20 through so it kind of stays in place so you can wear tight underwear so it stays in place and it
21 just gives the appearance of a small bulge. Or people can't even really notice it, it's like you
22 know it's there.

23 AJ: But it's more of a psychological thing. And you discarded that for love.

24 EO: Yeah, and now I'm like, "God, those are so expensive, why did I do that for this woman who was
25 . . . not worth it."

26 AJ: Wow, so that sort of awakened something in you.

27 EO: Yes.

28 AJ: But, prior to that – not really?

29 EO: I mean I didn't really have . . . I feel like I didn't really have the language for it, the internet
30 wasn't part of my upbringing – I think we got the internet when I was maybe a junior or senior in
31 high school. So, it wasn't really that readily thing you could go and read about or think about it.
32 I didn't know anybody who was trans or hadn't even really heard of it other than just kind of the
33 terrible terms that people used – like hermaphrodite or that kind of stuff. I just had no idea that
34 that was a real thing.

35 AJ: Clearly you saw at least one episode of Jerry Springer.

36 EO: Yeah, but I don't even know . . . I'm sure I did. Yeah, I probably did, but I just really had no . . .

- 1 AJ: Had tuned it out- no connection to it or whatever.
- 2 EO: Maybe, I just . . .
- 3 AJ: Let me ask you this then, Ethan, because a big part of the narrative around transgender identity
4 is that, "I knew since I was three years old," "I always was fixing my dad's car," . . .
- 5 EO: I mean I did those things.
- 6 AJ: "People called me a little boy," and, "I tried to go in the girls' bathroom and I would get kicked
7 out." That's kind of the traditional narrative and I just want to ask, because your story sounds
8 different from that. I don't want to put you into that narrative if that's not your story, but what
9 do you think about this idea that all transgender people have to have this sort of single story
10 that . . .
- 11 EO: Well, I think it's impossible for everyone to have a single story. It's just like if you think about
12 sexuality, gay people come out across the lifespan – there's no one way to do it, there's no one
13 way to figure it out, there's a lot of determining factors. It's like, whether or not I was trans
14 from birth and I just discovered it in my late 20s, or was I trans from birth and I never had the
15 exposure to know that that was even an option so it was just this thing that was in the back of
16 my brain until I discovered it. Or, maybe I wasn't trans from birth and I just sort of grew into this
17 identity. There are certainly things that I can recall growing up where I was not acting like a
18 stereotypical girl. I remember going through a phase, I guess it was, of trying to pee standing up
19 – and being older, I wasn't a toddler, I was probably 9, 10, 11, and I wanted to do it so bad. I
20 would sit backwards on the toilet and then try to slowly stand up – I really worked hard at it.
21 Always being more interested and a little bit more connected to my dad when I was younger.
22 I'd be watching TV on Saturday mornings and he would poke his head in, he's not a person of
23 many words, but he'd say, "I'm going to the hardware store, do you want to come?" I'd be like,
24 "Yeah," and shut off the TV and come with him.
- 25 AJ: So, you ditched cartoons to go to the hardware store with your dad.
- 26 EO: Yeah, he never asked my sister. He asked me if I wanted to play sports, he said, "Do you want to
27 play soccer this year?" I was like, "What? I can play soccer." It was a big deal. I feel like he and
28 I were really close and we really understood each other in that gendered way – we liked the
29 same things, and then we had a hard time once puberty hit and I got my period and I feel like
30 both of us were kind of confused.
- 31 AJ: Right – like, "What happened to my son?"
- 32 EO: Yeah, totally. So, I feel like I had those things, I didn't have language for it. So, there's a picture
33 of me . . . of my dad and we had an old Datsun car. The hood is up and he's bent over it and
34 there's a little block pulled up to the car and I'm standing over it looking into the hood too, I was
35 probably three.
- 36 AJ: Really?

- 1 EO: I had this long hair that's touching the engine block and I'm looking in. So, stuff like that I can
2 look back and see an affinity for. Does it mean I was trans at the time? Who knows? I was
3 certainly, I would think, gender creative from birth.
- 4 AJ: Yeah, gender creative – that's kind of a new term.
- 5 EO: Yeah.
- 6 AJ: But before . . . and I want you to maybe give what your definition of that is, but I just wanted to
7 ask do you still go to Home Depot now?
- 8 EO: Well, yeah – of course. The beauty is Pinterest . . . I can look up all of these home projects on
9 Pinterest – it's amazing. I'm going to fix the drywall on my front ceiling probably this weekend.
10 I've never done it before so I'm pretty excited.
- 11 AJ: So, you've been watching the videos and . . .
- 12 EO: Yeah, I try. I actually will call my dad sometimes, and he's come out to visit and helps with some
13 electrical stuff, and I was like, "You know, you really missed a great opportunity because you
14 could have taught me this stuff – why didn't you teach me these things?" Because I was a girl,
15 he just didn't teach me. He learned that stuff from his dad and now it's like I've got to go to
16 YouTube to figure out how to change this or that or . . .
- 17 AJ: Change what? Oh – this or that, you said.
- 18 EO: Yeah, just fix stuff – change an outlet stuff and . . .
- 19 AJ: Put in an overhead lamp or whatever.
- 20 EO: Yeah, I don't even know how to do that. And that's for everybody, I feel like everyone should be
21 taught those things – it's a good homeowner thing. But I was like, "You specifically didn't teach
22 me because I was a girl."
- 23 AJ: So, you have a pretty good relationship with your folks now?
- 24 EO: Yeah, it's all right.
- 25 AJ: Mom and dad?
- 26 EO: It's again not as close as I would like because they still live in Massachusetts.
- 27 AJ: Live far away – yeah. But I mean you can call them up and they're not berating you or you can
28 show up at Christmas and be . . . you don't get kicked out and all of that stuff?
- 29 EO: No, they're on board. I remember when I came back to tell them, I wanted to tell them in
30 person about my transition and I did it right as I was leaving the house to go hang out with my
31 best friend who still lived there in Massachusetts – I mean, I had my hand on the door knob.
- 32 AJ: "Oh, by the way."
- 33 EO: I was like, "I'm going to have surgery next year." I just waited a beat and my mom goes . . . and
34 this is not the greatest terminology, but she goes, "Are you going to have a sex change?" And I

- 1 was like, "Whoa, how did you know that?" And she was like, "Mom's know – mom's know
2 everything."
- 3 AJ: Wow.
- 4 EO: And my dad was like, "Oh, OK." I don't think my dad really knew but we had a very quick talk
5 about it. My dad made a joke about the ass hair that was going to come. He's like, "Have fun
6 with that ass hair." So I think they were as cool as they could be, I don't think they really
7 understand it but they don't need to understand it to love me and support me and care about
8 me.
- 9 AJ: Wow, well that's cool. It's kind of unfortunate that your sister . . . when you told me about your
10 sister, I was kind of anticipating this horrific parental story.
- 11 EO: Other way around.
- 12 AJ: So, that was your coming out to your folks – walking out the door.
- 13 EO: Yup, "I'm going to have surgery next year."
- 14 AJ: "I'm going to have surgery."
- 15 EO: And then I was like, "I've got books if you want to read books." We don't talk about stuff so I
16 didn't know what to say. "If you have any questions, you can ask me."
- 17 AJ: How did you come out to your sister? Did you write her a letter or did you . . .?
- 18 EO: You know, I actually don't remember – I don't remember. I should remember because coming
19 out as queer the first time, she outed me to my parents. She went into my email and read an
20 email from a woman that I was dating at the time and she told my parents that I was a lesbian.
21 So, maybe I've blocked out how I told her.
- 22 AJ: Yeah, we've got to protect ourselves.
- 23 EO: She's unreliable.
- 24 AJ: Yes, exactly. So, man. If you are willing and comfortable answering this question, please do, but
25 only to the extent that you're comfortable, what sort of medical interventions have you
26 undergone or plan to take related to your gender journey?
- 27 EO: I have been on testosterone replacement therapy since 2007, so this will be my 10th year. I've
28 had top surgery, chest surgery, and I've had a hysterectomy . . . I couldn't think of the name of
29 it. I had a total hysterectomy.
- 30 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 31 EO: I'm curious about other bottom surgeries, but I also know that it's kind of a rapidly evolving field
32 so I'm waiting, I think, a little bit, but it's something I'd like to explore once I feel like the science
33 is a little bit more there. Yeah, because . . . yeah, that's all I'll say.
- 34 AJ: From interviewing many other trans masculine or male-identified trans folks, yeah – the surgery
35 is not always as satisfying as sort of male to female or more . . .

- 1 EO: Yeah, and I feel like with the male to female folks that have bottom surgery, there is already
2 something there to help create something else so with trans masculine people you're trying to
3 create something out of nothing.
- 4 AJ: From very little.
- 5 EO: Yeah. And to be honest, just in terms of my feminist politics – like having a penis that looks like
6 cis men's penises isn't super crucial to my gender identity, it's not really . . . yeah. But, I'm
7 interested in hearing more about different meta surgery or . . . yeah, other stuff, I'm interested
8 – it just depends on the science.
- 9 AJ: Man, I'm so interested in so many things that you said. Thank you for sharing that about your
10 sort of medical history, I really appreciate that. That's always a tough question for me. It's not
11 this . . . being transgender is not really about the modifications that we make to our bodies to
12 become more aligned with our psychological state, but the reality is it is about our bodies and
13 there is some body dysphoria, body . . . I don't know, shaming. There is a huge aspect of being
14 transgender that is about body image.
- 15 EO: Yes, and I think it should be super accessible, if you want it – not a requisite. But, if that's
16 something that helps you feel more aligned with your gender, then I say do it.
- 17 AJ: Yeah, same here. But, thank you. No, something you said earlier about gender creative kid.
18 What's a gender creative kid? What's the sort of histrionics around that language?
- 19 EO: I guess my own definition of it is just kind of getting a kid's space, room. I guess I feel like the
20 opposite of the transphobia that we see is this knee jerk, "Oh, your kid is trans, that's great, let's
21 put them on puberty blockers, let's put them on . . . you know, suppress their puberty, and then
22 when they're of age, let's give them cross hormones."
- 23 AJ: Cross hormones, you said?
- 24 EO: Yeah, like cross hormone therapy – so if they were biologically male and they're trans, let's give
25 them female hormones at a certain point.
- 26 AJ: Got it.
- 27 EO: And that may be true for some kids, for sure, but also just giving all kids, whether they grow up
28 to be trans or they don't grow up to be trans, the space to explore their gender and express it in
29 a way that they want. I mean, it's my own personal opinion that if they're still distressed upon
30 pre-puberty and they're still really like, "I feel like a girl, I am a girl," then yeah, for sure, that kid
31 needs to go on puberty blockers. But, if it's somebody who is like . . . this is getting into really
32 specifics, but I really think it's just like you give a kid room to be whoever they want to be, then
33 if they really express a desire to not go through puberty as their biological sex, then support
34 them in that. And if they're like, "Actually, I'm kind of OK with my gender, I'm just a boy that
35 likes to paint his nails or . . ."
- 36 AJ: Wear pink shoes.

- 1 EO: Yeah, or whatever, then support them in that. But, yeah, I'm nervous about people knee-jerk
2 calling kids, like trans kids, and then going through all this medical stuff that we don't really have
3 studies to back up – like what it does to bodies. Even me, I started "T" in my late 20s, nobody
4 ever talked to me about freezing my eggs – ever, not once. And my partner and I, now my wife,
5 we had infertility problems and there was a point when I was like, "Wow, I'm . . ."
- 6 AJ: "I had those tools at one point."
- 7 EO: I was like, "If I had made a different choice, maybe we would have different choices." We could
8 have used my eggs in her body or something. So, that's something I feel like isn't really talked
9 about, maybe it doesn't affect kids as much, but if you go through puberty and you have
10 suppression hormones, it's for sure going to mess with your reproduction.
- 11 AJ: Affect them at some point in time when they want to consider children or families. Wow. So,
12 let's just put this in a little context because . . . well, can you state where you work?
- 13 EO: I work for the University of Minnesota's Program in Human Sexuality.
- 14 AJ: Yeah. And what do you guys do here?
- 15 EO: We have four arms of our program. We have a clinic practice, we have a research practice, and
16 we do advocacy and we do education. Do you want me to expound on any of those?
- 17 AJ: Yeah, please – absolutely.
- 18 EO: So, for clients we see . . . it's a fully functional clinic, we have couples counseling, we have sex
19 therapy, people concerned about erectile dysfunction will come in. We see folks who might
20 exhibit some compulsive sexual behaviors. We used to see sex offenders, we don't anymore.
21 We see partners of compulsive sexual behavior folks. We do transgender and gender therapy
22 with children, adolescents, young adults, adults, elderly folks. I think that's it for our clinic side.
23 And then research, we do a bunch of different research projects and education we teach every
24 single incoming medical student on human sexuality. I just found out we only have 20 minutes
25 for sexuality and gender, which is not a lot.
- 26 AJ: How long?
- 27 EO: Twenty minutes. That is 20 minutes longer than I have been talking right now . . . or 20 minutes
28 shorter than I've been talking.
- 29 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 30 EO: Which I feel like is just enough to explain the difference between sexuality and gender and
31 that's about it.
- 32 AJ: And this is for medical school students.
- 33 EO: Medical school students.
- 34 AJ: People who will be interacting with trans and gender non-conforming people.

- 1 EO: And actually, the medical students want more information but it's just that there is no room in
2 the curriculum that they're given to place our content. We also do advocacy, so there is a bunch
3 of upcoming bills coming up – bathroom bills, they're trying to do a . . . similar to Nebraska,
4 where they're trying to do a religious exemption bill in Minnesota that gives people religious
5 freedom to not serve queer people at their business. So, we've done expert testimony and gone
6 and advocated for those types of things.
- 7 AJ: Wow, so primarily, the people who work here are Ph.Ds., doctors, therapists.
- 8 EO: Mostly Ph.Ds. Everyone is a psychologist or a therapist, yes.
- 9 AJ: What's your role here, Ethan?
- 10 EO: I'm the communications officer. So, I do internal and external communications, I manage the
11 website, I do our annual report, any fliers or brochures or publications that come out, I'll design
12 and do that. I also do events – we're doing a large fund raising campaign, so I'll throw events –
13 we throw events across the country. Yeah, it's a little development stuff, a little bit of
14 everything.
- 15 AJ: Wow, so I know because I've interviewed Dr. Walter Bucketing, who worked here for 20+ years,
16 I believe, I've interviewed Dr. Eli Coleman, who was the director of the Program in Human
17 Sexuality, as well as Dr. Katie Spencer and so I know that PHS is, and was, like the second
18 medical school university facility in the country to perform SRS or sexual reassignment surgery
19 or gender-confirmation surgery as it is known in the most politically correct parlance of the day.
- 20 EO: Yes.
- 21 AJ: And I totally respect that, so I hope I don't sound like I'm being . . .
- 22 EO: No, it always changes.
- 23 AJ: The language changes over time, right? But, the program here was one of the first in the
24 country. So, there's a very long history of services and thinking and researching and ideas
25 around gender identity and, I think, gender reality. What are your thoughts about being a part
26 of this institution and what are some of the ways that . . . as a transgender person working in
27 this environment, that you feel like this organization is doing . . . I don't know, "right" by
28 transgender people?
- 29 EO: You know, I don't think of it really on a day-to-day basis, it's . . .
- 30 AJ: Just come to work and do your thing.
- 31 EO: Yeah, I come to work and I do my thing. I've been there for several years now so I'm rolling my
32 eyes sometimes at my boss and stuff, just like everybody else. And then, yeah, when I stop to
33 think about it, I'm like, "Wow, this is where WPATH was started," you know, it used to be Harry
34 Benjamin and . . .
- 35 AJ: WPATH is the World Professional . . .
- 36 EO: The World Professional Association for Transgender Health.

- 1 AJ: Yes.
- 2 EO: Eli Coleman has been a part of some of the first scholarly articles . . . not first, but some of the . .
3 . just really the scholarly articles that have changed trans peoples' lives – medically and socially.
- 4 AJ: I wouldn't say the first but maybe some of the most impactful.
- 5 EO: Most notable, yeah.
- 6 AJ: And notable, well-known articles and publications.
- 7 EO: Yeah. And he's now part of the revisions committee so he was influential in getting rid of the
8 year, live as the opposite gender for a year thing – the real-life test.
- 9 AJ: Wow, the real-life test.
- 10 EO: Yeah, he was like, "Why do we need . . ."
- 11 AJ: Eli got rid of that?
- 12 EO: Well, not just him.
- 13 AJ: But he was a part of that.
- 14 EO: Yeah, he's on the revisions committee so it's his job to keep everything current with what's
15 happening. I think that PHS has done a lot of harm to people too in trying to figure out . . . it's
16 hard because we're in the medical school so there is this whole hierarchy of doctors knowing
17 more than patients, which is sort of across the board, and not listening to their patients as much
18 as they could be to inform the practice and inform their care. I think that that's negatively
19 impacted trans people since the program started.
- 20 AJ: Right.
- 21 EO: But also, as they've been adapting as, I think, quickly as I think they possibly could, that they've
22 caught up to speed. I think that right now we're doing some really cutting edge, revolutionary
23 work on the gender front and I'm really excited that it's sort of my job to help let people know
24 how much they've changed because I feel like some people who only have this one perception
25 of PHS that may be rooted in the past, it's just not like that anymore. The program has just
26 really changed. I mean, if it hadn't, I just don't think I would be able to work here. But I've seen
27 them do some really amazing things for people and they've really just changed people's lives.
- 28 AJ: I personally think it's just amazing that you, as an out trans person, works here in a non-trans
29 related role. You're not the hair stylist or some stereotypical transgender . . . the HIV outreach
30 coordinator – and not to say that any of those things are in any way bad, but it's just in these
31 large institutions that's kind of, sometimes, where if trans identities get a job, at all, they're sort
32 of plugged into these . . .
- 33 EO: More stereotypical roles.

- 1 AJ: So, I mean, I think that that is a statement towards some of the progress and forwarding
2 thinking that you speak of. Do you care to talk about some of these revolutionary projects that
3 are underway?
- 4 EO: Yeah, I think the biggest thing is probably the GALA Model that Dr. Dianne Berg and Dr. Katie
5 Spencer have . . . it's like a theoretical model of care that . . .
- 6 AJ: So GALA, G-a-l-a.
- 7 EO: Yes.
- 8 AJ: Is that an acronym?
- 9 EO: Yeah, it's an acronym. It's the Gender Affirmative Lifespan Approach, so it sort of comes at . . .
- 10 AJ: Gender Affirmative Lifespan Approach.
- 11 EO: Yeah.
- 12 AJ: Got it.
- 13 EO: It comes . . . I feel like there's a deficit model a lot of the time, so when you talk about trans
14 healthcare it's STIs and doing, like you said, HIV outreach, and, of course, those things are very
15 important but if you think less about disease and stigma and discrimination and more like the
16 whole person's self, where do trans people learn about healthy sex? Where can . . . I'm trying to
17 think of some of the other ones . . . how can we support trans people to be their full selves and
18 not just . . . like not just have them survive but have them thrive? Like how can they have
19 wonderful sex lives, not just the absence of HIV?
- 20 AJ: I think you've mentioned one thing – like how do you . . . if people were thinking about your
21 whole self, this notion that you could preserve your eggs . . .
- 22 EO: Oh, eggs or sperm – sure.
- 23 AJ: . . . that may have come out, but it was seemingly focused on this one kind of goal.
- 24 EO: Yeah, just a simple narrative of how you're supposed to do things. Yeah, they're doing some
25 amazing work on beyond the binary - they've really changed the clinic. Our medical care person,
26 Dr. Jamie Feldman, is now doing hormone care for people who are non-binary – so they maybe
27 don't identify as male or female or identify as both or as fluid, and she's done some research
28 and she's doing low-dose hormone therapy. So, it's not necessarily this A to B thing, it's not like,
29 "You were male and now you will be female." It's sort of like, "If you want to be ambiguous,
30 that's fine, we'll support you and give you the hormone level that you need to be ambiguous
31 and then tapering it off or continuing on a low dose."
- 32 AJ: I've got to say, that's a huge change from 25 years ago when I started therapy here at PHS.
- 33 EO: Oh, yeah – that's a huge change from five years ago. I mean, just the fact that somebody would
34 do that is amazing. So, I feel like that kind of stuff is revolutionary. What else? They're doing
35 work on resiliency. They also have this idea that this isn't just for trans people, this is for
36 everybody – everyone should have the room to express their gender in however they want to. If

- 1 everybody had this room to sort of be their whole selves, we wouldn't have the stigma that
2 trans people do face, but it affects cis people too. Yeah.
- 3 AJ: Right. That's one of the most exciting aspects of it in my mind, is that, you know, it really
4 expands this notion of . . . it doesn't expand the notion of gender, but it expands the notion of
5 thinking about your gender. I think the majority of people don't think about their gender, right?
6 Most of the people on the planet, they just accept the fact that, "I'm a woman," and keep
7 moving, or, "I'm a guy and I should have Craftsman tools and watch baseball games," and they
8 don't even think about it.
- 9 EO: They don't question it.
- 10 AJ: Yeah, and so this creates that space to talk about it.
- 11 EO: There's a man in my family who is obsessed with cars – loves cars. He makes model cars, he
12 used to have a Dodge Dart – he just went all out for cars, and the person he's married to . . . I'm
13 trying to be vague about names right now, but she's like, "You know, sometimes I get the sense
14 that he doesn't even really care about cars," like she's not totally sure that he likes this hobby
15 but he's doing it because it reinforces . . . if people doubt his masculinity at all, he's like, "I've got
16 a 1971 Dodge Dart in the driveway." Yeah, this kind of work and this kind of stuff is for
17 everybody.
- 18 AJ: Right. That's super exciting. Thank you for opening up about that, I appreciate it. But, just a
19 little more back to some personal stuff about you.
- 20 EO: OK.
- 21 AJ: So, looking back over your decision to express your true gender identity, what were some
22 pivotal moments that sort of define your new life and would you have done anything
23 differently? Or, is it a new life – it could just be an extension of . . .?
- 24 EO: It definitely feels like I've grown into the person I am on the inside. Just a couple weeks after my
25 first shot of testosterone, I remember thinking it doesn't work that fast, it's not possible for it to
26 work that fast, but all the anxiety left my body. I was just so calm and relaxed. It was almost
27 like it was this thing that was missing from my body, that's the only way I could really describe it.
28 That was a really pivotal moment. I transitioned in California, because I was living there, and I
29 went to a Dodger's game with one of my friends and we all wanted to use the bathroom before
30 we left and I had recently come out to her and she was totally supportive – she was on board
31 100%. I think it was a group of . . . besides me, everybody else were women. We needed to use
32 the bathroom before we left the stadium and I just sort of paused for a second, and everyone
33 else is kind of chatting, and my friend reached over and was like, "Oh, just go." And she literally
34 pushed me into the men's room.
- 35 AJ: Really? Oh, wow.
- 36 EO: And so, I walked in and my heart just pounding in my chest like I was going to get my ass kicked
37 or something. That was an amazing moment, I think, for me – realizing that I could do this, that
38 I didn't die, that I didn't explode. Nobody even really looked twice at me but that's where

- 1 homophobia really works for me – nobody wants to look at anybody else in the bathroom, just
2 go in there, do your business, and leave.
- 3 AJ: Yeah, that's kind of the guy's model. Women, they chat it up in the bathroom.
- 4 EO: Oh, yeah.
- 5 AJ: Oh, man. Wow, those are great stories. Have you ever had problems in bathrooms? I can't
6 imagine but . . .
- 7 EO: I really haven't. I really haven't. I'm trying to think. I've gotten some looks in bathrooms, but
8 nobody . . . I've gotten kind of a couple of double takes in the beginning.
- 9 AJ: Really?
- 10 EO: Yeah, they kind of glance and then they're like, "Wait – what?" And that was one of my goals to
11 learn to use this device that's called a stand to pee device, because if anybody questioned me in
12 there I was going to walk up and pee at the urinal next to them and then they'd leave me alone.
13 It wasn't so much that it was crucial to my gender identity, I think . . .
- 14 AJ: Than it was about safety.
- 15 EO: Yeah, it was about safety. So, if I did get double takes, they didn't usually last long.
- 16 AJ: I think somebody from Minnesota developed that, I think that's right.
- 17 EO: The very first one?
- 18 AJ: Yeah.
- 19 EO: There's definitely somebody here that makes them now, I'm not sure if it was the first – maybe
20 it was.
- 21 AJ: Stand to Urinate or . . .?
- 22 EO: Oh yeah, that's Minnesota. This one was called Mango, it was made in Rhode Island.
- 23 AJ: OK, so there are different models.
- 24 EO: Yeah, there's different models.
- 25 AJ: Yeah, it's weird – this whole bathroom debate. You never hear anything about men trying to
26 pee in the men's bathroom, like that's not a thing.
- 27 EO: Well, yeah. People are not concerned . . . they're concerned about penises, that's what they're
28 concerned about. They don't want a penis in the women's room – that's what it comes down
29 to. They do not care if . . . they're like, "What? What's a trans guy?" They have no idea.
- 30 AJ: Yeah. It's kind of ridiculous and would be . . .
- 31 EO: It's totally ridiculous.

- 1 AJ: And would be totally humorous if it wasn't so deeply life threatening and completely
2 disrespectful. I'm not sure where they think trans people have been using the bathroom up
3 until this point.
- 4 EO: Yeah, that's the other thing. I think we actually have some . . . PHS has a couple of framed
5 posters that say, "You've been using the bathroom next to gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender
6 people and everyone is fine."
- 7 AJ: Right.
- 8 EO: Everything is OK. There's just no data to support any kind of violence happening in bathrooms.
9 And that's the thing, people should just address behavior . . .
- 10 AJ: Except for by, generally, cis gender men.
- 11 EO: Cis dudes.
- 12 AJ: Mostly white guys.
- 13 EO: I think if people are scared about bathroom stuff, let's talk about the behavior – there's
14 behaviors you don't want in bathrooms but it has nothing to do with gender identity or . . .
- 15 AJ: Who – right exactly.
- 16 EO: Or whose body it is.
- 17 AJ: Yeah. Wow. Is there a specific person or . . . I know there is the woman who pushed you into
18 the men's room, but a person who has really had a real impact on your gender identity?
- 19 EO: You know, I really would have to say my father, even though he's done nothing to . . . like he
20 hasn't actively tried to support my gender identity in a specific way. But, he's just a quiet, really
21 steady stable rock, you know? He's very religious, he does the youth lecture program at his
22 church and he lectures also, which is just doing some readings at church. He goes every week . .
23 . you know, he's just somebody who . . . we had an elderly neighbor growing up and he mowed
24 her lawn and shoveled – he never asked, he would just go over there. If she needed some fixing,
25 he would find it when he was over there doing other stuff, and he didn't tell anybody he did
26 that. I found out years later he was going to this place called . . . it was called Bethany Hospice
27 and it was a hospice care center set up specifically for men who were passing away from HIV
28 and AIDS.
- 29 AJ: What?
- 30 EO: He would go and sit down and just visit with these men and never ever told anybody. I found
31 out years later that he was doing that. He's not someone to . . . he's just amazing. He does all
32 these good things, he's a good person and he just doesn't tell anybody about it. It's somebody
33 who really look up to. And in terms of gender, too, he's just very solid, he's in control a lot, I've
34 never seen him . . . I don't know, just freak out about something. He's pretty calm and rational
35 and he likes quiet spaces, but he's into sports as well. I don't know, I'm not really talking too
36 much about my gender, but I guess I really relate to that.

- 1 AJ: This is . . . it's shaped who you are.
- 2 EO: Yeah.
- 3 AJ: So, just throwing this out there, if you ever want to come shovel snow and cut grass . . .
- 4 EO: You've got to be elderly first.
- 5 AJ: Well, I'm rapidly approaching that.
- 6 EO: You're getting there – ahh, come on.
- 7 AJ: Just throwing it out there. Romance, love, relationships. You said you have very rarely been
8 single.
- 9 EO: Yeah, I mean I've been single, for sure. I've had . . . I've probably had four, I would consider
10 four, long-term relationships and I'm 39, so I feel like that's kind of a lot.
- 11 AJ: Yeah, that's pretty much . . . I mean, I don't know how long the relationships lasted, but four
12 relationships can cover a pretty nice span of life.
- 13 EO: Probably three or four years for all of them.
- 14 AJ: Each.
- 15 EO: Yeah. I'm married right now, and we've been together for six years, so that's my longest and
16 will be my longest.
- 17 AJ: Yeah, absolutely. Well, it is your longest so far. But, so you mentioned that you dated guys
18 before and you identify as queer, so how has . . . what terms have you used to describe yourself
19 over time? How has that impacted your sexuality and/or relational preferences?
- 20 EO: Yeah, that's pretty interesting. So, like I said, I was straight by default until I was 17. I identified
21 as bi for about a month and then I was like, "Please." And then I was lesbian, or I usually just
22 said gay. And then after I transitioned, I just . . . it's not that the hormones did anything to me,
23 it's not like hormones make you gay or anything like that, but it was more like the world had
24 been opened up to me – I was like, "Anything is possible. If I can change my gender and really
25 be my true self, what other things have I not allowed myself to do because I feel like they
26 weren't for me." So, I dated some men. I dated trans men, I dated cis men, and one thing that
27 was really interesting learning about for my own sexuality was that I couldn't be with a man as a
28 woman, but I could be with a man as a man.
- 29 AJ: Wow.
- 30 EO: And I don't really know why that is, I really don't. I think it was just sort of society's expectation
31 that's placed on women, that wasn't the role I wanted to take in bed and so, later, when I was
32 presenting as male, I was passing – although I don't usually like using that terminology, I was
33 presenting as male and people were identifying me as male.
- 34 AJ: And there's no right or wrong language in this.

- 1 EO: I know. Passing is so shitty because there are so many people who can't or don't medically
2 transition so it's a bullshit thing, so people were perceiving me as male and I was dating men. I
3 had completely different experiences than I did when I was presenting as female and sleeping
4 with men. So, that was just really interesting.
- 5 AJ: Yeah.
- 6 EO: Being part of sort of a more cis gay male culture, like cruising and meeting up in back rooms and
7 that kind of thing, that's not really open to me but I would have to take a lot of time getting to
8 know somebody online a little bit first and go on a few dates to feel comfortable sort of doing
9 that kind of thing – just in terms of a safety reason.
- 10 AJ: Sure.
- 11 EO: But yeah, I definitely had a little taste of that and then I met my now wife shortly after my
12 entrance into the gay male world. We were open for a little while, but we're not – we don't
13 have an open relationship now, which is fine. I'm quite satisfied.
- 14 AJ: Nice.
- 15 EO: I mean we might revisit it in the future but we're pretty fine where we are right now. But it's a
16 very different world having sex with men as a man than having sex with a man as a woman.
- 17 AJ: Yeah, no – I've actually experienced both and . . .
- 18 EO: I was going to say, maybe I don't even need to tell you.
- 19 AJ: No, but you need to tell the camera though.
- 20 EO: Sure, sure.
- 21 AJ: No, thank you for opening up about that though. That's fascinating. I know that a lot of people
22 are like, "Well, if you just want to sleep with a guy, why didn't you just stay . . .?"
- 23 EO: Yeah.
- 24 AJ: But . . .
- 25 EO: It's different.
- 26 AJ: Right. It's not even about who I sleep with in terms of my gender identity or how I express my
27 gender . . .
- 28 EO: It's who I am when I sleep with somebody.
- 29 AJ: It's who I am – right, exactly.
- 30 EO: Yeah, totally. I guess I don't have all the words to totally articulate that. Some of it is about
31 power, some of it is about gender roles and . . . yeah.
- 32 AJ: Ethan, have you ever worked for a LGB or T-specific organization? Volunteer?
- 33 EO: Oh, yeah, I've volunteered.

- 1 AJ: Which ones?
- 2 EO: I volunteered for Minnesota Trans Health Coalition helping people administer their shots.
- 3 AJ: So, you were a shot caller?
- 4 EO: Shot caller – yup. I volunteered for TYSN, which is the Trans Youth Support Network.
- 5 AJ: Which no longer exists, unfortunately.
- 6 EO: Yeah, which is no longer with us. I volunteered for District 202 for a little bit, which is sort of
7 with us but not really with us.
- 8 AJ: It kind of lives online now, I think.
- 9 EO: Yeah, it lives online and I don't know what's happening with it. I've done some other volunteer
10 stuff that's not really direct – like I've made the logo for RECLAIM, like the person with the star
11 thing, and just kind of donated some design help or event help.
- 12 AJ: Did you ever work on the right to marry campaign – love wins or love trumps hate. I don't
13 know.
- 14 EO: No, I didn't. Yeah, no – that was . . . I was volunteering with the Twin Cities Avengers at that
15 time and really felt like . . . I didn't appreciate a lot of the . . . I just didn't appreciate their
16 direction. I felt like . . . it was certainly one issue, which is obviously what they were going for –
17 they were about this one issue, but there's a way of saying, "We'll deal with that later," and
18 putting things that I think are way bigger issues – like the fact that Black trans women of color
19 can't find jobs or decent health care and that kind of stuff is so basic needs to me that I was like .
20 . . I feel like marriage is a luxury. Plenty of people say it's not a luxury, people that maybe their
21 partner is undocumented and they want them to stay – of course it's not a luxury for everybody.
- 22 AJ: And it's a human right that we have in our society.
- 23 EO: Yeah, totally – it's a human right.
- 24 AJ: And so, if one group of people have that right, then everybody should have that right.
- 25 EO: Right.
- 26 AJ: But I think there's a way of saying it and dealing with it that can say, "Yes, this is a single issue;
27 however, we believe that in moving this issue forward, it opens up space for other issues." Like
28 that could have been the language around it.
- 29 EO: Or when they were like, "Well, after this we're going to deal with trans issues."
- 30 AJ: Right.
- 31 EO: If that had actually happened, that would be cool. Instead, all of these organizations just
32 dissolved – gone, and people were like, "OK, we're good now."
- 33 AJ: Yeah, which is really sad now because . . . guess what?
- 34 EO: Where are they when all this bathroom stuff is coming up?
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- 1 AJ: We're going to have to . . . all of those issues are back up in front of the nation's psychic . . .
- 2 EO: Our next administration is really going to fuck everybody.
- 3 AJ: Yeah, so hopefully they can rejigger those organizations back into existence because they're
- 4 going to need them.
- 5 EO: Yeah.
- 6 AJ: What about just interactions with like institutions . . . I mean, you work here at the University of
- 7 Minnesota, and it seems like things are going well, but I don't know. Have you had problems in
- 8 some of our societal institutions like colleges, like the police/criminal justice system, or the
- 9 medical . . . medical industrial complex?
- 10 EO: I knew you were going to say industrial complex after that. I don't so much anymore, but it's
- 11 also that I haven't had a reason to interact with the medical . . . I guess I sort of have, I don't
- 12 know. Well, the first terrible medical thing that happened to me was when I had my
- 13 hysterectomy and I was male on everything. My gender was "M" on all of my documents,
- 14 including my health care documents. My legal name was Ethan, everything said I was male and
- 15 he, but obviously, the people who came to take care of me in the hospital knew that I had been
- 16 born female because of my chart, because of the procedure I had had, and so I had a couple of
- 17 nurses who sat next to my bed and wanted to tell me quietly about the trans woman at their
- 18 church – the one trans person that they knew.
- 19 AJ: Yes, exactly.
- 20 EO: I was like, "That's cool, I'm kind of on morphine right now, I don't really care, I'm sure she's cool
- 21 and no I don't know her." So, good meaning.
- 22 AJ: I'm sorry.
- 23 EO: Well-meaning people but I don't care. I just had pieces of my body taken out and kind of like
- 24 not feeling great.
- 25 AJ: Right.
- 26 EO: And then, actually, when I was leaving, I had had a catheter in and the nurse . . . I was on pain
- 27 medication, so I'm not too clear of the timeline of this, but I have a distinct memory of being in
- 28 the bathroom and my nurse is standing in the doorway and she's explaining to me how to take
- 29 my catheter out because I think she felt uncomfortable touching my body. So, I took my own
- 30 catheter out – like per her instructions as she was in the doorway, she didn't want to come in.
- 31 She was like in the doorway telling me how to do it.
- 32 AJ: Was this something that you would have to do on an ongoing, regular basis? Or this was just a
- 33 one time take it out before you go home?
- 34 EO: No, it was to take the catheter out after surgery – yeah. Because they make you pee on your
- 35 own before you leave.
- 36 AJ: Isn't that their job?

- 1 EO: Yes, it's their job. But it was very much . . . I remember her sort of stammering over something –
2 the words or something and she was like, "Oh, it will just be easier if you do it and I'll explain it."
3 And then in hindsight I was like, "Wow, why didn't I report that or tell anybody?" But you're in
4 this position of power and . . .
- 5 AJ: And you were sort of morphined out.
- 6 EO: I was morphined out – or on some kind of pain med or something. And she's in a position of
7 power and I can only take this out so I can leave and I wanted to leave.
- 8 AJ: Right.
- 9 EO: So, that was pretty awful. Going back a little bit, when I first started "T", I, for some reason,
10 thought you had to go see an endocrinologist and so I looked one up in LA, I called first and I
11 explained my situation and I said, "Do you see trans patients?" And she said yes, she has trans
12 patients, come on in. I came in and she said all these weird things to me before she gave me my
13 shot, she said, "You know this is going to lower your voice, right? And this is going to make you
14 grown hair in places?" I was like, "Yeah, why do you think I'm here, that's what I want." Which I
15 felt was kind of unusual for her to say that to me. I don't know. And then she gave me an
16 unbelievably unethically low dose, she put me on a super low dose – one shot a month, which is
17 not going to . . .
- 18 AJ: Really do anything.
- 19 EO: No, it's not going to do anything. And that was the only time I saw her, but I have a feeling she
20 hadn't seen trans patients, but she wanted to say that she had – that's just my feeling looking
21 back, I don't know if that's actually true. And now she can be like, "Oh, I've seen trans folks."
22 She had no idea what she was doing, but I wanted the shot so bad, I was like, "That's fine, just
23 shoot me – that's fine." And then I went to see, actually, a transgender doctor who was
24 amazing – totally rocked my world.
- 25 AJ: A transgender doctor?
- 26 EO: Yes.
- 27 AJ: Nice.
- 28 EO: Maddie Deutsch.
- 29 AJ: Wow, I know the name.
- 30 EO: You know the name – she's pretty cool.
- 31 AJ: Out in San Francisco.
- 32 EO: She's in San Francisco now, she was in LA at the time and then she moved up.
- 33 AJ: Yeah, awesome. I think I have met Maddie once at a conference.
- 34 EO: She's pretty cool.

- 1 AJ: Yeah. We're getting towards the end here, Ethan, what do you think the relationship is between
2 the LGB and the T communities? They are sort of separate communities but, you know, they
3 certainly get lumped together. I think transgender people get sort of, I don't know –
4 inadvertently is not the word, but sort of perceptually considered gay or . . .
- 5 EO: Lumped in, like you said.
- 6 AJ: Exactly, yeah. But the goals are sort of divergent. We talked about it a little – marriage versus
7 being able to . . .
- 8 EO: Health care, jobs.
- 9 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 10 EO: Walking down the street.
- 11 AJ: Yeah, going to the bathroom.
- 12 EO: Going to the store maybe. I know that I have to be just as suspicious of cis gay people and
13 lesbian, bisexual people as I do of cis straight people.
- 14 AJ: Sure.
- 15 EO: Sometimes I feel a little bit better – like if I'm going to meet somebody and I know that they are
16 gay, lesbian, or bisexual, I normally feel a little bit better because I identify as queer and I feel
17 like we'll have some commonality.
- 18 AJ: Sure.
- 19 EO: But I, for sure, have my guard up all the time. My friends and I will talk about this and we'll say,
20 "Oh, that person is pretty cool – they're gay but they're not queer." So, they're maybe less
21 political or super identified with more traditional kind of gay culture, gay roles, which can be
22 racist and sexist and everything else.
- 23 AJ: That's interesting – do you think queer comes with a political identity?
- 24 EO: Sometimes – yeah. Sometimes I do. It used to be such a slur that I feel like . . . I feel like for me,
25 at least in my community or what I see as my community, is queer is a little bit more political –
26 somebody with more of an awareness of the other oppressions that exist and how they might
27 intersect and not intersect. I feel like it's a more nuanced view of sexuality and gender.
- 28 AJ: Wow, I have to say, I've never really thought about it in those terms but when you said it, it
29 resonated with me so strongly because . . . I mean, a lot of the people that I know – not all, but a
30 lot, who identify as lesbian or gay, they're not . . .
- 31 EO: You know what we say? HRC – are they HRC gay? Oh, not interested.
- 32 AJ: Exactly.
- 33 EO: It's like saying that just really . . . but I didn't mean to interrupt you.
- 34 AJ: No, I was just thinking that they don't really have a real political agenda around their . . .

- 1 EO: Besides marriage.
- 2 AJ: Besides marriage, right. And they can be political people, like they are into electoral politics, but
3 they're not really engaged in sort of more cultural politics around race and class and those kinds
4 of things, which queer people tend to be more politicized around. That's a very interesting
5 distinction that you just brought to my mind.
- 6 EO: You know, saying gender creative when I was talking about it giving room, I feel like a queer
7 gives room – a queer person, there's a lot of room in there to be queer. It's sort of a catch-all. ,
8 you can be a cis man who dates other cis men, you're a gay man – and I know plenty of them.
9 But when you identify as queer in that way, it tells me that there . . . yeah, just there is more
10 layers, it's a more complex situation, it's not only about who you're literally sleeping with or
11 what your gender identity is, it's just a different radicalized view, I think, of the world.
- 12 AJ: Yeah. Last question.
- 13 EO: Yeah.
- 14 AJ: Sort of a two-parter though, is there an agenda for the transgender community? If so, what is it
15 – in your opinion, or what should it be? And where do you see the trans community in the next
16 50 years? So, actually that's three questions.
- 17 EO: OK. I don't think that there is a clear trans agenda because those sort of agendas are often built
18 by people that have power in the community or the world. I know that the trans people that I
19 know that are in my community and people that I might know, even across the country, are
20 concerned about basic rights, they're concerned about access to health care – not just access to
21 health care but access to competent health care, like getting good health care from people that
22 know your body and all different types of bodies. Access to good jobs, housing, keeping trans
23 people out of prison, just really basic needs – that's my agenda. You shouldn't be killed going to
24 the store, or attacked going to the bar, or picking your kid up from school. There's no reason in
25 our society that people are attacking other people, other human beings, because of what they
26 look like.
- 27 AJ: Right.
- 28 EO: Or what they assume that their body is like under their clothes.
- 29 AJ: Yeah.
- 30 EO: It's kind of beyond me. So, that's what my agenda is. And where I see the trans community in
31 50 years, well Dr. Berg and Dr. Spencer are going to revolutionize the world.
- 32 AJ: That's what I'm saying – you're like right here at Ground Zero, at the nexus.
- 33 EO: Yeah. So much has happened in the last 10-15 years that I really feel like 50 years is kind of a
34 long trajectory, but I really just . . . I hope that . . .
- 35 AJ: So, you're saying that this could happen in 20 years?
- 36 EO: Yeah, maybe – or 10. I don't know. We've got a lot of work to do.

- 1 AJ: We didn't have iPhones 10 years ago.
- 2 EO: That's true.
- 3 AJ: And that has completely changed the world.
- 4 EO: Yeah, things have really sped up since that. I just want everyone to have the room to be
5 themselves and if that means that you transition or you don't transition, or you're a cis male
6 that likes to have anal sex by your cis woman partner, that that's fine too. And men wearing
7 skirts and women wearing jock straps . . . I don't know, just room for everyone to be themselves
8 and then it's not . . . I'm trying to think of the words. Being yourself isn't a threat to other
9 people, basically. If you're not hurting anybody else, just let people be themselves and their
10 whole selves. That's my dream, I don't know if it's really a trans dream but I feel like that should
11 be for everybody.
- 12 AJ: Wow, so amazing. Thank you for sharing your life, your thoughts, your brilliant ideas. I really
13 appreciate the opportunity to sit down with you today, Ethan.
- 14 EO: Thank you for hounding me enough to do this.
- 15 AJ: All right. Well, until we meet again, my friend.
- 16 EO: OK.
- 17 AJ: Peace.