

Taya Mitchell
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

April 6, 2016



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

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

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

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1 Andrea Jenkins -AJ
2 Taya Mitchell -TM
3
4

5 AJ: So, hello. My name is Andrea Jenkins, and I am the oral historian for the Transgender Oral
6 History Project at the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota. Today is April 6th, 2016,
7 and I am in south Minneapolis with Ms. Taya Mitchell.

8 TM: Hello.

9 AJ: How are you, Taya?

10 TM: I'm doing wonderful.

11 AJ: Great. Hey, listen, tell me - state your name and how you spell it. Right?

12 TM: Uh huh.

13 AJ: And then what is your gender identity today, and what was your gender identity assigned at
14 birth.

15 TM: Okay.

16 AJ: And then what are the pronouns that you go by.

17 TM: Okay. My name is Taya, spelled T-A-Y-A. I identify as a woman. I was assigned male at birth. And
18 my pronouns are she and her.

19 AJ: Great. Wow. Thank you. So, Taya, tell me what is the first thing you remember in life.

20 TM: The first thing I remember in life?

21 AJ: The first memory. Yeah.

22 TM: Oh, my god. The first memory that I actually have is a birthday party. I don't know if it was my
23 birthday party, or if it was my - like, one of my cousins' birthday party.

24 AJ: Right.

25 TM: But I put my face in - dead face in the cake.

26 AJ: Is that right?

27 TM: I remember it was a chocolate cake and I just put my face dead in the center of it.

28 AJ: You wanted some cake, huh?

29 TM: Yeah.

30 AJ: Eat the cake, Anna Mae, eat the cake.

31 TM: One of those moments.

- 1 AJ: Oh, man, you had a “What’s love got to do with it” moment, huh?
- 2 TM: Right. But I did it to myself.
- 3 AJ: But you did it to yourself!
- 4 TM: I was, like - I was, like, four or five.
- 5 AJ: Okay.
- 6 TM: Yeah.
- 7 AJ: Where’d you grow up?
- 8 TM: I grew up in - in south LA.
- 9 AJ: Oh, really?
- 10 TM: Yeah.
- 11 AJ: South-Central, or just south LA?
- 12 TM: Well, it was - when I was born, in like, Englewood, and then, like, once we got older we moved
13 out into the suburbs.
- 14 AJ: Okay. Okay.
- 15 TM: So I grew up in Woodland Hills.
- 16 AJ: Oh, wow. Uh huh.
- 17 TM: But I still have family in Englewood, South-Central, Watts.
- 18 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 19 TM: Yeah.
- 20 AJ: All over Los Angeles. Los Angeles. Wow, sunny California. What was it like growing up out there?
- 21 TM: It was - it was so much fun.
- 22 AJ: Yeah?
- 23 TM: So much fun. I - but - I don’t - I don’t really remember it, because I travel so much.
- 24 AJ: Okay, okay.
- 25 TM: I would - I want to go back, like, now that I’m older, to experience LA -
- 26 AJ: Right.
- 27 TM: - as an adult, rather than a kid.
- 28 AJ: Kid. Yeah. No, that makes sense. Totally makes sense. So did you go to grammar school,
29 elementary school in LA?

- 1 TM: I - I was homeschooled, until I was...I was homeschooled until high school.
- 2 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 3 TM: Yeah.
- 4 AJ: Okay. And then - all the way through high school, or...?
- 5 TM: So - so, high school, I went to a public school.
- 6 AJ: Okay.
- 7 TM: In Memphis, Tennessee. But prior to that, because we moved to Memphis, but, like, prior to
8 that, everything was, like, from kindergarten all the way up until grade eight, I think, I was
9 homeschooled.
- 10 AJ: So no bullying or anything like that at school?
- 11 TM: No.
- 12 AJ: 'Cause you weren't in school, per se.
- 13 TM: Right. Right. But definitely the bullying and stuff came from, like- came from, like, neighborhood
14 kids.
- 15 AJ: Oh, really.
- 16 TM: And, like - and, like, just -
- 17 AJ: Just being in the world.
- 18 TM: Just being myself. Yeah. Just being myself and being in the world. There was bullying.
- 19 AJ: Wow.
- 20 TM: And teasing and stuff. I think -
- 21 AJ: Yeah - do you think that was - oh, I'm sorry, go ahead.
- 22 TM: It's like, you can't really get away from it, even though you're in homeschool.
- 23 AJ: Yeah. That's true. Wow. Do you think that was around your gender identity or your perceived -
- 24 TM: Definitely. Definitely -
- 25 AJ: - gender identity?
- 26 TM: - because I was a very, very feminine little kid.
- 27 AJ: Really?
- 28 TM: Yeah.
- 29 AJ: Okay. Okay.
- 30 TM: Yes. I always say I was a flaming glitterball coming out of the womb.

- 1 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 2 TM: So...
- 3 AJ: A flaming glitterball coming out of the womb! That's an image that's going to be in my head all
4 day, Taya.
- 5 TM: But - yeah.
- 6 AJ: A beautiful image! I'm not -
- 7 TM: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Just like, a ball of beautiful glitter.
- 8 AJ: I love it! I love it, I love it. So people gave you a lot - a hard time about that.
- 9 TM: Yup. Yeah.
- 10 AJ: Family, too?
- 11 TM: Family too, yeah.
- 12 AJ: Yeah?
- 13 TM: Definitely. Like, they would say, like, "Toughen up," and "You're a boy, you're not supposed to
14 be playing with dolls!" and all that stuff.
- 15 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 16 TM: But I was, like, "Whatever!"
- 17 AJ: Oh, wow. Do you think your family sort of homeschooled you to try to keep you -
- 18 TM: I think that -
- 19 AJ: - out of some of that?
- 20 TM: I think - I think a lot of it was for that reason. And my grandfather was - is a blues singer.
- 21 AJ: Okay.
- 22 TM: So - Carl Sims.
- 23 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 24 TM: So we would - we would tour the US, like, going to festivals, like, just, like, him just having shows
25 in arenas, or, like, a theater or something. So, like, we would travel a lot, so I think that's a big
26 part of it. That was a big part of why homeschool, too.
- 27 AJ: Big part of why you were being homeschooled, 'cause you were on the road.
- 28 TM: Right.
- 29 AJ: With your - with your family. A musical family. What was that like?
- 30 TM: It was so much fun growing up! That's why I perform, and that's why I love music today, because

- 1 of that foundation that my grandfather set.
- 2 AJ: Right.
- 3 TM: It was - it was so much fun, and so - like, meeting so many interesting and different people. It
4 was beautiful.
- 5 AJ: Wow. That's awesome. So what kind of performance do you do?
- 6 TM: I sing, and act. I don't dance, really, much.
- 7 AJ: Really? I - I've seen you dance!
- 8 TM: I mean, I do dance, but mostly singing and acting, that's - and, like, musical theater. That's -
9 that's my thing.
- 10 AJ: Yeah? That's beautiful. So your home life, you were kind of bouncing around the country, going
11 to these musical festivals, and concerts, and concert halls.
- 12 TM: Yeah.
- 13 AJ: Did you have any siblings? Brothers or sisters that you - ?
- 14 TM: No.
- 15 AJ: It was just you?
- 16 TM: It was just me. Just me.
- 17 AJ: Yeah?
- 18 TM: Yeah.
- 19 AJ: And - and you were - you mentioned you were raised by your grandparents.
- 20 TM: Yes.
- 21 AJ: Okay. Wow.
- 22 TM: Yeah.
- 23 AJ: So -
- 24 TM: So basically I'm an only child. Like, I - I have brothers and sisters on my dad's side, but I don't
25 really know them and they don't know me.
- 26 AJ: Right.
- 27 TM: So it's basically like I'm an only child.
- 28 AJ: Sure. Yeah. You don't connect with them at all. When was the first time you realized that you
29 were not the gender that you were assigned at birth, or not the gender that everybody thought
30 you were?
- 31 TM: Very, very early on.

- 1 AJ: Is that right?
- 2 TM: Very early on. Like, maybe, like, three? Four? Four years old? Like, wanted to, like, play dress-up,
3 and tea parties, paint my nails with my girl cousins and stuff like that. Like, wanted to get - like
4 wanting to grow my hair out. Like, just all sorts of different things, like, that typical girls do.
- 5 AJ: Right.
- 6 TM: I wanted to be, like, be more in that area.
- 7 AJ: Sure.
- 8 TM: But my - my family would always, kind of, like, redirect me, go, "Hey, no, you're supposed to
9 want to play basketball."
- 10 AJ: Right, or -
- 11 TM: "You're supposed to want to play football. How about you play baseball?"
- 12 AJ: Okay. Yeah.
- 13 TM: And I'm, like, "No? Actually I think I'm pretty good, like, staying over here, thank you."
- 14 AJ: Okay! Wow, that's funny. Did you - did you try sports at all?
- 15 TM: I tried it. Hated it.
- 16 AJ: Hated it.
- 17 TM: Hated it.
- 18 AJ: Yeah.
- 19 TM: But...
- 20 AJ: So sports and athletics not your thing, huh?
- 21 TM: Mm-mm. Only sport that I did like was running. That's the only sport that I did like and that I
22 really connected to, because when you're running, you just lose yourself, and just - just go for it.
- 23 AJ: Yeah.
- 24 TM: And -
- 25 AJ: And running is kind of genderless, right?
- 26 TM: Exactly.
- 27 AJ: Yeah.
- 28 TM: So that was - that was the one sport that I really did connect to. But other than that, I was just
29 like, screw sports.
- 30 AJ: Yeah. Cool. So you realized at a very early age. But I'm sure you didn't necessarily come out as
31 being trans -

- 1 TM: Right. I didn't come out -
2 AJ: - at that time.
3 TM: I didn't come out at that time at all.
4 AJ: So what are some of the, sort of, terms that you used to describe yourself over time?
5 TM: Okay. So, at first I thought, "Hey, maybe I'm just, like, a really really gay boy." So I identified as a
6 gay male until...I would say I was about, like, twenty-one. But even then - even then, like,
7 everything was, like, more on the transfeminine side.
8 AJ: Yeah. Yeah.
9 TM: Even though I didn't have a name for it, or I couldn't vocalize it, how I wanted it to.
10 AJ: Sure.
11 TM: I think it was always there, I just didn't have a label for it.
12 AJ: Label for it. Yeah. Yeah. So in - so you went through a period of sort of identifying as a gay
13 person. And then -
14 TM: Yeah, I came out when I was twelve years old as a gay boy.
15 AJ: Really? Oh, wow.
16 TM: So it was just like - it's just been there.
17 AJ: How did your grandparents react to that?
18 TM: My - okay, my grand - my granddad was, like, oh, okay, we already knew.
19 AJ: Oh, really?
20 TM: My grandma was, like, "Um, I don't want you - I don't want you to get hurt."
21 AJ: Right.
22 TM: "But I support you, and I love you."
23 AJ: Yeah.
24 TM: "And I'm not go - I'm not going to do anything to - I'm going to love you unconditionally and I'm
25 not going to shun you out or shut you out or anything."
26 AJ: Right.
27 TM: But she - she was definitely worried about my safety.
28 AJ: Worried about your safety. Which is under - parents do that.
29 TM: Yeah. Yeah.
30 AJ: Whether you come out as gay or not, like -

- 1 TM: Yeah.
- 2 AJ: - they - they're - they worry about their children, so. So that's understandable. But you still have
3 a relationship with your family.
- 4 TM: Yeah.
- 5 AJ: Even since you came out as being transgender?
- 6 TM: Yes.
- 7 AJ: Yeah.
- 8 TM: Yeah. I mean, we talk every now and then. Either she'll reach out to me - my grandma will reach
9 out to me, or I'll reach out to her, sometimes. But it's not, like, a consistent kind of thing. It's
10 like, every - every month or so, she'll be like "Hey, how are you doing? Is everything good, like,
11 are you still working, blah blah blah."
- 12 AJ: Sure. Do you go visit for the holidays or anything like that, or...?
- 13 TM: Last time I saw my grandma -
- 14 AJ: I know it's pretty expensive to get out to California, but...
- 15 TM: Yeah. Last time I saw my grandmother was in...October.
- 16 AJ: Okay.
- 17 TM: Like, a little bit before my birthday. And we hugged, and, you know, talked for a minute, and
18 then - because I was going to Texas.
- 19 AJ: Oh, okay.
- 20 TM: Yeah.
- 21 AJ: Wow. So - so that's great. You still have a - a good...
- 22 TM: Yeah, a good relationship -
- 23 AJ: Relationship. Not close, 'cause you're just physically not in the same place.
- 24 TM: Yeah, not close. Right.
- 25 AJ: But emotionally close.
- 26 TM: Yeah. Definitely.
- 27 AJ: Yeah. I love that. What challenges have you faced since you have began to express your true
28 gender identity?
- 29 TM: So many. Just, like, a lack of access to - to jobs, and a lack of access to, like, stability, as far as,
30 like, housing, and a lot of just, like - just, like, navigating through the world. It's - it's - I think it's
31 a bit harder as a trans person.

- 1 AJ: Yeah. Yeah. I would agree. What are some specific things that you have encountered in your
2 journey?
- 3 TM: Okay. I applied for - I applied for an apartment and - was that Burnsville, or something?
4 And...like, when I - when I filled the application out, I filled it out as a female, but on my - on
5 my..
- 6 AJ: ID...
- 7 TM: ID, it says male.
- 8 AJ: Right.
- 9 TM: And, like, after that, we went through the interview process, I had the deposit, blah blah blah, all
10 that stuff. And after that it was just, like, "Okay, we'll be calling you to - to schedule - to show
11 you the apartment." All that stuff. And then, like, after - it was just, like, nothing. Absolutely
12 nothing.
- 13 AJ: Wow.
- 14 TM: So that was, like, some form of housing discrimination.
- 15 AJ: Yeah, absolutely.
- 16 TM: And there's - there's been, like, just - just times when I'm in public where it's just, like, I don't
17 know. I don't know how to describe it.
- 18 AJ: You ever experienced, like, street harassment?
- 19 TM: Oh, yeah. Every day. All day.
- 20 AJ: Really. Oh, no.
- 21 TM: Yeah. I try to - I try to, like, keep earphones in.
- 22 AJ: Right?
- 23 TM: I try to keep earphones in so if - like, if I don't - if it doesn't register to, like, my senses, it's not
24 happening.
- 25 AJ: Sure.
- 26 TM: But it happens everyday and it's - it's a reality that I have to face, but I try to - I try to deal with it
27 as less as possible.
- 28 AJ: Yeah. Wow. I mean, you're so beautiful, I can't imagine people -
- 29 TM: Thank you.
- 30 AJ: - just checking you like that on the street.
- 31 TM: Yeah.
- 32 AJ: But - but I know it happens. It does happen. What have been some of the positive things that

- 1 you've experienced since coming out?
- 2 TM: The positive things - it's just, I get to be myself!
- 3 AJ: Yes.
- 4 TM: And I get to just, like, just live my life and be happy in my own skin, which is something that, like,
5 now that I'm getting older, and just, like, coming more into my womanhood, it's just - it's so
6 refreshing. And I think that just, like - just learning to love myself and just be myself for exactly
7 how I am, I think that far outweighs all of this - all of the discrimination, all of the street
8 harassment. I think that far outweighs all of that stuff.
- 9 AJ: Oh, my goodness. Wow. That's so amazing.
- 10 TM: Yeah.
- 11 AJ: I'm - I'm overwhelmed right now. No, because - you know, it is a process to get to love yourself
12 for everyone.
- 13 TM: Exactly.
- 14 AJ: Right? No matter who you are. And I think it's - it's incredible when people who have been told
15 that they shouldn't exist - TM: Right.
- 16 AJ: - and that their lives don't matter, and that, you know, they don't, you know, that you can't use
17 the bathrooms in certain places.
- 18 TM: Right.
- 19 AJ: You know, to be able to learn to love -
- 20 TM: Which is ridiculous.
- 21 AJ: I know. Speak on that a little bit.
- 22 TM: I only want to use the restroom! I only want to urinate! What is the big deal about -
- 23 AJ: Yeah! Exactly!
- 24 TM: - like, that's - that's crazy. It's absolutely crazy. Okay. Obviously if I went in like this in a men's
25 restroom...
- 26 AJ: Yeah. You're going to be extremely harassed.
- 27 TM: Yes. Extremely harassed, and probably beaten up. Probably raped.
- 28 AJ: Do you - yeah. Sexually assaulted. Yeah.
- 29 TM: Like, who - I don't - I don't think anyone in their mind that's going to a public restroom is
30 thinking "Oh, let me just, like, do some...pervertedness."
- 31 AJ: Right.
- 32 TM: It - it just doesn't make sense to me, because when I'm thinking about, like, if I have to use the

- 1 restroom, I just want to use the restroom and get to where I'm going.
- 2 AJ: Yeah. Exactly. And there are laws that people -
- 3 TM: Right.
- 4 AJ: - beat somebody up or rape somebody or do anything -
- 5 TM: To a trans woman, it's excusable, because - "Oh, I didn't know she was trans." Or "he." That's -
- 6 that's the thing. "I didn't know he was a trans person."
- 7 AJ: Yeah.
- 8 TM: Or "He tricked me." Which is...no.
- 9 AJ: So the misgendering - do you experience that at all?
- 10 TM: Yeah. I - I just got misgendered, like, last week.
- 11 AJ: Oh, no.
- 12 TM: Some guy - I was at the light rail station. This guy just comes up to me and he's like, "Are you a
- 13 man or a woman?"
- 14 AJ: What makes people think they can just walk up to...
- 15 TM: Rude, first of all!
- 16 AJ: Did you know him?
- 17 TM: No! I didn't know him at all! I just walked away.
- 18 AJ: He's not a friend of yours?
- 19 TM: Not a friend. Just some stranger just comes up to me, "Are you a man or a woman." And I was
- 20 just like...No. Just don't even talk to me.
- 21 AJ: Right.
- 22 TM: Like...
- 23 AJ: Yeah.
- 24 TM: I would have - like, if he had said, "Hey, can I ask you a question? What pronouns do you use?"
- 25 AJ: Right.
- 26 TM: That would have been - I would have been, like, okay, I use she and her, but I am transwoman.
- 27 So I'm very open about who I am.
- 28 AJ: Sure. Yeah.
- 29 TM: And I just don't - I don't hide it. It is what it is.
- 30 AJ: Yeah.

- 1 TM: But, like, is - it's just in how you approach people.
- 2 AJ: Sure.
- 3 TM: I felt like that was very rude and it made me feel, like - it made me feel like crap, to be honest.
- 4 AJ: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely, I can imagine. I - I've experienced it myself, so I know -
- 5 TM: Yeah.
- 6 AJ: - how it can make one feel. I'm sorry that you experienced that, but - but it does kind of come...
- 7 TM: It comes with the territory, I guess.
- 8 AJ: Yeah. When is the first time you ever saw another trans person?
- 9 TM: The first time I saw a trans person...I don't know. But I do know the first time that a trans person
10 approached me, as far as becoming trans, it was - it was Pride 2013. This woman stopped me in
11 a bar and she was, like, "Hey. Are you transitioning?"
- 12 AJ: Oh wow.
- 13 TM: And I was like, "Uh, no, what's that?" And she was, like, "It's a process to become a
14 woman." And I was like, "Oh, okay." And she was like, "You do want to become a woman, right?"
15 And I was like, "Uh, I think so, yeah!"
- 16 AJ: Oh wow! Did you know this person?
- 17 TM: No, I didn't know her at all.
- 18 AJ: So just some random woman!
- 19 TM: Just a random trans woman was like, "Hey, are you transitioning?" I was like...
- 20 AJ: Okay!
- 21 TM: But she's - she's the one who led me to, like, start researching about trans people and
22 researching about hormone replacement -
- 23 AJ: Did you become friends with her?
- 24 TM: Huh?
- 25 AJ: Did you become friends with her?
- 26 TM: Yeah, I did.
- 27 AJ: Okay! Okay.
- 28 TM: She - she's in Atlanta now, but...
- 29 AJ: Okay.
- 30 TM: Yeah, we actually did become friends after that. Yeah.

- 1 AJ: Wow. So she sort of -
- 2 TM: She - she -
- 3 AJ: - connected you to resources, and to...?
- 4 TM: She didn't connect me to resources, she told me to - she told me to look it up, and then, like
- 5 after I looked it up, I found her - or I saw her, like, downtown or somewhere. We - we connected
- 6 again.
- 7 AJ: Right. Right.
- 8 TM: And we exchanged numbers.
- 9 AJ: Okay.
- 10 TM: And, you know, facebooks and stuff like that.
- 11 AJ: Wow.
- 12 TM: Became friends.
- 13 AJ: Wow! So she clocked you!
- 14 TM: Yeah!
- 15 AJ: As they say in the community.
- 16 TM: Yeah, she clocked me and was, like, "Uhh, I want to get you together."
- 17 AJ: Right! Let me get you together right now.
- 18 TM: Yeah.
- 19 AJ: Snatch them edges right up, honey!
- 20 TM: Yeah! And I - I do thank her for that, because - I mean if it - probably for her, I probably would
- 21 have still been a gender nonconforming person.
- 22 AJ: Do you mind saying her name? Is that a -
- 23 TM: Paradise.
- 24 AJ: Oh, really!
- 25 TM: Yeah.
- 26 AJ: Oh, wow!
- 27 TM: Yeah.
- 28 AJ: I know Paradise!
- 29 TM: Yeah!
- 30 AJ: Paradise Lashay.

- 1 TM: Yeah!
- 2 AJ: Oh, my goodness. Yeah, we've got to get her as a part of this project.
- 3 TM: Oh, yeah!
- 4 AJ: I think she lives in New York City right now, though.
- 5 TM: I thought she was in - last time I talked to her she was in Atlanta.
- 6 AJ: She was in Atlanta? Okay. All righty. Well, Paradise is a very - I would - I will call Paradise a force
7 of nature.
- 8 TM: Yes. Definitely. She's a firecracker, isn't she.
- 9 AJ: Yeah, she is.
- 10 TM: I love her.
- 11 AJ: I love her as well. I absolutely do. So, to the extent that you feel comfortable, Taya, can you
12 share any medical interventions that you have sort of undergone up to this point, or - ?
- 13 TM: Like, surgeries?
- 14 AJ: Yeah. Do you have any thoughts about that?
- 15 TM: I haven't had any surgeries yet. But - it's something that - it's something that I do think about.
- 16 AJ: Yeah?
- 17 TM: And it's something that is in the back of my head. Like, "Hmm, maybe I want to - maybe I want
18 to get a breast augmentation," or "Maybe I should get a nose job" or something like that. But
19 it's - it's, like, way in the back of my head. It's not a primary focus.
- 20 AJ: Sure.
- 21 TM: But I do think about it. As far as, like, hormonal, my hormone regimen and stuff, I do take
22 spironolactone.
- 23 AJ: Okay.
- 24 TM: And estradiol.
- 25 AJ: All right.
- 26 TM: Through the pill - both through pill form.
- 27 AJ: Pills? So no shot?
- 28 TM: Yeah, no shot. I do want to try - I hate needles!
- 29 AJ: Okay!
- 30 TM: So I will never - I'll probably never go to the shot.

- 1 AJ: Oh, no.
- 2 TM: But I am looking at patches, like -
- 3 AJ: Yeah.
- 4 TM: - transfer -
- 5 AJ: Transdermal.
- 6 TM: Mmhmm.
- 7 AJ: Yeah.
- 8 TM: Yeah, I am looking at that part - at that. Because I don't really take my pills every day like I
9 should.
- 10 AJ: Uh oh. Yeah...
- 11 TM: But! That is something that I do.
- 12 AJ: You've got to take care of your health, honey.
- 13 TM: Yeah.
- 14 AJ: That's a big part about it. Well, thank you for sharing that. I really appreciate it. You know - I
15 know, from my own experience, that the social transition is much more challenging.
- 16 TM: Yeah. Yeah.
- 17 AJ: Aspect than...
- 18 TM: Than the medical.
- 19 AJ: Yeah.
- 20 TM: Yeah.
- 21 AJ: So just being in the world, being who you are, being yourself, having people respect you as a
22 woman.
- 23 TM: Right.
- 24 AJ: As the woman that you are - is - is really important, but is also sometimes a challenge, to -
- 25 TM: Yeah, it can be.
- 26 AJ: - to get to that, so. But I think you've accomplished that.
- 27 TM: I...I would say yeah, I have.
- 28 AJ: Yeah?
- 29 TM: For the most part.
- 30 AJ: For the most part. It's an ongoing...

- 1 TM: It's an ongoing thing. It - it'll always happen where I'm clocked. It comes with the territory.
- 2 AJ: Yeah.
- 3 TM: I - at least I think. But -
- 4 AJ: And I guess you said, you know, this is who I am.
- 5 TM: Right.
- 6 AJ: You know? I use she and her pronouns and I'm a trans woman. Like -
- 7 TM: Right.
- 8 AJ: So it's not like - you know -
- 9 TM: It's not, like, a bad thing.
- 10 AJ: Right. It's not a bad thing at all, and not trying to really fool anybody, or deceive anybody.
- 11 TM: Exactly. That's - I think - I think that's the most - that's - that's the most important for me. I'm
12 not trying to fool anyone. I'll tell anyone, "Hey, I'm trans."
- 13 AJ: Yeah.
- 14 TM: Because I - I mean, it's just who I am. It's part of who I am.
- 15 AJ: How do people respond when you say that?
- 16 TM: Some people say "Oh, I didn't know," or some people say "I kind of could tell," or some people
17 say "Oh, I already know."
- 18 AJ: Really?
- 19 TM: Yeah.
- 20 AJ: Okay. Negativity - do you get any negativity when you come out as trans?
- 21 TM: I haven't received negativity. Thankfully.
- 22 AJ: Yeah. Yeah.
- 23 TM: Thankfully. I haven't been bashed, or - like, of course, like, verbally -
- 24 AJ: Yeah.
- 25 TM: - abused, but not physically.
- 26 AJ: Okay.
- 27 TM: Thankfully.
- 28 AJ: Thankfully. Thankfully. That's wonderful. So, looking back over your decision to express your
29 true gender identity, what were some pivotal moments? Like, I know you said Paradise snatched
30 you up out of the club and said "Come on, honey."

- 1 TM: Yeah.
- 2 AJ: "We're going to make you a girl." But - no, one - and - and that couldn't have happened if that
3 wasn't already...
- 4 TM: It was - yeah, it was already there.
- 5 AJ: Who you are. But - but what were some pivotal moments in your life that really triggered - "This
6 is - this is where I'm - this is who I am, this is where I need to go, this is what I need to do?"
- 7 TM: You know what? I don't know. Because - I really don't know. It started when I was, like, fourteen
8 years old. I started wearing makeup when I was fourteen.
- 9 AJ: Okay.
- 10 TM: Started growing my hair out at age, like, eighteen. Like, slowly incorporating women's clothing
11 into my wardrobe.
- 12 AJ: Okay.
- 13 TM: Or, like, mixing and matching some, like, some - like, it'll be, like, some masculine jeans and a
14 feminine top.
- 15 AJ: Right.
- 16 TM: Or vice versa. Wearing high heels and stuff like that. So it's - it's been, like, an ongoing process.
- 17 AJ: Sure. It's not a one time, kind of, one moment in history or whatever.
- 18 TM: Right. Right.
- 19 AJ: Huh. Yeah. No, and I get that. And - and it's fine, I mean - some people have that "Aha" moment,
20 and -
- 21 TM: Yeah. For me, it was just, like, "I'm just - I'm just doing this."
- 22 AJ: Yeah.
- 23 TM: And I - I don't have a word for it, don't have a label for it, I just know I like this, and this is what I
24 want to go for, so I'm just going to do it.
- 25 AJ: Wow. I love that. Anything that you regret in your new life that you would have done
26 differently?
- 27 TM: Any regrets. I wish I would've transitioned sooner, actually.
- 28 AJ: Yeah. Yeah.
- 29 TM: That's - that's it.
- 30 AJ: That's what I hear a lot of people say.
- 31 TM: Yeah. Just wish I would've did it sooner, when I was, like, twelve, or thirteen, when I came out as
32 a gay boy, I should've been, like, "Hey, I'm actually a girl on the inside!"

- 1 AJ: Yeah.
- 2 TM: I wonder how that would've worked.
- 3 AJ: Yeah. Sometimes it goes over well, sometimes -
- 4 TM: Right, sometimes it doesn't.
- 5 AJ: - it's not so - not so much. So - one of my questions is, has there been a specific moment or
6 person or organization that's had a significant impact on you related to your gender identity.
7 You already told me there's been a person. Any organizations?
- 8 TM: Oh, yeah, definitely.
- 9 AJ: Okay.
- 10 TM: Definitely. Minnesota Transgender Health Coalition.
- 11 AJ: The Health Coalition? Minnesota Transgender -
- 12 TM: Yeah - Health Coalition - they provided so many resources, so - like, opened so many doors for
13 me as far as, like, coming into my own as a - as, like, a woman, and coming into my own as a
14 community organizing, and doing, like, some of the activist work that I want to do.
- 15 AJ: Right.
- 16 TM: It's - it's definitely opened some doors for me, in that - in that way.
- 17 AJ: Okay.
- 18 TM: Also, OutFront Minnesota has been helpful as far as, like - like letting me lead trainings, and,
19 like, doing lobby day. And just, like, opening avenues for Black trans women.
- 20 AJ: Right.
- 21 TM: That's - I think that's so important for us to be represented and in a city where it's
22 predominantly white.
- 23 AJ: Yes.
- 24 TM: And - like, there's not - there's not a lot of Black trans representation, especially on the feminine
25 side.
- 26 AJ: Right.
- 27 TM: So I - yeah. I think OutFront is definitely one of them.
- 28 AJ: OutFront has been part of that.
- 29 TM: Mmhmm.
- 30 AJ: Okay. Yeah. Any other organizations or groups or...? I know I saw you voguing once.
- 31 TM: Yeah! Yeah.

- 1 AJ: And - which is a part of, sort of, house ball culture.
- 2 TM: Yeah, house ballroom.
- 3 AJ: Yeah.
- 4 TM: Right. I am in the House of Valentino.
- 5 AJ: The House of Valentino.
- 6 TM: Yes.
- 7 AJ: Tell me about the house scene - like -
- 8 TM: It's - it's a lot of fun.
- 9 AJ: Yeah?
- 10 TM: Yeah. It's a lot of fun because, like, if - if you're going to - if you're going to a ball in, say, like, DC,
11 or - or like, Florida, people from all over the country come. And it's just like a big networking
12 opportunity. So you meet so many brilliant, wonderful trans and - and, like, just Black LGBT
13 people. It's amazing.
- 14 AJ: Wow.
- 15 TM: And - I - I love being in House.
- 16 AJ: Yeah?
- 17 TM: I do!
- 18 AJ: So the House of Valentino - is that here?
- 19 TM: Yeah, it's here in -
- 20 AJ: Twin Cities?
- 21 TM: It's here in the Twin Cities, and it's also - we also have chapters in Texas, Chicago, Detroit. We
22 have - we're building a chapter in Atlanta. So we're pretty much nationwide. We have a chapter
23 in New York, and Boston.
- 24 AJ: Oh, my goodness.
- 25 TM: Yeah.
- 26 AJ: It's a powerful network, all over the place.
- 27 TM: Yeah.
- 28 AJ: What kind of - so there's this performance aspect to it, like going to the balls and things.
- 29 TM: Yes.
- 30 AJ: But what happens sort of in between? And, you know, I've seen Paris is Burning, and - and films,
31 and there's all kind of - sort of ball culture online, but - but what's your experience like? Do you -

- 1 do you live in a house? Do you live in the house or do people live in a house together here, in
2 the House of Valentino? Is that a thing?
- 3 TM: So - so - so at one point, yes, I did live in a house with two of my - I lived with a house sister and
4 a house brother.
- 5 AJ: Okay.
- 6 TM: And that - that process was interesting.
- 7 AJ: Okay.
- 8 TM: It was interesting. A lot - a lot of - a lot of, like, what goes on in between from, like, this ball to
9 this ball, it's a lot of, like - it's like, underground, and like, a little bit hush-hush.
- 10 AJ: Right.
- 11 TM: But it's like, "Okay, this house shaded us, so we - we - we're going to go for them!"
- 12 AJ: Right.
- 13 TM: "We're going to get them at the ball!"
- 14 AJ: Yeah.
- 15 TM: But it's like -
- 16 AJ: Competition, though, right?
- 17 TM: It's - right - it's like, comp - it's, like, competition. So it's, like - it's - it's fun to, like, be able to
18 express yourself, and - and just, like, do what you love, basically.
- 19 AJ: Yeah.
- 20 TM: And it's - it's expensive, too. I will say that.
- 21 AJ: Why is it so expensive?
- 22 TM: Because - okay. You have to - like, being in a house, you - you're expected to have a certain
23 amount of...like, the - the effect that you - that you put on, you're - you're expected to, like, be a
24 step above someone who isn't in a house.
- 25 AJ: Okay.
- 26 TM: And then, like, being in the House of Valentino, which - that name itself is like, a fashion house.
- 27 AJ: Sure.
- 28 TM: An expensive fashion house. So it's - it's, like, a step above that.
- 29 AJ: Above. Right.
- 30 TM: So that's, like - and then, like, putting into - putting money into your effect, and then traveling,
31 and then housing yourself while you're going to, like, these different balls and stuff.

- 1 AJ: Sure.
- 2 TM: And then on top of that, like, paying for the ball itself, which can sometimes be, like, fifty dollars
3 to get in.
- 4 AJ: Oh, wow. Okay.
- 5 TM: Yeah. So it's -
- 6 AJ: And when you say effect, you mean, like, your hair, your makeup, your clothes?
- 7 TM: Your hair, your makeup, your clothes, like - if they're calling for - if they're asking for, like, a
8 specific look, make - sometimes you have to, like, go out and search for that.
- 9 AJ: Sure.
- 10 TM: And, like, it can be expensive.
- 11 AJ: Yeah. What could be a look that they might say "This is the look for tonight"?
- 12 TM: Okay. So. I'm going for - I'm going to a ball in Texas.
- 13 AJ: Okay.
- 14 TM: And I - in June. And the effect is calling for a church lady look.
- 15 AJ: Wow.
- 16 TM: Right!
- 17 AJ: Okay!
- 18 TM: So I'm thinking - I'm thinking I want to get, like, a big Easter hat -
- 19 AJ: Big hat.
- 20 TM: And like, a nice blazer and, like, skirt set, but definitely, like, of quality.
- 21 AJ: Right. Yes,
- 22 TM: So I'm going to put some effort into that. Plus I want to do something extra, because I am in a
23 house, and, like, give out, like, a flyer for, like, a revival or something.
- 24 AJ: Right? Oh, wow! Okay!
- 25 TM: So - right! So - so, like, when it's -
- 26 AJ: So it's creativity...
- 27 TM: Yeah. It's like - it's - it's a whole bunch of creativity. Like, that - that are put into these balls.
- 28 AJ: Sure. Oh, my goodness.
- 29 TM: Yeah.
- 30 AJ: It's - it's a culture. You've - you've said a sort of subculture underground.

- 1 TM: Yeah.
- 2 AJ: But I think it - it creates family and network, for -
- 3 TM: Yeah, it does. It definitely does.
- 4 AJ: - transgender and gender nonconforming people to have a - a way of supporting each other.
- 5 TM: Right. And a way of, like, connecting with each other, and, like, lifting each other up.
- 6 AJ: Yeah. Yeah.
- 7 TM: And just - I - I would say, like, House of Valentino, I really feel connected to the members, and I
- 8 actually feel like there's a strong, strong, strong, like, focus on family rather than balls.
- 9 AJ: Okay. So the ball is sort of -
- 10 TM: It's like - it's like something that we do for fun.
- 11 AJ: Right.
- 12 TM: But we want to make sure that we do do them, because we are, you know, we do - we are a
- 13 house that walks balls, but, like, focused on, like, family, and making sure each other are strong,
- 14 and making sure each other are stable and stuff like that. Yeah.
- 15 AJ: Yeah. Is there any sort of political aspect to the balls? Like, I know I've been to a couple and
- 16 there will be people sort of doing HIV/AIDS advocacy, and -
- 17 TM: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Definitely
- 18 AJ: Other kinds of resources. Do you experience that when you go to them?
- 19 TM: Mmhmm. Yeah, there's - there's always - there's always an incentive to make sure that
- 20 everyone is, like, practicing safe sex, and, like, making sure they know their status.
- 21 AJ: Yeah.
- 22 TM: And, like, even voting, like, there's - there's been, like -
- 23 AJ: Oh, really?
- 24 TM: - an emphasis on that at some balls. Yeah. Definitely.
- 25 AJ: Yeah. No, that's what's up, man. Because people are sort of in this underground culture, we've
- 26 got to figure out ways to connect people to the broader culture, right?
- 27 TM: Exactly.
- 28 AJ: Yeah. That's what's up. Talk to me a little bit, Taya, about romance, and love, and relationships.
- 29 TM: Okay!
- 30 AJ: Are you - are you in love? And how - and - and then - in more importantly, how has - has
- 31 your...love life, your sexuality, been impacted by your gender identity?

- 1 TM: Okay. Am I in love? No. I'm single.
- 2 AJ: Okay.
- 3 TM: I do date, every now and then. I do go on a date every now and then.
- 4 AJ: Yeah.
- 5 TM: I have been in relationships since - since I've transitioned.
- 6 AJ: Okay. Yeah.
- 7 TM: It was fun while it lasted, I guess.
- 8 AJ: Yeah.
- 9 TM: I just - I just felt like - just, wasn't - it was going in a direction that I didn't want to go, so I just
10 washed my hands of it.
- 11 AJ: Okay. So you called it off.
- 12 TM: Yeah.
- 13 AJ: Okay.
- 14 TM: Yeah. It was going - like, it was getting too serious too quick, so I just - I was just like, no.
- 15 AJ: Wow. Okay. Yeah, you are only twenty-five years old, after all.
- 16 TM: Right. Right. It is challenging being a trans woman and dating. Because people - like, some guys
17 only like trans women, and most of them are looking for sex.
- 18 AJ: Right.
- 19 TM: It's not something I'm interested in. Or - and then, on the flip side, it's like, men who've never
20 been with a trans woman, and probably have thought about it or want to experience it, and it's
21 something - it's not something that they're used to, so they want to hide it behind closed doors.
- 22 AJ: Sure.
- 23 TM: I'm not into that.
- 24 AJ: Yeah.
- 25 TM: I'm - I'm - I'm not - I'm just not here for it. And I - I think the other - the other guys that I've
26 come in contact with, they're like...they - they say they're straight men, or whatever, and I - I
27 think they're straight men.
- 28 AJ: Yeah.
- 29 TM: Because I'm a woman, and...whatever. But it's - it's a lot of, like - it's a lot of weeding through
30 BS, and weeding out, like, trying to find the right guy who complements my personality, first of
31 all. Just, like, who I have, just, like, a chemistry with.

- 1 AJ: Right.
- 2 TM: Yeah. And - it's - it's a lot that goes into it.
- 3 AJ: Which is a challenge for anybody, you know. But I - I do think that a transgender identity makes
4 it harder.
- 5 TM: Makes it a little more difficult, yes. Dating is hard for anyone.
- 6 AJ: Yes. It is.
- 7 TM: And then being trans on top of that, it's just like oh...kay.
- 8 AJ: Yeah. Yeah, it's pretty -
- 9 TM: What did I get myself into?
- 10 AJ: - pretty challenging for Black women, too, just -
- 11 TM: Right.
- 12 AJ: - all Black women.
- 13 TM: It's either fetish -
- 14 AJ: Yeah.
- 15 TM: - or just like, you're overlooked. And then I'm a dark woman on top of that. So it's even more.
16 But it's - it's been fun.
- 17 AJ: What is that - how - so being a dark woman. You - you mentioned that, so I'm going to follow up
18 on it, like -
- 19 TM: Please.
- 20 AJ: What does that mean to you?
- 21 TM: My darkness is beautiful.
- 22 AJ: Okay.
- 23 TM: I love my dark skin.
- 24 AJ: Yeah.
- 25 TM: But I - I do feel like I'm discriminated against sometimes. Because of dark skin.
- 26 AJ: By other...
- 27 TM: By other - by -
- 28 AJ: Black people?
- 29 TM: By other Black people, by some white people. Even, like, people in the trans community will be,
30 like, oh, that's just, like, a dark girl, she's not going to do. You know?

- 1 AJ: Wow. Okay. No wonder people be throwing shade at me, I'm - I'm a dark girl, I never knew.
- 2 TM: Yeah. That may be a part of it.
- 3 AJ: What's your sexual orientation?
- 4 TM: I am a - I say, "I'm straight or whatever."
- 5 AJ: Okay. Straight or whatever. Okay. That tells me a lot, Taya.
- 6 TM: The "or whatever" part comes because I - I think I gravitate more towards pansexual men, or
7 more bisexual men.
- 8 AJ: Okay.
- 9 TM: Rather than a straight man. Because I'm not - I can't - I can't give a straight man a child. And I
10 kind of don't want to get married in the traditional sense. So I feel like, for me to get in a - like, a
11 serious relationship with a straight man would be, like, a waste of his time, because, like, a lot -
12 unless - unless he's someone who - who doesn't want kids, and all that good - like, all that stuff,
13 and like, family life, and stuff like that.
- 14 AJ: Sure.
- 15 TM: Like, unless it's someone who's not interested in that, then I'm open to, like, exploring that
16 option.
- 17 AJ: Right, right.
- 18 TM: But for the most part, it's like, I'd rather be - I'd rather be with, like, a - a bi man or a pansexual
19 man.
- 20 AJ: Okay. All right. So - but you're pretty into male-identified bodies - people.
- 21 TM: Yes. Yes.
- 22 AJ: Have there been any times when institutions have been either really helpful or really
23 insensitive? And when I say institutions, I mean, like, the medical industry, or the criminal justice
24 system, schools, or - you know, hospitals, that kind of thing.
- 25 TM: So I haven't been discriminated in the medical or schooling. What was the other one? What was
26 the other one that you mentioned?
- 27 AJ: In - criminal justice.
- 28 TM: Criminal justice, I haven't been arrested, but I know if I do, I'm going to be put in the male - the
29 male jail cell.
- 30 AJ: Right.
- 31 TM: So I try to avoid that at all cost.
- 32 AJ: At all cost.
- 33 TM: Yeah. At all cost.

- 1 AJ: But when you go to the doctor and hospitals, people have been pretty...?
- 2 TM: Yeah, people have been pretty - pretty good about, like, my gender identity. They call me Taya,
3 she/her.
- 4 AJ: Okay.
- 5 TM: And if they're unsure, they - they say "they."
- 6 AJ: Wow.
- 7 TM: Which I - which I prefer.
- 8 AJ: Yeah. Yeah. Wow. You've been pretty fortunate then.
- 9 TM: Yeah.
- 10 AJ: It means the world is changing a little bit.
- 11 TM: A little.
- 12 AJ: Yeah.
- 13 TM: I think - I think with my friend's case, with Fairview, it's - it's kind of, like - I think people are
14 paying more attention to us now.
- 15 AJ: Okay.
- 16 TM: Especially in, like, hospitals and, like, clinics and stuff like that. I think it's - I think it's becoming,
17 like, less and less and less of a thing, where, like, we're discriminated against in those - in those
18 areas.
- 19 AJ: So you have a friend who have a case against Fairview?
- 20 TM: Yeah.
- 21 AJ: What is that about?
- 22 TM: So my friend - I don't know if he wants me to mention his name or not -
- 23 AJ: Yeah, probably not. Yeah.
- 24 TM: But he - he is a trans man and he had an incident where he was - he was - he had to go to
25 Fairview clinic, and they bas - I don't remember the specifics -
- 26 AJ: It was unrelated to his gender identity, right?
- 27 TM: Yeah. Yeah, it was unrelated to his gender identity, but they were very, like, discriminatory and
28 wouldn't give him care, and stuff like that.
- 29 AJ: Yeah. Yeah. Wow.
- 30 TM: So he - I think he won that case, actually.
- 31 AJ: Yeah. I - I think you're right. I think I know the person you're referring to. Yeah. They did win,

- 1 and - and hopefully changes are happening.
- 2 TM: Yeah. Changes our perception on this sex - sexual orientation and gender - gender part of, like,
3 that whole Title IX clause, right?
- 4 AJ: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. Title IX protects women and girls and gives access, and it includes
5 transgender identified women.
- 6 TM: Yes.
- 7 AJ: That policy.
- 8 TM: Yeah.
- 9 AJ: Yeah. I've got to - I've got to follow up with that person.
- 10 TM: Yeah.
- 11 AJ: To find out how they're doing afterwards. So, what do you think the relationship is, like,
12 between the lesbian, the gay, the bisexual community, and the transgender community?
- 13 TM: We have a long way to go.
- 14 AJ: Yeah.
- 15 TM: We have a really long way to go.
- 16 AJ: What - what - what - what are some of your thoughts around...
- 17 TM: I try - okay. It's - I hear a lot of gay men. I - I don't know about lesbians, but I hear a lot of gay
18 men say "I don't understand trans people, they're still a man." I hear a lot of gay guys say "Oh,
19 that's just a man anyway, so, I - like, whatever."
- 20 AJ: Yeah. They feel like they can say anything or do anything, or - yeah.
- 21 TM: Yeah. So I feel like - I feel like we still have a - a long way to go socially with the LGB community.
22 And, like, making sure the T is inclusive, and making sure that we are all, like, loving each other
23 and supporting each other.
- 24 AJ: Right.
- 25 TM: 'Cause I don't - I don't - yes, there are some in - in the other LGBT - LGB part, that support us
26 and love us, but as a whole, I - I don't think there is a lot of incentive to connect with the trans
27 portion of that.
- 28 AJ: Wow. Yeah. Well, that's unfortunate. Do you - do you think that - well, here's what I was going
29 to ask. Were you involved in, sort of, this whole marriage equality movement?
- 30 TM: No.
- 31 AJ: No?
- 32 TM: No, I could - I could care less about marriage, to be honest.

- 1 AJ: Yeah.
- 2 TM: That's the last thing on my mind.
- 3 AJ: Right. Not ready to get married, huh?
- 4 TM: Right. No.
- 5 AJ: Okay. Do you think that - that the passage of same sex marriage, though, has any kind of impact
6 on the trans community, either negative or positive?
- 7 TM: Definitely. We can get married anywhere now.
- 8 AJ: Yeah.
- 9 TM: So - but - my sisters in Louisiana can get married, or Mississippi.
- 10 AJ: Right.
- 11 TM: And Georgia. Like, states that would never want to, like, put - like, have another, like, someone
12 assigned male at birth married to another man.
- 13 AJ: Yeah.
- 14 TM: Like, I think - I think that is so positive, that we - that we can do the - like, I can go to fucking
15 South Carolina and get married.
- 16 AJ: Right.
- 17 TM: Like, who would have thought!
- 18 AJ: Good luck with that, but -
- 19 TM: No. Not going to happen.
- 20 AJ: You might be able to get married, but you won't be able to go to the bathroom!
- 21 TM: Right.
- 22 AJ: Yeah.
- 23 TM: Unfortunate.
- 24 AJ: Yeah. What do you think about that? All of these bathroom bills, and all of this nonsense. I
25 mean, I know we talked about it a little bit earlier, but just a anti-transgender sentiment that's
26 happening.
- 27 TM: Right.
- 28 AJ: And let me frame it in another way.
- 29 TM: Okay.
- 30 AJ: So there's been all this, sort of, visibility that has been happening for the trans community. You
31 know, Laverne Cox on the cover of -

- 1 TM: Time Magazine.
2 AJ: Magazine.
3 TM: Janet Mock, Angelica Ross.
4 AJ: Yeah.
5 TM: Like, Chaz Bono. Like, so many.
6 AJ: Caitlyn Jenner.
7 TM: Caitlyn Jenner.
8 AJ: Yeah.
9 TM: The one who - I think - I think Caitlyn really spearheaded the trans movement. Even though
10 there were people before her, that - that have come out and been doing activist work and - for
11 so long, I think Caitlyn was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back.
12 AJ: Okay.
13 TM: With us.
14 AJ: Wow. And so created just, this whole worldwide international awareness about transgender
15 people.
16 TM: Yes.
17 AJ: Do you think that awareness is positive or negative?
18 TM: Both and.
19 AJ: Okay. Say more.
20 TM: As far as Caitlyn herself, I think she has a lot of work to do. A lot of reading to do. A lot of
21 learning to do.
22 AJ: Sure.
23 TM: A lot of self-learning to do. And a lot of intersectionality work to do.
24 AJ: Sure.
25 TM: Because, like, there's been people, like, Janet and Laverne and Cece who've been, like - just, like,
26 saying basically the same thing that Caitlyn has - has said, and has been trying to do, but it's like,
27 once Caitlyn came out and, you know, revealed herself to the world, it was just like a boom.
28 AJ: Right. Yeah, like oh my god, this is new!
29 TM: Yeah. Yeah. It was, like, oh, this is new, when trans people have been around since the
30 beginning of time.
31 AJ: Right.

- 1 TM: So.
- 2 AJ: Exactly. So - so that's the good part. What's the - what's the - you said it's both/and.
- 3 TM: Once again, people not respecting our identities, and not - not taking us serious. And even, like,
4 even, like, tabloid headlines saying "Caitlyn wants to be Bruce again" when she's never said that.
- 5 AJ: Right.
- 6 TM: I think - I think Caitlyn feels very comfortable in her skin. I - I think she may miss aspects of
7 Bruce, but I think Caitlyn is - I think she's - I think she's happy where she is.
- 8 AJ: Yeah.
- 9 TM: And she's been - she said she's been trying to transition since the eighties, so I don't - I think
10 there's a lot of, like - there's a lot of, like, our story's being told by people that aren't necessarily
11 us.
- 12 AJ: Yes.
- 13 TM: And they're getting it wrong, so, yeah.
- 14 AJ: Wow. Well that's - that's a beautiful statement. That's why I'm so glad that people like you and
15 others are willing to share their stories -
- 16 TM: Yeah.
- 17 AJ: - for this oral history project, so that we can have those real, lived narratives from people who -
18 who are transgender -
- 19 TM: Right.
- 20 AJ: - and not, just, know somebody, or -
- 21 TM: Exactly.
- 22 AJ: - their nephew is, you know, becoming a girl, or something. So thank you for - for being here,
23 and sharing that, Taya.
- 24 TM: Yeah.
- 25 AJ: What do you think - you know, I know you - you - you think a lot about...trans activism and
26 organizing around transgender issues and trans community. What do you think the agenda
27 should be for the transgender community going forward?
- 28 TM: Wow. That's a huge question. What the agenda should be. I think...I don't know how to answer
29 that question right now.
- 30 AJ: Yeah. Yeah.
- 31 TM: Because it's - it's so much going through my mind, on that - like, what should we focus on. I
32 think we should focus on, like, find - like, making a way for young trans people that are coming
33 up to - to be stable, as far as, like, housing. To have access to jobs. To have, like, just - like, to be

- 1 able to express themselves and live how they want to live.
- 2 AJ: That's a pretty solid agenda, I would say! Housing, jobs. I don't know. Maybe access to - I don't
3 know, healthcare, maybe?
- 4 TM: Yeah. Healthcare, definitely. Definitely healthcare.
- 5 AJ: Yeah? What is - what is your role in - in sort of trying to create that?
- 6 TM: I - what is my role in that? Oh, wow. Just...I think - I think being simply trans, and just showing
7 up.
- 8 AJ: Showing up.
- 9 TM: And, like, making my voice heard.
- 10 AJ: Yes.
- 11 TM: That's a big part of it, yeah.
- 12 AJ: Yeah. I absolutely agree, and I'm so thrilled and delighted and honored that you're a part of just
13 showing up and being out. I think that's a big part of the agenda, is we have to be out.
- 14 TM: Be visible.
- 15 AJ: Be visible.
- 16 TM: That's another part of the agenda that we - that we do want to focus on. Like, just be visible.
- 17 AJ: People need to see us in spaces that -
- 18 TM: That we ordinarily wouldn't go. Yeah.
- 19 AJ: Exactly. Exactly. Have you ever worked for or volunteered for any trans or LGBT organizations?
- 20 TM: Mmmhmm.
- 21 AJ: Yeah?
- 22 TM: I've done - I've done some things for...what was it? I think it was RECLAIM?
- 23 AJ: Okay. RECLAIM, yeah.
- 24 TM: Definitely in THC and OutFront. So those three.
- 25 AJ: Yeah. Cool. What - what's your performance life like? You told me you're a performer. You like
26 to sing...
- 27 TM: Love to sing.
- 28 AJ: And act.
- 29 TM: Love to write music. Love to act. I took a - I took a break for a - for a while.
- 30 AJ: Okay.

- 1 TM: To, like, to find my sound, and to find, like, what works for me. But I'm definitely - I'm starting to
2 get back into the groove of things. I took - last time I performed was in October.
- 3 AJ: Okay.
- 4 TM: So I'm - I'm starting to get back into the groove of things, get back into the swing. I miss
5 performing, actually.
- 6 AJ: Yeah.
- 7 TM: And I miss, like, just vibing with other artists. And, like, because - there's so many dope artists in
8 Minnesota!
- 9 AJ: There are. There are. It's a great artist community.
- 10 TM: So I - I definitely miss it.
- 11 AJ: Do you ever do, like, drag performances?
- 12 TM: I performed drag once.
- 13 AJ: Really?
- 14 TM: Mmhmm. It was at -
- 15 AJ: Liked it? Loved it? Hated it?
- 16 TM: It was at Madame, and I ended up winning the competition, actually.
- 17 AJ: Is that right?
- 18 TM: Yeah. I won that competition. It's not something that I would do normally, but, like, every now
19 and then, it's so fun.
- 20 AJ: Yeah?
- 21 TM: It's so fun. I get to be as, like, flamboyant and extravagant as I want.
- 22 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 23 TM: But - I mean, it's not something that I'm...it's not, like, a performance art that I'm - I would just,
24 like, naturally gravitate towards. It's more like singing and acting and stuff like that.
- 25 AJ: Okay. But you - you do consider drag -
- 26 TM: Performance art.
- 27 AJ: A performance art.
- 28 TM: Mmhmm.
- 29 AJ: Yeah.
- 30 TM: Yeah, it's definitely a performance art.

- 1 AJ: Wow. Man, Taya, how do - how do you think your trans identity has impacted your professional
2 life?
- 3 TM: I don't think it has at all. Because - I think because I'm trans, and a community organizer, it's
4 actually opened more doors for me.
- 5 AJ: Okay. That's - that's an impact. So it - it's created more opportunities for you.
- 6 TM: Yeah.
- 7 AJ: And what - I saw - I know that you're involved in, sort of, Black Lives Matter organizing.
- 8 TM: Yeah.
- 9 AJ: And social justice organizing. What do you see the - the intersections of - of being transgender-
10 identified and being African American? Like, what...how - how do you bring those two
11 communities together? I mean, I know you bring it together within your own -
- 12 TM: With my own body.
- 13 AJ: In your body. Right. Self. But how do you - how do you bring those communities together more
14 broadly?
- 15 TM: It's - it's so challenging. It's so challenging, because white supremacy has told Black bodies from
16 slavery that a man is, like, less of a man because of this.
- 17 AJ: Right.
- 18 TM: And a - a woman is a man because of XYZ. I think that holds a lot of weight in today's time.
19 Right?
- 20 AJ: Yeah.
- 21 TM: And, like, trying to - trying to break those stigmas and trying to, like, affirm ourselves as Black
22 trans people, I think we have so far to go. And, like, even - even as far as, like, having respect as
23 a Black woman. I think - I think that in itself is a big, big, big thing that we need to change, and
24 we have to try to - we have to try to break stigmas around - surrounding that, you know?
- 25 AJ: Right. Do you - do you find, sort of, transphobia or homophobia to be more prevalent in the
26 Black community, or in the -
- 27 TM: I would -
- 28 AJ: - or in the broader community at large.
- 29 TM: I don't know if it's more homophobia in the Black community - or homophobia and transphobia
30 in the Black community, rather than as a whole, but we definitely have to work - I think - I think
31 with this new generation that's coming up, there's a lot of work that's being done to lessen
32 homophobia.
- 33 AJ: Yeah.
- 34 TM: And to lessen, like, transphobia and just accept people for who they are.

- 1 AJ: Yeah.
- 2 TM: And I think it start - I think it started with, like, the kids that were born in the nineties, and it's
3 just like - it's just, like, moving on to, like, kids born in the 2000s and stuff -
- 4 AJ: Wow.
- 5 TM: And, like, that are upcoming, because there is a lot of respect, and there's a lot, a lot, a lot of
6 dope Black youth out there that want to love everyone, and want - every - like, want Black
7 people to come together and just have Black unity.
- 8 AJ: Yeah. I saw this - this photo on facebook the other day of - of you, and Rahima, and Michael.
- 9 TM: Yeah.
- 10 AJ: Who is a very active Black Lives Matter organizer.
- 11 TM: Yeah.
- 12 AJ: And it just warmed my heart to see the three of you smiling and happy together.
- 13 TM: Yeah.
- 14 AJ: And, you know, I don't know what - what Michael's identity is, but I know that -
- 15 TM: Michael is one of my best friends, actually.
- 16 AJ: Is that right?
- 17 TM: Yeah.
- 18 AJ: Well, I know that he is very well-respected within, sort of, the - the Black Lives
19 Matters...movement, and organizers from other, sort of, racial justice and - and social justice
20 organizations.
- 21 TM: Yeah, definitely.
- 22 AJ: And to see him embracing two trans women of color -
- 23 TM: Yeah.
- 24 AJ: - and, you know, when you post something up on the world wide web, it's just that.
- 25 TM: It's - right.
- 26 AJ: World wide.
- 27 TM: Yeah.
- 28 AJ: And, you know, a lot of Black men are just not willing to take that kind of risk.
- 29 TM: Yeah. They're not willing to take that risk, and they're not - they don't even - they don't even
30 want to think about it, actually.
- 31 AJ: So - so shifts are changing.

- 1 TM: Yeah. I think - I think shifts are changing, but it's going to take a lot of time, a lot of work, and
2 definitely a lot of effort and a lot of educating. I think that's a big part of it, too. We need to - we
3 need to start educating our older brothers and sisters on trans identities and, like, gay people. It
4 was - it was back in prehistoric African times.
- 5 AJ: Absolutely.
- 6 TM: You know?
- 7 AJ: Yeah.
- 8 TM: So it's, like, why are we shunning a part - a part of ourselves out, you know?
- 9 AJ: Yeah, no, I absolutely agree. What are you excited about right now, Taya?
- 10 TM: What am I excited about? I'm excited - I'm excited to - I'm excited for warmth. Warm weather!
- 11 AJ: Yeah?
- 12 TM: First of all!
- 13 AJ: Yeah, it's a little chilly right now. We're still -
- 14 TM: Yeah. I'm excited to just, like - I'm excited to just, like...get new opportunities as far as
15 performing.
- 16 AJ: Okay.
- 17 TM: And just, like, I want to travel more. I'm going to travel more this year.
- 18 AJ: Yeah, you said you're going to -
- 19 TM: I'm going to Texas, and then I'm going to Detroit.
- 20 AJ: Okay.
- 21 TM: And then I think I'm going to Chicago soon, actually.
- 22 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 23 TM: Yeah, I'm supposed to be going to Chicago at the end of May, so.
- 24 AJ: Okay. What's going on there?
- 25 TM: A ball.
- 26 AJ: A ball, wow.
- 27 TM: Yeah.
- 28 AJ: Okay.
- 29 TM: Yeah, there is a ball there.
- 30 AJ: So you're heavily into this ball scene, this ball culture. Can you win money doing those?

- 1 TM: Oh, yeah. You definitely win money. Yeah. There's some - some categories are upwards of
2 10,000 dollars.
- 3 AJ: Is that right?
- 4 TM: Yeah.
- 5 AJ: Wow. So it's worth the investment?
- 6 TM: Yeah. Yeah. Rahima actually - we went to a ball last year. She - she was in a category to win, I
7 think, 1,000 dollars.
- 8 AJ: Okay.
- 9 TM: So, yeah - it is. It can be lucrative, and it can pay off.
- 10 AJ: Yeah. Absolutely.
- 11 TM: Yeah.
- 12 AJ: I just want to say thank you so much for being a part of this.
- 13 TM: You're welcome!
- 14 AJ: Taya - just so delightful to talk to you, and to see your smiling face.
- 15 TM: Always a smile.
- 16 AJ: Is there anything else you want to share that I maybe didn't ask about?
- 17 TM: I think we covered it.
- 18 AJ: Yeah?
- 19 TM: I think we covered it, yeah.
- 20 AJ: All right, sweetheart. Well, until we meet again.
- 21 TM: Yes.
- 22 AJ: All right. Peace.
- 23 TM: Peace!