

Billy Navarro, Jr.
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

February 19, 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 Billy Navarro Jr. -BN
3

4 AJ: So, hello.

5 BN: Hello, Ms. Jenkins.

6 AJ: My name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian for the Transgender Oral History Project
7 at the University of Minnesota.
8

9 BN: That's a great title, oral historian.

10 AJ: Today is February 19, 2016. I am at the home of Billy Navarro, Jr., in Minneapolis. It's been kind
11 of a rainy day but I think the sun is going to come out a little bit later. So, Billy, how are you
12 today?

13 BN: I'm all right. Cameras are scary, but I'm here.

14 AJ: Can I get you to state your name, spell your name, tell me your gender identity today, and your
15 gender assigned at birth, and what pronouns do you prefer?

16 BN: Billy Navarro, Jr. B-i-l-l-y, because in hick country that's the boy way to spell it. Navarro is N-a-v-
17 a-r-r-o, and Junior, J-r. My gender identity today, gender queer trans man is usually as close as I
18 can get to any sort of gender identity. I was assigned female at birth and I use he and him
19 pronouns. Is that all of it?

20 AJ: Awesome, that's all of it. I just have to comment that you have the most prodigious beard.

21 BN: My fluffiness. And I would have trimmed this too if I would have known I was going to be on
22 camera. Fluffy, fluffy.

23 AJ: It's beautiful, it's gorgeous.

24 BN: Thank you.

25 AJ: So, Billy, can you tell me what is your earliest memory in life?

26 BN: I never remember if it's my earliest or if it's something I made up as a child and now believe it's
27 my earliest.

28 AJ: Whatever that is, that's fine.

29 BN: I remember being in my crib, because we were poor and so I was in my crib for a lot longer than
30 most kids – because it was what we had, so I was in it until maybe I was four.

31 AJ: Whoa.

32 BN: Just because we couldn't afford another bed so we just took the side off my crib one time. So,
33 maybe I was four, maybe I was younger – but I was definitely in my crib, and I remember my

- 1 maternal grandmother, who ended up raising me most of my life, being over my crib and being
2 really . . . like me feeling better that she was there, and just being like, “OK, I’m safe now.”
- 3 AJ: “I’m safe, grandma . . . ”
- 4 BN: Grandma’s here, then I’m good. And I found out as I got older that . . .
- 5 AJ: Abuela.
- 6 BN: No, that was my white grandma. I was raised by folks on the farm on my maternal white side.
7 But my parents were divorced and my mom worked all the time as a single mother so I was
8 raised in an in-home daycare with my grandma. I found out later in life that when I was little
9 she was the only one I would let hold me.
- 10 AJ: Wow.
- 11 BN: If I was crying or something, it was just her – from infancy. And the only man I would let hold
12 me was my dad and he was the only brown man around. I was terrified of white men.
- 13 AJ: Really, that’s interesting.
- 14 BN: That’s still one of my only big fears – so, interesting.
- 15 AJ: We’re going to get back to that question, for sure. Wow, so your earliest memory is of your
16 grandmother sort of just comforting you in your crib – I love it. So where did you go to
17 elementary school?
- 18 BN: Our Lady of Lake Catholic School.
- 19 AJ: Catholic school – where is that?
- 20 BN: Mound, Minnesota. It’s west of the Cities. It’s where all my aunts and uncles went, it’s where
21 my grandma is the head of the Women’s Auxiliary.
- 22 AJ: OK.
- 23 BN: She just made her, it was last year or the year before, her half millionth donut for the church.
- 24 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 25 BN: She was the donut lady, she made donuts for Sunday morning breakfast and our incredible
26 festivals.
- 27 AJ: 500,000 donuts.
- 28 BN: That’s my grandma.
- 29 AJ: Wow.
- 30 BN: She just turned 90 on January 1st.
- 31 AJ: Oh, boy.

- 1 BN: I still think she could probably run faster than me, she's one of those really healthy women who
2 has always been on the farm her whole entire life and doing work, so you wouldn't notice . . . so
3 yeah.
- 4 AJ: Eating good, clean air, hard work.
- 5 BN: Definitely. I'm not Catholic anymore but there's definitely a lot of stuff that my grandmother
6 taught me from her view of Catholicism that has very much taken me into the work I do in the
7 community now. I do pretty much the same work my grandma did, just for the trans and queer
8 POC community and not the Catholic Church.
- 9 AJ: Yeah, you do make lots of food.
- 10 BN: I make the food, I take care of the babies, I organize community spaces – it's all stuff I did with
11 my grandma for the church growing up.
- 12 AJ: Wow.
- 13 BN: I just do it for a different community. I try to explain that to her and she doesn't . . .
- 14 AJ: So, that's where that comes from.
- 15 BN: Absolutely.
- 16 AJ: I mean, I know you in the community as such. I've known you for quite some time.
- 17 BN: For quite some time.
- 18 AJ: Since you were . . .
- 19 BN: Since I was a teenager, and I'm old now.
- 20 AJ: It's just beautiful to see your growth and development as a leader in this community.
- 21 BN: Thank you.
- 22 AJ: And I know you shun from that title . . .
- 23 BN: A little bit, I'm trying.
- 24 AJ: But your impact is very strong. So, you're from Minnesota?
- 25 BN: Yes.
- 26 AJ: Born and raised. You talked a little bit about your grandmother, what was your home life like?
- 27 BN: Not good. My mom is the only person in the whole entire history of my white side to marry a
28 person of color, and then that family . . .
- 29 AJ: So, you're mixed race?
- 30 BN: Yeah, Puerto Rican and then my mom was Irish and Jewish, Bohemian. They didn't talk about
31 being Jewish, they were one of those families that came here and pretended to be Catholic.

- 1 AJ: Oh, wow, interesting.
- 2 BN: So, I didn't find out until I was older – I'm like, "Wait, great grandmother Lybra spoke Yiddish."
- 3 AJ: So, your mom is culturally Jewish, not necessarily . . .
- 4 BN: Is ethnically but not culturally.
- 5 AJ: Not culturally – OK.
- 6 BN: Yeah. We were all raised Catholic, including my grandmother – her parents came here from
7 Czechoslovakia and then my grandfather, his parents came here from Ireland. So, I'm only
8 second generation and third generation on all sides of my family.
- 9 AJ: How did your mom and dad meet, do you know?
- 10 BN: Like many men of color in that time period, the only way he got to college was on an athletic
11 scholarship and there was only two colleges in the whole country – one was in Denver and one
12 was in Minnesota, and that's how he met my mom, he randomly came to a college in
13 Minnesota. And that's how they met was in college.
- 14 AJ: OK.
- 15 BN: Which is strange.
- 16 AJ: Siblings?
- 17 BN: I have an older sister who is a doctor. She's a psychologist, so she practices. She also teaches at
18 the University of North Dakota, and then also does research specifically around women of color,
19 especially Latino women and different . . . I think her thesis was like Latino women doing
20 industrious work, work that was seen as man's work. So – brains, she's got lots of brains.
- 21 AJ: Yeah, smarty-pants.
- 22 BN: That's how she got out of our home situation in her life, she was in school and got scholarships
23 and used her brains to really do more with her life.
- 24 AJ: That's great.
- 25 BN: Yeah, she's a smarty.
- 26 AJ: When was the first time you realized that you were different from the gender you were assigned
27 at birth?
- 28 BN: I think for a long time when I was little I didn't . . . all I knew was that I knew that other people
29 were wrong, that they kept calling me a girl. And because I didn't know that boys and girls had
30 different bodies, because of Catholicism – yay repression, I just thought that they would see
31 when I grew up that they were wrong.
- 32 AJ: Say more about this, "didn't know that boys and girls had different body parts."

- 1 BN: I don't know that this is true for everybody in Catholicism, but for me – for sure, we just didn't
2 talk about stuff like that. When my grandma changed kid's diapers, it was, "Look away." And if I
3 looked, I was shamed for looking.
- 4 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 5 BN: So, it's like I really didn't quite understand . . .
- 6 AJ: So, you and your sister didn't bathe together?
- 7 BN: I remember us doing that, but I don't remember . . . I remember actively being told not to look.
8 And so, like not to . . . or if there was a difference, I didn't know there was supposed to be a
9 difference. It was very muddled because we just didn't talk about stuff like that. So, I just was
10 like, "You guys are weird, I'm going to grow up and be a dude and you're going to understand
11 how dumb you were. I don't get it."
- 12 AJ: That is hilarious.
- 13 BN: It was just very strange to me, it was just known to me. I know that I'm a boy and I know that . .
14 . I was raised with a cousin who is only nine months older than me who is a cis guy, and I just
15 assumed I was just like him. I didn't quite get that I was any different until people started telling
16 me that I was and then I thought they were crazy – until puberty hit, and then, like most trans
17 folks, the drama of puberty was terrible.
- 18 AJ: Yes.
- 19 BN: And then I was forced to play with girls and forced to wear bras and start wearing girl's clothes
20 and even myself, attempted really, really hard to be a girl at that point and it just didn't work.
- 21 AJ: It didn't work, huh?
- 22 BN: I would spend every Friday night for years . . . I would steal my sister's make-up and her
23 *Seventeen* magazine and try to figure out how to put on make-up and just sit there in front of
24 the TV with a Subway sandwich going, "I can do this." I would try really hard and I just . . . I still
25 don't know how to put on eyeliner right, it just does things – and I'm an artist, you'd think I
26 would know how to do that very well. No. So, yeah – I never remember not knowing, I just
27 remember what it was like when they told me I was a girl and having to go back in the closet . .
28 or, in the closet, really, for the first time and then having to re-enter as a teenager going,
29 "Actually . . ."
- 30 AJ: So, for a long time you just thought, "I'm a boy and this is . . ."
- 31 BN: And they're nuts. I had a great-grandmother . . .
- 32 AJ: At school, how was it at school?
- 33 BN: Well, because I grew up in a rural area, femininity and masculinity are really different than in the
34 city, so extreme femininity in anyone isn't really realistic – you can't be in high heels and bale
35 hay.
- 36 AJ: Right.

- 1 BN: You know what I mean? I even took home a . . .
- 2 AJ: "Green acres, is the place to be."
- 3 BN: Right. I took home my friend Katie Burgess, who is also trans, to my sister's wedding, and even
4 my sister – Katie just whispered, "They all look like men in dresses." I'm like, "These women
5 don't wear dresses, these women don't wear make-up." They're stomping down the aisle
6 because they stomp.
- 7 AJ: Exactly.
- 8 BN: They're used to wearing boots and in the muck. So, extreme femininity wasn't necessary, so my
9 understanding of gender was really different than maybe folks in the city was. Women could be
10 what we call gender queer and androgynous and still be women. I didn't see that extremeness.
11 And then I had a step-father who cooked, which was really weird for rural men, and then a
12 mother who made most of the money.
- 13 AJ: Oh, wow, so gender roles were kind of . . .
- 14 BN: Kind of weird that way, but then I went and spent most of my time with my grandparents and
15 those were hard core traditional roles, but my grandmother was also not high femme. She
16 worked just as hard as my grandpa, just at domestic women things or whatever. So, gender has
17 always been a little different viewed in my point, so that's why I think I could get confused as a
18 kid and could not understand.
- 19 AJ: Or at least not have an awareness of that kind of stuff.
- 20 BN: Yeah, not really get that they were right that I was assigned female at birth and that I just went
21 on to think they were nuts for a long time.
- 22 AJ: So, you tried the whole femme thing for a little while.
- 23 BN: Yes.
- 24 AJ: When did you figure out that this is not working for me.
- 25 BN: I knew it wasn't for me, I just knew. I think there was a time where I thought it might be easier
26 to please other people.
- 27 AJ: Yeah.
- 28 BN: That I think I wanted . . . I did not have an easy life, there wasn't many people of color where I
29 grew up. Being Catholic, there wasn't anybody who was divorced so that was always a huge
30 thing. My parents were the first divorced people in our family, which in Catholicism . . . they got
31 excommunicated from the Church. I ended up getting excommunicated when I came out in 7th
32 grade. It's just a lot of stuff, and my parents were super abusive. It just wasn't good, so I was
33 like, "Well, OK, here's this one thing that I can be. I can be normal in this one way and in every
34 other way I'll let myself be a weird artist, if I can just be a girl." And it lasted maybe four or five
35 years and I was just like, "Nope." And I got to the same place that a lot of trans people do
36 where I'm just like, "I'm going to die," and did really horrible things to myself – became an

1 addict, was homeless for a long time, cutting, all that kind of stuff. And I'm just like . . . I can live
2 and be extra super-duper weird in every aspect of my life, or I can die pretending to be a girl for
3 other people. And I just decided that I . . . I have always really wanted kids and at one point I
4 realized that I wasn't anybody I would let around children. For me, that's huge, because kids
5 and young people are a huge part of my life – advocating for them, making sure that they're
6 safe, making sure they get what they need to be empowered, even with the little ones just
7 making sure that they get fed. Anything – advocating for kids is a huge part of my life and when
8 I realized I wasn't anybody that I would let around children, at that point . . . like that was my
9 rock bottom, that something has to change. I was like, "If I need to be that weird dude, who is a
10 trans dude and also queer and also an artist and also chubby, all these weird things that aren't
11 OK with everybody, then that's what I've got to be. It's either that or nothing."

12 AJ: Wow. My first thought that comes to mind is so brave, but I always chafe when people tell me
13 I'm so brave because it's like if I had leukemia, I would want to live and I would do everything
14 that I could do to live. So, all you were doing is just trying to live and that's not necessarily
15 bravery, per se.

16 BN: I think it's a choice.

17 AJ: Right.

18 BN: I think it's . . . I don't know. I think I would probably call it brave in other people too, but with
19 myself I'll just be like . . . I mean, there wasn't much of a choice. There was existing or not
20 existing.

21 AJ: You chose . . .

22 BN: I chose to exist.

23 AJ: . . . to exist.

24 BN: And I was lucky. Not everybody does.

25 AJ: I'm so happy you made that choice.

26 BN: Thank you.

27 AJ: What terms do you use to describe yourself and how has that changed over time?

28 BN: I think when I first came out there wasn't the term gender queer, so I used the word gender
29 fabulous.

30 AJ: OK.

31 BN: I'm such a queen, that's totally how I came out to everybody. I was like, "I'm a little gender
32 fabulous, I don't know what that means to you."

33 AJ: Can I interrupt you for one second? I'm just going to ask you to move your . . .

34 BN: Mic?

35 AJ: . . . mic down just a little bit, I'm just concerned that maybe your beard might be . . .

- 1 BN: My luxurious beard?
- 2 AJ: . . . making that scratching sound.
- 3 BN: That's not good.
- 4 AJ: OK, so gender fabulous.
- 5 BN: Gender fabulous, I came out as that.
- 6 AJ: I love that.
- 7 BN: So dorky.
- 8 AJ: I don't think I've heard that label before.
- 9 BN: But there was no gender fluid, there was no gender queer – there was the binary.
- 10 AJ: Right, androgynous or trans man or trans woman or . . .
- 11 BN: Even when I went to do hormones it was a really big deal that my . . . it took a little longer and
12 my therapist had never given a letter to anybody who wasn't going to transition into trans male
13 and heterosexual. It was just getting off the books that that's the way it didn't have to be,
14 because, as you know, for a long time that was the only way they were going to give you a letter
15 for anything.
- 16 AJ: For anything, yeah.
- 17 BN: To transition into every binary known to man.
- 18 AJ: Yes.
- 19 BN: I was just like, "Listen, I am queer, that's not going to change with my gender – I like all folks. I
20 am kind of masculine of center, but I'm also . . . queeny. I don't know how to explain any of that
21 to you, but here's what that is." And he was just like, "Well, you're in a place where I think you
22 are ready for hormones, and that's what you want, but I don't know how to write this letter and
23 I don't know if it's OK if I write this letter." I had to go to this secret meeting of where all the
24 trans therapists meet together . . .
- 25 AJ: Right.
- 26 BN: And go over it with them for two months and go, "Here's why I think you should do it, what do
27 you all think?"
- 28 AJ: Where did you do your sort of medical transitioning at?
- 29 BN: I did it at La Clinica, which is a Latino clinic, because I wanted it really culturally specific. I had a
30 hormonal disorder that went untreated for like a decade, that left me sterile, when I was seeing
31 white doctors. They thought I was a hypochondriac, they thought I was doing street hormones
32 for a long time because my testosterone levels were really high and my estrogen level was really
33 low and I had facial hair from first puberty and broad shoulders from first puberty, and big

- 1 boobs. And they're like, "You're doing something," and I'm like, "No." A month at a Latino clinic
2 and they figured out what was wrong.
- 3 AJ: Wow.
- 4 BN: Because it's like they actually paid attention to me and were culturally sensitive.
- 5 AJ: Yeah, and listened.
- 6 BN: Yeah. And so, I transitioned with them and actually I was dating a nurse who I started the Shot
7 Clinic with who helped me teach my doctor how to transition me, helped me teach my doctor
8 what tests I needed to take, when I needed to take them – all these different things that he, on
9 his own, went and did a lot of really cool research and taught people at the clinic. And now, La
10 Clinica, especially for Latina and Hmong women and men, is a huge place for folks to transition
11 now.
- 12 AJ: Wow. Where is La Clinica?
- 13 BN: It's in St. Paul, on Cesar Chavez – like right over the river.
- 14 AJ: On the west side?
- 15 BN: Yeah, right over the river from the Science Museum – just on the edge of the west side. So now
16 that's where folks go who are in those two communities who they serve to transition. But, the
17 greater trans community doesn't know that because the greater trans community is mostly
18 white and wants a place that specializes in trans stuff and is where all white people feel
19 comfortable going. I keep telling folks, "No, this is another option," and . . .
- 20 AJ: So once again, trail blazer – you sort of opened this medical space up for trans-identified people.
- 21 BN: Yeah, I think it was me and a couple other trans folks who were going there at the same time as
22 me and we were just like . . . we want both – we want culturally sensitive and accurate medical
23 care and we want to transition where it's comfortable and not have to go to white doctors. We
24 went to the U of M and everything, because when I came out there was nothing for youth
25 except for the U of M, but their program just wasn't for me.
- 26 AJ: Sure.
- 27 BN: It was way too . . . I don't know, I just felt like a study. It was way too medicalized, it wasn't
28 personal at all – and it was white, nobody of color worked there at the time. I don't know if they
29 do now either. They did all the hoops and they definitely weren't going to write a letter for me
30 if I wasn't binary in at least one way. So, yay for Latinos.
- 31 AJ: Yeah. So, gender fabulous and then . . . then what?
- 32 BN: And then I think terms came about that . . . or labels came about that were just more descriptive
33 of what I was, so gender queer seemed really relevant. I was just like . . . both the gender
34 connotation and the political connotation of queer as it's developed, especially over the last
35 decade, seemed really relevant to me where it was a label without a label really – like this could

- 1 mean a million different thing, like I'm only putting this label on it because you all need a label
2 and so if you need a label here is the most generic one I could find.
- 3 AJ: Right.
- 4 BN: That could encompass me if that's my definition, so there.
- 5 AJ: Got it.
- 6 BN: And sexuality, the same reason I use queer where when I first came out I used something else
7 and then I used another thing and I was like, "Wait, none of these terms describe me – they're
8 all too, still, binary."
- 9 AJ: So lesbian didn't fit.
- 10 BN: I never identified as lesbian. I'm one of the few trans guys I know that has never identified as
11 lesbian, never hung out with . . . I always hung out with gay boys and trans women. Yeah, I was
12 the first trans guy who was a part of a drag family in Minneapolis. So, all my drag mothers and
13 drag grandmothers, they taught me how to dress up as a boy and helped me when I was
14 homeless. It was just the family that took care of me.
- 15 AJ: Do you feel comfortable naming one drag mother or . . .?
- 16 BN: I do my drag grandmother because she was amazing and she's not around anymore. Her name
17 was Holly Wood and she performed at the 90s.
- 18 AJ: Holly Wood.
- 19 BN: She was an older African American disabled trans woman. So she would put on her gowns and
20 strut on her crutches and was amazing.
- 21 AJ: I have never seen Holly Wood perform.
- 22 BN: It was a long time ago, I was like 13 when I first started being part of this family.
- 23 AJ: Oh my goodness.
- 24 BN: I remember the first time she met me and it was in front of the 90s and she was not dressed up.
25 She was like, "I've heard we've got a boy in the family for the first time." I was like, "Hi, I heard
26 you're my great grandmother." She was just like, "Hmm, we'll see – we'll see." And she died
27 soon after, unfortunately, so I never really got to know her very well. She was the top of the
28 family, she was amazing.
- 29 AJ: An icon.
- 30 BN: Yeah.
- 31 AJ: Can you talk about what kind of challenges that you've experienced since you've began to
32 express your truer gender identity?
- 33 BN: I always say that my generation had it so easy and then people remind me, "Well, you had to be
34 homeless to be yourself." I'm like, "True."

- 1 AJ: Yeah, so there's that.
- 2 BN: So, there's that. I had to be homeless for four years.
- 3 AJ: Oh, my God.
- 4 BN: I got kicked out of my home. I was on and off again back at home and on the streets for four
5 years. It was more than just my trans-ness, it was also like abuse issues and race issues. My
6 mom re-married a white man and he was awful. I just . . . it's really bad, the streets were safer
7 for me than my home was. So, half the time I would get kicked out and half the time I would run
8 because it was just safer for me in an abandoned building in the middle of fucking winter than it
9 was in rural Minnesota with them.
- 10 AJ: I'm sorry to hear that.
- 11 BN: Yeah, it's sucky. But I think . . . the reason why I think my generation was privileged was that we
12 felt we could do that and still have a place in the world. Most of the folks I knew were
13 homeless, but we had District 202, which was amazing.
- 14 AJ: Which is where we met.
- 15 BN: Exactly, you were a board member and I was a youth. I begged you to be our Executive Director
16 and you said, "Um, no." So, there was stuff where I felt really privileged because most people
17 didn't have that, most people didn't have a District 202 to go to or didn't have . . . even
18 Minneapolis outside of District 202, there's cafes where they welcomed us homeless kids in and
19 were like, "Pay fifty cents for a coffee and sit here all day because you have nowhere else to go."
- 20 AJ: Just so you know, I'm getting ready to do a history of Café Weird.
- 21 BN: Nice.
- 22 AJ: Because I believe that might be the Café that we're talking about.
- 23 BN: That's one of them - Café Weird and Café Zev.
- 24 AJ: Café Zev.
- 25 BN: Because Café Zev was so much closer to District 202.
- 26 AJ: Yeah.
- 27 BN: But I did do Café Weird sometimes. Café Weird has that Facebook page where people upload
28 pictures from the 1990s and I'm like, "What?"
- 29 AJ: Exactly.
- 30 BN: "I thought we looked normal, we looked weird."
- 31 AJ: They also had this book where people would just write in it and that book still exists – it will just
32 sit there.
- 33 BN: We had the same thing at District 202 and it's in the Tretter Collection.

- 1 AJ: Yeah.
- 2 BN: It's like pictures and stuff we wrote down, I think from when we moved to the new building.
- 3 AJ: Sure, I love that. So, you had some pretty significant challenges. What have been some of the
4 more positive aspects of expressing your truer gender identity?
- 5 BN: I think it brought me like this . . . when I first came out I lost all my friends except for two,
6 unfortunately. And so I thought . . . I had not seen a huge community base of trans folks in
7 Minneapolis, unless it was older white women who came out later in life, and the trans women
8 that were drag queens that I hung out with growing up which was very different.
- 9 AJ: I am so glad you mentioned the trans women who were drag queens.
- 10 BN: Right, because some were drag queens and some weren't.
- 11 AJ: And because now in our community . . .
- 12 BN: Or some were trans women and some weren't.
- 13 AJ: . . . drag queens are sort of being pushed out of our history. How do you feel about that?
- 14 BN: I think at first I was like . . . let's differentiate the difference between trans women and drag
15 queens, because for too long they were conflated as the same thing.
- 16 AJ: Absolutely.
- 17 BN: Like – sweet, let's do that. But let's not . . . they're still part of our community in the sense that
18 they're beyond gender binary.
- 19 AJ: Yes.
- 20 BN: Right? They're still a part of our community in that a lot of, especially our trans women elders
21 identified that way because that's the language they had at the time.
- 22 AJ: That's the language they had, that's the community that existed.
- 23 BN: Absolutely. So like a lot of people have argued whether Sylvia Rivera actually identified as a
24 trans woman because her language was not that, her language was drag queen and transvestite.
- 25 AJ: Yes, exactly.
- 26 BN: Words we don't use anymore in this community we call trans. But if you look at how she
27 actually talked about her identity and how she lived her life, and the pronouns she used, and
28 how she loved – that's actually how we define trans woman now, whether she would agree with
29 that or not. But we can't disregard that she also performed and she also put on gowns and
30 make-up and hair and did drag, but I also know trans women who get really insulted when they
31 do that type of performance and somebody calls it drag. They're like, "I'm not a drag queen, I'm
32 a trans woman – I'm performing. I'm performing my gender the way I see gender; you call it
33 drag because that's what you're used to." And so, I think it's a slippery slope and I think it
34 depends on how a person identifies, as everything does – everything. And we're all super
35 sensitive about it. But I think every trans woman, especially, that I talked to, has a different idea

- 1 how that should look. Do you know what I mean? Whether they've done what we call drag in
2 the past before they transitioned or are continuing to do what people are still calling drag after
3 they transition or if they're still somewhere in the middle. I have drag queen friends who
4 consider themselves part of the trans community because they are beyond gender in that way,
5 and now we're identifying as gender queer femmes so aren't they part of the community then?
6 Their identity is part of our umbrella. I think what I don't like is the dominance of anybody and
7 for too long . . .
- 8 AJ: Or any one narrative.
- 9 BN: Exactly. That's what I meant, that's much better wording for that. I think for too long the
10 dominant narrative was drag queens and that's what our community was. I think people don't
11 want to go back to that so they're getting overly sensitive by let's push it the fuck out
12 completely. And I'm like, "That's not any better." Because they are us, whether they identify
13 exactly as us or have our exact same politics, half the time those drag queens are trans women
14 and just taking off the extra layer of make-up for the make-up they wear every day. I know drag
15 kings who are the same way – who did drag for a really long time, transitioned and still go back
16 to the same clubs and do whatever everybody calls drag. They still go home tucked and packed
17 and everything.
- 18 AJ: Right exactly.
- 19 BN: They're not taking that part off, but they're taking off the exaggerated facial hair and . . . you
20 know.
- 21 AJ: Right.
- 22 BN: So, I think gender is just opening up in a way where people can actually say what they really are
23 instead of having to put themselves into those binary boxes, and that's super uncomfortable for
24 folks because they want boxes – even within our own community. They want those boxes to
25 feel comfortable, they want to know that they're in the right box that gets included underneath
26 the umbrella and that they exclude the right box so they get to continue to be under the
27 umbrella. And that gets really dangerous because then who's right and who's wrong? Then you
28 get dominant narratives and then you get people excluded – oh, that just freaks me out because
29 most of the time it's somebody weird, like me who refuses and is going, "But I was part of your
30 community, I swear I am."
- 31 AJ: "Where's your card?"
- 32 BN: Right, if your card isn't checkable . . . my card isn't checkable and now I can't have any of my
33 identities. So, do I still get to be under the umbrella? I don't know. I think I do but I also think
34 drag queens do if they identify that way.
- 35 AJ: Yeah, wow.
- 36 BN: And that's one of the things that I think is really hard for the community is they get to decide,
37 you don't. The individual person gets to decide if they want to be under your umbrella, you

- 1 don't get to choose that for them and that's really hard for folks because they want to know
2 what is right.
- 3 AJ: No, I've been sort of really struggling with kicking RuPaul out of the community.
- 4 BN: That's so hard for me. RuPaul is hard.
- 5 AJ: You know, which . . . I'm not going to delve into that conversation, we're going to stay with
6 interviewing Billy. So, what's your current relationship like with your birth family, Billy?
- 7 BN: I only really have contact with my dad and my sister and my maternal grandmother, kind of –
8 the one who raised me. It became exceedingly difficult as I came out about more of my
9 identities that . . . visiting her became really hard. A lot of my family lives on farms right next to
10 her, or she would sell off a back field for somebody to build a house on – one of her kids or
11 something. So, when I would come over, everybody would leave except for me and my
12 grandma and they're all used to being at my grandma's house. They'd all be, "Is he gone yet?"
- 13 AJ: Oh, that's so hard.
- 14 BN: Or she wouldn't call me by my right name and my right pronoun, even if I brought a friend with
15 me – and that's the only place in the whole entire world that I allow that, because it's my
16 grandma, it's my mom. I love her and I get that generationally that's really hard for, religiously
17 it's really, really hard for her, culturally it's really hard for her. She's never known a gay person,
18 she's never known a trans person and the first people of color – me and my sister are the first
19 people of color she's ever really known.
- 20 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 21 BN: She loves us because she's a moral and fabulous woman and knows she needs to. I don't know
22 that if I wasn't related to her that she would like me, which is really hard because she's like who
23 I love most in the world.
- 24 AJ: Oh, boy.
- 25 BN: But I also have to go, "At least she likes me now, at least I know that she loves me whether it's
26 how I want her to or not." Totally different. But it also becomes really hard to go there and see
27 that, or go there and get disrespected that way – or even call and know that other people are
28 around and she's embarrassed to be talking to me.
- 29 AJ: Oh boy, yeah.
- 30 BN: So, I don't call as much and I don't go over as much because that just becomes harder than
31 staying away – to hear that in her voice and going, "Oh, you actually don't want to talk to me.
32 Shit – and I love you so much. Damn."
- 33 AJ: Oh, that's so tough.
- 34 BN: So, like I said, I admire her – now I'm doing an in-home daycare, just like she did for 60 years.
35 It's so weird. I totally modeled my life after how she raised me to be, but just for queer and
36 trans POC folks. I love her in that way, but I just must be really understanding that I'm lucky she

- 1 talks to me, which is hard to say out loud, but I'm very, very lucky that she has anything to do
2 with me and I need to be grateful for that – which took years to be able to appreciate that part.
- 3 AJ: Wow.
- 4 BN: Because I was just like, "You should just love me no matter what," but that's just not how
5 humans work, unfortunately.
- 6 AJ: Chosen family?
- 7 BN: Tons, which is really great. I have my plantonic triad of Katie Burgess and Jay Masika . . .
8 awesome, we just had our five-year anniversary, it was adorable.
- 9 AJ: Yay! All right.
- 10 BN: We started dating on Christmas Eve, five years ago. So, every Christmas Eve we get together
11 and celebrate and cook and watch movies and exchange dorky presents.
- 12 AJ: Nice.
- 13 BN: One year Katie got Jay like a Bell jar of bacon because he loves bacon.
- 14 AJ: OK.
- 15 BN: Just weird stuff like that where it's like, "I know your true love, your true love is bacon – here."
- 16 AJ: Take it.
- 17 BN: We do summer vacations together, we've gone to the cabin together before. They're the
18 people who, if something happens in my life – they're the first person to call and make use I'm
19 OK and be like, "We'll be here." Which is amazing. And then I have other chosen family, like
20 Roxanne, that I do hardcore organizing with and I've known almost as long as I've known you.
- 21 AJ: Absolutely – yeah.
- 22 BN: Oh, my God, I think I met her when I was 18 when she became program director at District 202.
- 23 AJ: Which I'm very proud to say I had a very strong hand in that happening.
- 24 BN: Did you? Thank God. It was pretty traumatic before they got there.
- 25 AJ: Lee Combs was the program director prior – we won't say anything.
- 26 BN: I'm smiling. But . . . but when Rox came, by the time Rox came I was done with adults. I was
27 like, "No, I don't trust any of you – I'm done." And Rox loves to tell the story of how the first day
28 I met them I sat them in their office, shut the door, and yelled at them for an hour about being
29 an adult.
- 30 AJ: I've heard that story.
- 31 BN: I know. It was just, "No, this isn't for you, this is for us – no." Such gall.
- 32 AJ: And now you guys are hardcore organizers together.

- 1 BN: Absolutely. When me and my ex and all our friends started the Shot Clinic and then melded
2 with Minnesota Transgender Health Coalition, they were the first person we called to be our
3 executive director. Katie had been our program director before that and when we finally got
4 enough money to have an executive director, I'm like, "There's only one adult that I trust."
- 5 AJ: I was going to try to wait to ask this question, but you keep saying, "the Shot Clinic," so now
6 you've just to tell me what is the Shot Clinic?
- 7 BN: It's such a huge part of my life.
- 8 AJ: Yes, what is it?
- 9 BN: The Shot Clinic is this non-profit that me and a bunch of my friends started 10 years ago.
- 10 AJ: Ten years now?
- 11 BN: It's our 10-year anniversary. That we started, my ex was a nurse and so he had the medical
12 knowledge of how to do stuff and I had the community organizing part of it – not that he didn't,
13 he had that as well. And, I was starting hormones and I'm terrified of needles, I actually thought
14 I was going to have to go to GNC with the body builders and get shot up in the back with GNC. I
15 scoped one out in Calhoun Square.
- 16 AJ: Is that what happens?
- 17 BN: Yes, that's what I heard any way.
- 18 AJ: I don't know about that.
- 19 BN: I doubt that that happens, but that was the community rumor 10 years ago. I scoped one out at
20 like Calhoun Square and was like, "That's the GNC that I'll go to." And he was like, "You're not
21 doing that, I'm a nurse, I will help you do shots." And then we broke up and I was like . . . so we
22 started a non-profit and we decided that we were going to help the rest of the community do
23 shots too, I couldn't be the only one that was scared of doing shots. He had two other people
24 that he was already doing shots for, so we decided to do this and we started . . . I think the first
25 one was in his basement and then it was in my art studio at one of my apartments, and then it
26 was in the back seat of his car.
- 27 AJ: Oh, boy.
- 28 BN: Then it was in another basement he had and then we had . . .
- 29 AJ: But not street hormones?
- 30 BN: No, that was a big thing with us is that if you had . . . you had to have a prescription and we had
31 to know that it was yours. Because he was a nurse, he knew exactly how hormones would . . .
32 you would react if you weren't getting them regulated.
- 33 AJ: Sure.

- 1 BN: I actually started with street hormones, but I took them to my doctor and taught my doctor how
2 to regulate my hormones – and thank God he was about harm reduction because he was like, “I
3 know you’re going to do these without me anyway.”
- 4 AJ: Right, so let’s try to make it safe.
- 5 BN: Let’s make it safe. But with other folks, and that’s our big rule at the Shot Clinic, is we have to
6 know that you’re getting medical care because we’re not a real clinic. We can help you with
7 shots, we can go, “Here’s some questions to ask your doctor, but we can’t give you medical
8 advice because we’re not doctors.” So, after we did it for a while in all those places, we started
9 renting space from a chiropractic clinic that was run by a trans guy and then after that we were
10 at the RECLAIM offices for a little while, we would rent out every Friday night for two hours and
11 people would just come and we would do shots and we started training people in the
12 community to do shots. It started with just other trans folks would come in and get trained and
13 give each other shots. We were really lucky that Minnesota had really great laws that you’re
14 allowed to have anybody do your shot that you want.
- 15 AJ: I love that you call them shot callers.
- 16 BN: I know, that’s an evolution. We had some other terrible names for them – like Needle Ninjas for
17 a while. Oh my God – that lasted a month before somebody was like, “Billy – no.” I’m like, “Oh,
18 crap, you’re so right – I’m an ass.” There’s embarrassing stuff like that that we did where I was
19 like, “Oh, no.” I can’t remember what we originally called them but now it’s shot callers, just
20 because we wanted them to have this pride of you’re doing this amazing thing for the
21 community.
- 22 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 23 BN: And it takes months, even nurses and doctors we train for months before they’re allowed to
24 shot call. I just had a new trans woman come in yesterday who knows how to do shots, and
25 that’s fine – but I’m like, “You know, we could teach you this in a week and you could be a very
26 good shot caller. I’m not letting you alone with my community in the shot closet to get their
27 injections until I know how you work with the community.” So, that’s why it usually takes
28 months for shot callers, no matter what their training is, because we want to make sure they
29 interact with all kinds of folks. We have everybody from the community who comes in – all
30 different gender identities, ethnicities, ages. I mean folks who have been on hormones for 10
31 years, folks who this is their first time and they’re with their mom.
- 32 AJ: Oh, boy.
- 33 BN: Adorable, by the way – adorable. We’ve had so many more of those in the last two years and it
34 is so cute. Or elders who thought they knew how to do their shots and have been doing it for
35 decades and they come in and they’re like scar tissue everywhere and they’ve been using the
36 same needle for two years.
- 37 AJ: Oh no.

- 1 BN: The way some doctors do not educate our community on how to do stuff is unfathomable. We
2 literally have doctors right now who are just like, "I'm actually not going to teach you how to do
3 your shot, just go to the Shot Clinic."
- 4 AJ: OK.
- 5 BN: And I'm like, "Well, that fills me with pride in one way."
- 6 AJ: Right, but . . .
- 7 BN: The other way is you're actually getting paid to take care of your client, your patient, and we
8 make no money – we can barely keep the doors open and you're sending them to us to teach
9 them and I'm like . . . we actually had one, more than one but the one I remember the most, he
10 came in with his mom, he was 17, and his mom was mad because he was never going to have to
11 go through menopause, she said. I'm like, "What are you talking about?" She's like, "Well, I'm
12 just mad he just gets to go through puberty and miss menopause." I'm like, "He's going to go
13 through both at the same time." The doctors had never told them – had never told him what
14 was going to happen to his body and he was there for his first shot. He's contemplating
15 whether he wants to go through that or not – excited for his first shot, but now I'm going to go
16 through menopause and had to sit there and go, "Do I want to do this or not?" Doctors could
17 have told him that for months.
- 18 AJ: Absolutely.
- 19 BN: Why did an art teacher have to tell him that that was going to happen?
- 20 AJ: Unbelievable.
- 21 BN: Yeah, and that happens a lot, a lot – and that gets really, really frustrating. One of the things
22 that Minnesota Transgender Health Coalition does is do trainings for doctors, but it's really,
23 really difficult because none of us are doctors and they want to get trained by other doctors.
24 They don't think we're experts in our own community or our own bodies and our own medical
25 history, right? They're like, "Oh, that's really nice and cute that you think you know, but can we
26 hear it from a real doctor." I'm like, "Actually, none of you seem to get it so please bring me in
27 for a training or bring in my board or my community in for a training to teach you – you need to
28 tell us these things, you need to tell us what's going to happen to our bodies, step us through
29 this stuff." That's a big decision for somebody to make, whether they're 17 or 40, of what's
30 going to happen to their body, I shouldn't be the one explaining that to them five seconds
31 before they get their first shot.
- 32 AJ: Wow.
- 33 BN: And so, the Shot Clinic has definitely evolved in that way. We're like - OK, now we're going to
34 take this model of we were just going to give injections to you – cool, here's a list of questions,
35 go back to your doctor. Or, here's a list of questions, go to your pharmacist. Half the time
36 pharmacists aren't even giving them the right size needles. So, all this stuff has come up.
- 37 AJ: Do you think that's transphobia?

- 1 BN: I think a lot of it is, it's got to be transphobia.
- 2 AJ: Or just no awareness, no knowledge.
- 3 BN: I think there's a lot of funding and there's a lot of pressure for doctors and for pharmacists to
4 finally treat us, we're chic right now. Right? We're popular.
- 5 AJ: Yes.
- 6 BN: And they don't want to be known as the doctor who refuses to treat trans folks, right? But they
7 also don't want to get too involved, they also don't want to make a mistake. There's clinics
8 around town that have just started doing trans services that take meetings on everything that
9 they prescribe to a trans person before they do it. They're like, "Here's the trans person, here's
10 everything we're suggesting. All the providers talk about it and make sure it's OK before we
11 actually do anything."
- 12 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 13 BN: So, it delays the services to that patient until all those providers can agree that they're not going
14 to get sued somehow for doing this for trans folks. I think people are also still really scared
15 because they don't have enough knowledge and they don't get enough knowledge because they
16 don't want to get it from us – so who are they going to get it from if they're not getting it from
17 the community? There's nobody who has been doing this for 30 years effectively, or correctly.
18 There's no doctor to learn that from that's been doing it amazingly for decades, you learn it
19 from the community and they're resisting that. I see that in our clients that come,
20 unfortunately.
- 21 AJ: It's an amazing resource. I've seen people from out of town come . . . I go by and I just sort of
22 take it for granted because it's been there.
- 23 BN: I do the same thing with District 202.
- 24 AJ: And they come and they see the Shot Clinic and they're like, "Oh my God, this exists, this is so
25 beautiful." Literally people break out into tears almost.
- 26 BN: It's amazing. There's something special about Minnesota that most states won't allow
27 something like the Shot Clinic to exist.
- 28 AJ: Hmm, OK.
- 29 BN: There are several laws that protect us here but it's mostly that . . . I mean, we're the land of
30 10,000 social services and we're the land of the three places in the country that do trans health
31 care – we have one of the major ones.
- 32 AJ: Exactly.
- 33 BN: So, there's something special in Minnesota where that could happen, and it's also everybody
34 who was involved in the Shot Clinic were all people who were raised at District 202.
- 35 AJ: Yeah.

- 1 BN: We're all people who knew and were trained by other queers, and queers before them and
2 queers before them, on how to do advocacy work in this community and how to do that. We
3 learned from a very young age if we want something for our community, we do it ourselves. If
4 we need something in our community, we do it. District is where I started doing the first trans
5 youth stuff, because there was nothing – there was just the U of M, there was no trans support
6 group for youth, there was nothing for trans masculine folks.
- 7 AJ: Right.
- 8 BN: There was nothing for folks of color who were trans – no support outside your own little clique,
9 and District 202 let me do that, let me do that with a bunch of friends that we started groups for
10 supporting trans youth. That seemed revolutionary at the time. For us, we were just like, "We
11 need it, so we're doing it." We were raised in this culture that was like, "You need it, you do it,
12 awesome." I think we still kind of have that as off-shoots of District at the Shot Clinic of . . . we
13 need it. We started a food shelf, who would just do that? I was lucky enough to work with
14 organizers who were like, "Fine, Billy, but you take care of it." Literally they were like, "If you
15 make a mess, we're done."
- 16 AJ: And then the Clothing Shelf.
- 17 BN: And then the Clothing Shelf that we inherited from TYSN and then Gender Gear program, and
18 that's grown into a Winter Gear program that folks can come in and get winter jackets and stuff.
19 All these things were steps in the process over the last 10 years, but that's how we wanted to
20 evolve – what we see the community needing and let's add that. So, we've added support
21 groups, we've added . . . now we have our SOFFAs group for significant others and family and
22 friends of trans folks because when I was coming out there was tons of those, and now they're
23 all online. I'm like, "Weird."
- 24 AJ: Sofa group?
- 25 BN: SOFFA, Significant Others, Friends, Families, and Allies of trans folks.
- 26 AJ: I love it.
- 27 BN: I know. I remember there being tons of them when I first came out because everybody was like,
28 "What is this trans thing?"
- 29 AJ: Right.
- 30 BN: And now they're all online and people are doing the online fighting thing on them and so people
31 are like, "We need this resource, can the Exchange, can the Shot Clinic and THC help with that?"
32 I'm like, "That's what we're here for, so if you need that – cool, help us do it." We have SOFFA
33 folks who are helping us run that.
- 34 AJ: Wow.
- 35 BN: So yeah, again – it's just like the community needed something so we added it.
- 36 AJ: Billy, to the extent that you're comfortable, tell me about your own medical transition,
37 intervention.

- 1 BN: I've only ever done hormones. I would love to do more but I'm not physically healthy enough.
2 Some of the . . . I got permanent damage in my spinal cord from childhood abuse.
- 3 AJ: So, there was physical abuse then?
- 4 BN: Very much – a lot. So, a lot of the physical damage that I got from the abuse makes it so I can't
5 do a lot of things. I have early onset arthritis, I have scoliosis, things are bent in weird ways. So,
6 there's a lot that makes me not healthy enough to do a lot of things. So, I'm lucky in that I found
7 a community that lets me organize from behind a desk, right? Or behind a keyboard. Like with
8 the Black Lives Matter stuff, I tried to walk the streets and I couldn't.
- 9 AJ: Yeah.
- 10 BN: And it sucked because that's exactly where I would have been 10 years ago was right up in the
11 front walking, but my disease has degraded so much that I can't protest in the streets
12 anymore.
- 13 AJ: I remember walking with you when Tamika got shot.
- 14 BN: Oh, my God – yes. That was starting to be hard for me back then and now it's just more and
15 more. So, I'm really lucky that the community let me do stuff behind the scenes – I got to cook
16 or take care of kids, people's babies so they could be at the protest, or support people through
17 meals or getting winter jackets donated or something like that.
- 18 AJ: But that's an amazing thing, that has to happen in order for a protest to really move forward.
- 19 BN: It does, and I appreciate that. I think that's harder for me to appreciate just because I'm so used
20 to idealizing the folks in front of the microphone or whatever – right? Especially because I'm
21 used to them being around more and getting to hide behind them and some of our leaders have
22 left.
- 23 AJ: One of your biggest moments of advocacy, that I've witnessed anyway, and I'm sure you've
24 done many, many more things that I'm just not familiar with . . .
- 25 BN: You're so complimentary.
- 26 AJ: But you actually sparked this sort of international movement around the Free CeCe campaign.
- 27 BN: I think our committee sparked it, lets be real – but I was part of it. I was really lucky that I got to
28 be part of the original CeCe Support Committee that actually worked directly with CeCe.
- 29 AJ: So, tell us about this. I mean, we're using Free CeCe and CeCe and people don't really know
30 what this is all about.
- 31 BN: So CeCe, when she . . . CeCe McDonald, when she was 23 was attacked by Nazis. And, with
32 transphobic and racist remarks.
- 33 AJ: You're not just throwing around a term, Nazi, right?
- 34 BN: Yeah, he actually had a big swastika on his chest – the guy who attacked her. And when she was
35 trying to defend herself, the guy who attacked her ended up dead. Somebody had called the

1 cops and she went to the cops to try to get help because she was bleeding from the face,
 2 another person had smashed a beer bottle in her face – or a beer glass/mug, and the cops
 3 arrested her and they charged her with . . . I think the first charge was murder and they were
 4 trying to get her for 81 years in prison. She contacted . . . she had a case manager who
 5 contacted us at MTHC and the Trans Youth Support Network, at the time, to see if we knew her
 6 because this case manager wasn't part of the trans POC community and we were and we were
 7 like, "We do know her."

8 AJ: Yes.

9 BN: Like, "Holy crap," and all of us started organizing – between MTHC and TYSN, because we were
 10 housed together at the Shot Clinic, started working to try and free her.

11 AJ: MTHC – Minnesota Transgender Health Coalition.

12 BN: Yes, so long.

13 AJ: I've just to say that because . . .

14 BN: Totally, it's just such a long title, I wish we could shorten it. So we started working and we went
 15 to visit her in prison. Katie Burgess and Jay Masika and I were like the first three who really
 16 started organizing the first protest with her family. She had a lot of young people that she was
 17 taking care of at the time, who were living with her in her apartment who were suddenly about
 18 to be homeless. We didn't know . . . the three of us had never worked anything in the justice
 19 system at that point, we had never tried to do any free prisoner stuff. We had no idea what we
 20 were doing, we just knew that there was a trans woman of color in prison and if we didn't get
 21 her out she was going to die – and that was it. We were really lucky that we were able to have
 22 access to her and that the prison, or the jail at the time, would let us visit her. She really . . .
 23 she's amazing, I love her. But she really . . . she steered a lot of it from jail, she literally would tell
 24 us what to do and we would go back to the office and do it, and then we would visit her the next
 25 day and go, "Cool, we did this, this, and this – and this, this, and this came up. What do you
 26 want us to do?" She would tell us what to do and we would go back to the office and do it. She
 27 did that throughout the whole entire campaign, which I'm not on the inside of a lot of
 28 campaigns – but it seems really different from those campaigns where we weren't there with
 29 our political agenda or what we wanted to do. We had ideas, but our ideas were secondary.

30 AJ: Right, whatever CeCe wants to do, that's what we're going to do.

31 BN: Absolutely, and that's what we did. We would come at her with ideas – like we could do it this
 32 way or that way or we could do . . . we want to make sure if you're sentenced that you get into a
 33 women's prison, we could make that the big key. She didn't want to, so we didn't. We could
 34 make it that we wanted a fair trial, that was the first thing – we want a fair trial or we could
 35 make it there is no way you're going to get a fair trial as a trans woman of color. She was like,
 36 "Yeah, there's no way, we're not going to focus on trying to get a fair trial, we're going to focus
 37 on getting the charges dropped, because getting a fair trial is fantasyland – it's never going to
 38 happen." So even from the beginning she steered that. We gathered folks who had more
 39 knowledge, who were from the white anarcho community who knew how to do this, some of
 40 them had just gone through this with FBI raids and freeing prisoners, and then we got her family

- 1 and we got folks from the trans community and the POC community and we tried to form this
2 CeCe Support Committee where everybody got, “What is your skill? Cool, add that to the
3 campaign.”
- 4 AJ: I know, you guys called me and said, “Write an article, Andrea.”
- 5 BN: Do something. At the time we couldn’t get queer and we couldn’t get POC folks to cover her,
6 nobody would write stories about her because nobody wanted to claim her as part of their
7 community.
- 8 AJ: Exactly.
- 9 BN: And nobody, at the beginning, wanted to believe that she could be attacked – that the attacker
10 could be killed by her and that that she somehow innocent. All they could see was a Black trans
11 woman who was angry and wielding scissors. They couldn’t see somebody who was fighting for
12 her life and how dare she survive, she should have been a martyr and died, right? That was my
13 big thing. I was like, “I know what you all are saying, you’re say, ‘She lived, so how dare she?’”
- 14 AJ: Yes.
- 15 BN: That was the start of our viral campaign, our social media campaign was that folks would bring
16 in all the facts, we had really great folks who, like Lex Horan or other folks who would write our
17 press releases and then I would come in with, “This is my girl, this is the left corner of my heart.”
- 18 AJ: Yes.
- 19 BN: “This is her smile, this is what she looks like, this is how she’s suffering – can you please help my
20 friend?”
- 21 AJ: Yeah.
- 22 BN: Between those two things of here’s her story and here’s the reality of the facts of it and here’s
23 some human part of her and mix that together, people latched on.
- 24 AJ: *Democracy Now*, Melissa Harris-Perry.
- 25 BN: It was amazing.
- 26 AJ: Leslie Feinberg.
- 27 BN: People just showed up.
- 28 AJ: Transgender . . .
- 29 BN: What’s his face from Sylvia Rivera Law Project? Dean . . .
- 30 AJ: Dean Spade.
- 31 BN: Dean Spade showed up. All these people showed up to support her. It was months later, it was
32 after we did a bunch of work to get them to notice, but people showed up in a way that we
33 never could have planned, we never could have tried for – it just happened. And then people
34 started their own support committees in their cities. Like Chicago started one and Buffalo

1 started one and all of a sudden, all over the country – and then all of a sudden, other countries.
 2 And like Glasgow was emailing me going, “Is it cool if we start a support community because all
 3 over our city right now is ‘Free CeCe’ graffiti?” I’m like, “What the hell are you talking about?”
 4 The next day somebody from Paris was like, “Hey, how do I send her a book? And here’s five
 5 pictures of just the five things of graffiti that are all over our city right now of ‘Free CeCe’”.
 6 Which they had the best – Paris. Best graffiti, holy crap – it was beautiful. But things like that
 7 just happened and it was nothing we could plan for, it was nothing we could try for – it just
 8 happened and it happened because people saw the facts of her story, saw that she was a human
 9 being and were like, “No.” And because she led it and because it was all coming from her, I
 10 think that made all the difference, and that we weren’t people with our own political agenda,
 11 we weren’t people who were like, “We’re going to steer it this way because this is what’s
 12 happening politically or what our beliefs are.” Because people could see we were following her
 13 lead and that she was a human being who could speak for herself and not some tragic
 14 stereotype of what we see as Black trans women – especially young poor Black trans women
 15 and that we included . . . I know when we started working with a national organization that was
 16 really white, the first interview with them I think I had to remind them that she was Black like
 17 five times in a 10-minute interview.

18 AJ: Oh, wow.

19 BN: We were trying to see if they could help us with publicity and PR. And they’re like, “Oh yeah, of
 20 course.” But all they wanted to focus on was that she was trans.

21 AJ: Right.

22 BN: And I’m like, “No. This probably would not have happened to a white trans woman.” It might
 23 have, but not like this – not like this, and she wouldn’t be facing all of this. And it wouldn’t be
 24 happening to her if she also wasn’t poor and also wasn’t young.

25 AJ: So, you guys made sure that the intersections were clear?

26 BN: Absolutely – absolutely. And that was really, really important – because that brought all those
 27 communities together, so it wasn’t just a community of trans people of color who were there.
 28 There was white gay guys who were there, there was white anarcho kids, there were straight
 29 Black folks, there was immigrant communities from all over Latin America who were there for
 30 God’s sake. There was people from Occupy Wall Street because that was just ending when we
 31 were just starting.

32 AJ: Right, exactly.

33 BN: There was people that I did not recognize from other movements that came together for this
 34 that was just . . . I’ve never seen anything like that until we started doing Black Lives Matter –
 35 that’s the only other place that I’ve seen anything close to that. I don’t know if it’s Minnesota or
 36 . . .

37 AJ: Why do you think the CeCe McDonald story, Free CeCe, really opened up space - maybe I won’t
 38 say led to, but opened up space to have this social media, online campaign around social
 39 justice? Prior to that, I hadn’t really recognized a whole lot of social media organizing.

- 1 BN: I think it was happening but I don't think it happened on that level. I think there was something
2 in the way that we did it and something with her story that made it explode in a way that I had
3 not seen on social media before – you're right. There was something . . . I could put something
4 on Tumblr, Twitter and Facebook and literally watch it go viral in about two minutes.
- 5 AJ: Wow.
- 6 BN: Watch it duplicate to thousands and thousands of re-posts in minutes and I'd never seen that
7 with anything else that I had seen and had paid attention to politically. I've seen other people
8 use the ways in which we used social media for their movements now – I definitely see Black
9 Lives Matter folks doing it in a similar way, they've expanded on it and it's so much better and so
10 hard core. But there was things where Facebook and Twitter and Tumblr weren't being
11 watched the way it is now where we could get away with a lot more. I could post every nuance
12 of what we were going to do online, where we can't do that now.
- 13 AJ: Exactly – no, you can't do that anymore.
- 14 BN: They've had to totally sophisticate how they're doing stuff, which is amazing. I don't know that I
15 could do this Free CeCe campaign – any of us could do it, in the climate there is now of suspicion
16 and watching because so much of what we did was transparency, was here's the story, here's
17 the feelings, here's the woman, here's everything – here's where we're going to be, here's what
18 we need from you, like we're crying out for help please fucking pay attention to us.
- 19 AJ: Right.
- 20 BN: That we couldn't do now because people would just shut us down right away – we'd have the
21 cops at our door going, "You're planning a what? What kind of protest?" No matter how
22 peaceful it was - nothing . . . it just doesn't work the same anymore. There was something
23 magical about that time period where I could just put all her feelings, all my feelings, all the
24 support group's facts and feelings out there and people, I think that's what made people
25 connect.
- 26 AJ: I'm telling you, I was traveling all around the country – every activist space I went in, Free CeCe .
27 . . it was incredible to me.
- 28 BN: So amazing.
- 29 AJ: I'm like, "Yeah, I know CeCe."
- 30 BN: Still to this day when I get new students and I'll say, "Oh my friend CeCe taught me how to cook
31 that." Like I'm teaching a cooking class at Gaia Democratic School and they're like, "CeCe who?"
32 I'm like, "Oh, McDonald – do you know her?"
- 33 AJ: "Yes, we know her."
- 34 BN: But even during the campaign, I had no idea, really . . . even though I could see all these support
35 groups popping up and everything going viral, I never quite got how big it got until I met
36 Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*.
- 37 AJ: Yeah, *The New Jim Crow*.

- 1 BN: So I stood in line for two hours, this is how much I love CeCe, to get that book signed for her
2 because she was in prison at the time. I go up and I'm at the end of the line and Michelle is just
3 fucking tired, you could see it in her eyes. I'm like, "Hi, can you actually make this out to my
4 friend, CeCe? She's in prison right now and she's in a male prison because she's trans and she
5 actually passes your book around to everybody." Because CeCe had gotten . . . a supporter had
6 sent her a book, and she had passed it around the whole entire frickin' prison.
- 7 AJ: Wow.
- 8 BN: And all these men were getting educated.
- 9 AJ: What an educator – I love CeCe.
- 10 BN: Holy cow. And Michelle looks up at me and suddenly is not so asleep. She was like, "CeCe
11 McDonald?" And she was like, "Oh, you know her?" "Yeah, I know who CeCe McDonald is." I'm
12 like, "Oh, dork – OK."
- 13 AJ: Wow.
- 14 BN: And that kept happening, and then Laverne got involved in making her documentary and
15 advocating for her.
- 16 AJ: Laverne? Who is Laverne? Laverne and Shirley? Who are you talking about?
- 17 BN: Laverne Cox, whatever.
- 18 AJ: Oh, Laverne Cox from *Orange is the New Black* – that Laverne.
- 19 BN: Oh, yes.
- 20 AJ: Look at you – just dropping names.
- 21 BN: Shut up, it's so embarrassing.
- 22 AJ: Michelle Alexander, Laverne Cox.
- 23 BN: It's so embarrassing. But it's so weird that my life has become that. I'll have, especially students
24 or clients that are young folks who are like, "That is . . ." I'll have clients and young folks and
25 students who are like, "Oh my God, that is so cool you're so famous." I'll just look at them and
26 I'm like, "Actually there is a reason I don't talk about this a lot, because it's a really fucked up
27 way to know them." I know them because my friend almost died, I know them because my
28 friend almost died in prison. It's not anything I'm proud of, it's not anything that I'm like, "Oh,
29 look what I get to do with my life because I know these really fucking cool people."
- 30 AJ: Yeah.
- 31 BN: It's, "Look who I get to know because they helped save my friend."
- 32 AJ: That's beautiful.
- 33 BN: And that's what I think, again, made the CeCe Support Committee different, is that nobody was
34 in it to meet Laverne Cox.

- 1 AJ: Right.
- 2 BN: Nobody was in it to meet Michelle Alexander, nobody was in it to meet Leslie Feinberg. We got
3 to because they were amazing enough to come help our friend stay alive.
- 4 AJ: Sure.
- 5 BN: That's what I see was different about that campaign, and I see a lot of political prisoner
6 campaign things, is that it was so centralized on her and on what she wanted and on the human
7 being that she was, and we all fell in love with her. She's amazing – who wouldn't anyway.
- 8 AJ: Yeah, how could anyone not fall in love with CeCe?
- 9 BN: She's just . . . she's been out for two years now and it's . . .
- 10 AJ: Just so you know, CeCe is a part of this project too. I just want you to know that she's been
11 involved . . .
- 12 BN: Good. Have you interviewed her yet?
- 13 AJ: Yes, absolutely.
- 14 BN: I know she's in and out of town all the time.
- 15 AJ: And people ask me this question, "What's your favorite interview?" I'm telling you, Billy, you're
16 #51 and we haven't finished yours yet, but CeCe is the best interview.
- 17 BN: Absolutely.
- 18 AJ: Hands down.
- 19 BN: I think there's so . . . I think what surprised a lot of people . . .
- 20 AJ: Let me tell you who I've interviewed . . .
- 21 BN: I can only fucking imagine, Andrea.
- 22 AJ: Kate Bornstein, Kylar Broadus . . . I could go on and list so many more people, Ignacio Rivera,
23 Roxanne Anderson.
- 24 BN: Yeah.
- 25 AJ: CeCe McDonald – best interview to date.
- 26 BN: Absolutely. And I think there's a lot that people get surprised with with CeCe and one of the
27 ones I find so fucking insulting, but is so true by far, is how intelligent she is.
- 28 AJ: Yeah.
- 29 BN: People are like, "Oh, my God, she is so smart."
- 30 AJ: Yeah.

1 BN: And I'm like, "Why wouldn't she be?" I'm like, "You explain to my pasty male looking face, why
2 you think trans women of color wouldn't be smart."

3 AJ: Right – she's brilliant.

4 BN: Brilliant. Who else could be facing 81 years to life and be able to organize her own freedom
5 from jail?

6 AJ: Yeah. So, we should just say CeCe is home now.

7 BN: Yeah, CeCe is home now.

8 AJ: CeCe served 18 months.

9 BN: About 19 months.

10 AJ: 19 months – there's a beautiful film that is being made about her story.

11 BN: It should be out soon, hopefully.

12 AJ: Produced by the infamous Laverne Cox, whom you mentioned.

13 BN: Yeah.

14 AJ: Her name was invoked on *How to Get Away with Murder*.

15 BN: Did you see that? That was so weird.

16 AJ: I literally was sitting there watching the program and they said, "CeCe McDonald," and I'm like,
17 "What?" Shonda Rimes.

18 BN: And, of course, the first thing I said was, "They better be paying my fucking girl."

19 AJ: I know.

20 BN: Saying her name on TV.

21 AJ: Me too. I tweeted CeCe at that . . . I'm like, "CeCe, they're talking about you on TV, girl."

22 BN: It's so bizarre that she's become that . . .

23 AJ: "Bitch better have my money." That's what she wrote back. "Pay me like you . . ."

24 BN: And that's the other thing that I think, from the documentary, that I think people will see is . . .
25 everybody sees her name and sees her doing speaking gigs all over the country, she's writing
26 forwards to books – she just wrote a forward to an amazing book and they never paid her, they
27 never offered to pay her, they didn't think to pay her – they didn't think to pay her. And
28 between that and people not . . . they just don't think she's smart enough. I'm like, "You have
29 no idea how brilliant this woman is." But I think they also . . . there's a space where she's chic
30 right now, and especially Black trans women are chic, which is gross as shit, but they still don't
31 ultimately see the value in our community enough to pay us or see us as our own professionals
32 and our own experts.

- 1 AJ: Yeah.
- 2 BN: It gets frustrating when it's happening to somebody you love so hardcore and she's so in the
3 light and everybody is like, "Oh, she must be making so much money." I don't want to put her
4 shit out there, but I'm like . . . "I want to strangle you, you have no idea what you're talking
5 about and how much she struggles."
- 6 AJ: Well, she did *The Rolling Stone* interview and I think set the record straight a little bit around
7 that.
- 8 BN: A little bit, I wish it would have been more of the article. From the extended previews I've seen
9 of the documentary, there's more of that in there.
- 10 AJ: OK.
- 11 BN: Where it's like the reality of you can't get a job when you get out of prison and you have a
12 felony on your record.
- 13 AJ: Yeah, she has a felony now.
- 14 BN: It was hard enough for her to get a job before as a Black trans woman who was young and
15 undereducated.
- 16 AJ: Yes.
- 17 BN: Undereducated in the traditional, "I got a piece of paper" sense. It didn't matter how smart or
18 how capable she was, she was all these other identities – now you put a felony on that.
19 Between the court system and the lawyers and all those fuckers, I don't think they understand
20 how much they hurt her life.
- 21 AJ: Oh, yeah.
- 22 BN: How it's not just, "Oh, she only got 19 months – now she's out, wasn't she lucky." No, you hurt
23 her life so hardcore. Even on those levels, not to mention emotional levels. You put a trans
24 woman, a Black trans woman, in a prison with men and told her to survive, and then put her in
25 solitary most of the time and told her to be mentally healthy when she got out and ready to
26 take on the world. Do you know what I mean? I don't think the reality of some of this stuff,
27 after everything is being popular and chic and let's make movies and TV shows about it – the
28 reality of it still isn't getting shown to me, the reality of what you do when you go home and
29 how you take care of yourself. How do you live through that? Just because you survived and
30 you're still breathing, there's more to it than that.
- 31 AJ: Yeah, how do you get to thriving?
- 32 BN: Exactly. And I don't see any of these people who think we're cool and who are making money
33 off of stories thinking about that, or valuing us as a community, anyway, in that way enough to
34 go, "Yeah, you should probably get paid for that." Or, "Oh, we should see you as an expert and
35 give you equal pay as we have our white cis speakers."
- 36 AJ: Right, exactly.

1 BN: Oh, my God – all that.

2 AJ: I want to shift back to you a little bit, Billy.

3 BN: I'm much easier talking about other people.

4 AJ: Yeah, you're good at that. Talk to me about love and relationships and sexual identity and how
5 that has been impacted by your gender identity.

6 BN: It's weird for me to talk about. Again, with my sexuality, I don't have preferences when it comes
7 to gender. I think I definitely have preferences on being a nice person, have good politics.

8 AJ: OK, yes.

9 BN: Do you know what I mean? But when it comes to gender, I'm one of those odd people that
10 really have no preference. Somebody challenged me on that last night and was like, "Oh, but
11 you really like boys more." I was like I think I just feel more comfortable vocalizing and kind of
12 talking sexually about guys than I do other genders, because other genders are over sexualized,
13 especially femme gender so much. I'm transitioning to male-hood or being perceived as male,
14 there's certain things that I don't want to come off as, right? So, I'm extra careful around stuff
15 like that, but when it comes to who I actually date or who I love – even in my platonic triad,
16 those two people couldn't be more different. One is a white trans lady from the middle of
17 nowhere and one is a Black trans femme guy from the city. The three of us together are
18 hilarious because the three of us couldn't look more different. But there's something where . . .
19 our politics are aligned, or how we see the world in certain ways will align. Those things are
20 really, really important to me. It doesn't have to be the same, I'd actually prefer it not to be the
21 same because I love learning from other people with different points of view, but there are
22 certain essential things of seeing how you view the world and how you see the world and seeing
23 people as humans that I don't see in even a large quantity of the queer community. I still see
24 folks seeing people as labels, or, "I only interact with this label," or, "I won't date men but I'll
25 date trans men," or, "I'll date all women but I won't date trans women." All this stuff that I'm
26 like, "I can't get down with that." There's something about folks who see folks as just human,
27 that that's what I'm attracted to and all the other stuff seems like frosting – frosting on the Q
28 cake. It's hard to explain to folks my sexual identity or how I find people attractive because
29 they'll be like, "That crush is so different from the crush you have right now. What the heck?
30 Those two people aren't even in the same world, they don't even share communities." But
31 there's something essentially about them that I find attractive and it has nothing to do with how
32 they look on the outside or how they identify, it has to do with who they are. I get called
33 straight up hippie for that but still, that's fine. I make my own tie-dyes and wear overalls, I'm
34 comfortable with that identity.

35 AJ: Are you in a relationship now?

36 BN: I am not. I had . . . the last couple guys I attempted to date, and that's how I put it – attempted
37 to date, were cis white guys who ended up being either transphobic or racist, so when it came
38 time to bring me home it was, "I can't bring home a Puerto Rican," or, "I can't bring home a
39 trans guy." So, I'm taking a break – a little break. I think that's something that . . . I've only
40 passed as a guy for six years maybe, and that's something that I'm not used to navigating yet is I

- 1 very much learned how to navigate that I pass for white most of the time and know how to work
2 . . . like if I'm dating a white person, I'm like, "What are your politics? What is your shit?"
3 Because people can forget, they can be like, "Ooh, I'm dating a person of color but I don't have
4 to think about it because he doesn't look like what I think a person of color looks like."
- 5 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 6 BN: And it gets really hard because I haven't learned how to do that with gender at the same level,
7 where they like to forget. They like to forget that I'm trans or even if they work with me in the
8 trans community, they'll be like, "Oh, but you come off like a cis gay guy, so I can forget that
9 you're queer too. I can forget all these identities and just have you be this one box for me." I
10 haven't quite figured out how to weed those fuckers out yet.
- 11 AJ: OK.
- 12 BN: So . . .
- 13 AJ: The struggle is real.
- 14 BN: It is. And I think there's a different . . . when you don't identify within any box with any of your
15 identities, there's just a different filter you have to develop and it's not any harder or any worse
16 or any better than anything else, but it's just . . . Minnesota is also really difficult that way
17 because nobody wants to come off as a racist or a transphobe even if they really are, so they
18 won't say it straight up. But when I'm dating a white dude and he turns it to the hip-hop station
19 the second I get in the car, from his pop station, I have to go, "Hmmm, what was that? Why was
20 that necessary?" But it's like the finer filters that I have to do so I just . . . I get real picky and
21 now I'm just really picky about anybody that comes into my life. I've gotten to an age where I'm
22 like I don't actually need to deal with your racism or your transphobia or whatever – your
23 internalized . . . like I dated another gay guy who was straight passing, I guess – that
24 horribleness, and got really insecure being in public with me because I'm not. So, the whole
25 femme thing – so it was like, "I'm cool dating you, but you act like a straight dude in public." I'm
26 like, "Oh, honey, I couldn't try – even if I tried it would come off real silly – real silly."
- 27 AJ: Oh, you are funny.
- 28 BN: But it's like all those things that people want you to be to make them feel comfortable and I've
29 gotten to the age where I'm like, "Hmm, I'm good. I'm good on that." So, that becomes harder
30 and harder to find in a community where folks try to hide those kinds of prejudices. I often
31 think I would be better in a . . . I'm a snobby northerner so the south scares me, but from my
32 friends who have lived in the south, at least you know. At least you know if they're a racist
33 transphobe, at least you know. Here it's kind of like you have to get a certain Minnesota filter to
34 figure that out sometimes.
- 35 AJ: Guess about it, yeah.
- 36 BN: Which is annoying as hell.
- 37 AJ: What's the relationship, in your mind, between the L, the G, the B, and the T?

1 BN: Strained, to say the least. We're right after that whole . . . did you see that petition that petition
2 that went around where they were trying to get the T taking out of the community?

3 AJ: I saw that petition.

4 BN: Literally started to cry the first time I saw that. It was like, "This can't be our future." Even if it
5 was . . . I didn't know if it was big, if it was real, if it was a *The Onion* article. It seemed so
6 preposterous that I was just like . . . at first I was like, "No," and then I was like, "Oh my God, it's
7 real."

8 AJ: It's real.

9 BN: There's a section of the community that doesn't want to have anything to do with me in a way
10 where they can publicly say it – like I know they don't want anything to do with me, but for
11 them to write their name and make it public that they don't want anything to do with me and
12 my people is hardcore harsh. I don't . . . often I'm trying to explain this dissidence to my straight
13 cis father who doesn't quite get it, right? There's been times in my life when I've gotten fired
14 from queer organizations for being trans before laws in Minnesota were passed and having to
15 go home to my first-generation Puerto Rican father going, "I didn't pass well enough, they were
16 all white, they were all cis – I wasn't white enough and I wasn't cis enough and I got fired." And
17 having to explain that to him and he was like . . . he went through all this stuff to try to make this
18 world a better place for folks of color and assumed me, being this pasty, that I wouldn't have to
19 deal with a lot of stuff that he had to deal with. And the fact that not only do I have to deal with
20 it with race sometimes but then I have to deal with it with gender and sexuality like breaks him.
21 So trying to explain to him all this stuff and trying to explain that just because we're part of this
22 alphabet soup doesn't mean we love each other, it doesn't mean that we get along – it means
23 we probably should, it means logically you would think we would. But there's so . . . there's so
24 much fight for trying to be normal with some folks or trying to be average or trying to be one
25 thing away from straight, white and cis that you add all these other identities and they get
26 scared. I tried to explain to him, especially the first Pride where they kicked all the trans folks
27 out, even though we had started it – especially the trans women of color. And he's like, "I don't
28 understand." I'm like, "Dad, it was literally a year or two later, they just forgot us and literally
29 kicked us out and wouldn't let us come." It's not like it was 50 years later and nobody knew.

30 AJ: Have you seen the video of Sylvia Rivera taking over the stage at Pride?

31 BN: Yes, love her – screaming for the community.

32 AJ: "You've got to let me speak."

33 BN: Right. It's heartbreaking but people are laughing in the background of that video and I'm like,
34 "That woman is screaming for you, she did – she put her life on the line for you to be able to sit
35 here at this fair and you're kicking her to the curb." And trying to explain that to people, even
36 within the community but outside the community, is like almost impossible because it doesn't
37 seem like something like that could happen. It just doesn't seem logical that you would do that
38 to the people that helped free you, in some way. Do you know what I mean? Helped get you
39 those rights or helped get your rights out in the open, or literally put their bodies between you
40 and police officers. It doesn't make sense in any sort of way, so I have no way to figure out how

- 1 to explain that to folks except to tell them about it – this is what happened and I have no logical
2 way to tell you why that that makes sense.
- 3 AJ: Wow.
- 4 BN: But I see that being pulled forward in the community to the point where in that, "let's remove
5 the T," petition, they even wrote that we were re-writing history, that we had made that up –
6 that we had made up that trans women and street kids were at the front and center of that,
7 that we had made up the cafeteria riots. I'm like . . . there's pictures, there's news articles.
- 8 AJ: It's real.
- 9 BN: Right, like the denial of your own history just so you can be at the front and center of it makes
10 no sense to me. But I'm also not them and I'm also not . . . I've never been . . .
- 11 AJ: There are people who lived . . . Miss Major.
- 12 BN: Well, right – some of them are still alive, go talk to her. I think it was . . . it was either the movie
13 about her or the movie about one of them, one of . . . it was either Sylvia Rivera or Marsha
14 where there was actually gay, white cis men who were like, "No, this is how it happened."
- 15 AJ: Right.
- 16 BN: The other gay, white cis men are stupid. So, they even have allies in the community going, "No,"
17 but they only have like two of them. So, I don't know how to explain that to folks or to explain
18 that dissidence between our community except for, "Read our history." I don't know why they
19 did that, except that before they came out they were part of the supremacy, they were
20 considered straight white and cis and suddenly one of those identities gets taken away and they
21 don't know what to do if they're not supreme, so they do this. That's all I can think of – whether
22 that's true or not, I don't know. But that's the only even mildly logical sense I can make out of
23 any of it and even that is just like wow, you're tearing your own community apart, think of how
24 much further we could be. I had this argument with somebody else who does Black Lives
25 Matter stuff, of how I think if with the original civil rights movement if they hadn't kicked out all
26 the queers and kicked out all the trans folks, and we had focused on the intersectionalities from
27 the 1940s on, that we might be further.
- 28 AJ: Right.
- 29 BN: Or, we might all be at the same pace a little bit further back, but who knows?
- 30 AJ: That's an interesting concept.
- 31 BN: You can only contemplate what that is but as a young, just learning about politics person, I was
32 always . . . I never understood that. I never understand why Martin Luther King, Jr. kicked out
33 Bayard Rustin. What sense does that make? Why don't they fight together? If we fight
34 together that's more communities together, that's more of us pushing for equality – like you
35 fight for me, I'll fight for you, we'll fight together. But is that reality? Would that have actually
36 happened?
- 37 AJ: Well, we're doing this for history so that these stories can't be denied.

- 1 BN: Yes.
- 2 AJ: So, list for me the queer organizations that you have worked with, volunteered for, or been
3 involved in.
- 4 BN: Well, right now I work with MTHC, Minnesota Transgender Health Coalition. We used to
5 partner, before they dissolved, with the Trans Youth Support Network.
- 6 AJ: TYSN.
- 7 BN: Yup, TYSN, which was an amazing queer-led trans youth program focusing specifically on trans
8 women of color. I've also worked at Out for Equity, which I always called the Queer and Trans
9 wing of St. Paul Public Schools. I worked with them for a number of years, specifically around
10 trans POC stuff – working with students and then working with faculty and stuff, like how to
11 treat students better.
- 12 AJ: Cool.
- 13 BN: Oh my goodness – we're going to go back. The Minnesota AIDS Project, I worked as a housing
14 case manager for them for about a year.
- 15 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 16 BN: Oh, my God, there's so many. Rainbow Health Initiative, I worked for them for about two years
17 doing volunteer coordination. Good Lord . . . some were queer inclusive, but not necessarily
18 queer – but Street Works, I was a street outreach worker. Worked at a bunch of different
19 shelters, like Safe House and different places like that . . .
- 20 AJ: You were the queer organizer.
- 21 BN: I was the queer, right. I was the queer, I was the trans person, I was the person of color – that
22 was it. "We'll hire one and he'll pass in all the ways we want him to, so we say we hired one."
23 So, a lot around education and youth work and advocacy for the community – almost exclusively
24 with youth, but Minnesota AIDS Project and Access Works were the two where I worked with
25 adults who were HIV positive or Hep C positive, mostly queer and trans but also straight cis folks
26 as well. But mostly I've always worked with young people. I started when I was like 17.
- 27 AJ: Wow. So, you are hanging out with all these young people and let me just . . . this is our last
28 question. Hanging out with all these young people – trans people are coming out younger and
29 younger and younger.
- 30 BN: I mean, I work with babies right now – I work with 4-year-olds who are coming out as trans.
- 31 AJ: So where do you see the trans community in 50 years, Billy?
- 32 BN: Where do I want to see the trans community? Or where do I see the trans community?
- 33 AJ: And maybe I'll add to that – gender identity.

- 1 BN: I think what I want to see is that . . . and I think what I've seen a lot, especially in the last 10
2 years, is that with gender and sexuality that labels are less and less important, or that labels are
3 opening up more beyond the binaries.
- 4 AJ: Yes.
- 5 BN: I'm still in this place where I don't know if labels are important or not. I think they're important
6 in the sense that we need to have community and we need to be able to identify each other in
7 that community, but also I've seen how it limits folks as well within whatever binary you're in. I
8 would love to see it as something . . . like, I think when I was young and first coming out at 12 or
9 13, that I never could have imagined being allowed to have a family. I never could have
10 imagined . . . I knew that I would have to birth my own kids because nobody was going to give
11 me one, and the fact that trans men and trans women are adopting children now – even if it's
12 not that much, it's just starting to happen, the fact that it's happened and it's legal and that
13 some sort of government agency is allowing us to have children, blows my mind – blows my
14 mind. I knew it would happen for queers because, you know . . .
- 15 AJ: Straight acting.
- 16 BN: Right, straight acting, white acting, cis acting – whatever that is, they pass in all the ways they
17 could except for one identity, right? I saw that when I was just coming out, that more and more
18 queer . . .
- 19 AJ: But trans people are having babies now too.
- 20 BN: Trans couples are having their own babies.
- 21 AJ: Yes.
- 22 BN: Especially because I couldn't get my letter for so long because I wanted to have babies, I can't
23 believe that not only have they been fully transitioned medically in the ways that they want to
24 and still having babies. Or like trans women being able to inseminate other folks – I'm just like .
25 . . to me that was just like science fiction, that I knew was available but I never thought anyone
26 would allow us to do it. So, I think in the future what I would see is what we see kind of with the
27 queer community, with the LGBTQ is that they get to have families, they get to have protection at
28 work. I mean, even in Texas and some of the lower states, there was bathroom shit for queer
29 and gay people where they weren't allowing them into the bathrooms similar to the way they're
30 not allowing us into the bathrooms as trans folks; that we just . . . especially as a teacher, I went
31 into education and everybody was like, "You're fucking trans, you can't be a teacher – they don't
32 let trans people be teachers." And I'm like, "What else am I good at, I work with kids." It's
33 either be a gallery artist or be an art teacher, one seems a bit more logical than the other. I
34 went into it and just did it and never would I have thought that anybody would allow me to do it
35 in a public school and I just got done working for three years for one of the biggest public
36 schools in the state – as openly trans.
- 37 AJ: Right.

- 1 BN: And that being valued. So I think things like that – access to what everybody else sees as normal
2 . . . family, bathroom, work, whatever in 50 years to look back at this time like we look back at
3 the civil rights movement, like we will look back at the 1970s and 1980s for queers – like,
4 “What? We did that? Those were laws?” I had to explain to a young person that we used to
5 have sodomy laws.
- 6 AJ: Right.
- 7 BN: And they’re not that far off the books. And this kid was just like, “You’re kidding? It was illegal.”
8 And I’m like, “Oh, sweetie.”
- 9 AJ: Yes, they would lock you up in prison for years.
- 10 BN: For years. And the look on his face of just, “Why would you let that happen? How could people
11 have let that happen?” I want that to be in 50 years how we look at trans and gender stuff.
- 12 AJ: Wow.
- 13 BN: How could you have let that happen? Of course you’re equal, of course you’re a human being,
14 that I will never again have to explain to somebody that trans people are human beings.
15 Amazing.
- 16 AJ: Wow.
- 17 BN: That would be amazing.
- 18 AJ: Love it, that’s beautiful. Wow, Billy, this was an amazing conversation.
- 19 BN: Thank you.
- 20 AJ: Thank you so much.
- 21 BN: I talk a lot.
- 22 AJ: That’s the whole point.
- 23 BN: Thank you, I feel special.
- 24 AJ: I’m glad you did. In fact, you took an hour and 33 minutes.
- 25 BN: I don’t doubt it – you should see me at job interviews.
- 26 AJ: Hey, until we meet again my friend.
- 27 BN: Thank you. Yay!