

Alexis Paige
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

September 23, 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.

Andrea Jenkins
jenki120@umn.edu
(612) 625-4379

- 1 Andrea Jenkins -AJ
2 Alexis Paige -AP
3
- 4 AJ: So, hello.
- 5 AP: Well, hello.
- 6 AJ: My name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian for the Transgender Oral History Project
7 at the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota. Today is September 23, 2016, and I am
8 at Intermedia Arts here in Minneapolis, Minnesota, with Ms. Alexis Paige. Alexis, how are you
9 doing today?
- 10 AP: I'm doing good. I mean, first time in Minneapolis.
- 11 AJ: Really? Wow, what do you think?
- 12 AP: It's interesting. OK, this may be a little bad for people around here, but it's a lot better than I
13 thought it was going to be.
- 14 AJ: OK, well that's beautiful. We're glad to hear that. So, Alexis, can you spell your name the way
15 you spell it and tell us your gender identity, your gender assigned at birth, and your pronouns
16 that you use today.
- 17 AP: Yes. So, my name is Alexis Paige and that would be spelled A-l-e-x-i-s; and Paige is P-a-i-g-e. I
18 was assigned male at birth and more or less for most purposes, I go as a trans woman
19 nowadays. I am 28 years old and . . . I'm sorry, I couldn't remember the last part.
- 20 AJ: Your gender pronouns.
- 21 AP: Oh, pronouns, yes. I use either feminine or gender-neutral pronouns.
- 22 AJ: So, gender neutral would be like them or they.
- 23 AP: Yeah, like they, them, their.
- 24 AJ: Great. So, Alexis, just to kind of get us in the mood, can you tell me what is your earliest
25 memory? The first thing you remember?
- 26 AP: My earliest memory . . . gosh, that is a hard question. Sorry. I think it would be this one time
27 when I was living in Las Vegas, when my whole family was, and I was walking through a parking
28 lot with my dad and I remember seeing this trophy-shaped cloud. I can really remember the
29 cloud and the heat.
- 30 AJ: That's an interesting first memory – you're looking up at the sky, huh?
- 31 AP: Yes.
- 32 AJ: Did you grow up in Las Vegas, Nevada?
- 33 AP: Well, for a little bit. I was born in Burbank, California, it's a suburb near L.A.

- 1 AJ: Sure.
- 2 AP: And, not long after I was born we moved to Las Vegas, where we then proceeded to live there
3 for . . . until I was about five. And, at that point we moved up to Everett, Washington, and we
4 stayed there for a while. After a little while there, we moved to Sedro-Woolley, Washington.
- 5 AJ: You're going to have to spell that one for me, what was it called?
- 6 AP: Sedro-Woolley. S-e-d-r-o dash W-o-o-l-l-e-y.
- 7 AJ: Oh, wow – OK.
- 8 AP: It was two towns that merged into one so they hyphenated. But, I proceeded to move around a
9 lot more after that . . . all the way up and down from being in Washington, back into California,
10 and back into Washington. I think I can probably easily count 15 or 16 moves by the time I was
11 18.
- 12 AJ: Wow. So, you went to a lot of schools growing up.
- 13 AP: Yes.
- 14 AJ: What was school like moving around so much?
- 15 AP: It was odd. I think especially moving around so much, especially since social media and
16 everything wasn't as big. I didn't really make friends that often. I'd make friends, but I always
17 had the expectation that they were going to be gone and out of my life soon. It was kind of like
18 constantly being the new person, then becoming friends with a few people, and then moving
19 away. There were a few times we moved back into the same area where we had lived before,
20 so a few times when I'd suddenly meet up with old friends who I hadn't seen in years and never
21 thought I'd see again. But then we'd move away again. But that was . . . and also, just very
22 varied because I'd be in one place and then another and what they'd be teaching would be all
23 different.
- 24 AJ: Right, right – exactly. But you are an educated woman. You're a legal assistant, college
25 background. Was it hard to learn . . . clearly you're very intelligent so even though different
26 schools were teaching different things, you were able to kind of get through that process.
- 27 AJ: Yes. I was always very lucky to be someone who learns extremely well just by reading and so I
28 really didn't need to have that much in-class support. I could sit down and just read a textbook
29 and learn.
- 30 AJ: And understand what the concepts were?
- 31 AP: Yes. So, it was very helpful. It really is a matter of lucking out that I happened to have . . . I
32 happened to be very strong in one of the learning styles that schools teach to – because there's
33 many, but only a few that schools actually teach to.
- 34 AJ: Absolutely, that's true. What was family life like? Were you guys moving around a lot because it
35 was trauma happening in the household or just dad was getting new jobs all the time? What
36 was going on?

- 1 AP: My family really . . . my mom really liked to move around to different jobs in different areas. I
2 also don't think she was ever really satisfied wherever we were living. She always wanted to
3 own a home but wasn't really ever able to, so we always rented or we would be in other places
4 sometimes that would be like just staying in wayside motels for months on end. There were
5 times where we would move just for financial reasons – we couldn't afford to stay so there was
6 the hope that there would be a better job in a different area.
- 7 AJ: Sure.
- 8 AP: Or, just somewhere where everyone could be happier. Meanwhile, my dad was disabled when I
9 was about eight years old.
- 10 AJ: OK. What happened?
- 11 AP: He was up in Alaska temporarily doing Alaskan crab fishing to make some extra money and one
12 day while he was on the docks and they were loading and unloading all the ships, there was this
13 new person working on a crane and that new person forgot to give out the call to let everyone
14 know that the crane was starting up and was going to be moving things, and so my dad's foot
15 got stuck in a rope and he was lifted a little over 25 feet into the air and then the crane operator
16 being new freaked out and hit the emergency release, so he fell 25 feet and landed on his head
17 on concrete.
- 18 AJ: Oh, my goodness.
- 19 AP: Yeah.
- 20 AJ: He survived?
- 21 AP: He survived that and, especially as far as doctors felt, it was miraculous the minimal amount of
22 disabilities he had. The injuries still were very severe; he was in the hospital for almost a year,
23 was in rehab for another year, periodically he had to go back. He ended up having brain damage
24 and that was kind of the main thing that prevented him from being able to work. He had other
25 issues like one of his entire shoulder joints, like the whole ball joint, had to be completely
26 removed and then they just had to use pins to attach, to leave his arm attached to the shoulder,
27 and stuff like that.
- 28 AJ: Oh, boy – wow, that's pretty traumatic injuries – and traumatic for the family too.
- 29 AP: Yes.
- 30 AJ: I'm sorry to hear about that. Were your parents together?
- 31 AP: Yeah, they were together. Yes.
- 32 AJ: Brothers and sisters? How many siblings?
- 33 AP: I have four siblings – so, three sisters and a fourth sibling who is actually also trans like me, but is
34 a trans guy.
- 35 AJ: No way.

- 1 AP: Yes.
- 2 AJ: There are two trans siblings in your family?
- 3 AP: Yes.
- 4 AJ: What is that like? What do you guys say to each other and how does the rest of the family
5 respond to you two?
- 6 AP: I'd say . . . I think everyone responds pretty well. I mean, I actually do think that Corey has a bit
7 more issues because he lives right near my family; whereas, I live over 2000 miles away.
- 8 AJ: Oh, you moved away – yeah. Where do you live right now?
- 9 AP: Now, I currently live in Chicago, Illinois.
- 10 AJ: OK, wow. A trans . . . so, who came out first?
- 11 AP: I came out first. Corey, though, is my older brother, so he ended up coming out a couple years
12 after me.
- 13 AJ: Wow – trans women always leading the way.
- 14 AP: We always found it amusing that originally, I was the only boy and now he's the only boy.
- 15 AJ: Wow, that is . . . that's a story in and of itself right there.
- 16 AP: Yes.
- 17 AJ: Wow, you guys traded places, huh? You put a new spin on the movie *Trading Places*.
- 18 AP: Yes.
- 19 AJ: Wow. When did you first realize that you were not the gender you were assigned at birth?
- 20 AP: That's sort of a hard question to pinpoint. I mean, I definitely had thoughts about it even back
21 when I can think of being fairly young – around say . . . never really feeling fully comfortable, but
22 really having thoughts about gender and who I was, starting around 11 years old. I'd say I didn't
23 connect to the idea of being trans . . . probably somewhere around 12 or 13 when I finally had
24 internet access and could really look around. My thoughts on my own gender identity are very
25 sort of mixed up with my own physical development and in the way that when I was 11, it
26 became apparent that I was developing breasts and this actually led to a series of doctor visits, it
27 led to all these talks about needing various surgeries, doctors who were recommending having a
28 double mastectomy done.
- 29 AJ: There was that much breast tissue?
- 30 AP: Oh, yeah, I fully developed breasts even before I started hormone therapy; I had developed to a
31 D cup.
- 32 AJ: A D cup?
- 33 AP: Yes.

- 1 AJ: Wow.
- 2 AP: And then there was some other stuff. There were some issues with the way my pelvis had
3 shaped and little things that they . . . so, there's lots of this talk of surgery a lot throughout my
4 early teenage years, but we didn't really have the money to ever afford any of these things –
5 even though they were being talked of. You need insurance for that stuff and when your family
6 is growing up and living in motels and moving under the cover of night, the thought of multi-
7 thousand dollar surgeries is just out of the question.
- 8 AJ: It's just out of the question, right.
- 9 AP: If you're not going to die from it, then that's not happening.
- 10 AJ: Literally.
- 11 AP: Yeah, so it was actually by the time I got to high school I was having to bind my breasts every
12 day. It was sort of that compromise my parents had thought of.
- 13 AJ: So, you didn't . . . at that point of time in your life, you didn't really want to express a feminine
14 identity, even though you were having these sort of secondary sexual traits?
- 15 AP: I was never the most masculine of children and I had other things that happened. I didn't really
16 develop facial hair, my voice barely dropped so I never really had to do any voice training or
17 anything like that, but . . . I never really was interested in sports, I was never very . . . like
18 aggressive – any of that stuff that is part of the more stereotypical masculine culture. I was
19 never interested in cars or stuff.
- 20 AJ: Really?
- 21 AP: Yeah. It was weird; I would constantly think about transition and I would want to, but I really
22 hated my body and I really hated not being normal. I mean, I remember the first time I ever saw
23 a picture of someone who I felt looked like me, was actually in a textbook and they were
24 showing . . . a history textbook, like the whole freak shows that used to be done, and it was a
25 picture of someone who was labeled, *The Amazing Hermaphrodite*, and they were in one of
26 these carnival shows.
- 27 AJ: Sure.
- 28 AP: And, that was sort of . . . that was the first time I saw someone with a body type that I actually
29 went, "Wow, this is like me." And, really the only time. So, even as I was feeling very much not
30 wanting to be male, not feeling male, I just hated my body and I just wanted to be normal. That
31 was it – I just wanted to be normal and as that happened, I kind of just gave up on myself. I
32 ended up gaining a lot of weight – around like 16 and going on, just as it became more and more
33 apparent, I just wasn't caring anymore.
- 34 AJ: So, and there's tissue right behind you if you need to . . . and if these questions get too tough,
35 just tell me, "I ain't answering that," and I'll keep it moving. I'm curious, though, you were going
36 to all of these doctors, were you ever diagnosed as being intersexed?

- 1 AP: No, I wasn't. Doctors were not ever . . . the doctors I went to because they were always doctors
2 at free clinics, they were never really worried about what was causing it so much as being like,
3 "Well this is the issue, this is what we would need to do." And, also very much . . . this weird
4 mix of being, "This is what would need to be done and these sort of surgeries." And also, a
5 downplaying of . . . also, as much as they were pushing surgery, they were also trying to
6 downplay things to me, I think, for my self-esteem. I do know that there are some things like
7 there were real considerations for putting me on testosterone, but the reason I never did was . .
8 . and I guess they had tested this and this was something doctors were really recommending
9 beyond testosterone, that they really . . . my mom was very worried that taking testosterone as
10 a steroid would really affect my personality and who I was and so she didn't want that.
- 11 AJ: Sure, absolutely. Have you learned to love and appreciate your body?
- 12 AP: I have . . . I definitely have. I mean, that was really a lot of my journey through transition was
13 learning to love and appreciate my body, love and appreciate who I was, to be comfortable. I
14 mean, it was kind of . . . for me, what transition was when it came to social aspects and
15 everything, was that I grew out my hair and I changed my clothing style a bit.
- 16 AJ: And that was transitioning?
- 17 AP: That was transition – with that, I was transitioned in everyone's opinion when I would walk
18 around the streets and stuff and with anyone who didn't know me.
- 19 AJ: Right, thought you were just a beautiful woman.
- 20 AP: I never had those issues when it came to passing, but it really was . . . it was about the decision
21 to not continue hating myself, to not continue feeling like . . . to feeling compelled to have these
22 various surgeries to look normal, to fit into society that I didn't want to have . . . I really didn't
23 want to have them. I didn't want to have things like a double mastectomy. I just so much
24 wanted to feel like I could blend in without seeming like a freak. God, that was all I wanted out
25 of it and my transition was to just stop feeling like a freak. I mean, that is what transition gave
26 me and I finally got to feel normal and comfortable in my skin and comfortable walking around
27 in society. So, it just . . . I never have learned if I have any sort of intersex condition. I've talked
28 to some doctors about it; one of them had some thoughts on what I could have had or could
29 have, but at least they thought it would be very hard to decide because by the time I talked to
30 that doctor who had, I had kind of already started taking hormones and they just felt like it
31 would always mess with the test that they were doing and the other tests that they could do
32 didn't have a 100% accuracy rate.
- 33 AJ: Sure.
- 34 AP: So, it didn't matter.
- 35 AJ: So, this sort of social transition sort of helped you become more comfortable with the body that
36 you were born into.

- 1 AP: Yes, it did. And, the main reason I even started taking hormones was, like I said, I didn't really
2 grow facial hair but as I got into sort of my early 20s, I started finding a few stray hairs and so I
3 didn't know where that was going to lead in another 10 years.
- 4 AJ: Like most women do.
- 5 AP: So, I was like . . . OK. That was really the guiding thing to me that I need this, but from the start it
6 was always more just about being a maintenance dose than about anything or trying to really
7 have any physical effect.
- 8 AJ: Wow, that is fascinating. Have you had any other medical interventions since then?
- 9 AP: Since then, no, I haven't had any other ones besides hormones. I've thought about surgeries,
10 but even then with those, part of my transition was becoming comfortable with my body
11 without feeling the need to have surgery.
- 12 AJ: Right.
- 13 AP: And so, even though I thought about it a lot – because when you're thinking about transition,
14 it's all over online, it's a discussion that has to be had it seems like if you're going to be in an
15 online forum for any length of time or if you go to a support group, people are going to be
16 asking you – even if you don't, people are going to be asking you.
- 17 AJ: Right.
- 18 AP: So, I don't know what could happen in the future and what I could want. As it is, it isn't, but
19 besides that . . . let's see . . . yeah, besides that, I haven't really had anything. I did have a few
20 weird side effects from hormones that no one else I knew had.
- 21 AJ: Like what? If you don't mind talking about it.
- 22 AP: When I started taking estrogen, it had such a rapid effect on my body – for like my body shifting
23 hormonal balance, it actually temporarily affected the growth of my fingernails and toenails and
24 all of my fingernails and toenails fell off and then grew back in.
- 25 AJ: Oh no – really?
- 26 AP: Yeah, really. I may still have some pictures of them – I took pictures because it was the weirdest
27 thing ever – but all of them did.
- 28 AJ: Was it painful?
- 29 AP: Actually, no.
- 30 AJ: It was just like you're shedding this skin and growing some new skin.
- 31 AP: Just the fingernails because what basically happened was the effect from them had them stop
32 growing for just a little bit and when they started growing, it was a new nail that started. So, the
33 new nail grew out and just pushed all the old nails off.
- 34 AJ: Wow.

- 1 AP: And so, basically there just came a point where it went like that and I had nails that were just to
2 here suddenly instead of being up to here. It was very odd.
- 3 AJ: I've talked to quite a few people who have been on hormone therapy and I have not heard this
4 story – including myself.
- 5 AP: After we're done, if you'd like, I can look on my phone. I may still have the pictures saved.
- 6 AJ: Yeah – wow, that's very interesting. Did the hormones . . . did they make you feel more whole
7 emotionally?
- 8 AP: I'm not sure. I've had so many mixed up feelings, I don't know what I would attribute to
9 hormones and what I would attribute to therapy and learning to be more happy with myself and
10 starting to feel more comfortable with myself.
- 11 AJ: So, you did do therapy?
- 12 AP: I did do therapy.
- 13 AJ: Which is a medical intervention, I would say.
- 14 AP: Oh, I guess – yeah. Then that would count. I did do some therapy because it felt needed. And
15 so, that . . . but yeah, I'm not really sure ever what changes I would attribute . . . I definitely felt
16 like I had more energy.
- 17 AJ: So, your body was craving estrogen it kind of seems like.
- 18 AP: That is one thing I'd say.
- 19 AJ: Just from listening to your story, estrogen was important to your body – not even just mentally,
20 but your body was physically saying this is what I really need.
- 21 AP: Yeah.
- 22 AJ: And then once you had more energy . . .
- 23 AP: Yeah, and so that also makes it hard to say for emotional . . . just having more energy makes
24 someone feel better.
- 25 AJ: Yeah, absolutely. So, what . . . we kind of talked about this a little bit, but I guess I'm just going
26 to ask it a little more directly. What has been sort of the most positive aspects that you've
27 experienced since your transition, or since being in transition? Because transition is never really
28 over, is it?
- 29 AP: Yeah, it's never really over. I mean, the most positive aspects would be . . . it really would just
30 be comfort. The comfort of it, the comfort of walking around. I mean, I feel better, I feel more
31 comfortable walking around, I feel more comfortable going about my day, I feel more
32 comfortable in my interactions with people. I mean, it's not to say walking around being
33 identified as a woman there aren't things that are very uncomfortable that happen. But, on a
34 personal level, for who I am, I do feel more comfortable. I don't feel like I'm constantly hiding

- 1 my body with things like binding and I don't feel this expectation to be part of this very toxic
2 masculine society.
- 3 AJ: Talk about toxic masculinity. What does that mean to you?
- 4 AP: To me . . .
- 5 AJ: Because people listening to this may not have a sense of what toxic masculinity is.
- 6 AP: To me, it has to do with the culture that boys are raised in and that men live in, and that's not to
7 say this is all boys or all men, it's definitely not, but there are cultural values when you see . . .
8 we have these values that glorify violence, be that actual violence or be it symbolic violence.
9 We expect for boys and men to be raised to be aggressive and we talk about them being
10 confident, but confident in this aggressive way. When you look at heroes, heroes are always a
11 bit arrogant. I mean, let's look at like . . . when you think about toxic masculinity, think about . . .
12 . . . like with the superhero movies, when you look at someone like Batman, who so many people
13 love. Well, what does Batman do? Batman spends every night fighting, beating people up, he's
14 an incredibly wealthy, incredibly liked by women, and then when he goes out to social events,
15 which is supposed to be his cover, he acts as a playboy billionaire doing whatever he wants with
16 models who are always falling over for him. When he's Batman, if he's not beating someone up,
17 then there are female villains who are falling in love with him and want him. So, that becomes .
18 . . . he's this example of masculinity, he's this example of what it means to be a man that people
19 are shown, that boys are shown, that women are shown, girls are shown, because it does affect
20 everyone. It affects the ways in which we treat our . . . it affects the ways in which we treat
21 each other, it affects the way that women will expect to be treated or how they will react to
22 men. You see other parts of toxic masculinity in things like romantic movies, like rom-coms,
23 where the guy . . . where you'll have a woman be like, "No, stay away," and the guy keeps
24 pursuing over and over. And you're like – that's depressing, it's stalking, it's creepy.
- 25 AJ: Right.
- 26 AP: And you look at James Bond as a hero who, for a long time, was shown as this pinnacle of
27 masculinity. Watch the James Bond movies, James Bond - a number of times, is shown to be a
28 rapist and not even anyone can say anything about it. There are literally, in some of the movies,
29 there's one of the characters from one of the movies in the 1970s who was supposed to be a
30 lesbian, who repeatedly says no to James Bond, and James Bond forces himself on her and rapes
31 her anyway in the movie – except it's played off as . . . after all the repeated no's, she had to
32 give in when he kissed her and therefore she wanted this to happen. This is toxic masculinity –
33 it's the things that we show that subconsciously affect how people view and expect men to act
34 and how men think they're supposed to act.
- 35 AJ: I love how you use pop culture to sort of define this idea of toxic masculinity, which just
36 illustrates how insidious it is in our culture and society. Are you a science fiction, animation . . . ?
- 37 AP: I do really love science fiction and fantasy. I love animation. I love . . . I really love almost all
38 forms of film. The things I don't love . . . I don't love gory horror movies, I don't like them at all.
39 I just . . . I know some people like them, but to me story is so much more important and I get . . .
40 I don't like watching a movie that is more about gore and violence and shock value.

- 1 AJ: Yeah, there's usually no plot line, per se. Alexis, what is your ethnic identity and how does that
2 impact your gender identity?
- 3 AP: My ethnic identity is mixed race. I am half-Korean; my mother was Korean – she was adopted
4 over to the U.S. My father is actually a mixture of Norwegian and Italian and a little bit of Polish,
5 or something like that. I can't remember. He told me before, but it was some mix that
6 amounted to being he was white.
- 7 AJ: Your dad is white.
- 8 AP: That's the thing – that's what it amounted to, he was white. But, growing up in the U.S., I don't
9 have this strong connection to Korean culture. My mom was adopted over here as a baby.
- 10 AJ: And raised in a white household.
- 11 AP: She was raised in southern Kentucky in the 1960s and 1970s as the only Asian girl that she knew
12 of in southern Kentucky. There are parts of being Korean, parts of the various Asian cultures
13 that she took in and that I've taken in and that I've explored and incorporated into my life, but
14 really, my life is the life of someone who appears just barely not white in America, which, in
15 America, there is very much the one-drop rule and so that is enough to have always received, it
16 was very clear, different treatment from other people, and that's why I would make reference
17 to being mixed race – and specifically, Korean, because of the ways in which Asian stereotypes
18 have played into my life, even though I also get confused a lot for being Latinx.
- 19 AJ: Has that had an impact on your gender identity at all?
- 20 AP: I don't think it has had an impact on my gender identity at all? I mean . . .
- 21 AJ: And, maybe a better question is how does your ethnic identity intersect with your gender
22 identity?
- 23 AP: OK, I think with that question, I would definitely say it intersects in the treatment I do receive.
24 Like one thing, prior to transitioning, I would have people ask me the whole thing of being . . .
25 "So, what are you? What race are you?" Since transitioning, I have had a number of instances
26 with men who don't even ask what I am, they will actually just go, "Are you this?" And they'll
27 choose for me.
- 28 AJ: Ahh, interesting.
- 29 AP: In fact, I remember this experience so much. I was standing at the bus stop and these two
30 different white kids came up and one of them . . .
- 31 AJ: Two different white kids?
- 32 AP: White guys.
- 33 AJ: White guys, OK.
- 34 AP: One of them said that I was Filipina and the other thought I was part Brazilian and they got in an
35 argument, and even when I said, "I'm half Korean," they didn't listen to that and they actually
36 continued to argue with each other about what I was – either Filipina or part Brazilian.

- 1 AJ: That's hilarious, actually – but it's also very, very sexist and demeaning.
- 2 AP: Yeah. So, it's that sort of treatment and the way in which that treatment comes about from
3 men that intersects. Also, of course, there's the fact that being this mixed race, part-Asian trans
4 woman . . . Asian women come with this whole exotic stereotype and . . .
- 5 AJ: Yeah, submissive . . .
- 6 AP: Yes, and trans women come with this whole . . . again, submissive, hyper-feminine/very sexual
7 stereotypes and those mix together – or they have been. When I've tried online dating in the
8 past, those have mixed together for some people and you can see that come about. I think,
9 especially for people I've known who are full Asian trans women, this affects them even to a
10 greater degree. But, I would just say that that is the way in which it does intersect that, as with
11 anything in my life, I'm not just a trans woman – I am a trans woman of color, one who is
12 considered ambiguous of color to a number of people. Because that does happen where people
13 are like, "Where are you from?" And, they list anywhere – and depending on where I'm at will
14 affect it. When I'm in California, I'm much more likely to be seen as Latinx; in the Pacific
15 Northwest, whenever I was near one of the Native reservations, I would be questioned about
16 whether or not I myself was an indigenous person here in the U.S. It does vary just like that.
- 17 AJ: Wow.
- 18 AP: Whatever is the more common culture around me is what I tend to end up getting people being
19 like, "Are you part this? Where is this in your family line?"
- 20 AJ: Right. I'm still kind of fascinated by these two guys arguing over whether you were Brazilian or
21 Filipina. That is just hilarious to me – and even after you told them, "No, I am . . ."
- 22 AP: Yeah, they just completely did not listen and they continued this back and forth.
- 23 AJ: Wow. You mentioned online dating. Talk to me about relationships. Are you in a relationship?
24 Do you date men? Do you date women? What's your sexual identity, if you will?
- 25 AP: I tend to identify as either bisexual or queer and those ones tend to be . . . well, I just want to
26 say, with any of the labels I use, including with trans woman, including with pronoun choices
27 and with sexuality, I tend to use these just because the ease of explaining within society. I have
28 long since passed the personal need for a label beyond just being a person. But, I would say that
29 bisexual or queer is what I do tend to use. Online dating, I felt like was a series of failures.
30 There was some hope and I have had some friends who have had really good long-lasting
31 relationships from online dating and so . . . but, for me, it was sort of like a series of failures. I
32 then ended up . . . I've had a number of relationships; my first relationship was before I
33 transitioned when I was 13. I had a relationship recently that was a more serious one and we
34 were living together; we ended up breaking up though. Now, I'm kind of in this . . . I don't know
35 what to call it, with someone. We haven't really discussed that at all. I would say we would
36 both agree it's something more than friendship, just not what it is, where it's going or what's
37 happening.
- 38 AJ: Good. So, you have been able to find love, companionship, relationship post-transition?

- 1 AP: Yeah, I have. That hasn't been something that's been very hard for me. I mean, I definitely . . .
2 I've had situations where I've had to come out and be like, "Hey, I don't know if you know this,
3 I've transitioned and stuff," and that didn't always go well. I mean, never violently, but I also
4 was very careful with that to be over the phone or in public where that wouldn't be a risk. I also
5 do tend to just be very upfront about who I am from the very beginning because I find that just
6 saves times. But, it really hasn't been hard and actually so far, my last few relationships have all
7 been meeting in person . . . I guess there was one that was like meeting over social media
8 through a friend without meaning it to be a date thing that turned into one. But, yeah, it hasn't
9 . . . I will say I also very much choose to date only within the LGBTQ communities – that's my
10 own personal comfort, I don't really feel comfortable dating cis straight men and that's just
11 because I don't want to . . . I want to have the connection, the understanding of what life is like
12 for someone who is part of our communities and also because, I mean, for some people these
13 things are more background to them and in some ways it is for me, but really it's so much of my
14 life. It's my work. For years now I have worked at LGBTQ-related non-profits.
- 15 AJ: Which ones.
- 16 AP: Well, besides Lambda Legal . . .
- 17 AJ: Which is where you work now?
- 18 AP: Yes. I've worked at the Cascade AIDS Project, I've also done a lot of volunteer work with places
19 like LGBTQ community centers, I've done volunteer work with transgender working groups for
20 different advocacy organizations such as Basic Rights Oregon.
- 21 AJ: BRO.
- 22 AP: Yes, and various ones like that that have . . . for a little bit, when it was starting, I helped out a
23 bit with the Trans Lifeline. So, I've done these things and I've built myself up through them and
24 if you look at my resume, it's literally just things . . . if it doesn't have HIV or AIDS in the name,
25 it's going to have something that relates back to being part of the LGBTQ community. So, it is
26 my life, it's where I am, it's everything I do and it's what I want to do.
- 27 AJ: Yeah. What do you think the relationship is between the L, the G, the B and the T?
- 28 AP: Oh, God – maybe I shouldn't have said I worked at Lambda Legal if these are the questions. No,
29 I would just hedge this with this is my own personal opinion. OK? Just so . . .
- 30 AJ: Well, it is – this is not an interview about your workplace, this is an interview about your
31 personal identity.
- 32 AP: Well one, I think we are a lot more connected than people always accept. But, it is so fractured.
33 There are so many people . . . one thing about the ways in which sexual orientation and gender
34 identity and gender expression are different, and they're not the same thing, but there sure is
35 an overlap in communities. There are many people who would identify with L, G, or B whose
36 gender expression is very not part of societal normative expressions for their gender. And,
37 there are many people who are transgender or gender non-conforming, non-binary, who don't
38 identify as being straight; they aren't dating in the straight community. So, we very much are

1 connected in this way and historically we've been connected because of the overlaps with the
2 way people view us and see us. But, at the same time, I feel like there is always this wall
3 between someone who is trans and someone who is something else; someone who is in the L,
4 G, or B and someone who is trans, it's there . . . it's not like this person, I'm a bisexual trans
5 woman but if we were going to label ourselves out, I would be willing to bet odds are I wouldn't
6 be put in the bisexual category, I'd be put in the trans woman category – I'd be put under the T.

7 AJ: Right.

8 AP: When that's not even a question of which is more important to me, it's the way it would be. So,
9 I think there's this split in people being like we're separate when we're not. A lot of the times
10 you'll see people in the LGB who can be very transphobic and who will question why are we
11 helping trans people and this and that and they don't even see that connection in the ways in
12 which people express their identity and the ways in which trans people don't have to be
13 straight. And then even within the trans community, there can be this split where I think it's
14 something . . . I don't know when it started, but I think the two views reinforce each other
15 where the trans community you can have people like, "You're trans first." It's that same
16 thought process, "Hey, we're all trans and then we're something else." And that something else
17 might come up occasionally but if we're going to be separating people even within the trans
18 community, there's those people who would put trans in its own category. This is all in very,
19 very general terms and I'm thinking of the areas where there's issues because there's lots and
20 lots of great people in all the communities who are very aware and understand all the ways we
21 are interconnected, especially in those communities.

22 AJ: Absolutely.

23 AP: But I do think when it comes to the issues, that's the biggest issue. We constantly, both sides,
24 are reinforcing this idea that we're separate. I think to the various marriage equality campaigns
25 where people were ignoring trans people as being part of these campaigns and there are trans
26 people feeling thrown under the bus and it's like, "Well, wait, I'm bisexual – my last relationship
27 was with a woman. We would like to get married." I have friends, same things, who have these
28 relationships that aren't these either heteronormative or straight relationships and even when
29 they are, there's all the issues related to how this is seen overlapped by people who don't
30 understand the concept of gender identity. So, it's there and it was always there, but yet this
31 was chosen and it felt, so often, to be ignored by everyone – or if not everyone, by a lot of
32 people, and for trans people to kind of, at times, be either ignored or kicked out. And trans
33 people to be sitting there and kind of being like, I think, going, "What's the point of this for me?"
34 I do think . . . I know there are some things that are so much more important than the idea of
35 marriage but, at the same time, when I think of the whole marriage campaign, I wasn't thinking
36 of the taxes or anything, I was thinking of all the people who have had partners die that weren't
37 allowed to see them in the hospital. There's a lot you could argue are more important, but
38 when someone you love is on their deathbed and because you aren't allowed this piece of
39 paper, you're not allowed to sit beside them. Why? That was the thing to me, that was what
40 made the whole entire marriage fight so important.

- 1 AJ: Wow, that's beautiful. I have been thinking a lot about the issues around marriage equality and
2 trans needs and I absolutely support marriage equality, but that is one concept that I've never
3 fully thought of, at least in my own thinking. It's a very true and poignant point that you bring
4 up.
- 5 AP: Yeah, and even for all the LGBTQ trans people, for all the straight trans people who are dealing
6 with issues revolving around marriage before marriage equality happened, that's an issue that
7 affects them too – it affects all of us, any of us who love, who have a partner. That was the
8 thing for me – it wasn't taxes, it was just that - all the stories, all the people I have met, all the
9 ones I've heard of not being able to be right there in that room with them – not even being able
10 to know what was happening to them, to have a doctor tell you they have this long to go. I just
11 couldn't imagine being in that place. It would make . . . I don't even have words for how horrific
12 of an experience it would be.
- 13 AJ: Yeah, wow. So, you know, I don't . . . well, let me just ask the question. Have you had any sort
14 of negative experiences because of your trans identity with some of the institutions around
15 education or criminal justice or access to the workplace? Has your trans identity negatively
16 impacted your interactions with the broader society? And, including the medical institutions
17 too.
- 18 AP: I'd say in my relationship life I feel . . . I said I have had issues with people turning away because
19 I'm trans and it's part of why I've learned to be very upfront. I've had issues with people who
20 are specifically, having tried online, for wanting to fetishize me for being trans. In the medical
21 community, I feel like I've had issues with the medical community . . . I don't know, I feel like
22 even with the best of them, I feel like they treat me as a liar if I try and talk about issues. So, it's
23 much easier to just be like, "I need this. I just want a prescription refill," or, "I want this," and
24 not talk about other issues with them. When it comes to the business world, I'm not going to
25 separate between work and volunteer experience just for the sake of talking about places. But,
26 even there, even having done either paid or volunteer work with the various organizations that
27 are so focused around the LGBTQ communities, I've had issues.
- 28 AJ: Really?
- 29 AP: Oh, yeah, I've had issues. I've had times where it was very clear with some places where they
30 wanted me to be in a picture very specifically as being a trans person in the picture, to do things
31 and to be that – to be the trans person for them who is there and not just being there as a
32 person. And, I've had . . . I've also had other issues too, like with people being so well meaning
33 and trying to be such good allies to the trans community, that it feels stereotypical. I mean, I get
34 why they aren't but there are times when I am my own person, I have my own thoughts and I'm
35 glad that you are so willing to look out for trans people who work here, but I kind of want to be
36 like even though I'm glad and understand the things you're doing, they don't always offend me,
37 they don't always cause these issues, you don't actually know me well enough to understand
38 what my sense of humor is with my friends. These people over here are my friends, they get my
39 sense of humor, they get what is appropriate to be said between friends. So, being an ally is
40 great but it would be a lot better instead of trying to just be my hero who swoops in to help me,
41 that you actually sat down with me and got to know me enough to know when I'm in need of

1 help and when I'm not. So, that's something I've had . . . I also have had things to do with the
2 interactions of being trans and race in places. There was a place I volunteered at where it was
3 back when there was the whole thing with RuPaul and various phrases being used and it created
4 this thing of . . . well, what ended up happening was a lot of other people who had volunteered
5 there were part of the . . . who were people of color who were part of the drag community and
6 a lot of the people . . . I was actually the only trans woman who was volunteering there, so
7 everyone else was allies. But, it ended up being this thing where almost all the people of color
8 were on the side being like, "Hey, it's drag, this stuff happens, we're extreme," because they
9 were part of the drag community and this other side who was almost entirely made up of these
10 people who were white allies being like, "No, this is horribly transphobic." And I very much
11 ended up in this situation in the middle between them where I felt like I was being forced to
12 choose between the people who were trans allies and other people of color.

13 AJ: Wow, that is really interesting.

14 AP: And standing in the middle. This actually has to do with the nature of the drag community,
15 especially as it relates to the trans community, which isn't always as thought of and I actually do
16 think at times it's very much not thought of to white trans people who are less likely to have
17 ever been a part of the drag community before transitioning.

18 AJ: You nailed it – you nailed it.

19 AP: If we go back to Stonewall, so many of us were having to go through the drag community.

20 AJ: Absolutely.

21 AP: It was just about safety and it was also about the only place where there was the knowledge of
22 transition. I mean, there were definitely times when I was a teenager, I did some drag and stuff
23 like that. And before transition, there were some times where I did it because it was fun, it was
24 enjoyable, and it was a way to . . .

25 AJ: Be you.

26 AP: Be me, and to get to experiment with expressing myself in ways that didn't feel as permanent as
27 coming out would be. There was a safety, a haven there, for being different, that it wasn't
28 understood isn't there everywhere. It's that thing – especially besides getting into cultures
29 which I don't really want to get into because of how stereotypical it would be, especially when
30 talking about communities of color, the white communities, and the various ones, but I would
31 say there is the intersectional nature of it, which each thing you're building on another. It's one
32 thing to be someone whose in the LGBTQ community, it's another thing to be a person of color,
33 it's another thing to be gender non-conforming, and it's another thing to be seen in drag.

34 AJ: Yeah.

35 AP: And, even removing one of those layers, even that one of being a person of color, you don't
36 really have to . . . that removes one barrier preventing you from being safe in our society. It's
37 not seen besides . . . and then you get into money issues, which is a whole other area – income,
38 life.

- 1 AJ: Oh, boy. Man, Alexis, we're getting towards the end here, but what do you think the agenda
2 should be for the transgender community going forward? Or, is there an agenda? I don't know .
3 . . if you think there is or should be. And, where do you see trans identity in 50 years?
- 4 AP: OK. I think the agenda going forward . . . I think, I'd say for the entirety of our . . . there's the big
5 activist agendas and the movements we need to make there, but I think those are easy enough
6 to look up online and see and lots of people have those thoughts. So, I'd rather focus on what I
7 feel are more personal areas focused on both healing and specifically healing the fractures
8 within the trans community because there are some deep rifts in the trans community among
9 different groups of us and some of these are . . .
- 10 AJ: Rifts? Did you say rifts?
- 11 AP: Rifts, yes. And some of these are based around the time when we transitioned and therefore
12 the beliefs that we built up while transitioning because of what was known at the time and how
13 people thought and talked at the time. And rifts to do with whether people are passing or not
14 passing and rifts to do with the question of stealth. I mean, I think there's a real thing at least,
15 because I have friends who are stealth. There's a real thing from people who are stealth who
16 have a lot of fear about being outed and project that onto trans people who can't pass. But,
17 there's also a very real thing from people who aren't passing, and I'm being very general here,
18 who are projecting a lot of jealousy and anger at society and at the world for not being able to
19 pass on to those people who can pass and be stealth. There's just all these things like that, and I
20 think our communities . . . we need to have . . . we need some way to really start re-connecting
21 and healing these rifts, accepting the various ways that people can be trans, can express their
22 gender identity, and be able to support each other. That is the thing I would love to see the
23 trans community work on. When it comes to trans identity, I think we're going to see more and
24 more . . . I think this is a good thing, a movement towards more and more non-binary identities.
25 I think more and more . . . at least, maybe I'm biased here because it's the way I feel and the
26 way I've grown up where the specifics of identity in the form of labels, that's not really . . . this
27 label, as good as it is for helping to immediately express thoughts, what's really important is that
28 you should be valued and respected as a person, that you should be able to dress, be, act the
29 way that makes you comfortable and makes you comfortable in your own skin.
- 30 AJ: In the moment.
- 31 AP: Yes, in that moment.
- 32 AJ: Like, if I wear a dress today, I shouldn't have to be subjected to wearing a dress for the next 50
33 years.
- 34 AP: Yes. And I do think there's a point where having that label, you need to move beyond holding
35 on to it because while it helps a person, it helps to have this word, it holds you back as you
36 become locked into the stereotypes around that label – at least subconsciously. So, by not
37 holding it – and that's where I think we're going, we're going more towards non-binary and
38 more towards very fluid, where people don't hold a specific label, where we really understand
39 this is a spectrum and even if you say you're a trans woman, well actually, as a spectrum, it's not
40 just a spectrum like a line, it's a big 3-D sphere and you can be anywhere in it and if we're really

1 going to do this, we're going to start needing to be giving you a 3-dimensional graph to plot
2 where I am and where I am at different moments, so there is no one label that actually ever
3 truly contains, and that's where I see the whole trans movement going, is more towards this.
4 And, I actually think it's the same with movements around sexuality as well.

5 AJ: Wow. Alexis, that was brilliant. Thank you so much for your deep analysis, for your generosity
6 of spirit, and for your willingness to share yourself. Thank you.

7 AP: Well, thank you. I actually really enjoyed this opportunity.

8 AJ: Well, until we meet again, my friend.

9 AP: Yes.