

Ejay Jack
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

September 15, 2015



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 Ejay Jack -EJ

3

4

5 AJ: Good morning.

6 EJ: Good morning.

7 AJ: My name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian for the Transgender Oral History Project
8 at the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota. Today is September 15, 2016, and I am
9 today in downtown Minneapolis at the Hennepin County Health Services building and I'm here
10 today to interview Ejay Jack.

11 EJ: Yes.

12 AJ: How you doing, Ejay?

13 EJ: I'm good, I'm good – a little nervous.

14 AJ: Hey, don't be nervous, man. It's the story of your life so I think you know that story better than
15 anybody else, I would suspect. Thank you for being willing to participate in this project today.
16 So, Ejay, if you don't mind, just start by introducing yourself, state your name and how you spell
17 it, what your gender identity is today, and what your gender was assigned at birth, and as well
18 as what pronouns do you use.

19 EJ: OK. So, I'm Ejay Jack and I spell my first name E-j-a-y, last name J-a-c-k.

20 AJ: That's quite a name, I've got to say.

21 EJ: Thank you, thank you – well, it's chosen.

22 AJ: Absolutely.

23 EJ: I identify as a trans guy and my sex assigned at birth was female. Did I miss something?

24 AJ: Your pronouns.

25 EJ: Pronouns – he and him.

26 AJ: He and him. How did you come to your name?

27 EJ: So, when I first came out I was really androgynous and gender queer and I wanted to make sure
28 that I kept with that. I didn't like my first name, which was too feminine, and I didn't want to
29 use my last name as my first name because I would have had two first names – Jack, which was
30 too masculine, so I combined them into initials but then spelled it out so it was gender neutral.

31 AJ: Wow. That's a pretty interesting formula.

32 EJ: Yeah, you know – it took a while and friends helped.

33 AJ: Yeah, Jack Jack might not have really been that great.

- 1 EJ: Or the reverse wasn't going to work either.
- 2 AJ: Oh boy. So Ejay, tell me what is your earliest memory in life. What is the first thing you recall?
3 And it doesn't have to deal with your gender identity, although if it does that's perfectly fine.
- 4 EJ: That's a hard question because I'm not entirely sure, and it's probably later than what I've heard
5 most people . . . so, I think my earliest memory, and it's not super clear, would be being outside
6 and being active and participating with gardening activities or outside on the lawn with my
7 father.
- 8 AJ: Oh wow.
- 9 EJ: Like kind of super attached to him and what he was doing.
- 10 AJ: Really?
- 11 EJ: Whether it was working on cars and mechanics or . . . yeah, just building something. It was
12 usually just hanging out with him around the house.
- 13 AJ: Hanging out with dad.
- 14 EJ: Yup, yup.
- 15 AJ: As a little girl?
- 16 EJ: Yes, as a little girl.
- 17 AJ: Was that . . . how did your folks accept that? Was your dad sort of open to that? Did you have
18 other siblings – brothers and sisters?
- 19 EJ: Yeah, so . . . I would say gender wasn't really discussed or talked about, there was no meta
20 process in my family. I was just me and I just happened to be a tomboy from very, very young.
21 I'm the youngest of three children and I have two siblings – my sister is five years younger than I
22 am and my brother is 10 years older than I am, so there's quite a gap. And we have different
23 fathers, so they have the same mother and father and I have a different father than them. And
24 so, you know, my father was fine and taught me how to work on cars and taught me anything
25 that he was doing. He just let me pal around with him. My mother wanted, I think, me to pal
26 around with her but I wasn't really interested in the traditional gender activities that were
27 happening in my household. My mom was mostly cooking or cleaning . . .
- 28 AJ: Baking.
- 29 EJ: Yeah, yeah. All into shopping and dressing up and I wanted nothing to do with that. So yeah.
- 30 AJ: So, this was your biological dad then not your stepdad.
- 31 EJ: Correct, biological father.
- 32 AJ: OK, which was your sibling's stepdad, I gather.
- 33 EJ: Yes.
- 34 AJ: Wow, where was all of this happening at? Where were you born?

- 1 EJ: This was in rural Pennsylvania, in the northwest corner between Erie and Pittsburgh, in a small
2 town called Oil City, Pennsylvania.
- 3 AJ: That's the name of the town, Oil City?
- 4 EJ: Yup.
- 5 AJ: All right.
- 6 EJ: It's about 12,000 people, or it was.
- 7 AJ: Do you ever go back there?
- 8 EJ: I do, about once a year or once every two years?
- 9 AJ: Your folks are still there?
- 10 EJ: My mother still lives there, my father passed away about five years ago.
- 11 AJ: I'm sorry to hear that. And have you gone back in your current incarnation as Ejay?
- 12 EJ: I have. I don't go out much, mainly because it's super conservative. The ideals that are
13 predominant in that area, I do not agree with. There's a lot of Confederate flags and . . .
- 14 AJ: Wow, in Pennsylvania?
- 15 EJ: Yeah, it's considered Pennsyl-tucky, like that whole thing, they joke about that. But I go home
16 to visit my mother and we don't really go out much because I think it's hard for her to navigate
17 and hard for her to explain why her youngest child is a man.
- 18 AJ: Wow.
- 19 EJ: I took my partner there and I think she summed it up pretty well which was that she was
20 surprised that I made it out alive and that's sometimes how I feel.
- 21 AJ: Wow, really?
- 22 EJ: Yeah.
- 23 AJ: So what was it like growing up there? So you lived there your entire life, right?
- 24 EJ: Yeah, so I lived there until I was 18 and then I went to Penn State University, which is another
25 small town in Pennsylvania. But it was . . . it was tough. It's predominantly a white community,
26 it was predominantly Christian. I graduated high school in 1998, so there wasn't a ton of LGBT
27 activism going on, let alone in a small town.
- 28 AJ: Sure. And you recognized your queer-ness?
- 29 EJ: Yeah, so I came out in high school as a lesbian in 1997, which threw my folks off and that didn't
30 go very well because they were teachers in the school district and in that community it was all
31 about your image and what you put out to the community. So, that didn't go over well. My
32 parents divorced when I was in 3rd grade so I kind of found a safe haven with my father,
33 however my father remarried and had another family so I didn't really have space at his house. I
34 wasn't really fitting in at my mother's house so I was very secluded. I had a couple of really

- 1 close friends that knew that I was a lesbian at the time and trying to discover, sort of figure out,
2 now retrospectively it's nuanced.
- 3 AJ: Yeah, gender identity but that wasn't . . .
- 4 EJ: Gender identity and trans identities weren't really known to me at that point so I just grasped
5 what I could with which was to be a lesbian. Yeah, so I never got . . . I didn't get bullied too
6 much because I was strong and people were scared of me because, I think, I was a silent, don't
7 mess with me kind of person. So that was my self-protective façade that I put out there.
- 8 AJ: I just want to be clear, don't feel like you have to censor your language or yourself in this
9 conversation, feel free to be as expressive as you need to be, but not to say go on a swearing
10 rant or anything like that. But I just want you to feel like you can express yourself freely.
- 11 EJ: OK.
- 12 AJ: So you were kind of a tough guy?
- 13 EJ: Yup, as a self-protective measure.
- 14 AJ: So you were a tomboy all through life, were you an athlete at all?
- 15 EJ: Yeah, so I was a swimmer, which was tough because I was very good at swimming but I didn't
16 like the skimpy women's suit and it's . . .
- 17 AJ: How did you handle that?
- 18 EJ: I think I just repressed the fact and it was more about just focusing on the athleticism and
19 beating my time and beating my competitors in the pool.
- 20 AJ: Wow. Any other sports?
- 21 EJ: I did mountain biking because the trails in Pennsylvania are amazing. So I got into mountain
22 biking and I had visions of doing triathlons, those were relatively new but there weren't any
23 locals so it took me 15 years to do my first one. So I was into . . . and I did rock climbing and
24 then did I did some whitewater rafting, just south of Pittsburgh there is a river. So I was more
25 outdoors . . .
- 26 AJ: Outdoorsy kind of stuff.
- 27 EJ: Yeah. Hiking . . .
- 28 AJ: The sort of things that are stereotyped or classified as "male" activities.
- 29 EJ: Yeah, yup.
- 30 AJ: What were your brothers and sisters like growing up? I kind of get the sense your mom was a
31 little uncomfortable with the lesbian identity and not wanting to go shopping and all of those
32 things. Were your brother and sister sort of in the same category? They sound like they're a
33 little older.
- 34 EJ: My sister was five years older so she was around, we were very different. She was a girly-girl
35 and I was not. And my brother, I don't really remember him much in the house. I remember . . .

- 1 this is another early memory, he was a wrestler and a football player and I was in elementary
2 school when he was in high school and so we would mess around and he would wrestle with me
3 and he would tell me that his coach told him that he needed to practice at home. So he would
4 practice on me, which I loved. I was excited about that and I wanted to be a wrestler, mainly
5 because of him, but I wasn't allowed in high school because that's what boys do. So, that's my
6 main memory of him.
- 7 AJ: OK. So it was kind of cool, he was treating you like his kid sibling basically. So no bullying in the
8 household per se?
- 9 EJ: No, no bullying in the household.
- 10 AJ: That's good. Wow. So when did you realize that you were not the gender you were assigned at
11 birth?
- 12 EJ: I realized that my freshman to sophomore year of college. So, 1999. And that came about by
13 reading Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* and Pat Califia's work and reading those sources and
14 hearing the word gender queer, reading it, and recognizing that I didn't have to identify as a
15 man or a woman, and that fit me. Yeah, it just felt really true to who I was and so consumed all
16 of that and just journals and resources that I don't have any more but yeah . . . just consuming
17 all the literature while at Penn State, and came out and then tried to fit what was my name.
- 18 AJ: So you came out as trans in college?
- 19 EJ: Yes. Well really . . . yeah, androgynous, gender queer, trans. So yeah.
- 20 AJ: What labels have you used to identify yourself and how has that changed over time?
- 21 EJ: Yeah, it's changed quite a bit. So yeah, it started lesbian and then, like I just said, gender queer,
22 androgynous, transgender. But I didn't really latch on to transgender, it was mainly gender
23 queer and androgynous for about 10 years – starting in 1998, 1999, for about 10 years until
24 about 2008 when I started hormones. Mainly because I got older and my body was like, "Whoa,
25 I'm not a young supple person that can do things." I needed to take some medical interventions
26 that felt right for me so I started taking hormones then.
- 27 AJ: And then, have you don't any other medical . . . I mean, to the extent that you feel comfortable.
- 28 EJ: Yeah, so I was on hormones and then I had . . . I've always had a really muscular body, so I had a
29 really small chest so I just had a little bit of liposuction done on my chest. So I don't have the
30 stars that are typical of trans men, so I'm not identifiable when my shirt is off in that way.
- 31 AJ: Wow, that's interesting. It puts you in sort of a different sphere from a lot of trans men who I
32 just know from being in community that being able to go out without a shirt is sort of a prized
33 experience.
- 34 EJ: Yup, totally believe that.
- 35 AJ: And to do that without having sort of the visible scars, because the scars can be pretty intense. I
36 don't know why they have to be that intense for trans men because I don't think they're that
37 intense for women who have mastectomies related to cancer.

- 1 EJ: Right.
- 2 AJ: But the scars that I've seen for trans men seem to be really intense. So to be able to do that,
3 how does that make you feel relative to other trans brothers?
- 4 EJ: It's a double-edged sword and I would say even looking like this is also a double-edged sword,
5 being able to pass, because I can pass for safety, I can pass for work reasons so employment . . .
6 so sort of all these issues that my trans brothers and sisters might have, I haven't necessarily
7 experienced and I recognize that. But at the same time . . . so that's like a lot of the privilege,
8 right? A lot of the white male privilege that I embody or am offered, if you will. On the flip side
9 is that I'm going 10 years as gender queer, sometimes that history is erased because then I'm
10 not seen as part of the community unless I fully out myself. I balance my outing myself with also
11 taking up space as a white male and so there's always this balance that I am considering and
12 thinking about when I'm in queer spaces or women trans and femme spaces. So it's a different
13 navigation. I had to navigate it as an androgynous gender queer person, as getting misgendered
14 and being thought that I was much younger than what I actually was, and now that I look the
15 way I do through my transition, I'm navigating being in my queer community, being included in
16 my queer community, while making sure that I'm not taking up space and acknowledging my
17 privilege that I have. So it's been an interesting journey.
- 18 AJ: Do you think some trans men express any jealousy because you don't have those scars?
- 19 EJ: I haven't experienced the jealousy and it might be because I'm not usually hanging out with
20 trans men with our shirts off.
- 21 AJ: Right, yeah.
- 22 EJ: Or swimming with them or whatever. But, I know it's . . . not a limitation but a difference of
23 experience so . . . yeah. I mean sometimes I wish I had the scars so that I could be seen as trans,
24 absolutely, and sometimes I'm glad that I don't. Sometimes I wish I had a different surgery
25 because it's not exactly what I thought or wanted, so there's also that piece too.
- 26 AJ: Sure. Wow, you bring up a lot of really interesting ideas but just before we keep moving on, I
27 mean . . . hormones, lipo, any other medical interventions that you've had?
- 28 EJ: Yes. I had a full hysterectomy.
- 29 AJ: Wow.
- 30 EJ: I was just talking to a person last night and they wanted to ask me questions and we were just
31 discussing this stuff, so it was quite timely because I haven't had many people ask me recently.
- 32 AJ: Yeah, it's interesting – you don't necessarily talk about your trans identity that much, and
33 particularly the details of it. Right? That's my experience anyway.
- 34 EJ: Yeah, it's really hard for me. Not because I don't want to be out, but . . . I'm not sure really what
35 it is. I guess I come out as a way to advocate for other people. I've always just felt like Ejay,
36 from being a young girl working with my dad in high school, being androgynous and gender
37 queer for 10 years, I've always just sort of said, "I'm just Ejay, whatever my gender is." I made
38 these decisions to transition and look the way that I look now, but gender is so fluid and

- 1 changing so I have a hard time knowing when to sort of say, "Yeah, I'm trans too." When I
2 would do that, I guess I'm always thinking of what does that add to the conversation and
3 particularly if I'm with people in the community, I'm always . . . and there's other trans people
4 around, I think it's important to allow space for other people to talk. I'm always just navigating
5 that and being really mindful and tend to try to just make sure I listen more and come out or . . .
6 I come out probably more in non-trans spaces when I hear gender essentialism or misogynistic
7 or racist comments, that's when I don't necessarily . . . sometimes I come out or sometimes I
8 just speak . . .
- 9 AJ: Check the behavior. Well, that's good to know because that's where it's most effective, I think.
10 But it also, as you noted, I think coming out within trans community gives you a level of
11 credibility to be able to participate in the conversation too.
- 12 EJ: Yeah.
- 13 AJ: Yeah. So this notion of passing, I'm really kind of interested in. And you spoke about it relative
14 to safety and to employment. How has it impacted your relationships?
- 15 EJ: Friendship and romantic relationships?
- 16 AJ: Yeah. Mostly romantic.
- 17 EJ: Well, more so romantic. My sexual orientation is queer so I date women and men and I've
18 dated trans people as well.
- 19 AJ: You lucky guy.
- 20 EJ: I know, right. I love the person, that whole adage. That's always a timing piece as well, so talk
21 about coming out, right? When you're interested in someone and want to date somebody and
22 you want them to know you for who you are and not what you have between your legs. So, I'm
23 in a primary relationship with my female partner and she knew that I was trans pretty early on.
- 24 AJ: Cis gender?
- 25 EJ: Cis gender female, yes. And, she identified as queer, more lesbian. So, I came out early and we
26 talked about it.
- 27 AJ: And so now you guys are a straight couple.
- 28 EJ: Which is problematic. She didn't know if she wanted to date me for a long time, or once we got
29 in a relationship she was having issues because . . . yeah, we look like a straight couple. Talk
30 about erasure again of our lived experience and reality.
- 31 AJ: I just want to be clear, I saw that lovingly.
- 32 EJ: Yeah, yeah – yeah. I was getting there, I was getting there. Yeah, so the same thing as sort of
33 what I said, when we see problematic behavior we have to sort of speak up and say, "You know,
34 that's not cool."
- 35 AJ: Do you guys hang out in queer community mostly? Or straight community? Or you just kind of
36 float back and forth to where . . .

- 1 EJ: We float back and forth. We have a lot of queer friends that we kind of hang out one-on-one.
2 As I got older I'm boring and I'm kind of a stay-in-the house or see me running or biking. So I'm
3 not the activist that I used to be when I was younger, so I'm not in like community in regards to
4 advocacy. I'll do speaking when I think it's needed. So when the legislature might need a
5 convincing face and I can sort of stand up there and then when I come out they kind of have to
6 check themselves because they assume a lot of things. That's what I've slowly . . . evolved, I
7 guess, into.
- 8 AJ: OK.
- 9 EJ: I also date men, so that's also . . . gay men, primarily cis gender gay men. That's a very different
10 ballgame. The apps nowadays, the hook-up apps . . .
- 11 AJ: Tinder, Grindr, those kinds of things?
- 12 EJ: Grindr, SCRUFF – yeah. They now have transgender . . .
- 13 AJ: SCRUFF, did you say?
- 14 EJ: Yes.
- 15 AJ: OK, I don't know this one.
- 16 EJ: Yeah, so you can identify that you are a bear or whatever, and then one is transgender. They
17 don't identify what that means, it's like the umbrella category. So sometimes I put that on my
18 profile, sometimes I don't, but that's a whole other experience – coming out to gay men. Some
19 of them are very respectful, it's becoming more and more respectful, but five or eight years ago
20 it was not. It was not always a safe place to be.
- 21 AJ: Really? Kind of brutal?
- 22 EJ: Yeah, very brutal. Very just . . . you know, granted they're hook-up sites so sometimes people
23 are only looking for sex, but not everybody that's on there. But regardless of what people were
24 looking for, there was . . . and still to this day there are, but very much what's between your
25 legs? why is it that someone who is born a female transitions to be a male and now is a gay
26 male? How does that even work? So all this, but with very rude, very real language.
- 27 AJ: So that brings up, what do you think is the relationship between the L, the G, the B and the T?
- 28 EJ: That's a good question. I definitely haven't figured it out but I'll just say this, from my
29 perspective and from a lot of the trans guys that I'm friends with. I ran a support group for trans
30 guys . . .
- 31 AJ: Oh really? Here in the Twin Cities?
- 32 EJ: No, in Omaha, Nebraska, where I moved from.
- 33 AJ: What was it called?
- 34 EJ: Just a trans masculine support group, and for their partners too.
- 35 AJ: Were there a lot of trans men in Omaha, Nebraska?

- 1 EJ: Yeah, that's where I transitioned – yeah. That's where I found my first doctor and my first
2 community.
- 3 AJ: Is that right?
- 4 EJ: Yeah, there's quite a few.
- 5 AJ: So is it a pretty welcoming community for trans identities?
- 6 EJ: It is. It's tighter knit, I would say, than the Twin Cities, because there's fewer individuals.
- 7 AJ: Right, and the city is a little smaller too.
- 8 EJ: Yeah, definitely smaller. But, yeah, there is a support group and people were great and
9 supportive in sharing information and ideas, and a lot of social events as well.
- 10 AJ: Wow, separate from the broader LGBT community?
- 11 EJ: Yeah.
- 12 AJ: So, do you think that the T sort of belongs with the other letters of the infamous acronym?
- 13 EJ: Yeah, I guess so. I haven't really thought about that. I think sexuality and gender are closely
14 linked and I think they're both fluid.
- 15 AJ: Yes.
- 16 EJ: And I think as a minority group, whether we would want to split it up or not, and I'm not
17 advocating for . . . the LGBTQI get lumped together and some of the letters are more silent than
18 the others depending on what's the most interesting topic of the day. But I think there's . . . for
19 advocacy reasons and getting laws of protections, it's important to be together.
- 20 AJ: Right.
- 21 EJ: But there is always nuances and differences and . . .
- 22 AJ: And the reality is that, as evidenced by your own personal life, that trans-identified people can
23 be lesbian, bisexual, gay, heterosexual.
- 24 EJ: And that's what I was going to say is that my own experience is such that when I own my gender
25 queer, and really transitioned into identifying more as transgender, for me, that kind of
26 coincided with really a few years before starting testosterone, is that when I started
27 testosterone in my medical transition, that allowed me to own my feminine identity a little bit
28 more, and my feminine side of my gender, and it also allowed me to feel more comfortable with
29 men in a sexual relationship or romantic. So one led to the other, where I think I had been
30 attracted . . . I had boyfriends in high school before I came out as lesbian and I was trying to
31 figure out the gender stuff, but I couldn't like men and be a lesbian so I had to shut that part of
32 me off and it wasn't until I could really actualize who I was in my gender, that I could say, "No,
33 those attractions still exist, it's just really nuanced."
- 34 AJ: And they're valid.
- 35 EJ: Right, absolutely.

- 1 AJ: What have been some of the more challenging things that you have experienced since you came
2 out as transgender?
- 3 EJ: So, I live . . . I came out as gender queer in college and was in college for four years, and then I
4 was in the Peace Corps in The Gambia, West Africa, and so for two years my gender didn't really
5 matter or it was also going back into the closet, if you will, because . . . I don't want to say it's a
6 luxury, because that's not true, but when you're in the face of extreme poverty and just dealing
7 with meeting your basic needs . . .
- 8 AJ: Gender becomes less of a priority, I would suspect.
- 9 EJ: And I was also, clearly I'm white, living in rural Gambia and with no running water, no electricity,
10 in a small village of maybe 100, 150 people, where at least half of them, or one-third of them,
11 were children. I was just different to begin with, right? I glowed in the dark and if I walked
12 around at night I scared people, for real.
- 13 AJ: Oh my goodness, like a ghost, huh?
- 14 EJ: Yeah, yeah. So that gave me some perspective in lots of different ways, but I wasn't really doing
15 any kind of activism, I wasn't really exploring any medical transition at that time. I would still
16 read books that I had brought with me but I was more just exploring the world and
17 understanding who I was in the world very generally. So that was . . . and then people would
18 ask me in Mandinka, which was the language that I learned, if I was a man or a woman and I
19 would say both, and they just thought that I didn't know the language. So I did all these small
20 things to feel true to myself, but at the same time it didn't really matter in the larger context. I
21 took a gender neutral name, Sahjo, which is the name that comes after when somebody has
22 twins – so either a man or a woman could be named Sahjo.
- 23 AJ: Oh really, how do you spell Sahjo?
- 24 EJ: S-a-h-j-o. It's a non-written language so it's also . . . like you might see it spelled different ways.
- 25 AJ: Isn't Kunta Kinte from Gambia, West Africa, the Mandinka tribe? Yeah.
- 26 EJ: I don't know. Yeah, well that's . . .
- 27 AJ: Do you know the story of *Roots*. Have you ever watched that documentary or read the book?
- 28 EJ: I watched it when it first came out, but I haven't . . .
- 29 AJ: You were pretty young.
- 30 EJ: Yes.
- 31 AJ: Yes, that is where Kunte Kinta originated from.
- 32 EJ: Huh, well now I'll have to read it, the book, because I haven't read the book.
- 33 AJ: Yeah, it's a great book. West Africa, right?
- 34 EJ: Yeah.

- 1 AJ: Wow, that's a pretty interesting experience. So that was a challenge having to sort of hide your
2 identity. Any other challenges like with institutions or educational, medical, health care?
- 3 EJ: You know, there's always the fear of seeing a new practitioner or new medical provider and
4 having to . . . you know, if they see something in my chart, testosterone, they start asking me
5 and it's not really pertinent for that specific visit.
- 6 AJ: Right, you have strep throat and they want to know why you're taking testosterone.
- 7 EJ: Right. But I would say I've been really lucky in regards to employment. I transitioned, my
8 medical transition, was when I was in grad school so I had the protection of higher education
9 and being a student.
- 10 AJ: You went to grad school at Penn State as well?
- 11 EJ: No, I went to grad school in Omaha, at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.
- 12 AJ: OK. What did you study?
- 13 EJ: I studied social work and public administration. So a master's social worker.
- 14 AJ: And you have a pretty great job now.
- 15 EJ: Yes, I do.
- 16 AJ: What's your title?
- 17 EJ: So I'm Community Health . . . let me see here, Community Health Programs Supervisor. What
18 that basically means, it's a governmental title. I supervise the HIV prevention and outreach
19 teams at the Red Door, the Hennepin County Public Health Clinic.
- 20 AJ: OK, wow.
- 21 EJ: Yeah.
- 22 AJ: Is HIV still a problem for trans-identified people?
- 23 EJ: Absolutely. And there's no national validated statistics about that but all the research that we
24 see is that, specifically, transgender women of color have higher rates, potentially higher rates
25 than the MSM population. So hopefully in the next couple of years the CDC will get us national
26 data on that. But, it's problematic and it just . . . the HIV incidence rates in transgender women
27 of color just got recognized by our first national HIV/AIDS strategy 2.0, I would say. So finally
28 calling attention to it so, of course, if there's no attention then there's no data then there's no
29 money to really do the work. So we're just starting to see that and we have a small grant here
30 that I applied for and we got so we're starting . . .
- 31 AJ: Specifically related to transgender women of color?
- 32 EJ: Yeah, that's our main target. We'll sort of see anybody, because there's also trans men who
33 have sex with men . . .
- 34 AJ: Absolutely.

- 1 EJ: But the main, what's really been talked about, is transgender women of color. Soon I think trans
2 men who have sex with men is going to be getting more attention.
- 3 AJ: But theoretically, there are services for men who have sex with men and since trans men are
4 men, they have a higher likelihood of getting services than trans women who don't necessarily
5 get classified as women.
- 6 EJ: Right, CDC still classifies them as . . .
- 7 AJ: Men who have sex with men. It's so frustrating because I was part of the historic first
8 transgender consultation with the CDC about HIV and AIDS, which I think was in . . . like 1995.
- 9 EJ: I think I have that journal that came out of that – yeah, where you're recognized.
- 10 AJ: It was 16 years ago and still no pertinent movement to speak of even though . . . yeah. Boy, well
11 what have been some of the joys of your life since you've come out as transgender? Other than
12 this huge privilege of being a white male.
- 13 EJ: It's just being comfortable in my skin and finding my voice. I struggled with suicide as a high
14 school student, so not having those feelings anymore. Which really gets me, because I hear
15 about young people committing suicide and the rates of suicide in the trans population, it's very
16 real and so my transition has really . . . it's amazing how it just washes that away to be able to
17 just be real and have your voice and feel confident and comfortable. So those are the joys . . .
18 and, you know, I really value being part of this community. It's beautiful, amazing people doing
19 all sorts of work and the shit that we have to all go through and the resilience of the community
20 is just . . . I feel privileged to be part of it.
- 21 AJ: Sure, yeah.
- 22 EJ: That's my joy.
- 23 AJ: Oh, wow. When is the first time you ever met a transgender or gender-queer person?
- 24 EJ: Yeah, it was during a panel at Penn State that I almost didn't go to because I was scared. So
25 yeah, the LGBT Center, at the time, had done a panel with transgender individuals. This was
26 1999, I believe. And, of course, I sat in the back and didn't ask any questions.
- 27 AJ: Did you introduce yourself to the person afterwards or anything like that?
- 28 EJ: No. I'm kind of a quiet person.
- 29 AJ: Just naturally, but then I imagine, I know, I became even more withdrawn in situations like that
30 where there may have been a trans person that I identified with but I didn't want to be
31 identified as such and so consequently . . .
- 32 EJ: Yeah.
- 33 AJ: Who was that person, do you remember?
- 34 EJ: I don't remember – it was a panel of a few people. It was like three or four transgender people,
35 both male to female and female to man. There weren't really any gender-queer folks and that's

- 1 what I was identifying with at the time so it allowed me to know that transition is possible. But I
2 don't know who the individuals are, I can still contact . . . the administrators are still there.
- 3 AJ: It's not that big of a deal, it's just . . .
- 4 EJ: Yeah, that wasn't the main point, I was just kind of like . . . you know, you read all this stuff
5 online or in the books and then you're faced with it and it's kind of like . . . it can be a little bit
6 mythical when you just read it and you aren't faced with it, so when I went to see it and was just
7 like, "Wow, OK."
- 8 AJ: This is real, this can happen.
- 9 EJ: This is real. Yeah.
- 10 AJ: Do you remember the first trans person you actually met and were able to sort of have a
11 conversation with? Or the first person who had an impact on you?
- 12 EJ: Clearly it's not right there.
- 13 AJ: Not jumping out. You didn't have a trans father who sort of shepherded you through the maze
14 of hormones and doctors and all of that kind of stuff.
- 15 EJ: No, I didn't. It wasn't until I was at Penn State and I was in The Gambia and then went back to
16 Penn State for two years and then I was in Omaha, and that's when I found the support group.
17 The guys in that group really helped. I would ask them questions every once in a while, but it
18 wasn't until my best friend in grad school, Tim, who is a lovely gay man among many other
19 identities, who was my model of masculinity and who I could ask guy stuff about. So it wasn't . .
20 .
- 21 AJ: So it wasn't a trans guy?
- 22 EJ: No.
- 23 AJ: That's pretty incredible. Thinking back over your decision to really express your true gender
24 identity, is there anything you would change or . . .?
- 25 EJ: You know, probably. Yes. I go back and forth on if I would have changed how I started
26 hormones and how much I took. I have had several friends, since I started, negotiate with their
27 doctor to take lower levels of testosterone because what I hear them saying, it resonated with
28 me about not really wanting to be . . . not feeling quite like a man or a woman, kind of feeling
29 more in-between, so they took enough hormones to stop their period and to deepen their voice
30 and to have some facial hair but that wasn't really what they . . . sort of to become
31 androgynous.
- 32 AJ: A little more balanced.
- 33 EJ: Yeah. And I thought well I wonder if I wouldn't have wanted to start that way and whether or
34 not I would have continued to more of a full dose, if you will. I don't know. So I've thought
35 about that but ultimately I am happy with where I'm at. I may not have had a full hysterectomy;
36 I may have kept my ovaries so that I could stop hormones at a certain point in my life because I
37 will always have to take them.

- 1 AJ: Right, because your body doesn't produce and you can't live without some hormones, right?
- 2 EJ: Hormones, yeah. So if there are different options there, and I haven't fully researched the
3 existing medical literature of what can happen now about just taking the uterus and keeping
4 your ovaries and doing different things like that.
- 5 AJ: So there's a lot of research to still be done around trans bodies and trans identities and such.
- 6 EJ: Yeah.
- 7 AJ: How did you come out to your family and friends?
- 8 EJ: So, I was identified as lesbian for a long period of time. I started hormones before I told my
9 mother that I was transitioning. I didn't go home for a long period of time and I was on
10 hormones for about six to eight months and I was going home for my brother's wedding. I had a
11 film called *Call Me Kade*, which is about a young trans guy who gets on hormone blockers and
12 then transitions and it's about his family. So I went home, my mother and my sister were at my
13 mother's house and myself, and I let them know that I wanted them to watch a film and I
14 wanted to discuss a film. So I popped it in. That's all I said.
- 15 AJ: Really?
- 16 EJ: So we watched it and afterwards my mother is sitting still and staring at the TV screen. My
17 sister was like, "So . . ." And I had changed my name at this point, and she was like, "So why did
18 you show us this film, Ejay?" Kind of like prodding me – and she was super supportive. I said,
19 "Well, the character Kade, he was transitioning and that's actually what I'm in the process of
20 doing." I told them that I'd been on hormones for about six months and would be transitioning.
21 I had changed my name several years before this and that was part of this process. So, my sister
22 was supportive, my mother went into, "How does this happen?" Biologically, nature, why does
23 this occur?
- 24 AJ: Looking for the scientific rationale.
- 25 EJ: And honestly I think it was more her saying, "Did I do something wrong? What did I do? How
26 did I play a part in this?" So I referred to PFLAG and answered some of her questions as best as I
27 could.
- 28 AJ: Yeah, unfortunately parents always think it's something they did or didn't do and typically it's
29 not.
- 30 EJ: Right.
- 31 AJ: That has nothing to do with it whatsoever, other than, I think, supportive parents can make
32 transitioning easier.
- 33 EJ: Easier, yeah. She and I have had several conversations over the years and she still struggles with
34 it. However, I think she's honestly come to a point where she feels more comfortable with me
35 being a man and dating a woman than me being a lesbian. It fits her schema of the world, it fits
36 her man and woman, go through life, you get married, you have babies, you do all these things.
37 And so she can live that fantasy. I don't tell her that I date men as well.

- 1 AJ: She doesn't need to know all of that.
- 2 EJ: Yeah.
- 3 AJ: So this relationship, this sounds pretty serious.
- 4 EJ: It is, yeah.
- 5 AJ: How long have you guys been together?
- 6 EJ: We've been together . . . it will be three years in October and we're getting married next year, in
7 May.
- 8 AJ: You're getting married?
- 9 EJ: Yeah, so it's serious.
- 10 AJ: Wow.
- 11 EJ: We're having what I call the deconstructive gay marriage.
- 12 AJ: I know, because the passage of marriage equality means nothing in this situation, right?
- 13 EJ: Right, right.
- 14 AJ: You guys could just get married anyway.
- 15 EJ: Yup.
- 16 AJ: But how does marriage equality impact your decision to be married and how do you think the
17 issue of marriage equality and sort of the fight and struggle for marriage equality has impacted
18 the transgender community? So that's two questions.
- 19 EJ: OK. So, marriage equality impacted me and my decision to get married now because it has
20 passed. I would not have done this, even though I technically could get married earlier – before
21 it passed, because it just . . . the . . . yeah, I don't even know how to launch into the whole thing.
22 But if my community doesn't have access to something, and somehow because I transition now I
23 have access to it – that doesn't feel right to me. It's my own ethical thoughts and actions. So
24 now that it has passed, it's like, "Oh well, this is a possibility." And that impacted me
25 psychologically, I think – that the tide is turning. I remember when Hawaii tried to pass it in the
26 1990s and it didn't go anywhere.
- 27 AJ: Sure.
- 28 EJ: And how marriage equality has impacted the trans community? You know, I would say it
29 seemed that all the resources, all the LGBT resources – the large organizations that do LGBT
30 rights, human rights campaign . . .
- 31 AJ: HRC.
- 32 EJ: Yup, task force, Democrats . . . all these sort of groups put resources towards marriage equality
33 and marriage is a privilege and is not, I think, the most pressing issue for trans people. And so,
34 marriage equality is great but those resources need to be, I think, routed and re-routed and

- 1 should have been parceled out in my opinion to things that really matter, which I spoke about –
2 the rates of suicide in the trans community, and the LGBT community quite frankly too.
- 3 AJ: Broadly.
- 4 EJ: Homelessness, HIV, health care – just general access to health care. So, I think it took away
5 from those issues for a long time and I think that that has a major impact. There hasn't been a
6 role call to those issues like there has been . . . that's equivalent to what marriage equality was.
- 7 AJ: Right, not even close.
- 8 EJ: So where is that? Where is the will of our larger community's resources to be put towards those
9 issues?
- 10 AJ: Wow. Where do you think the agenda for the transgender community should be going
11 forward? And I guess, put that in the context of Caitlyn Jenner, Laverne Cox, Janet Mock – so all
12 of this sort of trans visibility as well as a number of the issues that you just so clearly articulated
13 around homelessness and suicide rates and unemployment rates, high rates of incidents of HIV
14 and AIDS? What should the agenda for transgender people be according to Ejay Jack?
- 15 EJ: Well, it's nice to have really visible trans women out there. I will say that I really appreciate
16 Janet Mock's, I've seen her speak a couple of times, her attention to knowing our own history
17 because it's really important because trans people really started the LGBT movement.
- 18 AJ: Sure, absolutely.
- 19 EJ: I think that's a great thing that she's doing on educating not just the trans community or the LGB
20 community, but the larger community. But the agenda, according to me, I think . . . I think it
21 needs to be . . . I don't know that I can . . . could I rank attention to suicide or homelessness or
22 unemployment or HIV/AIDS ahead of any one of those? I don't think I can because they're all
23 interconnected. So I think the agenda needs to be more about those issues, very actionable and
24 resource driven towards those issues, but the overall is that people who are not trans need to
25 be educated and need to figure it out and figure out their own biases and get over it – and stop
26 regulating where we can go to the bathroom - you know, who we are according to them. And I
27 don't know how . . . that just happens by coming out and doing these kinds of projects and other
28 things. If you're talking about specific policy, I think the homelessness, the suicide rates, the
29 access to health care are all intertwined. So I can't think of any one that I would . . .
- 30 AJ: Lift above the others.
- 31 EJ: Yeah.
- 32 AJ: Yeah . . . no, I certainly hear you. So, you're the supervisor for a program here at the Red Door
33 at Hennepin County Community Outreach or . . . Community Health, right?
- 34 EJ: Yeah, Community Health.
- 35 AJ: I know that now you guys have got some specific programming targeted towards transgender
36 people and even more specifically, transgender women of color. Can you tell us a little bit about
37 that project?

- 1 EJ: Yeah, it just started so we're still formulating it. We hired a woman who is well connected who
2 is trans identified and our hope, and I follow her lead really, but our hope is to make sure that
3 (1) our clinic is trans competent because we can't provide any services until we get our house in
4 order, so making sure that we're doing what we need to do here and make sure providers are
5 educated, front-line staff are educated, forms are correct – which they're not right now, they're
6 close. And then to be a safe place for the trans community to come and get sexual health
7 services – so HIV, STI testing, pre-exposure prophylaxis to prevent HIV if someone has been
8 exposed – before they've been exposed, post-exposure prophylaxis if they've already been
9 exposed.
- 10 AJ: Is that PrEP?
- 11 EJ: Yeah, PrEP and PEP. Doing a very specific and targeted outreach to ensure that we are allowing
12 trans-identified people to get on PrEP regardless of risk, just because of the high rates in the
13 social and sexual networks. And, then also doing something like a support group but not quite a
14 support group . . . more a safe place to be able to talk about, really, the intersection of gender
15 identity and sexual orientation, or sexual behavior, and hopefully in a more uplifting way – fun,
16 silly.
- 17 AJ: Kiki, as the girls say.
- 18 EJ: Yeah, yeah. Because to go and just sort of complain . . . you can sometimes go into a support
19 group feeling good and then you come out feeling worse.
- 20 AJ: Depressed, yeah.
- 21 EJ: Yeah, so we're going to try and get away from that model. And then maybe if the community
22 wants or needs it, have trans-specific clinic maybe quarterly or whatever, where it would just be
23 for trans people. There's a double-edged sword with that, I'm not sure if the community wants
24 that. So, we have to sort of take the pulse.
- 25 AJ: So, when you say a trans-specific clinic, do you mean a day when just transgender people can
26 come and get services? Or transgender-specific services are provided?
- 27 EJ: The former. So, where trans people it's sort of their safe space and time to not run into . . .
- 28 AJ: The broader population.
- 29 EJ: The broader population, yeah. Our clinic doesn't do hormones. We do syringe exchange but
30 primarily targeted toward injection drug users, not for hormones – which we might be able to
31 see what we can do with that.
- 32 AJ: Yes, it seems like that would be a part of . . . from just my own sort of layman's understanding.
33 A needle going into your arm is a needle going into your arm whether it's hormones or heroin.
34 And I know that on the streets people do use dirty needles to inject hormones, unfortunately.
- 35 EJ: Yeah, right. Getting the right size and all of that, and also, let's be honest, that's a great service
36 and it's not that different from what we currently exist, so it's just having the will to do it
37 internally and my getting higher ups to also approve. So . . .

- 1 AJ: I think that's why it's important to have trans people in these positions who really understand
2 the issues and can have the voice and the understanding to speak to those issues.
- 3 EJ: Yeah, I would totally agree.
- 4 AJ: Yeah. So, is this project underway or is it starting? When does it start?
- 5 EJ: I think our main kickoff is going to be November 17, 2016.
- 6 AJ: That's right around Transgender Day of Remembrance . . . the 18th, I think.
- 7 EJ: Yeah, exactly. So that's strategic.
- 8 AJ: OK.
- 9 EJ: And just Transgender Awareness Week that week, so I'm trying to partner with some other
10 organizations to do some other things – not just look at the remembrance part which is
11 acknowledging the violence that's done to trans people but let's flip that and be like, "We're
12 strong and we're positive and we're going to also celebrate our lives and everything that we
13 do." In addition to remembering.
- 14 AJ: Yeah, I'm on that team - #resilience.
- 15 EJ: Yeah, yeah – absolutely.
- 16 AJ: Well that's cool, it sounds like a really wonderful service that you guys are building and
17 intending to provide.
- 18 EJ: Trying. There's restraints because we're governmental agencies so we can't do all the fun and
19 exciting things that I would want to do necessarily, or used to be able to do when I worked at
20 Planned Parenthood – and that's where the support group that I used to run was part of. It's a
21 balancing act.
- 22 AJ: Now you mentioned Planned Parenthood and I have always, just personally, been a strong
23 advocate for reproductive rights because I know that a lot of trans people get their health care
24 needs met through Planned Parenthood. Can you speak to that? I say it, as sort of an outsider,
25 but as a person who worked there and identifies as trans, how do you think Planned Parenthood
26 impacts trans lives and this sort of . . . and just speak about this sort of right-wing attack on
27 Planned Parenthood. I don't want to sound accusatory but that's the only way I can really
28 describe it because they're literally trying to de-fund Planned Parenthood.
- 29 EJ: Yeah, so the context of Planned Parenthood is that they're all different affiliates across the
30 nation. So when I was working at Planned Parenthood I was working in Planned Parenthood of
31 Nebraska and Iowa. So, a trans guy that came before me that worked at Planned Parenthood
32 got our affiliate to start doing hormones at our Planned Parenthood, which was amazing. And
33 so that's why we also had a support group, was to help navigate guys through our Planned
34 Parenthood system, because it's not always the easiest – call centers and different things like
35 that. But, our affiliate was super supportive and the only way we could have done the hormone
36 treatment there, and therapies there, was with support of the national Planned Parenthood,
37 and national Planned Parenthood is supportive of trans health care and hormones and allowing
38 their affiliates to do hormones. I would say trans people typically . . . yeah, if we don't have

- 1 insurance, we don't have access, so we have to go to the clinics that provide services on a sliding
2 fee or what have you . . .
- 3 AJ: Free.
- 4 EJ: Free, so things like the Red Door and Planned Parenthood are where we might only be able to
5 get any kind of health care. So I think they're in the forefront of that fight for health care access
6 for trans folks. And it's unfortunate the attacks that happen at Planned Parenthood – the
7 coordinated attacks and just the stigma against saying you work for Planned Parenthood. There
8 would be people that worked for Planned Parenthood that don't tell their families that they
9 work for Planned Parenthood because of the stigma. It's unfortunate because it's not just trans
10 people that don't have access to health care or health insurance to get care.
- 11 AJ: It's women, which is half the population.
- 12 EJ: And men, right? It's a lot of folks and that's their first stop and to de-fund that when we can, at
13 one time, expand health insurance, sort of – state-by-state, and then de-fund Planned
14 Parenthood, it just doesn't make sense. It's clearly an attack on anybody's body that isn't a cis
15 gendered guy, right? And let's be honest, it's primarily an attack by white cis gendered men and
16 I think that's . . . to say that that is problematic is not grand enough.
- 17 AJ: Yeah. Do you think the trans community has enough awareness about this issue and is vocal
18 enough about advocating for Planned Parenthood, in your opinion?
- 19 EJ: In my opinion, no – I don't think so. I think there could be more mobilization around that. And
20 it's . . . in our community here it depends, right. So our Planned Parenthood doesn't do
21 hormone services for trans folks but we have similar clinics like Family Tree who expanded that
22 service and does amazing work.
- 23 AJ: But hormones aren't the only thing that trans people need.
- 24 EJ: No, but it's usually going to get them in the door faster, right? Because . . . one, I think that
25 signals that we're competent, we can have the services – we have the political will or the
26 resources. We have the will, in some way or another, to have these services, and then maybe I'll
27 let you look at my business because I've been here doing whatever.
- 28 AJ: Yeah.
- 29 EJ: Because that's scary as a trans person.
- 30 AJ: Yeah, it is. Wow. Well, this has been a great conversation, Ejay. I just want to really just thank
31 you for your openness and honesty. Is there anything that I didn't have the presence of mind to
32 ask that you think folks should know?
- 33 EJ: The only thing, and I touched on it, I think, throughout the interview, is I think what's most
34 interesting . . . I appreciate you interviewing me and being able to participate and I think it's
35 really exciting to think about this body of work in 50 years and 100 years and looking back at it.
36 What I also think about is, and what I've touched upon, I think, a few times here and there, is
37 the intersection of gender and race and I think that right now in our time, is that there is a lot of
38 attention about trans individuals and about Black Lives Matter and sort of the intersection of

1 these movements and thinking about what's that going to look like and how are we working
2 together to look at the -isms and the injustices that occur on trans bodies and Black bodies, POC
3 bodies, and it will be interesting to sort of see these interviews in 50 or 100 years and what's
4 changed? Hopefully a lot.

5 AJ: Yeah, what do you think will have changed?

6 EJ: Well, I have hopes that minorities now will not be a minority, that there is more of a level
7 playing field and more of an understanding of intersectionality and that we all have something
8 to provide and we all are unique and there doesn't need to be this huge gap of power and
9 resources and it's not one group against another, but that it's more communal, if you will. And
10 we have a more communal society in however that might look or play out. That's my hope, and
11 there's just a greater understanding of your uniqueness doesn't have to invoke fear in me if I
12 could just be curious, right?

13 AJ: Right.

14 EJ: I don't know.

15 AJ: Wow. Thank you, Ejay. And congratulations on your upcoming marriage.

16 EJ: Thank you.

17 AJ: All right. Bye.

18 EJ: Bye.