

Alex Iantaffi  
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins  
Interviewer

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

October 6, 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 Alex Iantaffi -AI

3

4

5 AJ: So, hello. My name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian with the Transgender Oral  
6 History Project at the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota. Today is October 6,  
7 2015, and I'm here in Minneapolis with Dr. Alex Iantaffi. Am I pronouncing your name correctly?

8 AI: You're pronouncing it perfect.

9 AJ: Wonderful. So Alex, I'm just going to ask you if you can just state your name and maybe spell it  
10 for our transcriber, and tell me what your preferred pronouns are, how you identify today and  
11 what was your gender assigned at birth.

12 AI: My name is Alex Iantaffi. So Alex is just A-I-e-x and then Iantaffi, it's I-a-n-t for table-a-f for  
13 Freddie, f-i. And my pronouns are he/him or they/them. And my sex assigned at birth was  
14 female and I identify as a non-binary gender-queer trans masculine person.

15 AJ: Wow, that's an identity that I have not heard yet to date. And it's really interesting, you're the  
16 21<sup>st</sup> person that I've interviewed and I probably have 21 different identities so far – maybe more  
17 like 18. But yeah, this process is just opening my eyes to so many new ideas and new ways of  
18 thinking about gender. Alex, I'm going to ask you to . . . we're just going to go way back and just  
19 say tell me a little bit about your earliest memory. It doesn't have to be around gender, but the  
20 earliest thing you remember.

21 AI: That's really hard. I feel like a lot of my memories from childhood are kind of spotty and the  
22 older I get the spottier they get.

23 AJ: OK.

24 AI: I guess I have some really great happy memories of hanging out with my grandmother. My  
25 grandmother did most of . . . pretty much all of the child care when I was growing up. This is my  
26 maternal grandmother, so my mom's mom. I spent a lot of time with her and so I have a lot of  
27 memories of just being with her, watching TV – she watched a lot of Telenovelas, that was very  
28 popular in Italy. So South American Telenovelas dubbed in Italian.

29 AJ: Oh wow.

30 AI: It was fascinating. And she was a seamstress so she spent a lot of time sewing and she sewed all  
31 of our . . . most of our nice clothes growing up. So we would have jeans and t-shirts, it was the  
32 1970s, but then anything that was like formal wear for an occasion or for a recital, because I was  
33 studying music, my grandma would make it.

34 AJ: So she was very talented.

35 AI: Yeah, that's how she supported my mom and my uncle when they were growing up.

36 AJ: Oh wow.

- 1 AI: She was really great and she didn't want to pass it on because she wanted my mom to not have  
2 to rely on a manual trade. So she made sure my mom went to high school, because my  
3 grandma stopped her education when she was in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade elementary school. That's how far  
4 she went with formal education. But she taught me because I was the grandchild, so I  
5 remember sewing Barbie clothes and trying to learn how to sew with her. So yeah, those are  
6 some of my early memories.
- 7 AJ: Wow, so you grew up in Italy?
- 8 AI: Yes.
- 9 AJ: Which part?
- 10 AI: Mostly I was brought up in Rome, which is where we lived. All of the Christmas holidays, Easter  
11 holidays, all our summers, were spent in Sicily with my great aunts and my grandma, mostly  
12 because my mom and dad usually either got second jobs while they had the summer off from  
13 school or were getting ready for school because they were both teachers. So, we spent a lot of  
14 time with the great aunts and my grandmother in Sicily, probably about four months out of the  
15 year if we add up like the summer and the Christmas holidays and everything – four months we  
16 would be in Sicily.
- 17 AJ: So you were in sort of the most famous parts of Italy.
- 18 AI: That's right – Rome and Sicily.
- 19 AJ: Rome and Sicily. I mean there's Florence and all of those kinds of places but people really think  
20 about Rome.
- 21 AI: Yes.
- 22 AJ: And the Vatican and Sicily as sort of main points of interest in Italy. What was it like growing up  
23 in Rome?
- 24 AI: It was good, it was . . . you know, when you're little you don't know that you're in one of the  
25 most prominent places in the world, you just live your life, right?
- 26 AJ: It's just home.
- 27 AI: So when I was really little, at first we lived with my paternal grandmother and aunt – when I was  
28 a baby. So my mom and dad were kind of being put up by my paternal grandmother and my  
29 aunt. And then for a short period of time we had our own apartment and then we moved in  
30 with my grandmother. So it was my maternal grandmother, my parents, and myself and my  
31 sister didn't come along until I was 10. So it was crowded but a lot of working class families  
32 were crowded and were used to being in a one- or two-bedroom apartment. I was within  
33 walking distance of my school, which I really loved – my elementary school. And I loved going to  
34 church – church was my refuge because it was quiet. By the time I was seven or eight, because  
35 there was only one road crossing to go there, I was allowed to go by myself. So if I wanted to  
36 escape the house I could do that. And then the nuns were nearby and I did my first communion  
37 with them and so I would go to Sunday school and there would be games and other kids and I  
38 really loved that. And pretty much everybody I knew, apart from some family friends, was

- 1 within very short walking distance when I was in my elementary school. Things changed in  
2 middle school but that was kind of the early part. And then in middle school, my parents got a  
3 flat in this old area that was very left leaning – there was still a Communist party at the time.  
4 My dad was a trade union organizer and . . .
- 5 AJ: Which kind?
- 6 AI: A trade union.
- 7 AJ: A trade union.
- 8 AI: And a card-carrying Communist.
- 9 AJ: Oh wow, OK.
- 10 AI: He was one of those which . . . I think I can say it now and not endanger my immigration status.
- 11 AJ: Was that Mussolini or . . .?
- 12 AI: No, no – Communism.
- 13 AJ: Communism.
- 14 AI: Communism, as in Russian Communism.
- 15 AJ: Oh wow.
- 16 AI: Marx and all that, yeah.
- 17 AJ: OK, wow – Marx.
- 18 AI: So no fascism, total opposite – total opposite.
- 19 AJ: All right, educate me.
- 20 AI: So very left wing. So I was brought up in a very left-wing . . . so my dad was very left wing and  
21 my mom and my mom’s mom were Catholic which, in Italy, it was not a very good mix. Most  
22 Communists were atheists and most Catholics really were suspicious of Communists. And so  
23 this was a thing.
- 24 AJ: A mixed marriage almost.
- 25 AI: It was a mixed marriage. When we went to Sicily, people in the streets would say things like,  
26 “Oh, you are the daughter of Hammer and Sickle,” which is a symbol of the Communist party.  
27 So I started to become more aware of my parent’s identities, also they got this . . . like a  
28 mortgage-supported flat for the first time. We’d always rented so this was the first flat they  
29 bought, and my mom just finished paying off her mortgage just a few years ago.
- 30 AJ: Oh wow.
- 31 AI: So we moved into this flat when I was 10 years old in this high rise, it’s a very inner city area. A  
32 lot of stuff was under construction, church was kind of in a . . . like in a garage, and a lot of

- 1 families would slam the door in the face of the priest because there was a lot of Communists  
2 families that moved there.
- 3 AJ: Oh wow.
- 4 AI: But I would also go to church so I was in this weird . . . I was in the Scouts, and the Scouts would  
5 go to church on Sundays all together. So it was this really weird shift from being in an older part  
6 of Rome to a very newly built part of Rome. And that's when, also, there was more distinction  
7 between realizing that I was from a more working class background than a middle class –  
8 because when we were renting we were in a more mixed-income neighborhood, and I was also  
9 in elementary school. So we moved, but because I was doing well in school I went to this music-  
10 oriented public school and so I would commute to school to this very shish-y neighborhood  
11 where I didn't have a lot in common with the other kids. I got bullied a lot and I would . . .  
12 homemade clothes that my grandma would make.
- 13 AJ: I was going to ask . . . sure, that wasn't really a good thing.
- 14 AI: Which looking back, they were beautiful – it was like handmade couture. But that's now how  
15 you think when you're in middle school, I was just ashamed.
- 16 AJ: Yeah.
- 17 AI: And it was the 1980s and there was all this fashion that was so different from what my  
18 grandmother was making. But I was doing well and I did well with music, but I wasn't doing well  
19 with the other subjects – because music was mostly one-on-one, depending on what instrument  
20 you played.
- 21 AJ: What instrument did you play?
- 22 AI: I played the piano.
- 23 AJ: Really?
- 24 AI: That's the same piano – over there, that is the same piano.
- 25 AJ: Is that right? Let's see if we can get a shot of this piano over here. Wow, that's beautiful.
- 26 AI: That piano my parents started renting from Ricordi, which was this big music shop in Rome,  
27 when I was about seven or eight years old. I'd been studying the piano for a couple of years  
28 with . . . one of my mom's friend's mom was a piano teacher, so they did some sort of a barter  
29 for me to have lessons. They rented it every month and then when I was about 15, the shop  
30 was like, "You've been renting it so long, why don't you just buy it at a reduced price." So they  
31 bought the piano and it's the same piano.
- 32 AJ: Wow.
- 33 AI: And it's a really good piano.
- 34 AJ: Does it still play well?

- 1 AI: It still plays and we tune it and my daughter has been learning how to play on that piano, which  
2 is really nice. So that piano went from Italy to England and then it was shipped from England to  
3 here when we moved to the states. So yeah, by the time I was in high school I was aware that  
4 we lived in this beautiful city. My dad was very educated even though we're kind of working  
5 class poors. We didn't want for anything but I was aware that I wasn't getting vacations like my  
6 friends – we'd just go visit the great aunts and stay at their house. But he was really well  
7 educated so he would take me around Rome, we would go to different churches every Sunday,  
8 he would show me all this art. So I was kind of bathed in history – we would be studying  
9 Michelangelo and you could go and look at Michelangelo's work; you're studying Bernini and  
10 you can go and look up Bernini's work. It was incredible.
- 11 AJ: Wow.
- 12 AI: And then my music teachers taught me how to get . . . there's a special student card that costs  
13 like nothing to go and see the most prominent musicians that would play, but you would go to  
14 the rehearsal. So they would let music students come to the dress rehearsal for like \$10 a year  
15 or something, not even. So I would go to all these concerts, I've seen Uto Ughi live and a signed  
16 autograph.
- 17 AJ: How do you spell his name?
- 18 AI: Oh, Uto Ughi – U-t-o U-g-h-i. He was a very popular string musician when I was growing up.  
19 And then also my dad knew how to get free tickets to the national theatre through the library –  
20 because there was a lot of initiatives. We were in a very low-income neighborhood, so if you  
21 went to the library, to a talk, then they would give you free tickets to go to the theatre, that kind  
22 of stuff. So, we had all this privilege of education that my dad brought. And my dad had a really  
23 different background from my mom. He was brought up in kind of a theatre family where . . .
- 24 AJ: So an artistic . . . ?
- 25 AI: Artistic and very well educated, but poor by choice rather than poor by background.
- 26 AJ: Wow, OK.
- 27 AI: You know, when you are artists and you choose to be an artist full time it's not a really well-  
28 paying job.
- 29 AJ: No, it's not.
- 30 AI: And even worse for women – like my paternal grandmother would be . . . it was as good as  
31 being a whore to be a cabaret artist. She was a singer and an actor, she would probably be  
32 considered like a burlesque artist and singer nowadays.
- 33 AJ: OK.
- 34 AI: Which is very respectful now but not so respectable in the early 1900s in Italy.
- 35 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 36 AI: So anyway, there was a lot of difference between my families. I loved all the art and I loved the  
37 church. Church just kept being this refuge for me and I spent a lot of time with priests and nuns,

- 1           there were priests and nuns from all over the world. There were people from all over the world,  
2           so I had this awareness that the world was a really big place.
- 3   AJ:     Big place, yeah.
- 4   AI:     Right from the beginning, and then I would go to my mom's village in Sicily where the world was  
5           a really small place. I wasn't allowed to walk around boys, that wasn't allowed at the time. It's  
6           different now, but in the 1970s and 1980s, if you walked with a boy in the main square then that  
7           would compromise your honor, unless you were engaged. And so I was a bit of a rebel and I  
8           would like . . . I had a lot of male best friends so I would just go around and . . .
- 9   AJ:     I wonder why.
- 10  AI:     Exactly, lots of things make sense with hindsight. So it was wonderful to be in Rome because  
11           there were all these opportunities that I don't think I would have had in a small town and I loved  
12           that, I loved that. And I loved all the exposure to all the different languages and people from all  
13           over the world, and priests and nuns from all over the world come to Rome because of the  
14           Vatican. I got to get communion from John Paul II when I was 18.
- 15  AJ:     Oh my goodness, wow.
- 16  AI:     Yeah, that was pretty exciting. Our church finally got built . . .
- 17  AJ:     He was one of the more popular Popes.
- 18  AI:     Yes, the good Polish Pope, not Ratzinger. So he came to inaugurate our church when it was  
19           finally built and consecrate it, which took a long time – several years. The younger people could  
20           get communion from the Pope directly and I was very active in my church, so I was one of the  
21           young people selected to receive communion from the Pope because I'd been teaching Sunday  
22           school since I was like 14, to the younger kids.
- 23  AJ:     Wow.
- 24  AI:     So as soon as I was confirmed I was allowed to teach Sunday school to the younger kids. So that  
25           was . . . my mom still has a photo of me getting communion from the Pope, and there's me with  
26           my very short hair, my little glasses, and my super nerdy sweater.
- 27  AJ:     Oh wow.
- 28  AI:     It's a great photo, I should find it and send you a copy. That would be really fun. My mom has it  
29           so I should ask her to take a good copy with her camera. So yeah, it was this weird contrast  
30           between feeling like my world was really small in some ways because I didn't travel until I was in  
31           my young adult years. I didn't really travel outside of Italy until I was 16, that was my first trip  
32           out of the country. But at the same time it was really big because I lived in Rome. That's a really  
33           long answer . . . I can keep going about my childhood.
- 34  AJ:     I want to know about the childhood but I want to know more details about . . . so when was the  
35           first time you recognized that you were different from the gender you were assigned at birth?
- 36  AI:     I keep thinking about this and I'm not sure. I have photos of myself and those I do have . . . like I  
37           have this photo of myself as a 6- or 7-year-old person and I just look like a boy. I would go



- 1 around in track suits and my hair was super short and I loved that. And even when I was really  
2 tiny, like 3 or 4-years-old, I have these photos where I don't fit the girl stereotype and I had all  
3 this . . . I knew that I didn't, especially when I got to middle school I didn't feel like I was like the  
4 other girls. There was zero transgender visibility when I was growing up in Italy in the 1970s and  
5 1980s – like none.
- 6 AJ: Pretty much all around the world but . . .
- 7 AI: But especially in Italy. Even when I was out as queer in my 20s, so this would be the second half  
8 of the 1990s, there was one lesbian restaurant in Rome where you had to buzz – and it didn't  
9 say anything on the outside, you had to know it was there. And they would buzz you in, it would  
10 be locked.
- 11 AJ: Oh wow.
- 12 AI: It was like a secret society. So there is a lot of visibility now, but there wasn't when I was  
13 growing up at all.
- 14 AJ: Did you ever go to the lesbian restaurant?
- 15 AI: I did, when I was in my 20s, and it was great. So I didn't know what was going on, but I knew  
16 that I really liked . . . I had more in common with boys and I liked hanging out with boys, but I  
17 also . . . middle school, high school is when you realize who you're attracted to, I was also  
18 attracted to them so it was really confusing.
- 19 AJ: Sure. You were attracted to boys?
- 20 AI: Yes, mostly. But then I had these very strong female friendships where I would be very . . . now,  
21 with hindsight I would call it romantic, but at the time it was very innocent because I was very  
22 Catholic, so I didn't think about sex. So it was very innocent but very intense – like I have this  
23 best friend who wrote me like love poems, but I didn't know they were love poems at the time.  
24 I was like, "That is really cute. She's younger than me, she's looking up to me." That kind of  
25 thing. Now in hindsight, I'm like, "Hmmm, how fascinating." So I would have these very  
26 occasional intense female friendships and very intense relationships . . . like friendships with  
27 boys where often I would also have huge crushes on these close friends, and it was all very  
28 confusing. And, I was very nerdy so not a lot . . . there wasn't a lot of awareness, I guess, of my  
29 sexuality. It was a confusing time. In terms of gender presentation, I kept my hair short for  
30 most of my life. I had a brief period in my life, in my late 20s, very early 30s, where my hair was  
31 long – for like a half-minute and that was it, and then I was done. My dad would take me to the  
32 barber to get my hair cut.
- 33 AJ: Really? You went to the barber to get your hair cut?
- 34 AI: Yeah, but it was like - oh, that's just practical – barbers charge way less than hairdressers, which  
35 is true.
- 36 AJ: This is true.
- 37 AI: In Italy it's very acceptable to be very tactile with people and so I would hold hands with my  
38 girlfriends, my friends who were girls. I would also be really . . . it would be fine to hang out

- 1 with the boys because . . . you know, the 1970s and 1980s, there was a lot around feminism. So  
2 I was like, "Maybe I'm just a very feminist kind of girl." I was trying to make sense of who I was.  
3 But yeah, there was this weird and inverted . . .
- 4 AJ: But a feminist girl would not hang out with the guys.
- 5 AI: Right? I know. I really didn't know, so this was just my life. I would go get my hair cut at the  
6 barbers, people would often mistake me for a boy on the bus and I thought that was great.
- 7 AJ: So you got sir-ed and him and . . .
- 8 AI: Young man.
- 9 AJ: Young man.
- 10 AI: And I loved it.
- 11 AJ: It didn't make you feel any kind of . . .
- 12 AI: No, it felt really good.
- 13 AJ: OK, all right.
- 14 AI: But then it wasn't until years ago that I realized oh, most 16-year-old girls would feel really  
15 offended or really weird if somebody mis-gendered them.
- 16 AJ: Deeply offended.
- 17 AI: Whereas I was like, "This is so cool."
- 18 AJ: OK.
- 19 AI: I think I mostly was just plain confused and I never thought . . . I didn't feel like I had a gender or  
20 a sexuality for a lot of time growing up. I also enjoyed playing with Barbie's and musicals, and I  
21 was very musical. And a lot of nuns had very short hair because it's very practical and you're  
22 supposed to have short hair if you're a nun.
- 23 AJ: Oh really, I didn't know that.
- 24 AI: Because it gets really messy otherwise, under the veil. Very few nuns have got long hair. So it  
25 wasn't a thing, nobody called me names, nobody thought I was weird.
- 26 AJ: So when you were bullied in school it wasn't about gender presentation or gender identity.
- 27 AI: No, it was about being poor or being fat, which now I know I wasn't fat, but at the time I didn't  
28 know. I had a terrible eating . . . I went through a bunch of eating disorders when I was . . . I was  
29 anorexic in my teenage years and then I got found out because my menstruation stopped and  
30 eventually my parents noticed that I was living on 500 calories a day. But I was very active, I was  
31 a dancer and I was very physically active and I really liked my body being smaller. Looking back  
32 there is a lot of things that make sense. I was large chested and I hated it. I hated being large  
33 chested, I hated attention to my body – like being groped on the bus, which was not at all an  
34 unusual occurrence in Italy.

- 1 AJ: Really?
- 2 AI: In Italy in the 1980s, at least once a week you'd get some adult, full-grown adult man, groping  
3 on the bus.
- 4 AJ: Of little girls, young girls?
- 5 AI: Yeah, teenagers.
- 6 AJ: Teenagers?
- 7 AI: Yes, teenagers, and I was also very vocal about that was not OK. I would shame people. I would  
8 be like, "Did you just touch my butt?" really loudly. I was . . . well, here I would probably be  
9 called white trash. I was really loud on the bus and hung out with all the really loud girls and  
10 boys. We all, it was like Lord of the Flies, we would all play . . . it was a big set of high-rise  
11 buildings and we would all play together, because all our parents worked long hours. And so  
12 gender wasn't a big deal it didn't feel like, until I was in high school and then mostly it was really  
13 confusing. I went down the, "Girls can do anything," and so this is just my way of being a girl –  
14 more . . . and I wasn't butch enough, that was really masculine. I liked music, I liked pretty  
15 things, and I liked looking good.
- 16 AJ: And you liked making Barbie clothes.
- 17 AI: Exactly, I liked making Barbie clothes and going to concerts, like classical music concerts. And so  
18 it was this weird . . . I had a very queer masculinity that I couldn't make sense of until I met one  
19 of my close friends, Ilario, who was gay, I found out – he came out to me when I was . . . I think I  
20 was 18 and he was 16 and that was the first gay person.
- 21 AJ: Ilario. I-I. . .
- 22 AI: I-I-a-r-i-o.
- 23 AJ: OK, just like it sounds.
- 24 AI: Yeah, just like it sounds. And he came out to me and I was like, "Whatever, who cares?" But I  
25 never put two and two together, so men can be gay but I never thought that that applied to me.  
26 So I just kind of went through my life, kind of stumbling through honestly. I would say things,  
27 like when I found out about drag I would say things like, "I'm pretending to be a girl, I'm in  
28 drag." And people would laugh and go, "Oh, that makes no sense because you are a girl." I was  
29 like, "I guess, but I feel like I'm playing at being a girl, it doesn't feel natural to me." I would try  
30 to talk about it but nobody had any language or made any sense of it. So my family never made  
31 a big deal of any of my behaviors or that I wanted to wear pants instead of skirts, preferably. I  
32 would begrudgingly wear dresses for formal occasions but I was always in trousers. But I think  
33 we were close enough to kind of the feminist revolution that nobody wanted to make a big deal  
34 in a progressive family. My grandma thought it was a big deal, on my mom's side, but  
35 everybody else . . . and it was Rome, it wasn't a small village.
- 36 AJ: Yeah, big city.

1 AI: Exactly, it was a big city. So I got away, I think, with a lot of things – like I got away with being  
2 myself without anybody questioning it and I didn't like my body but I got around . . . I really liked  
3 moving, so I did a lot of dancing and swimming. We had gym in school and I got into gymnastics  
4 and so I think I tried to make peace with my body through what my body could do and always  
5 emphasizing what my body could do. I was a cross-country runner and so I really liked my body  
6 and I would pound my body. And then it wasn't until I was in my early 20s that I realized that  
7 something was going on and it was about sexuality at first, it still wasn't about gender. I knew . .  
8 . like I would say those things like, "I'm playing at being a girl, I'm really good at kind of  
9 pretending to be a girl." But it didn't make sense to anybody, not even me. And then the first  
10 time I saw two women kissing in London, I moved to London when I was 22 with a scholarship  
11 and then . . .

12 AJ: To study, you went there to study?

13 AI: I went for four months and then I saw some opportunity and never went home. There was a lot  
14 of trauma and domestic violence in my house growing up so the first opportunity I saw I got out,  
15 and that was my first opportunity. And so the first time I saw two women kissing in London, I  
16 was like, "Ohhh." I swear they must have thought I was some weird, bigoted homophobe  
17 because I just literally stared at them like this – and something clicked and I went, "I think I'm  
18 bisexual." And then I was starting to get into women's studies more, thinking about . . . I had a  
19 lecture at the university where I was working, they pushed me to do a studentship to get a Ph.D.  
20 in feminist studies, so I started to really get into women's studies. I understood about  
21 lesbianism and bisexuality and I really wanted to come out but I was so afraid – I was afraid that  
22 I would lose everybody. I first came out as bi to my fiancé at the time, who threatened to tell  
23 my whole family and said that I would lose everybody.

24 AJ: Oh boy.

25 AI: And so I married him, which was a really terrible idea and then he turned out to be violent, so  
26 our marriage only lasted one year and then I got a divorce very quickly on the grounds of  
27 domestic violence and came out, all at the same time, in my early 20s. So I got married, got  
28 divorced, and came out.

29 AJ: You came out as . . . ?

30 AI: Bisexual.

31 AJ: Bisexual.

32 AI: For like five minutes because when I came out as bisexual . . . well first there was a lot of denials.  
33 So I told my best friend in Italy, who was called Iladia – which I think is really hilarious that my  
34 first gay friend was Ilario and my best friend from college, we're still friends, Iladia. I told her  
35 and she was like, "No, I think you're just getting cold feet. Have you ever even kissed a girl?" I  
36 was like, "No." She was like, "You're fine." I tried to tell my priest and he was like, "Well, if  
37 you're bisexual you can make a choice and so don't choose the back-up scene." That kind of  
38 stuff, so all that bullshit. So I really tried to stick it through, but it was actually a Catholic priest  
39 in England, in Reading where I lived . . .

- 1 AJ: You lived in Reading?
- 2 AI: In Reading, England at this point. So, I was in this violent marriage, I knew I was queer of some  
3 sort, and I was in deep crisis of faith, and I was talking to Father James. Father James looks at  
4 me and goes, "You just need to get out of your violent marriage, come out, and find a religion  
5 that is more accepting because I don't think the Catholic Church is going to come around for a  
6 long time." And I was deeply religious.
- 7 AJ: Wow, your priest said this?
- 8 AI: Oh yeah. I wanted to be a nun, I was deeply religious – religion had saved my life and given me  
9 this outlet to feel safe and process my trauma and have a safe, loving place. For it was really  
10 hard for me. So Father James was like, "You need to live your authentic life, that's what God  
11 wants from you." And so this was me at . . . I don't know, how old was I at this point? I was 24.
- 12 AJ: Your priest told you to live your authentic life?
- 13 AI: So this priest, Father James, is like, "You need to live your authentic life." So I left my violent  
14 husband, which was . . . that's a whole story by itself, came out – which was really hard because  
15 a lot of people starting making conjectures that of course he hit me because I was queer. So  
16 that was really awful.
- 17 AJ: So sort of blaming the victim sort of thing.
- 18 AI: Blaming me, so that was really crappy – but I knew, because I had experienced domestic  
19 violence as a child and I just snapped and I was like, "If I don't put a stop to this now, I will  
20 become my mother and my children and my children's children . . ." Like I could see the inter-  
21 generational trauma.
- 22 AJ: So you broke the cycle?
- 23 AI: So I wanted to break the cycle so I was like, "I'm not going to take this in, I'm not going to be  
24 blamed for this." I came out, I shaved my hair – I came out in a big way. I shaved my head, I was  
25 super out. I was out as bisexual but then . . . Reading is a fairly provincial town, so it's not a  
26 small town. It's like a university town and it's middle-size. It's fairly small and there are like two  
27 gay bars.
- 28 AJ: Like St. Paul maybe?
- 29 AI: Kind of like St. Paul, yes. There are two gay bars in the whole town, right? And I realized there  
30 was a lot of bi-phobia and I was never going to get laid if I was out as bisexual.
- 31 AJ: Oh wow.
- 32 AI: And I was never going to get accepted.
- 33 AJ: OK.
- 34 AI: And I was already seen as suspicious because I was foreign. Women would already be like,  
35 "Well, you're Italian, you can't be trusted. Italian people are hot-blooded and they'll betray  
36 you."

- 1 AJ: Oh, all of these stereotypes.
- 2 AI: A lot of xenophobia, a lot of xenophobia in England. So I was like, "Most of the guys I like are  
3 gay, so they're not going to go for me so I might as well say I'm a lesbian." So that's what I did  
4 for a few years. So I lived as an out lesbian for about . . . almost four years. I was very  
5 embedded in the community. I came out to parents who stopped talking . . . well, I stopped  
6 talking to them for a year. I came out to my parents and my mom said, "I do not fucking love  
7 you now."
- 8 AJ: Oh boy.
- 9 AI: And my dad just denied it. He was like, "You don't have the right hormonal imbalance to be a  
10 lesbian." I was like, "What does that even mean?" He was like, "You're feminine." I was like,  
11 "Whatever." So I said, "Fine, I'm just not going to talk to you and I'm not going to come home."  
12 I didn't go home for a year.
- 13 AJ: Really?
- 14 AI: And I stuck with it. My mom called and . . .
- 15 AJ: So this was your choice?
- 16 AI: Oh yeah. My mom would call and cry and I was like, "Nope, this is who I am. I am not going  
17 back. Either you accept me for who I am or you don't have a relationship with me." I was doing  
18 my Ph.D. in women's studies and I was like, "This is me and if I have to lose my family I will lose  
19 my family," which was a big deal. I didn't go home for Christmas, which was like a tragedy for  
20 everybody. So, they did – they accepted me. And then I . . . I'm getting to the gender piece  
21 slowly but surely.
- 22 AJ: Did you have a relationship with a woman?
- 23 AI: I did, I had several. I was like, "Time to party." And finally I got to explore my sexuality, I also  
24 found out about kinky sexualities and I was like, "Oh, there's a whole world of how I can be out  
25 there." So there was a lot of exploring while I was doing my Ph.D. and then I got my Ph.D. and  
26 there's a lot of stuff that's going on there. But I met Michael, who I'm still with, and I started  
27 dating him, which was a big deal because I lost all my lesbian community – minus two people.  
28 Literally I had two lesbian friends left out of . . . I was very embedded in community. I was on  
29 the board of the local LGBTQ youth group, I was doing fund raising, I was out everywhere at the  
30 university, with my family. And not a lot of people were out yet at that time, especially in a kind  
31 of smaller town. And definitely not a lot of foreigners.
- 32 AJ: So you were like the big person on . . .
- 33 AI: So I was out and then I started dating this dude. So that was really traumatic, but luckily . . .
- 34 AJ: Is your partner from Reading?
- 35 AI: He used to live there, yes. Michael and I were both working at the same university when we  
36 met. And so, I had some gay male friends who were fine – they were like, "Whatever." So I

- 1 started dating Mike and he took me to the first BiCon, which is this big bisexual convention in  
2 the UK.
- 3 AJ: Right, I've heard of BiCon.
- 4 AI: I love BiCon. So I went to my first BiCon. He was like, "I'm not saying you're a bisexual or  
5 anything," because I was going through the whole, "I'm a dyke, dude." I wasn't a lesbian – I was  
6 a dyke.
- 7 AJ: A dyke, OK.
- 8 AI: That was a thing.
- 9 AJ: That was a thing.
- 10 AI: It was a thing – I wasn't a lesbian.
- 11 AJ: There's a difference, right?
- 12 AI: I was committed. I was like, "I'm a dyke, dating a dude, it happens." I've read Carol Quinn and .  
13 . . . we went to BiCon and I went, "Ohhh, I have just . . . in the same way in which I'd been trying  
14 to be a girl all these years, I've also been trying to be queer in a way that's accepted. I just get to  
15 be me." And so here I am, I'm 28 and finally figuring out . . . yeah, 28 or 29, it was that year. I  
16 just got to be whoever I want and that blew my mind. This was also the first time that I met out  
17 trans people who were visibly gender non-conforming. So Jenny, who is a very out prominent . .  
18 . she runs . . . she edits Bi Community News, BCN, and she's a trans feminine, gender non-  
19 conforming bi organizer in Manchester. And she was organizing that . . .
- 20 AJ: Where does Jenny live?
- 21 AI: She lives in Manchester, UK. And so it was Jenny and then there were all these other trans and  
22 gender non-conforming folks at BiCon. So yeah, I met all these trans and gender non-  
23 conforming people and it was the first time that I saw female assigned at birth, gender fluid, and  
24 trans masculine people. I had never come across that. And so at first I was like, "Oh, gender  
25 fluid, this makes a lot of sense – I think that's who I am." But everybody was very light in their  
26 body, they didn't have big chests – they were very tiny. I was not tiny.
- 27 AJ: Sure.
- 28 AI: I was like, "Oh, you have to be really androgynous to be gender fluid." Right? We have such  
29 messed up . . .
- 30 AJ: I know, where do these ideas come from.
- 31 AI: But I think that's who I am inside. And then eventually it clicked and so I started identifying as  
32 gender queer slowly and then when I was . . . so I had Melissa when I was 32, so I became very  
33 involved in bi community. I was out to myself as gender fluid and to Michael, but not to a lot of  
34 people. I was trying to make sense of my gender, I was in this very gender bending bi  
35 community, and I started to read more trans authors – like I found Pat Califia's writing, Del  
36 LaGrace Volcano was really popular at the time, so I started to get a sense . . . there was a little  
37 bit more internet so I could research on the internet.

- 1 AJ: Sure.
- 2 AI: So I started to become more aware of trans community.
- 3 AJ: So this was mid-1990s, maybe?
- 4 AI: This was late 1990s, early 2000s. And so, by the time I was 30, which would be 14 years ago,  
5 almost 15, I was out as gender queer and then I had Melissa when I was 32. I was identifying as  
6 gender queer and gender fluid. And then after I had Melissa and I was done breastfeeding, I felt  
7 like my body had done its job and I was ready. So when she was a toddler probably, I started  
8 binding and wearing more masculine clothes professionally. I was still walking this line where I  
9 was like, "Do I really get to wear masculine clothes or men's clothes?" So I actually started  
10 wearing men's clothes in my early 30s.
- 11 AJ: Were you still living in England then?
- 12 AI: Yes, and I started binding when I was around 34 or 35. We moved here in 2008, so I would have  
13 been 37 then. And this was the first place where I had meaningful trans community. So I got  
14 involved with trans community straight away. I was already presenting as masculine, but it was  
15 the first place where people would explicitly say, "What are your pronouns?" I'd be like, "Oh,  
16 whatever – maybe he/him, I don't know." And people started using my pronouns and it felt  
17 really good.
- 18 AJ: Wow.
- 19 AI: And I was out to my mom as gender queer but she didn't really understand what that meant. So  
20 I was actively binding, presenting masculine full-time and then binding was getting really hard  
21 and I had good health insurance through the University of Minnesota and could afford to have  
22 top surgery. I had top surgery in 2010, which was covered by my insurance, and for my mom,  
23 that was when she really realized I was trans. I had talked about being gender queer for years,  
24 since I was like 30 or 31, even before I had Melissa. So we talked about it and I was almost 40, it  
25 was three months before turning 40, my top surgery. And it took her almost 10 years to figure .  
26 . . it wasn't until I went to do something medically focused, and I'd gone by Alex since I was 14-  
27 years-old, by the way. I saw *Flashdance* when I was 14-years-old and the main character is  
28 named Alex and she's very gender non-conforming in some ways. She had sexual agency, she  
29 wears this tuxedo thing at one point, and she is a metal-welding dancer. She was the most . . .  
30 the person was closest to what I perceived my mixed identity to be – like not fully masculine,  
31 not fully feminine. And so I went by Alex since I was 14-years-old and my mom knew that,  
32 because she used it all the time. But it wasn't until I went to do something medical that it really  
33 clicked for a lot of people. It clicked for my mom, it clicked for my employer even though I'd  
34 always presented as masculine – actually that clicked a little earlier because people were using  
35 different pronouns, depending on whether they asked me or not.
- 36 AJ: If they asked they knew, if they didn't ask then you were still . . .
- 37 AI: Yeah, I wasn't telling them and my position was like, "Well, this is how I'm presenting. If  
38 somebody isn't asking, why is it on me to tell them? Cis people don't have to go around  
39 announcing their gender.



- 1 AJ: Announcing their gender, pronouns.
- 2 AI: Why do I have to announce my identity?
- 3 AJ: It makes perfect sense.
- 4 AI: So it really wasn't until my late 30s, early . . . the most recent eight years that I was more visible  
5 as trans for a lot of people.
- 6 AJ: OK.
- 7 AI: Even though I would say I've identified . . . and I didn't really . . . a lot of folks didn't see gender  
8 queer or non-binary identities under the trans umbrella necessarily when I first started coming  
9 out. But if I count from when I was out as gender queer, probably about 15 years almost that  
10 I've been out as trans.
- 11 AJ: It's very clear . . . GNC is very clearly under the trans umbrella now.
- 12 AI: Yeah, and in terms of presenting gender non-conforming, I would say that's my whole life in  
13 some ways. I have so many photos from when I'm little, you look at it and you're like, "That's a  
14 little boy, right?" And even when I'm . . . there are those photos that Mike sometimes loves to  
15 look at and go, "Even when you're trying to be a girl, it's so clear that you're not." My dad  
16 would tease me, I would stride down the beach when we went to the seaside, and he would say,  
17 "You can't walk like that, that's a very masculine walk - and then your chest goes up and down  
18 and that's not OK." And I was like 14 or 15. I was like, "Well I don't fucking care, I'm going to  
19 walk down the beach the way I want to walk." And so I think in terms of being gender non-  
20 conforming it's been all my life, but I didn't have a label until this last 10 or 15 years.
- 21 AJ: Do you think gender non-conforming identities will stay under the trans umbrella forever? I just  
22 had a conversation about this earlier today. What's your thoughts? Do you think there will  
23 come a time . . . because transgender really sort of . . . when you think about . . .
- 24 AI: It's huge.
- 25 AJ: It's huge, but it sort of stabilizes the binary, at least the way it is understood and presented now.  
26 It's male to female or female to male, but gender non-conforming really blows that whole  
27 notion of binary up.
- 28 AI: It does.
- 29 AJ: So what's your thoughts?
- 30 AI: It's fascinating. I just had to put all my thoughts on paper because some of my colleagues in the  
31 UK are writing a book about non-binary genders, and I had the light task to write the future  
32 directions.
- 33 AJ: Oh wow.
- 34 AI: Do I have a crystal ball? It was really hard to write this chapter.
- 35 AJ: So I asked the right person.

1 AI: So I've been thinking about this very recently and I think that eventually non-binary identities,  
2 they are challenging the dichotomy between trans and cis people because who gets to decide  
3 where that line is between cis and trans? Is it if you legally transition, medically, socially, like  
4 who gets to define it and then there are the bigger issues that the gender binary itself . . . it's  
5 part of this colonizing, Christianizing, white supremacist thing because the more we really look  
6 at evidence from anthropology, there have always been a variety of genders in lots of different  
7 cultures and places. So I think that eventually, my hope is that we might move to where it's this  
8 world where it is understood that, of course, gender is more than a spectrum, it's a landscape,  
9 and people can make multiple choices, including body modification, and I don't really think that  
10 we can even imagine that because we are so immersed in binary cis genderist thinking that it's  
11 even hard to imagine. Sometimes I think it's even scarier because I'm like well it's very different  
12 to experience the world as a trans person than as a cis person. I know, I experience it every day  
13 – going to the bathroom can be really intimidating and going around with my kid I get looked at  
14 in a certain way. I'm very aware of our cis genderist system and, at the same time, wow if we  
15 really go with the non-binary genderist idea it blows the whole thing apart, it deconstructs the  
16 whole idea of gender. A lot of the work that DarkMatter, the poetry duo, are doing around  
17 unmasking all the trans misogyny but the intersection also with like racism and colonization and  
18 all those kind of ideas.

19 AJ: And they're called DarkMatter?

20 AI: DarkMatter, it's a poetry duo and they're trans feminine, I believe, folks – I think. I don't even  
21 think we can imagine it, but I don't think the trans cis dichotomy will last if we truly find a way of  
22 giving full citizenship and understanding to non-binary genders. Like I dream of a world where a  
23 child is born and, of course, we're not going to know their gender until they tell us. So we just  
24 use gender neutral pronouns and then when they're four or five, they'll tell us because that's  
25 when children tell you who they are. Right? What would that be like? And then we're like, "Oh,  
26 now I know who you are." And maybe that will change and that's OK.

27 AJ: Boy, I gave a very similar answer to this question so . . . wow, it's pretty nice to know that I'm in  
28 smart company like you, Alex.

29 AI: Or I'm in smart company like you, Andrea, because you're pretty smart and amazing.

30 AJ: That's awesome. You've talked a little bit about this but what one person or one event or one  
31 thing, and you talked about BiCon and the situation where you saw the two lesbian-identified  
32 women in London kissing, but was there one thing that sort of really clicked this trans GNC  
33 identity that made it take hold for you?

34 AI: Yes, something where I committed and I was like, "No, this is really who I am."

35 AJ: Yes.

36 AI: I think it was the decision to have top surgery. I remember, I'd been binding and binding and it  
37 was awful. I'm asthmatic and I have fibromyalgia and binding was terrible for me, physically  
38 painful.

39 AJ: Yeah, and it is pretty painful most people.

- 1 AI: Oh anybody, but then I had heightened levels of pain.
- 2 AJ: Right, and the difficulty breathing. It exacerbates all of that.
- 3 AI: There were days when I couldn't put my binder on by myself or take it off by myself. Michael  
4 was super supportive and really there . . . I used to get really horrible skin rashes. I remember  
5 this moment . . . and I was looking for a surgeon and I went to a couple consults and I got  
6 discriminated by one surgeon who was like, "Oh, yeah, we'll do the operation this way and this  
7 way, but I don't operate on transgender people." I was like, "What does that even mean?"  
8 Anyway, I was going through this process and I remember that, even before that process, there  
9 was this moment where, "OK, I cannot keep binding for the rest of my life, this is not healthy for  
10 my body – my body is definitely giving me a very clear message that this is not OK." So either I  
11 go back to non-binding and whenever I did I would get mis-gendered, like all the time. There  
12 was just no way. I still get mis-gendered but it doesn't feel as intense and at least I felt better in  
13 my body. Or, I have health insurance, I could get top surgery . . . it was really I got approved  
14 straight away. I've always seen a therapist since training to be a therapist because I think it's  
15 healthy, so my therapist was like, "Yeah, whatever, I'll write you a letter."
- 16 AJ: So what do you do? Tell us what you do?
- 17 AI: Oh that's right. I'm a therapist. So I think that was the moment where I was like - this is it.  
18 Either I keep going around my whole life saying I'm a non-binary gender fluid person and  
19 nobody really sees it but me – or some people would see it, and that would be OK. I couldn't  
20 bear it. I couldn't bear it – the thought of going around and not binding, it literally broke my  
21 heart. It was like I can't do this. I don't know . . . at that point I didn't know what was going to  
22 happen with the permanent residency or anything so I was like . . . and I knew that in England I  
23 would not be able to get top surgery as a non-binary person.
- 24 AJ: Oh wow.
- 25 AI: It's changing, but at the time.
- 26 AJ: So you'd have to be on this binary . . .
- 27 AI: Or you have to pretend to be on the binary at least. And so I did, I had top surgery and it was  
28 the best decision I've ever made. I remember looking at my body and going, "Oh, this is how my  
29 body . . ." Even moving in my body – like dancing and swimming, I'm going, "This is how my  
30 body was always supposed to feel." It was just like being home. So for me that's probably the  
31 most defining moment. But I think I knew the moment I met Jenny, at that first BiCon, and I  
32 looked . . . and she's a very gender non-conforming trans feminine person, very openly and  
33 shamelessly so. I looked at her and I went, "This is who I am. It doesn't make complete sense to  
34 me yet, but this is who I am." Not one thing or another, but this makes sense to me – of course,  
35 you get to be who you are, this is what it means to be authentic.
- 36 AJ: Sweet. You're in a relationship?
- 37 AI: Yes.
- 38 AJ: How long have you been with Michael?

- 1 AI: I've been with Michael . . . it will be 16 years next March, so 15 years and some.
- 2 AJ: So you identified as bi, you identified as lesbian for a little while, now you're just gender non-  
3 conforming.
- 4 AI: I still identify as bi.
- 5 AJ: Bisexual.
- 6 AI: Yes, I feel like I have a lot of loyalty to the bi community and I feel like bi community organizing  
7 has always been really close to trans organizing because it's this not being in a box. And so I feel  
8 really close to bi-plus communities.
- 9 AJ: Bi-plus communities.
- 10 AI: Now we use bi-plus to include pan and fluid.
- 11 AJ: Sure.
- 12 AI: But I really like . . . the bi community links me to ancestors and all those organizers that have  
13 openly worked for a less binary world, like a non-monosexual world and there's always been  
14 much more . . . not always, but often, more embracing of trans folks in a lot of bi communities.  
15 Not always, but often, in my experience. So I still identify as bi.
- 16 AJ: It's interesting that you mentioned that you found that trans people tend to find acceptance in  
17 bi communities, what do you think the relationship between the L, the G, and the B is to the T?
- 18 AI: Yeah.
- 19 AJ: Is there a relationship?
- 20 AI: It's complicated, right?
- 21 AJ: Should there be a relationship?
- 22 AI: I don't know. I feel like it makes sense for me . . . how do I feel? I feel the whole LGBT thing, it's  
23 really about normativity because when . . . in the lesbian restaurant with the buzzing at the door  
24 in Italy, nobody cared if you were lesbian or bisexual or whatever, because you were basically . .  
25 . once you are in some sort of way, you don't fit in the norm, you're a part of us. So a lot of  
26 organizing, like Stonewall – I don't think Sylvia Rivera, Marsha P. Johnson and the other . . . like  
27 the first women who organized Pride, I always forget the name . . . Linda somebody, I think.  
28 They didn't sit around talking identity politics, they were all marginalized and they organized  
29 together. Like in most communities that I've known and come from historically, you organize  
30 together because honestly most people looked at us and said, "You're freaks." They didn't say,  
31 "You're lesbian," or "You're gay," or "Bisexual" or "Transgender." They're like, "You're some  
32 weird pervert pricks over there."
- 33 AJ: Exactly – and stay over there and go away.
- 34 AI: And stay over there and don't come near us.
- 35 AJ: Yes.

- 1 AI: And I think us people have gained respectability and citizenship, then there's been a, "Let's  
2 claim identities that are separate from each other," and then there's been this marginalizing of  
3 trans folks who honestly have always been some of the most visible. I think that goes for any  
4 gender non-conforming folks. The butches and the feminine man and the trans folks, those  
5 were the people who couldn't hide it.
- 6 AJ: And those are the people who get discriminated and violence and . . .
- 7 AI: Targeted.
- 8 AJ: And targeted, lose their jobs and can't get an apartment.
- 9 AI: Exactly. And who cares if you're a trans woman or a super femme gay man or a bi person or  
10 butch? What people are looking at is you don't fit in, usually because of some gender markers  
11 and sometimes because of relationships, and now we want to do all this clean,  
12 compartmentalized organizing which is great but it doesn't make sense to me because cis  
13 genderism impacts anybody who is gender non-conforming. Transphobia and trans misogyny  
14 are their own thing, but anybody who doesn't fit in feels the impact of cis genderism.
- 15 AJ: Sure.
- 16 AI: Anybody who doesn't fit in feels the impact of queer phobia. Like when we make fun of the boy  
17 who wants to play ballet and is sensitive, it doesn't matter what that boy's sexual orientation is  
18 going to be, we're really policing gender.
- 19 AJ: Yes.
- 20 AI: I just wish we could . . . like if we figured it out, then all of this division is nonsensical and all of  
21 this policing of borders is nonsensical and really what it has been about is it's a political agenda.  
22 Let's get the people who are more acceptable, like the mostly white, gender conforming,  
23 respectable, middle-class, gay and lesbian citizens, their rights, and then everybody else will  
24 come along, right? Even in marriage equality . . .
- 25 AJ: That's the model.
- 26 AI: They called it gay marriage – it's not gay marriage, there's plenty of bi and trans people of mixed  
27 orientation marriages.
- 28 AJ: Exactly.
- 29 AI: So trans people have a sexual orientation and some very binary trans straight folks, don't feel a  
30 part of the LGBT community. Why would they? They're like, "I feel like I'm a man or a woman  
31 and I'm straight, what have I got to do with LGBT folks?" I get it. "Yeah, right, you don't have a  
32 lot to do with it. You're basically a straight man or a straight woman." And that's OK. I think  
33 that we need to create a world where that's OK. I also don't think there's a lot of feelings about  
34 people disappearing from the community and I'm like, "That's OK." Some people just want to  
35 live their lives and it's not like you have to take this mantle of activism. And it's true, that some  
36 folks don't have an option because of the visibility. But visibility is so contextual. I've gone from  
37 being a very visible lesbian to passing as straight in the early years of my marriage with Michael.  
38 I was out, but unless people asked me there was a lot of assumed heterosexuality, to being very

- 1 visibly, I would say, trans. Most people know that there's something going on with my gender  
2 just looking at me and they just don't know what to do with my family. And then depending on  
3 who I am with, people are making decisions about my gender and sexual orientation. So with  
4 the Twin Cities being progressive, if I'm with female friends, people will just assume we're a  
5 lesbian couple. If I'm with a bunch of gay boys, I might kind of pass a little more sometimes –  
6 but not always, especially more conservative areas, because it doesn't cross their mind, the  
7 possibility of trans guys. So it's all over the map.
- 8 AJ: That's interesting.
- 9 AI: Right, visibility management – what is that? I don't even know how to handle it sometimes.
- 10 AJ: Caitlyn Jenner.
- 11 AI: Haha – Caitlyn Jenner, just ad lib anything?
- 12 AJ: Ad lib anything.
- 13 AI: Well, Caitlyn Jenner is a celebrity and she's doing what celebrities do, which is . . . I mean, she's  
14 raising awareness, which I think is great. She's getting attention because she already had  
15 attention as somebody who was famous.
- 16 AJ: She was an Olympic gold medalist.
- 17 AI: She was an Olympic gold medalist, she belongs to a family that's very much in the spotlight. I  
18 don't even understand about the Kardashians but I understand that she's part of that family.
- 19 AJ: Right, yes.
- 20 AI: I wasn't even aware of the Kardashians until Caitlyn Jenner.
- 21 AJ: Really? OK.
- 22 AI: I live in a bubble. I'm like, "What is happening? Who are these people?"
- 23 AJ: Where's the television because I don't see any televisions around here?
- 24 AI: Right, exactly. We stream all of our programs, there's a TV downstairs in the basement. Yeah, I  
25 think she's a very privileged, also very in the spotlight so she didn't get the option of  
26 transitioning quietly. I think she's done the best she could to educate folks. I don't know, I think  
27 it's a big world and we need all of us. I know that some people . . . I think it's very  
28 understandable that people have big feelings about Caitlyn Jenner getting that much press when  
29 there's other amazing people . . . I mean, Laverne Cox is doing an amazing job of . . . I mean, she  
30 was on the cover of *Time*. I bought three copies of that *Time* magazine. She's amazing.
- 31 AJ: She is amazing.
- 32 AI: And she deserves 500 times the amount of press that Caitlyn Jenner got. I'm also aware that we  
33 live in a . . . the U.S. is an incredibly racist society and so the access that Caitlyn is going to have  
34 is not going to be the same access that Laverne Cox is going to have.
- 35 AJ: And even Laverne has her level of privilege and stardom and celebrity as well.

- 1 AI: Absolutely, compared to people like you have been doing trans activism for a long time.
- 2 AJ: For a very long time.
- 3 AI: And other folks that have been doing trans activism.
- 4 AJ: Over 20 years!
- 5 AI: Like Cecilia Chung, the world is full of amazing trans women of color, the U.S. is full of amazing  
6 trans women of color who have been doing activism. Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, look  
7 at all their activism around Stonewall.
- 8 AJ: Sure.
- 9 AI: So, of course, I get irritated that like Caitlyn Jenner didn't invent transgender. It feels like, "Oh,  
10 Caitlyn Jenner has come out and now people are aware that there are trans people in the  
11 world."
- 12 AJ: I agree, yeah.
- 13 AI: It's like, "Were you asleep?" At the same time, I'm like well we're getting visibility and that is  
14 good to some degree but it also . . . I think visibility is a double-edged sword because every time  
15 there is visibility there is also more visibility of the backlash, of the hate, there is increased  
16 danger, I think, for the more vulnerable trans people on the street which tends to be trans  
17 feminine people of color and more visible gender non-conforming folks.
- 18 AJ: The murder rates have been off the charts since Caitlyn has come out. Twenty-plus trans  
19 women have been murdered so far in 2015.
- 20 AI: People are scared and people are lashing out to the most vulnerable folks and that scares me.  
21 So when people are like, "Isn't it great that transgender people are getting all this visibility?" I'm  
22 like, "I don't know, I think sometimes it was a little safer to be under the radar for a lot of people  
23 and now people are looking out for it. They know that transgender people exist and in some  
24 ways that makes the community more vulnerable, and especially trans feminine people of color.  
25 Yeah, that's scary.
- 26 AJ: That's a great observation. This has been fascinating discussion, Alex. What else do you think  
27 people should know about Alex Iantaffi or the transgender non-conforming world that you  
28 inhabit?
- 29 AI: I don't know. I guess we didn't talk about my work at all, what I do in the world.
- 30 AJ: Yeah, tell me a little bit about your work.
- 31 AI: Well, I'm a therapist and I've been a therapist . . . I've been a licensed therapist for almost 10  
32 years, it will be 10 years next summer.
- 33 AJ: Wow, and you have a Ph.D.
- 34 AI: Yes, and I've had a Ph.D. for longer. Actually, I got my Ph.D. in 1999 because it wasn't . . . I  
35 trained as a clinician after I was a researcher already. I think it's really interesting to be out as a

- 1 non-binary trans academic in a lot of different ways, and especially not being in transgender  
2 studies as a field.
- 3 AJ: Yeah, because that's where a lot of people end up, right? Or women's studies.
- 4 AI: Yeah, which kind of makes sense. I started from women's studies but then more and more I  
5 kind of moved more towards sexual health and health. I've done some . . . I did end up doing  
6 some work on trans issues because I feel there is just so much need of trans perspective and I  
7 also feel it's complicated to kind of be pigeon-holed and pushed to . . . there is this assumption  
8 that people make that because I'm trans, of course all my work is going to be focused on trans  
9 issues. Actually a lot of my work has been in deaf education and disability and gender and I'm a  
10 family therapist.
- 11 AJ: When you say deaf education . . .
- 12 AI: Deaf as in d-e-a-f.
- 13 AJ: OK.
- 14 AI: Hearing. I've been a signer for over 20 years. I learned . . .
- 15 AJ: Oh, I didn't know that. You speak ASL?
- 16 AI: I do, not as fluent in ASL because my first sign language was Italian sign language when I was 17.  
17 And then I learned British sign language, in which I'm very fluent. I've been a British sign  
18 language user for . . . wow, over 20 years. So actually I've been signing for about 25 years all  
19 together, something like that. Longer? I'm getting old. And then I've been trying to learn ASL in  
20 the last few years so I'm not fluent but I can communicate in ASL and a little bit in LSQ, which is  
21 the Quebecoise language.
- 22 AJ: Which is it?
- 23 AI: Quebecoise.
- 24 AJ: Quebecoise?
- 25 AI: Which is the Francophone deaf folks in Quebec speak sign LSQ, yeah they speak LSQ.
- 26 AJ: OK, I've got to . . . I have a transcriber who is going to want to know this word.
- 27 AI: She's like what are you talking about?
- 28 AJ: Yes, and she's going to email me and say, "Can you spell that?" So please spell it for us.
- 29 AI: Yeah, LSQ, which is, in French I will butcher some French now, the Langue des signes  
30 Quebecoise, which is the Quebecoise from Quebec sign language.
- 31 AJ: OK, she'll figure it out.
- 32 AI: Yeah, and I'm fluent in British sign language, BSL, and I'm getting fluent in ASL, which is  
33 American sign language.
- 34 AJ: She can look it up and find the word online.



- 1 AI: Totally. So it's interesting to kind of have people want to pigeon-hole you in this tiny box, like,  
2 "Oh, you're trans so you do trans things." And I'm like, "Ahhh, I was a scholar for several years  
3 before coming out." It's fascinating, it's just fascinating how people always want to pigeon-hole  
4 us. And also what's been fascinating, I think, is just being the tokenizing – like, "We want you to  
5 be visible as a trans person, but we don't want you to change things."
- 6 AJ: Right.
- 7 AI: Because, you know, the system – you know, the c-i-s system as we call it in our house, it's deep  
8 in academia. It's really deep, especially when you look at mental health, we look at men's and  
9 women's mental health, men's and women's public health. So traveling those differences has  
10 been really challenging and sometimes I wonder, I think I made my own choices in terms of  
11 career, which have included like changing countries and always going after things I was  
12 passionate about rather than a career. And part of that has also been coming from a working  
13 class background. I had no idea what an academic career looked like. I see people . . . like  
14 somebody who got their Ph.D. at the same time as me, has just made professor at the University  
15 of Cambridge, and I was still a contract assistant professor. Our CVs are not that different,  
16 we've written pretty much the same amount.
- 17 AJ: Do you think your gender identity has something to do with that?
- 18 AI: I think it's been a combination of my class and gender identity. Partially it's been because of my  
19 class background, I had no idea how to navigate a professional world. I didn't know about  
20 mentorship, I didn't know how much my choices would impact things, I didn't have a sense of  
21 entitlement in academia.
- 22 AJ: Right, like I deserve to be a full tenure . . . right.
- 23 AI: Exactly. I'm like, "Oh, I'm getting paid to do work I love, that's great. I'm getting paid." Coming  
24 from a working class background, you're like, "Can I pay my bills?" "Am I getting paid?" "Hey,  
25 I'm getting paid to do work I love, that's a bonus." So that was partially that, so I realized I've  
26 been doing a lot of work that was in support of other people's careers rather than my own. And  
27 it's taken me almost 20 years of academia to realize how much I've done in service of other  
28 people's careers. It's just been heartbreaking, but fascinating. And partially I made choices to  
29 go after jobs I really liked and I moved countries and I had Melissa, but partially I think it is the  
30 gender identity piece.
- 31 AJ: Sure.
- 32 AI: Partially I think that . . . who are your peers? If you're in a world that is supposed to be where  
33 your peers, you have a peer group and there is a peer-review process, if you're trans or a person  
34 of color, if you're working class, those are not your peers.
- 35 AJ: Those are not your peers.
- 36 AI: By and large. So I know that my story is not unique. I think anybody who doesn't come from  
37 what academics are supposed to look like, which is mostly middle to upper middle class, like  
38 white cis, predominantly not uniquely straight. There's a long tradition of white gay men in  
39 academia.

- 1 AJ: Sure.
- 2 AI: But it's harder, it's just harder – it takes longer and the path doesn't seem to be as straight  
3 forward. I've seen that with a lot of people and I think it's that issue that, especially women of  
4 color academics, have written about around epistemic injustice. So this idea that who you are is  
5 already seen as not a credible source of knowledge.
- 6 AJ: Right.
- 7 AI: And I think that that is particularly, I'm just doing to say one more thing on this, which I think as  
8 a therapist who works with trans people, I know I'm always going to be seen as suspect by the  
9 establishment because I have a vested interest, right, in inverting clients.
- 10 AJ: Got it.
- 11 AI: So you're always going to be seen as inherently biased, especially when you work with young  
12 people. Am I, just by my very presence, going to be an undue influence on a child. But that is  
13 based on an assumption that a cis identity is preferable to a trans identity, because nobody ever  
14 says that the cis therapist is an undue influence on a child who is exploring their gender identity.  
15 And sometimes that weighs on me but I think that's more than made up for by just the sheer joy  
16 that a lot of trans folks have in being able to see a trans therapist. I'll never forget the defining  
17 moment why I knew it was important for me to be out as a therapist was this 12-year-old, when  
18 I was still working at the Center for Sexual Health, the first time around – it was during my  
19 second post-doc. This 12-year-old trans masculine looks at me and goes, "Are you really a  
20 doctor like Dr. So-and-so and Dr. So-and-so?" Who are also Ph.D.s, not M.D.s. And I said, "Yes, I  
21 really am." And just his face, it was this possibility and I was like this is why I'm out. People  
22 need to know that you get to be . . . you get to have this, you get to have those opportunities,  
23 you get to be a source of knowledge, you get to be an expert, or you get to be in a position of  
24 authority. And, of course, it takes a ton of privilege and all of that to get here and it's also  
25 important, I think, for trans youth to know that there are many options. It's like when people . .  
26 . I know that when trans youth of color look at you, Andrea, they see a sea of possibility and I  
27 know the reality is that you fought really hard for a lot of . . . for all your education and . . .
- 28 AJ: For everything.
- 29 AI: For everything – even for our fucking lives, right?
- 30 AJ: For our lives, absolutely.
- 31 AI: For everything.
- 32 AJ: But it is a joy to see that look of possibility, right?
- 33 AI: Exactly. And, you know, there are times when I'm like . . . I was never supposed to be alive for  
34 so many reasons. I have been suicidal or living with suicidality as I like to call it, since I was an  
35 early teen. I don't anymore. I was talking to my therapist and I was like I realize that I'm  
36 overwhelmed and I'm not suicidal and I'm 44. But, you know, I'm a survivor of early childhood  
37 abuse and trauma and already that kind of lowers the odds for survival, right?
- 38 AJ: Yes.

- 1 AI: And then this whole trying . . . I didn't even know who I was or I didn't have the language for  
2 who I was – all those things. And with hindsight I'm like - oh, it makes sense that if the world  
3 tells you that you shouldn't even be alive, how do you keep getting up every day and saying, "I  
4 am and I am alive and I'm here and I'm going to be me." And so it just takes a lot, it takes a lot.
- 5 AJ: It's called resilience, I think.
- 6 AI: And I see young people do it every day. The world is telling them you're not supposed to be this  
7 and you're not . . . and the rates of murder of trans women in this country is telling trans women  
8 of color you're not supposed to be alive and yet people get up every day and go to work and go  
9 to school.
- 10 AJ: And make it happen.
- 11 AI: And I know I'm not alone. I think that for me, whether it was movies or books or people who  
12 were going through crap that they weren't supposed to survive and they survived, and the  
13 possibility. I think that finding science fiction at such an early age was the possibility that the  
14 world didn't have to be what it was. I love that possibility. So, I didn't even know where I  
15 started from there, but I guess that's why I'm out as a trans person and I guess that's why I think  
16 it's important to be authentic, which also for me included deciding that really I'm not . . . I'm not  
17 a trans man, I don't see myself as a man. I see myself as a non-binary gender fluid person. I feel  
18 there is masculine and feminine in me and I use he/him pronouns because they're easier for  
19 people, and they make people think about my gender because a lot of people want to use she  
20 for me because I'm pretty effeminate, but I also use they/them pronouns increasingly as people  
21 are becoming aware. And when I was starting to take testosterone, my body was changing and  
22 people were so excited about my increased masculinity and I thought, "But that's as much of a  
23 lie as when I was trying to be a girl." If I try to be a man that is also a lie. So, that's why I say  
24 gender queer, gender fluid, trans masculine person because to live full-time as a man,  
25 sometimes it's really tempting because life would be easier, I think. I mean, white dudes - that  
26 would be easier.
- 27 AJ: There's a little bit of privilege there.
- 28 AI: Just a tad. It's tempting – and it's not who I am and I'm like . . . yeah. I don't know – blah, blah,  
29 lots of things.
- 30 AJ: Thank you, Alex. Thank you so much, this has been great.
- 31 AI: I know, I feel like I haven't even told you about immigration and how hard it is for trans people.  
32 So talk to somebody else . . . talk to other people, trans people and immigration – it sucks.
- 33 AJ: I've had that discussion and it's . . .
- 34 AI: Because the only thing I'll say is even if you have a Ph.D. and you're white and educated, it's still  
35 hard and it still sucks.
- 36 AJ: Wow.
- 37 AI: But you've had much better people to talk about this issue.

- 1 AJ: No, no, no.
- 2 AI: It's just to remind people that you can . . . I have a ton of privilege and it still has been a struggle.  
3 You're so liable to come across transphobia and . . . yeah, it's a fucked up system, our  
4 immigration system here.
- 5 AJ: It absolutely is but it seems like every issue that we have to come across in life, if you're trans  
6 identified or a gender non-conforming identified person, those issues are exacerbated by your  
7 gender identity.
- 8 AI: Yeah, yeah - that is so true. Thank you. Thank you for letting me add that little piece.
- 9 AJ: No, absolutely – that's wonderful. Good-bye.
- 10 AI: Good-bye.
- 11