

Phillipe Cunningham  
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins  
Interviewer

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

September 25, 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 Phillipe Cunningham -PC

3

4

5 AJ: My name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian for the Transgender Oral History Project  
6 at the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota. Today is September 25, 2015, and I am  
7 at the home of Phillipe Cunningham in North Minneapolis. I'm going to ask you, if you don't  
8 mind, introducing yourself and maybe spelling your name for our transcriber, but also tell me  
9 what your preferred gender pronouns are, what was your gender assigned at birth, and then  
10 what is your sexual orientation?

11

12 PC: So, my name is Phillipe Cunningham, spelled P-h-i-l-l-i-p-e and my preferred gender pronouns  
13 are male, so masculine he/him/his. My sexual orientation is gay or queer and I was assigned  
14 female at birth.

15

16 AJ: Great. So Phillipe, tell me about your earliest memory.

17

18 PC: My earliest memory. Honestly, the first true memory that I can hold on to very clearly was a  
19 very conscious decision and awareness that I had at about four years old, when I was in  
20 preschool, I remember feeling self-conscious because I could tell that I was the only brown kid in  
21 my class – black or brown. So looking around and noticing, and then noticing how people  
22 interacted differently with me and my family. I really remember that very clearly.

23

24 AJ: So your first memory was around racial identity.

25

26 PC: Yeah, it was around social isolation.

27

28 AJ: So tell me a little bit about where you went to school and where you grew up.

29

30 PC: Whenever people ask me where I'm from, I always make the joke that I'm from the middle of  
31 the cornfields in Illinois, which is actually a very accurate description of where I'm from. So,  
32 where I'm from is called Streator, Illinois.

33

34 AJ: Streator?

35

36 PC: Yes, it's about two hours southwest of Chicago. People often like to ask, "Oh, that's a suburb?"  
37 I'm like, "No, it is very far away."

38

39 AJ: Is it near Joliet? Or is it past . . . ?

40

41 PC: Further southwest than that, about another hour. And the nearest highway is like 20 minutes in  
42 any direction. So it takes a minute to get there. When I was little . . .

43

44 AJ: So it's literally an urban community – farm community?

45

- 1 PC: It's just very blue collar. My dad built tractors for 38 years, my mom was a dry cleaner. It's just  
2 very blue collar. We were the only interracial family, really Black family, for a good chunk of my  
3 early childhood so I just had an awareness of that at a very young age.  
4
- 5 AJ: So you went to elementary school in Streator, Illinois?  
6
- 7 PC: Yes, I did. I went to pre-K through 12, all in Streator. We lived there my whole life,  
8 unfortunately. And then at 18, it was only probably three weeks or so after I turned 18 that I  
9 left Streator and I've never lived there since.  
10
- 11 AJ: So you had this memory of feeling different and I suspect if you stayed in that town that whole  
12 time, probably the racial make-up didn't change that dramatically.  
13
- 14 PC: It actually did.  
15
- 16 AJ: Did it?  
17
- 18 PC: In middle school they . . . I do believe they started closing Cabrini-Green on the south side and, I  
19 think, a few other housing projects and the city was giving them housing vouchers outside of the  
20 city. And so when I was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, there was a huge flood of Black families that moved into  
21 Streator from the south side of Chicago.  
22
- 23 AJ: What?  
24
- 25 PC: All of a sudden I went from being the only Black kid to being one of like . . . 50.  
26
- 27 AJ: Wow, this might be for another interview, but the cultural shock of being moved from the inner  
28 city to essentially a rural community . . .  
29
- 30 PC: Yes, it is a rural community.  
31
- 32 AJ: It had to be really traumatic for those families that were shipped out.  
33
- 34 PC: Yeah. It also was a huge shock to the local community because they had such little exposure to  
35 Black folks and there already were such stereotypes. And then when you have folks who . . . like  
36 some folks who were living in the worst conditions in Chicago economically, health outcomes  
37 when you have those folks then removed from that environment and put into an environment  
38 of racist white people, then all of a sudden . . . so there was a huge clash that happened and, as  
39 a result, I became the tragic mulatto. The white kids were mean to me my whole life and now  
40 the Black kids were mean to me too. So, like, from the slave narrative – I totally turned into that  
41 and that became my narrative once they moved. I thought it was going to be great.  
42
- 43 AJ: So you experienced some bullying or what we would call bullying, but really some negative  
44 things that were going on at school?  
45

- 1 PC: When I reflect back on my childhood, a consistent thing that really just resonated throughout  
2 my childhood was social isolation and a lot of rejection. I didn't really start to experience true  
3 friendships probably until this past year or so, just because when I was growing up there was  
4 always a distance between me and my peers, there always was a sense of not quite being  
5 friends. It never really felt like people were invested in my well-being, I was always on the  
6 periphery.  
7
- 8 AJ: Why do you think that is? I know it's a difficult question to answer.  
9
- 10 PC: I've spent a lot of time reflecting on it just to really kind of heal from those experiences and to  
11 be able to do differently now and break those patterns of experience. But anyway . . . what was  
12 the question again?  
13
- 14 AJ: Just kind of why do you think that those relationships don't always seem to connect like those  
15 friendships you talked about - it feels like you were kind of distant or had been distant in the  
16 past?  
17
- 18 PC: Yeah, I think that in my hometown, in particular, those formidable ages of connection and  
19 community, there were a couple of issues. One is that I'm Black, and so that doesn't help, and  
20 the second was that my family was really working class. Both my parents came from extreme  
21 poverty. My mom has a criminal record so those sort of class-related things kind of also really  
22 determined it. So yeah, I just never really connected.  
23
- 24 AJ: That makes perfect sense. So, what were your mom and dad like? Did you have brothers and  
25 sisters? Were you an only child?  
26
- 27 PC: My parents were married before they married each other and so they have children from their  
28 previous marriages and in both cases, their ex's got full custody. What that means is that when  
29 they got together and had me, I was essentially raised as an only child with half-siblings very  
30 briefly rotating in and out, but never really forming a relationship with any of them. They were  
31 also all much older than me, at least eight years older. My parents are awesome though. I hold  
32 so much space for them because, honestly, they did the best that they could with what they  
33 had. Both are really quite remarkable given the circumstances in which they were raised. They  
34 weren't perfect but I hold so much space for the experiences that they've had and who they are  
35 as a result of that. One thing that I take ownership of is the privilege of experiencing  
36 unconditional love. I take ownership of that privilege because that gives me a different  
37 foundation to build on – like I have an anchor, I know what that feels like so I can give that, I can  
38 produce that. And also, it's a sense of stability that a lot of folks don't get. So I recognize that.  
39
- 40 AJ: Wow. When was the first time you realized that you were not the gender you were assigned at  
41 birth?  
42
- 43 PC: That's always an interesting question because I feel like my story doesn't follow the traditional  
44 narrative. I remember very clearly, also around four or five years old . . . I always thought my  
45 dad, my dad used to be a body builder and he's still really fit, I just remember being really  
46 envious of his body and I remember also feeling like, "Why won't my body look like that?" I

1 remember very vividly one year for my birthday, or just even as a surprise, my dad got me half-  
2 pound dumbbells so that we could work out together when I was really little. I remember telling  
3 my mom, "When I grow up I want to be a boy." It was just kind of like I was really confused as  
4 to why I wasn't one already. She said, "That's just not what people do, that's not a thing." And I  
5 was like, "OK." And then didn't re-examine that for 20 more years. I was a very compliant child  
6 and I lived in a world where my parents . . . I just complied with what my parents said. So my  
7 mom said that wasn't a thing and so I said that wasn't a thing. And then when I was 18, I moved  
8 to the Bay area and that was the first exposure that I had to the trans folks, because I went to  
9 Mills College and there were quite a few trans men on the campus. That was the first time I  
10 allowed myself to explore my gender presentation a little bit. I always prided myself on being a  
11 lipstick lesbian until I was about 18.

12  
13 AJ: Is Mills College a . . .

14  
15 PC: It's a women's college.

16  
17 AJ: All women's.

18  
19 PC: Yes, but it gave a lot of space for trans men, I felt like.

20  
21 AJ: And it's in . . . ?

22  
23 PC: Oakland.

24  
25 AJ: So there were a lot of trans guys on campus?

26  
27 PC: Yeah, or people teetering on that. So I gave myself about six months of being butch, I gave  
28 myself a good try, and then . . .

29  
30 AJ: So you had come out as lesbian?

31  
32 PC: Yeah, I came out as a lesbian right before I went to college at 18, so it was the summer I turned  
33 18. And to be honest, I was a terrible lesbian. I was like, "I'm a lesbian," and I literally . . . this is  
34 a real-life story, I was wearing a rainbow bracelet from . . .

35  
36 AJ: Some Pride parade or something.

37  
38 PC: Yeah, exactly – the first one I went to. And I arrived at campus, I wanted to get involved with  
39 the undergraduate student government. I went to the office, sat down with the vice president, I  
40 thought he was cute and then discretely took off the rainbow bracelet. Terrible lesbian, but I  
41 gave it a good try, I gave it a good go – because that's what it felt like.

42  
43 AJ: Like you were trying to be a lesbian, but you weren't really a lesbian - you were trying, right?

44  
45 PC: Well, I was trying but it was what I thought I was because I knew that something wasn't aligned.  
46 My sense of identity never could quite gel so it was a lot of searching, which is why . . . I am

1 interested, well I was more so, now it's like I allow myself just to accept that I'm just interested  
2 in masculinity. So I was a lipstick lesbian, essentially, from 18 to 20 or so, then I was butch for  
3 six months, and then during that time became so infatuated with one of my . . . I did martial  
4 arts, one of my teammates, and I was like, "Ohh, he is real cute – oh, oh." And here I am rocking  
5 polos and cargo shorts, looking real butch, and then had kind of a moment of clarity of this  
6 presentation doesn't feel right, this identity doesn't feel right. Then I kind of shifted over to  
7 being more feminine again, and queer identified – I joke around that I was mostly straight, and  
8 then . . . so when I was in college at DePaul University, I took a Gay American History class to  
9 fulfill a multicultural requirement and the professor divvied up the syllabus – you read that  
10 chapter and then presented questions and facilitated a conversation. I was captivated by the  
11 idea of gay trans people. I logically understand it, but I don't get it. I just can't quite wrap my  
12 mind around it, but I always though remember understanding it to some degree and bringing  
13 that up in conversations, "Well trans people can be gay too," but still not fully understanding  
14 what that felt like or looked like, because I hadn't actually met a gay trans person. So, I picked  
15 that topic, I picked that. I read it, I read the story of Lou Sullivan, who was an activist out of San  
16 Francisco – he was a gay trans man with a partner and ended up dying from AIDS, during the  
17 AIDS epidemic. So I read his story and I closed it and pushed it away and had this moment  
18 where I was just like . . . absolutely, 100% certain, I was like, "Oh my God, I'm a gay man." It was  
19 a very clear connection.  
20

21 AJ: And so, you said, this happened at DePaw?

22  
23 PC: DePaul.

24  
25 AJ: Oh, DePaul. So back in Chicago, so you transferred from Mills?

26  
27 PC: Yes.

28  
29 AJ: How long did you stay at Mills?

30  
31 PC: I transferred actually twice. I started at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, spent three  
32 semesters there, then I spent three semester at Mills, and then I finished at DePaul. And I did  
33 summer sessions at UC-Berkeley. So I explored a whole bunch while I was out . . .  
34

35 AJ: No, I'm just trying to get the story.

36  
37 PC: So I graduated from DePaul and I transitioned there at the end of my junior year. It was during  
38 that class, it was literally two weeks later I came out.  
39

40 (pause to let the cat out)

41  
42 AJ: You were just talking about the experience in your junior year at DePaul when you transitioned  
43 at school. That's big.

44  
45 PC: It's actually interesting because I didn't really fully comprehend how big it was because I  
46 definitely did that coming out super loud, because I was queer and was very aware of the fact of

1 the intersectionality and the complexities already involved in social justice, so I did that very  
2 coming out loud thing and really held that space that I can be a feminine trans man. Now I  
3 reflect on it and I was like man I was creating space in ways that I didn't recognize at that time,  
4 but it was a thing.

5  
6 AJ: There's a lot of peer pressure that happens even in college. People are being individuals but  
7 they're still conforming to the college norms in order to sort of get along and get through, and  
8 you just blasted all of that. How did your classmates react and respond?

9  
10 PC: Just to give you a little context about how I was showing up, I actually . . . by the time I was at  
11 DePaul, I had been out of school for about a year and a half because I couldn't afford to stay in  
12 school when I was out in the Bay area. So I was a little bit older when I went to DePaul and I just  
13 had no interest at that time in the college experience, but I wanted to feel connected to  
14 community so I joined a sorority. So that was the only real connection that I had to the  
15 university other . . . I would go to class and then go home. So during that time actually, what  
16 culture I was steeped in was Chicago nightlife because I was working as a bartender overnights  
17 and going to school during the day. So I was a nightlife persona a little bit, in my own little way,  
18 and so I transitioned very publicly in Boy's Town, so that was where my problems were.

19  
20 AJ: Boy's Town. What is Boy's Town? Tell us a little bit about Boy's Town.

21  
22 PC: So Boy's Town is the gay district in Chicago that is incredibly racist, incredibly classist,  
23 exclusionary, it is highly problematic, and that was where I spent the first four years of my  
24 transition – in the middle of all of that, because I didn't know I was a gay man. I was a gay man  
25 so I didn't know anything else, I just went to where gay men were. I was the only gay trans  
26 man in all this space all the time. So I experienced a lot of pushback from the people that I saw  
27 in that scene and people were extremely transphobic.

28  
29 AJ: So transphobia . . .

30  
31 PC: It was rampant.

32  
33 AJ: Racism . . .

34  
35 PC: Absolutely.

36  
37 AJ: I suspect maybe some sexism too.

38  
39 PC: Oh absolutely and it showed up in this way of, "You will never be one of us." So I would be out,  
40 and this was when I started to pass – like "t" was working real good, and so I'm sitting here  
41 trying to holler and dance with a guy and, this literally happened, a guy walked behind him and  
42 whispered in his hear, "Just so you know, that's a girl." And, I was totally put on the spot – like,  
43 "Well, what's that supposed to mean?" And then I was like, "Oh my God." So that really did  
44 happen and things like that did happen frequently. Also, I was experiencing race in a different  
45 way at that time as well, going from being a light-skinned mixed woman who fits within  
46 conventional attractiveness in some ways, to being a Black man period – granted I do have light



- 1 skin privilege and I own that, it was a traumatic experience. And then to be completely  
2 immersed in a racist culture and in Chicago, which adds a whole other layer of racism. Going  
3 through that, it took me a long time to recover from the rage that I was constantly experiencing  
4 as a response of how can people not see what they're doing, why is this considered OK the way  
5 that I was suddenly treated. It was very drastic, very quickly.  
6
- 7 AJ: So you had immersed yourself in this sort of gay male life, had you had inroads or relationships  
8 within the lesbian community too?  
9
- 10 PC: No, I actually had no connections whatsoever to the lesbian community.  
11
- 12 AJ: To the trans community?  
13
- 14 PC: No, not really. I sought it out, but never fully connected.  
15
- 16 AJ: You just didn't fully connect.  
17
- 18 PC: Yeah . . .  
19
- 20 AJ: Because that's got to be tough to be in the cis gay male's face as a trans man and that's your  
21 only socialization.  
22
- 23 PC: Yes, a Black trans man at that, so experiencing that layer of it. I didn't realize how much and  
24 how deep into survival mode I was until I left Chicago. I was wasting so much life energy on  
25 survival in that environment. When I came here I was extremely intentional about cultivating a  
26 different kind of life for myself, I wasn't moving here to create a carbon-gray copy of my life in  
27 Chicago. I was leaving because I needed to and, in doing so, cleared that slate and . . . as you  
28 have seen, in some ways, my life has become a lot better.  
29
- 30 AJ: Well I have witnessed a beautiful life but I don't have a vision of what it was prior.  
31
- 32 PC: I was sad, I was really sad and I was really lonely. I didn't meet another Black trans man until  
33 three years into my transition. It took a long time.  
34
- 35 AJ: Who was that?  
36
- 37 PC: I think I met Melvin Whitehead first.  
38
- 39 AJ: Who's Melvin? Tell me a little bit about Melvin.  
40
- 41 PC: Melvin is an associate professor at Lewis University in Joliet. He is also queer so that was really  
42 cool too.  
43
- 44 AJ: A trans man who identifies as queer.  
45

- 1 PC: Yes, so that was pretty cool to meet another queer trans man of color because I had, up until  
2 then, I had never met another . . .  
3
- 4 AJ: So who were your role models? You read Lou Sullivan.  
5
- 6 PC: I read the one story.  
7
- 8 AJ: Yeah, but how did you sort of create this persona or this identity? Was it gay men who were  
9 your role models? And if that's true, that's real – that's OK.  
10
- 11 PC: I would say probably more like . . . I was actually pretty within drag queen culture so that's  
12 where I ended up falling into, like out of safety. In Chicago, at that time, a vast majority of the  
13 most well-known queens were all Black, and so I did find that little safe haven but even then I  
14 was still removed because I wasn't in that same experience.  
15
- 16 AJ: But those were your peers, that was your peer group.  
17
- 18 PC: Slightly – yeah.  
19
- 20 AJ: That's who you would drink with when you would see them out at the bars and stuff like that.  
21
- 22 PC: Yeah, at least during that period. Once I left and graduated college and then started teaching, I  
23 didn't stay connected to that community and honestly, I recognize when I look back at my life  
24 there was a pervasive cycle of social isolation and I didn't know how to do anything differently  
25 than keep copying that over and over and over again. That separation, that feeling of low self-  
26 worth because it was constantly being reflected back that I was not worth the same. I just kept  
27 perpetuating that in my own life and I didn't have people that I necessarily looked up to. I guess  
28 probably the closest would be RuPaul. RuPaul was my idol since I was like six. My mom used to  
29 let me stay up late and watch the RuPaul Show on VH1. She bought me *To Wong Foo* and *The*  
30 *Birdcage*. I wanted to be a drag queen. My mom actually said to me, like her moment of  
31 support came from her being like, "I see it now, I see that I had a gay son and I just didn't  
32 recognize it because you were putting make-up on and heels." But I also had a feather boa  
33 collection, that's a real thing. But yeah, that's . . . sorry, I just got so caught up with the feather  
34 boas.  
35
- 36 AJ: No, that's fine. So what terms do you use to describe yourself, and you've already said you're  
37 gay or queer.  
38
- 39 PC: Yeah.  
40
- 41 AJ: But has that changed over time? And I know you talked about that a little bit but just indulge  
42 me.  
43
- 44 PC: Sure. Yeah, are you talking about just kind of in general?  
45
- 46 AJ: Yeah, like some people . . . and you said you could have been straight . . .

- 1  
2 PC: I can't come out as anything else is basically the case.  
3  
4 AJ: You've hit every label.  
5  
6 PC: I have. I've got the L, the G, I've got all of it. I came out as bisexual at 16 or 17, came out – but  
7 that was where my bullying really started. When I was in middle school I was always very  
8 tomboyish and very sports-y. I had a huge crush on my best friend and we kissed a little, I think  
9 that's pretty common actually. I really had a big crush on her and then she moved away and it  
10 was a secret, and then it ended up that she shared it with someone and then the whole school  
11 found out and then I was tortured after that. I was at the front-end of cyber-bullying. This is  
12 when AOL Instant Messenger was the hot thing, that was really when connectivity to the  
13 internet was starting to be a thing, especially in rural areas. So, I'd get home and hop online  
14 hoping to make some friends and there would be coordinated attacks on me – like where I  
15 would have four or five or more people at the same time send me a message saying, "You are  
16 ugly because you're Black." Which is a stupid . . . that's not even . . . literally verbatim they said,  
17 "You're ugly because you're Black." That's not an exaggeration, which is a basic insult, but God  
18 it was earth shattering at that time. And that persisted very quietly. When I went into high  
19 school that was when I switched the presentation and became more feminine in my  
20 presentation, and then I came out as bi at 17 or so. So basically the different labels that I've  
21 had, I kind of feel like it's just peeling the onion. I was like, "Am I bisexual? No, that doesn't feel  
22 right." Then I was like, "Am I lesbian? No, that doesn't feel right." "Well maybe I'm mostly  
23 straight. No, that doesn't feel right either." And then it was like, "Well maybe I'm butch." I just  
24 kept trying, I was trying to figure it out.  
25  
26 AJ: Just trying to figure out where you belong.  
27  
28 PC: And honestly, like I said, once I was like, "Oh my God, I'm a gay man," I knew that that was it. It  
29 was just extremely clear. It was like for the first time, my personality, my childhood, all of my  
30 experiences made sense. I was like, "Oh, that . . ."  
31  
32 AJ: That's awesome. What challenges have you faced since you've begun to really express your true  
33 gender identity?  
34  
35 PC: Well, I shared some things around becoming a Black man that was quite traumatizing. But the  
36 other part of it . . .  
37  
38 AJ: And you can say more about that if you want. Actually, yes, please. Black men are under attack  
39 in our society, which is not a new phenomenon.  
40  
41 PC: Not at all.  
42  
43 AJ: It's pretty much been that way since Africans have been transported and enslaved in America.  
44 So how does it feel to go from being a Black woman with, you've said it yourself – this relatively  
45 light skin privilege to becoming a Black male, which, in many ways, some of that light skinned  
46 privilege goes away when it's packaged in a male body.

- 1  
2 PC: The only way that I can describe was traumatizing, or I should say it was traumatizing, because  
3 after spending almost 23 years being socialized, of leaning into my beauty privilege, as a woman  
4 in order to escape any sort of fear that might come up along the way, I no longer had that  
5 barrier that I could lean into to not feel afraid. I was socially conditioned to be afraid of men, I  
6 was socially conditioned to shrink – like whenever there is a challenge, to shrink. And so  
7 imagine suddenly being in that experience of being afraid and shrinking but yet I’m the one who  
8 is being viewed as a threat. And so, I was so scared all the time of how people would assume  
9 things about me and then respond aggressively. I was so afraid of violence happening to me.  
10 There is a part of being light-skinned too that people don’t really talk about, which is . . . since  
11 we’re seen as less threatening, sometimes people get real brave in how they interact with us, do  
12 you know what I mean?  
13  
14 AJ: Ahh, yes.  
15  
16 PC: Because they’re not as afraid, I think, is how it really boils down. And so . . .  
17  
18 AJ: I’ve never thought . . . being a dark-skinned person, I’ve never really thought about that.  
19  
20 PC: My dad is very dark skinned, and a big guy, so he’s extremely threatening to people, so people  
21 don’t get brave with him. But my little puny arms, light skin, smaller guy. So I would get  
22 shoulder checked, I would get cut in line, things that . . . does nobody else see this? You know,  
23 get real brave and then I would be the one in the wrong to confront or to say anything. So I was  
24 constantly being set up in these ways that I had never been before. These were acts of  
25 aggression, very passively, but say something. Do you know what I mean? Because there is an  
26 automatic assumption that if you turn around and say something, everyone else is going to have  
27 their back and you’re going to be in the wrong. No matter the fact that they’re . . . and I started  
28 having people come up to me and tell me to be quiet.  
29  
30 AJ: Guys would do this?  
31  
32 PC: Actually it was primarily white women.  
33  
34 AJ: Oh, OK.  
35  
36 PC: I started having a lot of white women get real brave in policing how I behaved in public. And so,  
37 actually I was walking around north Minneapolis and I was talking to Lane, my now husband, on  
38 Facetime – so we’re talking and I was just going for a walk, it was a really nice day. And I had  
39 this older white woman come out of her house and try to take my phone out of my hand and  
40 she accused me of trying to case houses to burglarize.  
41  
42 AJ: Oh my goodness.  
43  
44 PC: So, Lane witnessed it, as a white person, and on the other side of it was just like, “Oh my God,  
45 how can this person not see that they just assumed so much.” I was sitting here talking to  
46 someone and they’re thinking that I’m planning on robbing their houses later. And so that was

- 1 really confusing for him, and me too. It was like, “God, can I just go for a walk.” But thank God,  
2 though, that she didn’t call the police because she was too scared – that’s something I think  
3 about, that a lot of times white folks are too scared to say anything which is why they call 9-1-1.  
4
- 5 AJ: So she didn’t talk to you as a trans person, she just thought you were a Black male, criminal.  
6
- 7 PC: So this part of the trans narrative, the Black trans masculine experience, is completely hidden, I  
8 feel like, from the rest of the trans narrative.  
9
- 10 AJ: Well I’m glad you’re here to help. You won’t be able to do it all but it’s definitely a start on the  
11 path to trying to understand that.  
12
- 13 PC: Yeah, you know, there is almost this negation that sort of happens with passing privilege – it’s  
14 like passing as a Black man is . . . that’s a different experience entirely, so it’s like while I have  
15 more privilege in passing, I also have less privilege as a man so that experience often has not  
16 been captured.  
17
- 18 AJ: What have been some of the positive aspects of expressing your true gender identity?  
19
- 20 PC: Well, I’m happier than I’ve ever been. I really went through some really deep soul searching  
21 during . . . probably by year two of my transition, because I was so depressed and I was so full of  
22 rage, I was so socially isolated. I was working as a public school teacher on the south side of  
23 Chicago and I was special education, I didn’t have the resources, I was working 80-90 hour  
24 weeks. I was just really miserable so I paused. When I left . . . I actually took some time and  
25 actually de-transitioned for about nine months.  
26
- 27 AJ: Oh, wow.  
28
- 29 PC: Yeah, because I wanted to escape what was happening. I was like, “You know what? I’m  
30 making the decision right here and now that I would rather not be myself and live in a world as a  
31 woman than be myself and be a Black man.” I made that clear distinction. I was like, “I can’t  
32 live like this anymore.” I was so depressed. I went off testosterone and started presenting  
33 again as feminine, was Ms. Cunningham – the school gave me a space to de-transition, which  
34 was really cool.  
35
- 36 AJ: That sounds awesome.  
37
- 38 PC: It was cool they allowed it but does that mean it was an accepting culture, absolutely not. I  
39 mean, because basically what happened was to the world I became a Black trans woman. So I  
40 spent nine months being perceived as a Black trans woman.  
41
- 42 AJ: Wow.  
43
- 44 PC: And honestly, that was the time in my life where I was . . .  
45

- 1 AJ: Because people had sort of recognized and maybe accepted that you're this Black male, and  
2 now you're showing up in what is considered drag.  
3
- 4 PC: Basically. Yeah, and also at this point . . .  
5
- 6 AJ: Well, as a Black female.  
7
- 8 PC: Right. And at this point I had been on testosterone for about two and a half years, so I looked  
9 different.  
10
- 11 AJ: So you had to shave . . .  
12
- 13 PC: I had to shave, I had already had top surgery. So all of it was just really icky for me in terms of  
14 how much I was trying to escape my own experience. But I'm grateful for that nine month  
15 period, though, of walking down the street and being mis-gendered intentionally by people.  
16 People saying, "Sir," when here I am with full face of make-up on and a barrette and a purse. So  
17 during that experience . . .  
18
- 19 AJ: Welcome to my world.  
20
- 21 PC: Hello, and I am there . . . God bless you, honestly. So basically, that was the time though in  
22 which I had a very distinct shift in my mindset, my perspective of the world, where I realized  
23 that it does not matter what the person crossing the street sees me as. They can see me as a  
24 man or as a woman and I'm still Phillippe. I finally understood that. So that didn't upset me, that  
25 didn't trigger me, that wasn't like some sort of visceral reaction anymore to being mid-  
26 gendered. And then I started not wearing make-up and I really started to allow myself the space  
27 to being a Black man again in that feeling of – it doesn't matter how people treat you, just be  
28 yourself, just love yourself. I came out the other side a completely different person, much more  
29 settled in my identity, much happier than I'd ever been. I process it all differently. So that's a  
30 really . . . I am who I'm meant to be in this lifetime, right now in this moment. I wish I could  
31 have spent my whole life on this frequency. But I needed to figure it all out otherwise first.  
32
- 33 AJ: It takes time to get there.  
34
- 35 PC: It sure does and I'm glad.  
36
- 37 AJ: What's your current relationship like with your birth family?  
38
- 39 PC: I'm close with my parents. My mother was not happy when I came out. My mother was very  
40 attached, has always been extremely attached, to the idea of having a daughter. And so, she  
41 was not happy when I came out and said a lot of the textbook things that you're not supposed  
42 to say. The, "You murdered my daughter, I will never forgive you for this." My mom has always  
43 said my whole life, "You've got to live to make yourself happy, you've got to live your own life,"  
44 and then she said, "I wish I would have never said that to you." But because of the fact that I  
45 was coming out in this very radical mindset, I just was not even bothered by it because I knew  
46 she was having her feelings about it so I didn't really internalize it. Some of those things stung a

1 little bit, but it was something that I felt like I could just process and kept it moving. My dad is  
2 pretty quiet so he was just kind of like, "OK." But we're really close now, they defend me in my  
3 hometown if somebody mis-genders me.  
4

5 AJ: Really? Mom too?  
6

7 PC: Yes. My mom – so she actually . . . when I went to go get top surgery in Florida, she went with  
8 me. My dad was going to go with me but then he got a part-time job so he couldn't go. She was  
9 like, "I'm not going to let you go down there and get surgery and then be down there by  
10 yourself." So she went with me and there was this moment for her, like I was telling you – it  
11 was on the plane on the way to Florida, she just looked at me and she was like, "I see it now. I  
12 see how the people you were obsessed with growing up were RuPaul, Starina off of *The*  
13 *Birdcage*, Noxeema Jackson from *To Wong Foo* - you know, drag queens, trans women, gender  
14 queer people were my idols growing up now. She was like, "I see it now, I see that I had a gay  
15 son growing up, and I see it in you now. I can see how I have a gay son." And then when I went  
16 off testosterone and went through my de-transition phase, I became very depressed. My body  
17 actually, the doctor told me that he thinks that my body physically manifests gender dysphoria  
18 in a way that it creates estrogen but then kind of rejects it, because I experienced a lot of  
19 depression growing up and then when I went on testosterone it went away - it was like gone.  
20 And so my mom was like, "I actually think you need to go back on . . ."  
21

22 AJ: Put you on some HRT.  
23

24 PC: Yeah, go back on testosterone. And then when I did and she saw how much happier I was, like  
25 she could compare the two, she really switched and was like, "You're my son." My parents call  
26 me son, they send me Christmas cards with "son" on it. So my parents are there, my extended  
27 family is a hit or miss, but that's OK – I'm blessed every day by my parents.  
28

29 AJ: So, you have a chosen family now, or a new family. You just recently got married. I had the  
30 honor and the privilege of witnessing the marriage of you and Lane, two trans gay men. That's  
31 fascinating to me. Do you want to talk about that at all?  
32

33 PC: Yeah, sure. I mean, I could gush about Lane all day. He's my favorite person, he's such a good  
34 person. I had never been with a trans man before Lane, and actually the same can be said for  
35 him – he had never been with a trans man either. And looking at that, reflecting on that, I  
36 actually never even considered dating a trans man, with the exception of one who was a friend –  
37 but even then it was just kind of a friend with like, "Oh, I'm crushing on you a little," it never  
38 went anywhere. But it was a lot of internalized trans phobia, where I was like, "Why would I  
39 date another trans man?" I talked with a couple of trans women, but I had never really  
40 considered a trans man. But when I saw Lane, and I had already kind of started working through  
41 that – like self-reflecting on why am I so resistant, and a big part of it was feeling so . . . like a  
42 visceral reaction to the idea of being a lesbian, I could just hear what people would say. And so,  
43 I was resistant to accepting the idea of that until I realized it was just internalized transphobia.  
44 But when I met Lane it was heart eyes and swoon and it didn't even matter. In fact, there's a  
45 little bit of an, "Oh my God, this works so well." It's so much easier, we just align, we  
46 understand, we have similar emotional processes.

1  
2 AJ: So most people don't know that either of you are trans . . .  
3  
4 PC: Yeah, people don't know.  
5  
6 AJ: So they read you guys as a gay couple.  
7  
8 PC: Yeah.  
9  
10 AJ: How is that?  
11  
12 PC: It's cool.  
13  
14 AJ: In society and the world, when you travel, go to restaurants.  
15  
16 PC: Well, it's cool for me because I am a gay man so I really love being out in the world and being a  
17 gay man.  
18  
19 AJ: And being read as that.  
20  
21 PC: And being read as that and being married to my husband and being out in public as a gay couple  
22 and being viewed as a gay, male couple. That feels really good to me. We are in such a bubble  
23 and we challenge each other and really process a lot of the pain that we've accumulated over  
24 our lives, that we live in a bubble and can go out in public and be affectionate and be in our  
25 bubble in public because we are just not bothered by it. And also, Minneapolis is fairly queer  
26 friendly so we're also in a safer space.  
27  
28 AJ: You're also an interracial couple. I know that you mentioned you grew up in an interracial  
29 family, so have you noticed or experienced any sort of discrimination or hostility around the fact  
30 that it's an interracial relationship?  
31  
32 PC: So, no – not like any sort of . . .  
33  
34 AJ: In your face.  
35  
36 PC: Yeah, nobody has said anything, nothing has happened. I would say that actually probably the  
37 crux of the experience and the process that I experienced, was being in an interracial experience  
38 myself. I actually declared to my parents . . . Lane and I met in February, probably in December  
39 or January, that I would never date a white man again. And I hadn't at that point for a very long  
40 time anyway, but I was just like, "I'm a Black man, my experience is really difficult, and I will not  
41 hold space for a white man who cannot hear my experience."  
42  
43 AJ: Sure.  
44  
45 PC: "I'm just not going to live the rest of my life like that." When Lane and I met at Creating Change,  
46 and we were at the vigil for Jessie Hernandez, the facilitator of this vigil was like, "Turn to the



1 person next to you and share what's coming up for you right now." And so, Lane and I turned to  
2 each other, and this was when we just had met, and I was very honest. I don't remember what I  
3 said, but I was very real in what was coming up for me – about feeling my self-worth and my  
4 value in this society, and I could so tell that he held space, that he heard me and did not  
5 internalize that as a white person at all. I could see that he could actually feel like, "Damn," like  
6 he was empathizing and hearing me. That was the first time that I've ever felt a white person  
7 hold that space for me, it was actually quite distinctive and that left a mark on me. Then we  
8 ended up getting together and I had to process that, as an activist – an extremely pro-Black  
9 activist around a bunch of other Black radical revolutionaries, and now I'm with a white person.  
10 And so I had to really process navigating . . . am I conforming to society's cultural norms? Am I  
11 adhering to that by showing up in this relationship? I swear to you, though – this is the thing,  
12 that it does not matter. Lane and I are soulmates. That was something that I just had to work  
13 through. I always feel really nervous, still, about if it hurt my street cred as a pro-Black activist.  
14 But it is what it is and honestly, Lane is the kind of white ally that we all really hope and pray for.  
15 He really is.

16  
17 AJ: Sure. He's a part of activist circles and advocacy work.

18  
19 PC: Yeah, we actually . . .

20  
21 AJ: He's on the front line, it's like he . . . I know him to be down.

22  
23 PC: Yeah, he's so down. So when we were in Chicago at Color of Violence, we actually were sitting  
24 in a hotel room with all Black trans folks, all Black trans revolutionaries from all over the  
25 country, and there was a conversation being had actually about this very high level idea of white  
26 bodies as a form of terrorism. What an intense conversation, right? And he's the only white  
27 person in the room . . .

28  
29 AJ: I don't think I was in that conversation.

30  
31 PC: I don't think you were – no. He internalized zero percent of that. He held space for it, he heard  
32 exactly why someone would hear or see a white body as a form of terrorism and he's like, "I  
33 hear that and I hold that as true." And that was also quite a remarkable experience. I know that  
34 it's kind of silly that we have to celebrate someone not being riddled with white fragility but . . .  
35 this is a noticeable, how I've never experienced that before. And when I asked him, actually,  
36 "how does it feel to be in a space during those kind of conversations?" He said . . . he teared up  
37 a little bit and he was like, "I feel like that's my place in this work – to hear and then to go to  
38 other white people and be like, 'yo, we are not doing right, like this is how we should be  
39 engaged in this.'" And he's like, "I feel like that's what my work is, it's not for me to defend  
40 white people in those spaces or for me to take it personally, it's for me to take those  
41 experiences, try my best to hold them, and then go back to white folks and have conversations  
42 differently." So, he's a phenomenal person.

43  
44 AJ: To the extent that you're comfortable, and again you've talked about hormone therapy, you've  
45 talked about top surgery, but what medical interventions have you had and do you have any  
46 thoughts or plans or ideations about future medical intervention that's transition related?

- 1  
2 PC: Sure. So I've been on testosterone off and on now for five years. I hate needles, unfortunately,  
3 and so I never . . .  
4  
5 AJ: It's important for a trans man.  
6  
7 PC: Right, every week though – what? So I did it about once every six to eight weeks, I was terrible  
8 about taking my testosterone the way I'm supposed to. I recently got the gel version and so  
9 actually what's funny is five years in to my transition I'm actually kind of going through puberty  
10 again because now my body is maintaining that testosterone level, so my beard is filling in, my  
11 voice dropped a little bit. But anyway, I started testosterone actually only a few months after  
12 coming out and I did informed consent. If I could go back and push the re-set button and do it  
13 differently, I would have probably actually followed the standards of care because I was not  
14 emotionally prepared to be a Black man in this society. I had no support, anywhere, for that. I  
15 really could have used more support at that time. And so, I'm just saying for my own experience  
16 of having . . . like if I could have worked with a Black man, a male therapist, as I was going  
17 through it or beforehand to really understand what my experience was about to be, I would do  
18 it that way. I feel like I rushed into it, thinking I was going to be like a white trans man on either  
19 side, all this privilege, being a babe and everybody is going to want to be my friend or  
20 something. And I think some folks maybe do that, but really? Eyes on passing and things like  
21 that . . . sorry, tangent. I did what a lot of white trans guys . . . I'm sure actually trans guys all  
22 over the place, which is watch the YouTube videos to find people reflected back at you, hear  
23 stories. And pretty much the most well-known videos are all white guys. So they were having a  
24 grand old time, they were loving their life. So I just really think I needed to be better anchored  
25 and really understanding what that experience was going to be like. So I did that. About a year  
26 and a half into my transition, or my medical transition, is when I had top surgery. Actually Lane  
27 and I got top surgery with the same surgeon.  
28  
29 AJ: Oh wow. Coincidentally or together?  
30  
31 PC: Coincidentally. No, I got top surgery in . . .  
32  
33 AJ: You said you went to Florida.  
34  
35 PC: Yeah, there's a . . . in the trans masculine community there's a few . . .  
36  
37 AJ: A handful of surgeons.  
38  
39 PC: . . . who do really good work, yeah. But it's still sort of silly though.  
40  
41 AJ: Who is the doctor?  
42  
43 PC: Dr. Garramone.  
44  
45 AJ: Do you know how to spell that?  
46

- 1 PC: G-a-r-r-a-m-o-n-e. Fantastic doctor, oh my gosh. Great staff, so supportive.  
2
- 3 AJ: He's in Florida?  
4
- 5 PC: Yeah, Florida.  
6
- 7 AJ: What part?  
8
- 9 PC: Ft. Lauderdale. Fun coincidence.  
10
- 11 AJ: That's interesting.  
12
- 13 PC: Yeah, so I consider . . . I would like to have a hysterectomy at some point, just because my  
14 organs cause me pain as a result of my hormone therapy. So, they cause me pain and I have no  
15 intention, really, of using them. But I would . . .  
16
- 17 AJ: Now I know Lane has talked about having children.  
18
- 19 PC: Yes, we will have kids.  
20
- 21 AJ: It just won't be you.  
22
- 23 PC: I will not carry. So what I hope to do is freeze my eggs and then get a hysterectomy at some  
24 point. That's just not meant for me in this lifetime, but I would like biological children which is  
25 why I would like to freeze my eggs.  
26
- 27 AJ: Well thank you for being honest about that and sharing. What specific moment or person or  
28 organization has had a significant impact on you related to your gender identity? So you talked  
29 about Lou Sullivan and you talked about RuPaul and those sort of cultural, iconic movies. Were  
30 there organizations or people that you actually knew that had a role when you look back?  
31 Melvin White – that's who I was trying to think of, you talked about Melvin White.  
32
- 33 PC: I think his name was Melvin Whitehead. It was nice connecting with another Black queer trans  
34 person. So that was nice. You've got to give me a second here to try to really . . . I would say  
35 moving to Minneapolis was probably my life changing moment around that. I was so  
36 disconnected from my trans identity and I have been since I came out as trans. I was extremely  
37 100% in that mentality of, "I'm a gay man, I am not a gay trans man." I lived that and I fought  
38 really hard to be viewed as that. When I re-entered after my de-transition, started presenting as  
39 masculine again, that started to shift, I actually started being really open about being trans and  
40 started sharing that – and promised myself that I would never go stealth again – because I was  
41 stealth as a teacher, prior to de-transitioning, and it was really hard for me. I wasn't happy in  
42 that experience.  
43
- 44 AJ: What about your interactions with institutions? So, medical personnel or the criminal justice  
45 system or educational institutions? It sounds like DePaul was kind of pretty . . .  
46

- 1 PC: They were real easy, it was OK. There was no drama, my sorority was like, "OK." Yeah, and then  
2 the national board, even when my sorority reached out and asked for my support to be able to  
3 help them to be more trans inclusive.  
4
- 5 AJ: Oh, wow.  
6
- 7 PC: Yeah, pretty cool.  
8
- 9 AJ: Social security . . . ?  
10
- 11 PC: Medical, I was getting to medical. I did not have good experiences, I still don't have good  
12 experiences with the medical industry. So it's always high stress going to the doctor, it's also  
13 kind of a double-edge sword of passing – there's just constant . . . like moment after moment  
14 after moment of people being like, "Oh," and then responding inappropriately. Do you know  
15 what I mean?  
16
- 17 AJ: You have ovaries.  
18
- 19 PC: Right, right, right – and then asking inappropriate questions almost immediately and I'm like, "I  
20 know that wasn't the next question on the medical form that you just . . ." So, in Minneapolis,  
21 well it actually was in Columbia Heights, a northern suburb, where I went to a doctor, did get  
22 established with medical care here, and with my insurance I'm labeled as female and I have to  
23 be labeled as female in order to get gendered procedures covered. I learned this the hard way  
24 when I was in Chicago Public Schools when someone, without my consent, changed it to male  
25 and then when I got an annual exam they didn't cover it because it didn't align with my gender.  
26 So I tried to explain to them there that I needed to be listed as female and this nurse was like, "I  
27 just don't think that we can do that." I was like, "Why?" She was like, "I think it's a policy." And  
28 I was like, "Well, thinking and knowing are two different things." But she pretty much said no – I  
29 mean this is Minnesota so it was sort of a passive-aggressive no. And then I was like, "Can you  
30 please go check with someone?" And so then . . . plus, by the way, she was speaking very  
31 emphatically so she was loud, and then went out into the hall and then very loudly talked to  
32 someone else, like another nurse, about the policy. And she was saying, "I just don't think that  
33 we can do this, I don't think we can do this." And I could hear all of it, first of all it was really  
34 uncomfortable and so then basically at the end they said no and I didn't want to keep fighting it  
35 and I haven't had any problems. But that discomfort though of fighting to be listed as female –  
36 ewww. And ironically before I had a beard but still passed, in some ways – a little bit, once I  
37 would say I was female assigned at birth, they would change it on my chart. It's like gender  
38 policing on both sides of it when I was trying – like, "No, I'm male," when I was trying to do that  
39 they were like, "No, you're female." And then on the other side I was like, "I have to be listed . .  
40 ." "No, male." But on a serious note though actually, when I went to go get top surgery, I went  
41 to a clinic in Humboldt Park in Chicago. I was not making a lot of money so it was a community  
42 clinic and I went to get cleared for surgery, just a form that had to be filled out. I went into this  
43 place and I looked the way that I looked and when I explained to the doctor – we made it  
44 through probably about one-quarter of . . . just kind of doing the usual parts, and I explained  
45 that I was getting top surgery and medically transitioning, and then he didn't believe me. Then  
46 he was like, "Wait, why? I don't understand." I was like, "Well, I don't really know how else to

- 1 explain it.” And then he was like, “Show me then.” I didn’t know . . . I wanted to get cleared for  
2 surgery, so I complied and lifted up my shirt so that he could see my breasts and then he  
3 proceeded to squeeze my breasts.  
4
- 5 AJ: Oh wow.  
6
- 7 PC: Why, to check if they were real? First of all, me lifting up my shirt wasn’t necessary in the first  
8 place and then touching me was extra not necessary – especially in that way. And then the  
9 worst part of it was that he didn’t clear me for surgery.  
10
- 11 AJ: Oh my gosh.  
12
- 13 PC: That was the worst of it. I’ve had a lot of issues around medical-related things. But I will say,  
14 though, that the City of Minneapolis, since I’ve been working there with HR, they actually went  
15 extremely out of their way to be sensitive and make sure that my insurance was aligned the way  
16 it was supposed to. The woman who kind of coordinates it gave me a call and was like, “I’m just  
17 checking in to let you know I’m still checking about the gender identity,” because I wanted to  
18 know if it would be publicly listed as female, which actually I have to ask every time I go through  
19 a new job and insurance because I have to be listed as female in the system. And she’s like, “I  
20 just want you to know we’re still working on that, but don’t worry we’re being very discreet, it’s  
21 only a need-to-know thing.” Incredibly sensitive, she had no reactions to what I said. So that  
22 was a really peaceful, energizing experience actually.  
23
- 24 AJ: That’s awesome. There must have been some trans person who had been through that before.  
25
- 26 PC: I don’t know, maybe. Thank you for creating that space.  
27
- 28 AJ: Speaking of jobs, in your new work you’ve been appointed as an aide to the mayor to the City of  
29 Minneapolis.  
30
- 31 PC: Yeah.  
32
- 33 AJ: That’s a really, really big deal. I read an article in the *Advocate* magazine that went viral, that  
34 talked about this role. Tell us about this new job and what you’re doing and how it is going and  
35 all that stuff.  
36
- 37 PC: I could gush about this job all day – I love it so much. So I am the Senior Policy Aide and Advisor  
38 on Education and Youth Success for the City of Minneapolis, for the mayor. Essentially I advise  
39 the mayor on youth-related issues and . . .  
40
- 41 AJ: Mayor Betsy Hodges?  
42
- 43 PC: Yes, Mayor Betsy Hodges. On any youth-related issues but then also adding a youth  
44 development lens to various work being done. So the criminal justice system, well let’s add that  
45 youth development lens to it. So if we’re talking about juvenile justice reform, we’re actually  
46 having a youth development lens because as somebody . . . I have almost 10 years of youth work

- 1 experience, both in the classroom and out of the classroom. I've spent a lot of time cultivating  
2 those skills so I can add, with research and best practices, to that conversation. Youth  
3 employment, I collaborate with the economic development senior policy aide on youth  
4 employment-related work. So that's what I'm doing. I also am starting to develop, or adding to  
5 my portfolio I should say, racial equity-related work. So that's also . . . I am going with the  
6 mayor to a national league of cities convening of a leadership council to talk about national  
7 models of racial equity. So, yeah – I'm really exciting. This is work that I've spent my whole life  
8 preparing for and I did not realize it. I get to do what I love so much every day.  
9
- 10 AJ: Well congratulations – that's an amazing opportunity and the community is really proud of you,  
11 I am personally really proud of you. Yesterday we saw each other, we were at the 2<sup>nd</sup>  
12 Minneapolis Trans Equity Summit and I know . . .  
13
- 14 PC: Thank you for creating it!  
15
- 16 AJ: Thank you. You were on the committee to help plan this. What are your thoughts about  
17 yesterday's summit? I know you attended last year's summit as well.  
18
- 19 PC: Yeah, so to go from last year to this year – what a 180. Last year, I showed up – at that time I  
20 had just started a fellowship and so I was going there to network and then dove into civic  
21 engagement because of other policy aides being there and getting involved in city work. Now  
22 when the second one rolls around, I'm working at the City, for the mayor, and I'm involved in  
23 planning the second one. Here I was, I hadn't even met you yet at the last one.  
24
- 25 AJ: Right, exactly.  
26
- 27 PC: So yesterday was amazing and I was so happy to be involved in the planning of it and being able  
28 to look at it on this side. I think that it speaks volumes to the community that we have here, the  
29 allies that we have here, the eagerness to learn. I feel like people there were really ready to  
30 have some conversations around the complexities of relationships in the police/trans  
31 community relationships, how do we do things differently also with the city, the government –  
32 how do we show up differently in those relationships. There was an eagerness to have that  
33 conversation, I felt like it was palpable.  
34
- 35 AJ: It was, it was absolutely palpable. Great energy there yesterday.  
36
- 37 PC: Absolutely.  
38
- 39 AJ: Wow, this has been just a really fascinating conversation, Phillippe.  
40
- 41 PC: Thank you.  
42
- 43 AJ: I have a question here, what has been the impact of your trans identity on your professional life,  
44 and I think we just talked about that. Is there more you want to say about it?  
45

1 PC: Yeah, there is. There is something to be said about the experience of being stealth in one career  
2 and then changing careers and being very out as trans. And I speak from a different experience.  
3 Having experienced both sides of gender in this world and the complexities of intersectionality  
4 within that, when I show up to my work I show up loud with all of that experience. And so there  
5 is something so liberating for me in my own experience of being able to bring the richness of my  
6 life experience to these conversations. I get to . . . behind closed doors when it's just very  
7 privileged few making those decisions, I now have access to those spaces – a little bit, a little bit  
8 more, and can interject pieces of information that everyone else . . . like no one else in the room  
9 could have added, nor even comprehend. Do you know what I mean? For example, with the  
10 work with . . . there's a lot of work happening nationally around boys and young men of color,  
11 really focusing on re-engaging the community, etc. I am always that person who is like, "What  
12 about the girls? What about the young women?" I'll start spewing the statistics. My Brother's  
13 Keeper is actually in my portfolio but it's also in my consciousness and I'm holding space that we  
14 need to do work for girls and young women too.

15  
16 AJ: My Brother's Keeper is the national program developed by President Obama.

17  
18 PC: Yes, it was originally for Black boys and young men but they've expanded it for men of color. It's  
19 just an initiative to pull community together for collective impact to address issues that are  
20 faced by boys and young men of color. But, my male privilege has also met with 23 years of  
21 being a woman, so I hold that I carry male privilege in the world, but also I do not let that ever  
22 make me forget the 23 years that I survived as a woman in this world. Right? There is an attack  
23 on that experience for women, so I will always bring that in – even in male only spaces. And so,  
24 being trans is what makes me good at what I do because of the complexities of my experience. I  
25 understand marginalization, I understand urgency, I understand why the work is so important.  
26 And so, I think that really I am stronger and better at the work in my job because of the fact that  
27 I'm trans and that I get to be real loud about it. So, yeah – that really matters to me.

28  
29 AJ: I'm going to ask you a few questions and I just want you to say the first thing that comes to  
30 mind.

31  
32 PC: OK – like single words? I love rules.

33  
34 AJ: One sentence.

35  
36 PC: Got it.

37  
38 AJ: Caitlin Jenner.

39  
40 PC: Too loud, too soon.

41  
42 AJ: Twenty trans women have been murdered in 2015.

43  
44 PC: That is absolutely unacceptable, why is everyone not freaking out?

45  
46 AJ: What is the future of the trans community?

- 1  
2 PC: Leadership, visibility, power.  
3  
4 AJ: Is there a trans community?  
5  
6 PC: I think that there are a lot of people who are trans but I think that privilege is pervasive in all  
7 communities and is divisive in all communities.  
8  
9 AJ: I'm just blown away by our discussion today, Phillipe. Is there anything else you want to be sure  
10 that you say to conclude this conversation?  
11  
12 PC: Well thank you so much for giving me the time and the space to be able to engage in this project  
13 because, like I said, I feel like the Black trans masculine experience has been just so left out of  
14 this conversation overall. The trauma of becoming a Black man in America, the experience of . .  
15 .  
16  
17 AJ: By choice.  
18  
19 PC: Right, right, right.  
20  
21 AJ: Not necessarily by choice, and I want to be careful here because it's not a choice, it's a choice to  
22 acknowledge your true identity.  
23  
24 PC: Absolutely, yes. The way that I see it is that I chose to express my gender the way that is right  
25 for me.  
26  
27 AJ: That you know to be true.  
28  
29 PC: Right. And so I made the decision to step into that and in doing so, stepped into being a Black  
30 man in our society. And, that matters in our experience because if we don't take the time to  
31 take a step back and see that the mass oppression of Black men affects people in the trans  
32 community too and therefore is a part of the trans narrative and therefore is a part of the work  
33 too, if we don't realize that – if our stories keep being silenced, then that's going to become  
34 someone else's problem instead of the community's problem. So I really appreciate the space  
35 to be able to share what this experience is like to being trans.  
36  
37 AJ: Wow, well thank you so much for sharing your joy, your resilience, your competence, and your  
38 vulnerability. I really appreciate it.  
39  
40 PC: Thank you so much for having me.  
41  
42 AJ: Good luck with everything in the future.  
43  
44 PC: Thank you.