

## **NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

<https://www.nyctransoralhistory.org/>  
<http://oralhistory.nypl.org/neighborhoods/trans-history>

### **INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT**

**ASH**

**Interviewer:** Red Schulte

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**Transcribed by** Eva Rivera (volunteer)

**NYC TOHP Interview Transcript #117**

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**Red Schulte:** Hello my name is Red Schulte, and I will be having a conversation with Ash for the New York City Trans Oral History Project. In collaboration with the New York Public Library's Community Oral History Project. This is an Oral History Project centered on the experiences of trans identifying people. It is Thursday April 11, 2019 and this is being recorded in SoHo Manhattan. Let's begin.

**Ash:** Okay.

**Schulte:** Please tell me your name and your age if you like.

**Ash:** My name is Ash. I'm 30.

**Schulte:** And what are your gender pronouns Ash?

**Ash:** So I use He/Him/They/Them.

**Schulte:** And how would you describe your gender?

**Ash:** Hmm—yeah—How would I describe my gender? I think maybe right now, maybe today, maybe like this week, I feel mostly pretty masculine with a little sprinkle I guess or something because it's warm out. So I guess to me that feels like, both, I don't know, giving myself the freedom to be like assertive, and also like sure, and at the same time to be sort of like reserved, but also colorful. I think—yeah I think I've been feeling that way this week.

**Schulte:** It's a beautiful description. Are there other ways that you identify that you would like it to be recorded in this interview?

**Ash:** Yeah, I think I would like to say that—like I said that I feel that way today, this week, and like you know that can change week by week. Even if it's either internally and externally, or just internally in the way that I feel I am relating to the world. But yeah I feel a lot more sort of like fluid in that expression and I think it comes out in many ways. Sometimes it's through the music I listen to, and that will impact the way that I feel, and my gender feels that day. Or I don't know the colors I choose to wear, or the way that I choose to talk, or how I take up space, or if I don't at all. If I want to be seen, or if I don't want to be seen so yeah—I feel a lot more fluid then I think—maybe like this week particularly. So I guess that also is—that was pretty fluid too, so that's cool. [Laughs]

**Schulte:** Awesome, I want to move into a section of questions around early life and influences... Where are you from originally?

**Ash:** Yeah, so I am [coughs] excuse me. I'm from, well I say Atlanta, I lived in Atlanta when I was still in college. I was born sort of like—if I take it back—in a small town called Warner Robins, Georgia. I think it's mostly a military town, I'm not from a military family. But yeah, so that's where I was born and grew up. Then we moved closer to Atlanta when I was younger, I mean

overall I say I'm from Georgia. I identify as being a southern person, I lived in Texas from a while too—yes so most of my early memories though, are mostly in Georgia and some in Texas.

**Schulte:** Where did you look for inspiration or comfort growing up in Georgia?

**Ash:** Yeah I think—so I have a really tight family, I think a lot of my inspiration and comfort came from family. I also have—my family is very—you got a lot going on, there's other folks in my family two of my cousins in particular who are who are like—follow along like a gender and a sexuality spectrum. So they were always there, they are both older than me, so I sort of always felt comfort in them. Even though if I didn't really know why or why I felt sort of close, I think in high school I had a really tight group of queer friends, Black queer friends that were like really down from me. I felt like I didn't have that for some period of time too, so when I got it, so we are still tight now—I think in also a lot of like groups, I mean for it challenging, like I found comfort and also at times at church and community that—so just the food in the South and how that feels really great. Sports, I was really big into sports, still am so yeah I feel like I found a lot of comfort in mostly those communities yeah.

**Schulte:** Can you tell me about an early encounter you had with the trans community?

**Ash:** Yeah, that's a good question. I was sort of thinking about this and so I remembered, I think like two things, two instances or whatever so I—when I was in middle school, I had a friend, so maybe I was however old you are in the seventh grade or something. A friend and I, my parents were out of town and a friend and I wanted to go to six flags. So, her parents dropped us off and we were there hanging out and we both were like “everyone is excited!” We were like, “why is everyone so excited?” And we were looking around and we were like “oh! Its pride day in six flags!” [laughs] And we were there alone, like okay, I know at that time I was like, I sort of know what the word gay means and that was sort of it for the language. And I was like “people are wearing all type of things, they are doing— who are these people?” “Who are they with?” And I sort of was like—I probably, I think it was that time or the second time I mostly identify as trans masculine. I had met a few trans femme people—I remember meeting folks at the park like you know, they were just really nice and loving on us younger people in their space. And I was just like, I don't know what's happening, but this is fun and everybody is excited and then I think the second time was I think in high school, my crew of friends would take the bus, even though we weren't suppose too. And the little train that existed in Atlanta, so down town and hang out and yeah. And I just remember a crew of like trans femmes, like Black trans femmes being out and I sort of was like “okay like people can do gender in so many ways.” And like never really attaching that to myself even though I was really—I think—I identify as a study like a butch at the time, I was like they are doing something different than what I am doing. Right, you know, they are existing and they are having heels on, and dresses, and skirts and all that. But I'm like—I'm doing— but what I'm doing is regular like I don't think about it as like, as like, I'm just wearing these clothes because whatever. But they were just doing something else and I remember that—and I don't think I spoke to them and I just think I sort of looked and ogled and was like, “what is the world?” Yeah, and I think those are the two times that stuck to me, and then there might have been another time as an adult person I think but yeah. [Sniffs]

**Schulte:** When was the first time you heard the term trans? Or other terms for example, like queen or gender nonconforming...Butch etc.

**Ash:** Yeah, I think—so I have heard butch for a while, but so yeah I would say high school. Around high school age when I was in high school—when was I in high school? 2003? 2003 and then I graduated like 2007 that makes sense, yeah—so I think I had heard those words around then, maybe probably earlier. But from the world I was in a butch—to us at the time was sort of like a only white masculine woman. We didn't use that term for Black masculine people. At the time like in the crew that I was in right... So I heard the word but it didn't fit, so we were always—if you were younger you were a stud and if you were older you were just a lesbian. It was just like that was it! [laughs] I also didn't really know older queer folks too, so I was just like that's what you are. I didn't hear the term like GNC I don't think I heard—I um probably heard like “tranny” before, but only in terrible fucked up ways. And probably from like TV...

**Schulte:** Right.

**Ash:** But I didn't hear GNC until, getting out, like college, and getting out of college. Maybe getting out of college and even still I was in both like loving, and like great but like a really particular queer community. So I heard AG like aggressive but I felt like a northern word... So in the South we used different words like—I remember a time when a lot of my friends were like we don't call ourselves any of those words we just like girls. So, it was just sort of like a cross of whatever gender spectrum—people were just like “I'm not a lesbian, I'm not GNC, I'm not butch, I'm not this.” You just like girls right, like that was like a whole identity at a time. And then that sort of changed, and I think [coughs] some people were saying [coughs] but I think now—and my friends now who like ideas like GNC would just say like, “I switched it up!” That was sort of it. Now knowing that also a switch can have a conversation about sexuality [laughs] like oh I love it, okay I love it! [laughs] But at the time I was like, “oh! You switched it up, so sometimes you wear this and sometimes you wear that!” But yeah, I don't really have a lot of those words. And I think maybe just to say a little more like I think that—like also when I moved to Chicago too, which I'm sure I'll talk a lot about, was like super eye opening in many ways, and I opened up in many ways. One of those ways was like it was the first time, so I moved to Chicago in 2011, I intentionally, I think was like seeking out queer people of many different like flavors and textures and like genders. And so I got a lot of language but I also got a lot of like, I felt like I got more options, that I could explore for myself in a way that I didn't have before. I was in a very particular sort of like crew and that felt good, and also when I moved I was like “Oh! There's other option like what are those?” So what other words—so I really think around that time was really when I got a lot of, a lot more language to be honest yeah.

**Schulte:** Would you want to talk a little bit more about who specifically, or maybe what specifically helped you shaped your ideas about gender and sexuality?

**Ash:** Sure, yeah I would say like I was saying earlier it was mostly friends right. Like I, you know—we were all trying to support each other and trying to have fun, and so one person would do

something, or say something and then we sort of like follow. And then if it didn't feel good we would do something else. So we would follow right—we all started like changing the clothes we wore, at the same time—sharing clothes. We started to like figuring out what our sexuality meant and then some people would like do one thing and some folks would do another thing. I think I started like separating from that at a period of time though, when a lot of my close friends at that time felt like really good. Most of them are now in Atlantic City still feel really good and like with their lesbian identity, and I think now they would probably say they are either GNC or butch identity. And so, I think that was great for me at a moment and I think I started to separate, and I don't really actually know how or why? I do think and this maybe—and I always feel like really good about this and also recognize that for me this was a huge privilege and the way my family also sort of took to that. And they took it, well started to do tea, and all that stuff there was a lot of hiccups but at a time when I sort of was like, "I'm going to strictly wear pants!" and like I'm only going to like I don't know whatever else I do. I'm only going to wear my hair this certain way, you're not going to tell me what to buy and all this stuff, like they really were like "okay! Cool, go ahead do that!" And I think that made a lot of stuff for me at the time a lot easier—I was just able to like try that out. I felt good and I was like I'm going to just be this way—I think later too when I had moved to Chicago, right I think yeah under grad, undergrad for me was trash I didn't learn anything. [laughs] I took some like—and not to say that academics is everything, but you know I did go to undergrad. I am in a grad program, so I think I did get a lot of words from academia right—and these words were either like—and for me reinforced through other communities that are tied to academia or not. So it is important to, to my sort of trajectory—but undergrad I didn't really learn shit, but grad school I feel like I got a lot of language and I started to read more... Cause also I was around more people who like, who specifically, who intentionally like reading and that was a first for me. My family is not, in my sort of like immediate family folks like you know they get a lot of knowledge, and stuff from other places, like stuff like this, storytelling is big but they don't really like—we weren't like a reading family. So in grad school I got a lot more words from reading. And I think also made intentional relations with people who are reading and complicating many things around both gender and sexuality. And I think I learned a lot of words and learned a lot of things then, but then I also like getting into organizing work, and so I was reading and learning words. But then also meeting people who were using some of those same words with some different words right, they were like "Okay! Transgender and blah, blah, blah is in a book and that's fine to say trans." That's what people say on the street. So like just use that word and I'm like okay cool! Like pronouns are great and we should respect their right pronouns and—yes of course—and sometimes for me I don't have time for that. That's just, well let me try these pronouns as we are doing shit so that was also a part of my process. I think I found comfort both academic and also none academic homes and getting my words and figuring out myself at the time yeah.

**Schulte:** Maybe let's spend some more time on childhood and if you could tell me a little bit more about your childhood and family origin?

**Ash:** Um-hmm. Oh yeah so I—so my parents married for like 32 or something years [Laughs] yeah, they met in college. They met at Georgia Southern, which is close to Savannah. I have an older sibling, he's like nine years older than me. He has a different mom than my sister and I, my

sister is younger, my sister has a little baby right now, so it's like we are a tight little five-ish obviously family have stuff. Yeah so I always felt that like both the middle and the oldest, cause there was like a lot of, my brother was older so he left at a point. So like I sort of looked out for my sister a lot, and then I'm also kind of the middle because he did a lot of stuff first. And he ruined a lot of stuff for us [Laughs] cause he did it first. [laughs] Like I couldn't have a TV in my room ever because he ruined that, so I appreciate that. [laugh] Yeah my family is in many ways I feel like they're typical Black southern Christian family. And then I also value the fact that they aren't—this—is—we were moving a lot like I didn't really realize how much religion had impacted a lot of things... Like I would do—even phrases I'd say sometimes, and I know that Jesus is in it, but for me it didn't feel like Jesus was in it.

**Schulte:** Um-hmm, um-hmm.

**Ash:** But for other people it would be like “oh! That's really Jesus like!” Like oh! Got it! Okay! [Laugh] Yeah a bunch of people say “Oh Lord!” all the time right? Or whatever but maybe they do, so it always felt typical to me. But also they—my family has felt really unique to me and the ways they've been at least open to new ideas, or like any of the weird shit that I'm part of. I'm—I'm the one that would bring up all the weird shit and they will sort of be like “Alright! We will learn through you and we'll figure it out.” Yeah, I grew up—also I think I as a younger kid I think I—you know I never—I” say that we took a sort of like class trajectory. Though I will say that I never experienced intense poverty or anything like that. My parents were working class when I was a kid and now my parents live well and live comfortably. So, that has definitely impacted a lot of things for me, like we go on family vacations once a year and stuff like that. Yeah, which is a good time for us, and also yeah it's a good time for us and to be together. And also I think like that's impacted where we've been able to move, and like the other kids that I was around as a younger kid. I went from an all Black school as a kid to a more mixed school, to mostly white high school because of where we moved and because you now money and all that terrible shit. So I always got to play sports and you know all those things, I feel most close to—I'll say my mom and my sister in my family—they're my favorites and I think I'm their favorite. Yeah and then you know I have a granny who I'm close to, my moms' mom. And then I have a big extended family and we do like major family things together—that's always felt really good yeah.

**Schulte:** Do you want to say anything else about class background while growing up?

**Ash:** Um-hmm.

**Schulte:** Do you want to spend more time there?

**Ash:** Yeah I guess I'll say like [Sniffs] for us I think—I don't think this is one of the things I feel that now—I mean like currently right now, like in the past week or two, I think I've been thinking a lot about how to have conversations about class with my parents. And I think it's because—right I feel like I've worked in—mostly recently started to work a lot around—both like not just an analysis like a thought—I was thinking like—how can I say this? Sort of like how to—I don't—I live in, like living with somebody, we pay rent based on our income right. If I told my parents that

they will be like “why?” You know you both live there and so you should split the cost, you know sort of of thing, but how to have an actual conversation with them about certain things. Cause a lot of time what I’ll do is I won’t bring up those things with them cause I’m weary about their understanding and all that. So—but I have thought about—so yeah like growing up and just seeing what for me felt like really dramatic shifts because mostly my dad got new jobs. So like I was saying I was mostly in a Black school and then I moved to Texas, and it was mostly White but also a lot of Latin mixed folks and some Black folks. And even that racial mix was just so starkly different and the way I was treated different and things I was exposed to was very different. And then moving into high school and mostly a white high school was even more dramatic and even different. Yeah and so just like always—and I think later going to college and going to grad school and thinking about the ways that—having particularly access though—with for me and then some of my close friends like change our life trajectories—but I still don’t feel like I know how to fully speak to—right like, like you know saying I got to sort of explore and experiment and sort of do a lot of stuff—I could wear the clothes I wanted too because my parents would pay them right.

**Schulte:** Um-hmm.

**Ash:** Or like I got a job and I could buy the stuff that I wanted too. Versus some of my other friends shared clothes because they couldn’t do those things, so I think I did experience a different level sort of of autonomy in many ways. Not that everything was all good because obviously it wasn’t [laughs] but yeah. In many ways I did and then—in also like really dramatic right going from a particular environment to moving into one that was mostly white and high school was not at all what I wanted. And then being in Atlanta which is such a place like—I don’t know if people still call it like “Black Hollywood” or whatever. I hate that but it is like a place that a lot of Black folks across a bunch of class backgrounds do exist right and at the time I was like, “If we’re going to live in this big house why can’t we live in a big house in a neighborhood with Black people?” Now for me I’m just like, “we don’t need the big house anyways.” Like I don’t care who’s in my neighborhood but also like why are we doing any of this? And so...

**Schulte:** Um-hmm. [Laughs]

**Ash:** But yeah I think my parents would say that like, you know upward mobility is very important and so that’s what they were chasing and it’s afforded me many things and also thinking about to the detriment of who and what and also like, “do I need all that shit?” Like... Could I not have experimented like been both free and like well and good without the tons of clothes that I had. I could have done that, I could have been creative—right like queer trans people are super creative and I could have done it and also—it’s given me a lot to be able to do that. Yeah, so I think that’s some of the stuff that I have been recently thinking about, as far as of class goes yeah. [Sniffs]

**Schulte:** You’ve introduced some of these things, and earlier when you were addressing another question—how would you describe some of your various communities growing up? Maybe church or in your neighborhood or sport teams—um how would you describe your interactions with your communities and what they consisted of?

**Ash:** Yeah, um—I feel like it was a lot—with church and sports in particular it was a lot of like routine. You know there’s a lot of repetition, which I think can be helpful and for me at least can be—like if I know I’m going to see you every Wednesday like bible study right, like we develop a relationship. And I know I’m going to see you every certain week at practice we develop some sort of relationship. And for me I think it was important, always important but specially at certain points in my life was really important. When I felt like I don’t know how to fit at all but I always had a thing to fall back on right. Like I remember—like I had moved to Texas as a kid and I really didn’t have friends but it was alright I’ll play soccer right.

**Schulte:** Um-hmm.

**Ash:** I don’t know how I’m going to fit in this place—but I’m going to play soccer, and that was a place where I fit in. It was also the place, at least for me at the time right, when folks right where like, “this is a girl child!” Like I could just sort of do the things that people would say that girl children can’t do right. Like you can tackle people, well you’re not supposed to but you could tackle people. Right like you could be like super aggressive, you could be competitive, you could do all of that right. I could be like sweaty and not trying to be “cute”—and so that felt really safe and I also had friends who were doing that. And there’s always a catch right when we leave that space, and the expectations right that come with. And people think you are a girl child and then when you don’t want those—it’s complicated. Though it still felt—yeah like really comfortable and good. I think I was in the band for a minute in middle school too. [Laughs] I was like, I tried to be cool and I didn’t think I would, but I really liked the clarinet. So that was fun and then if you were—I remember thinking you got to pick whatever instrument but if you were really good you got to play the bigger clarinet, the bass clarinet, and there was a giant one I can’t remember what it’s called. But that was the one where you got to sit down and you got to blow it really hard and play, and I was like “That’s the coolest one!” You don’t stand up you don’t be all pretty. You get to sit in a chair and you get to play this big instrument and it’s something about how massive those things were, and I think it was at the same time where like someone told me I couldn’t play the drums because only boys the drums. So it was all these things—like the band feels cool but I can’t play the drums, so all my friends were in the band so that was cool. So yeah and I think that church has always be like you know—like Bibleville, it’s always been the fall back and I think about church a lot now too. Just like—I went to a—it wasn’t a queer trans—I think the pastor was pretty queer, “allegedly” I mean I’m using allegedly as is not really saying that. In college—so when I was hanging at the time we would go to that church, and so that church felt really good it just—it was in a school like mostly it was about the singing and just sort of like “let me make you feel good.” They barley read from a bible and stuff like that but it just felt like, “Okay! Something about this feels a little different.” The old pastor was preaching about how hell was like, “don’t go there blah, blah, blah.” This is just more like we came here, we hang out, and you’re telling me some positive stuff and we are going to sing and that’s cool. So I felt community there I think, but yeah those have been I think the biggest forms of comfort I felt and then grad school later in life. I would say—yeah.

**Schulte:** Do you go back to visit? Your place or origin like where you—your hometown? Like very often?

**Ash:** The place I was born in no! [laughs] I think one time I drove through there—I don't know why we were going but we drove through. I had like a whole like full brake down once, I think this was like five—I can't remember when it was—it was a couple years ago. So I had changed my name and then I wanted to change my—I was thinking of changing my birth certificate. And someone told me that you have to go back to the place that you were born in, or you had to get them to send all your paper work. So I researched it and at least at the time it was saying that you had to go back to the place to go to the court to do something, and I was just like never! Like that's not happening! And I don't know what this place is like now, I don't have any real memories of it. But I was also its small town Georgia, I'm going to go where? To like a court? Volunteer to go to the court to tell them I want my birth certificate and explain to them why I was like absolutely not! Like that's not happening! But I haven't been back there since then, but I go to Atlanta pretty often—and other towns where my family lives around it. My dad's mom was also from a very small town close to like Athens and we use to go here a lot, but I haven't been back there since—several years now—six plus. Cause that doesn't feel good to me either right. People saw me and thought they knew me at a certain way and now I just pop up, and it's one of those towns where everybody is related to everybody. So I can't go and not to say who I am and not say who my grandma was. And then it will just be like what? What? Yeah too many questions like, "What happened?" So, I don't go back there. I went to my mom's town once for a wedding I think? And that took a lot of prep for me to go back, and I sort of just played the background like "I'm just the stranger, and I'm just here, and I'm not related to anyone." But it's another small town where everyone is related, so that didn't really feel good either. So yeah I tend to not because you can't be anonymous in those places, almost every person is like a cousin and I mean blood cousin or like other wise cousin—so I just can't yeah.

**Schulte:** Before we move into kind of like a post hometown and move into um—like you know, later adulthood um questions... Would you want any other themes around Southernness, or Blackness, or transness? And the way that those themes and those existent identities have shaped you?

**Ash:** Yeah I think—I feel like one—part of it feels like a, a gift my parents gave me, to be able to move, I do feel like as a kid it allowed me to sort of like feel like the world was open up to me, and again to this is still tied a privilege and a willing to do so. I was able to move and I can move around—yeah and so it does feel like a huge thing, and so I think when I do move around I feel like a person from the South. So much more especially being in the North, being Midwest too and being here in New York now—and it feels really important to me to hold it and to preserve it, and at the same time it also—I think as an adult, it feels like I'm closer to, especially to Black Americans in the North and the Midwest because of their many connections to the South. And so I went to this random bar the other night and there was a bunch of Black elders in there who were just all talking about stuff. And I just walked in because they had some blues music playing, so I'm just going to go and I was like the youngest person in there at least by 30 years. And I was talking to someone and she's like "Oh yeah! I'm about to go down South." And I was like "Why are you going down South?" and she's like "Oh! That's where my family is from." And I'm like "oh! Where is your family from?" and she's like "oh Mississippi" and I was like, "Oh cool!" and we

just started talking about the South and how they go every summer and stuff, and so it's those connections to me have always felt important just because of where I'm from. But I felt even more—like moving around, just thinking about those connections you know we both have a lot of like anger, and hurt, and violence attached to them. And also have a lot of joy, and love, and familial like qualities and so it feels really important to me. And also just like the differences between, you know sometimes when I meet other Black folks and how I'm just like, "What kind of food do you eat or what do you do?" and I'm just like "in the South we do this thing, and this is like really Southern!" It just feels like a part of my identity like the other parts of my identity in a way that I think that for like a while not really—really do—I also think too like—yeah, I just think those things for me aren't—for many people—but for me aren't really separate, I'm sort of like "yes I'm trans" and also it means a different thing for me to be a trans person who is from the deepest of the bible belt, and it's obviously no shade to all the Black trans people everywhere. Their experiences are totally different one from mine too right, but the one that I have just feels like it does feel like mine, and one that I really like to share—and many of those ways but yeah.

**Schulte:** So where did you go after you left the South? And what brought you to that new place?

**Ash:** Yeah, so I went to Chicago, which I loved so much. I loved Chicago so much—yeah I went to Chicago [Sniffs] I was trying to go to grad school I think I did make that—which is the best decision I ever made. I think at the time, when I was trying to think of what I was going to do with myself, like after grad school I made this horrible choice that I think some people make, "I don't know what I'm going to do? I'm going to go to grad school" Like that's—looking back not that's not how you should decide to go to grad school. It ended up being great for me so I honestly thought about going to New York first, and I visited, and I visited New York, and I visited Chicago, and I just met people on that day, on that trip to Chicago. And I didn't meet as many people here in New York and it just felt more like home. I specifically met someone who I really loved and cherished—who is a Black queer person and I met them first, within the first hour I think that I got there, and I was like "this is where I'm supposed to be." And they just sort of gave me the run down, "Alright you wanna go to this school, alright let me tell you what's actually real." [laughs] And like "where do you want to live? No! Don't live there! Let me tell you what's real." And I was like okay this is where I am supposed to be—I had also research—sort of like—some—I had learned about sort of some movements and histories in both places and just thought about that too right. Like it was never for me in the cards to go to like middle town nowhere... It was never for me in the cards to go somewhere that didn't explicitly have, and like named both queer and both Black histories and have those feel really present, at least for me, and so that's why I picked both place—but, yeah best decision I ever made.

**Schulte:** Can you tell me a little bit more about what you learned from living in that place?

**Ash:** Um-hmm.

**Schulte:** From living in Chicago? And maybe how did it compare from where you grew up?

**Ash:** Yeah, I think I learned, I think that [inaudible] I think that one thing that I learned, I learned a lot about me—Yeah so I came at a time when I had gotten out of relationship [burps] excuse me. Which was like—I mean I was 22, but it was so monumental! Now I’m thinking about it I was like, “was it really?” but it was. But it was so big at the time. I feel I hadn’t—you know I left as a young adult and I hadn’t moved away on my own [sniffs] and so I had learned like, “Oh! How do I like make new friends?” as a young adult and like, “how do I figure out like how to finish school?” And like “How do I figure out what’s important to me? Or how do I figure out the person I want to be?” And that means the person I wanna look like or feel like, how do I figure out those things? And I had a major “I don’t know what I’m doing!” moment, and then [sniffs] I think the city, and its lovely way, at least for me it sort of helped me figure it out. Like one conversation turned into another and turned into like an invitation to something which turned into like, “Oh! You should go to this place! To this party!” and like oh at this party there’s so many people that are like doing so many projects, and also like doing gender in way, and doing relationships in ways. Like what is this? That turned into multiple other things, and turned into dinners, and potlucks, and I feel like Chicago love its potlucks more than any other place I’ve ever been too. [laughs] And like—which is great! And it—which turned into a lot of free food, which is also great! [laughs] But, yeah I felt that I learned a lot about me and I think like—in that place I’ve learned a lot about [sniffs] just how to get to know a new city, and I think I learned a lot just politically and I had, I was challenged a lot around many things. Yeah just like how we all don’t come to the things we know at birth or whatever right. Like people—I thought I knew a lot of stuff. I thought a lot of stuff was important to me at the time and then I learned that it wasn’t, or like “Oh! There’s a different way!” or like there’s many alternatives, we can do something different as a [sniffs] like you know, as a large collective groups of people. Like one of the very small things was like—I remember I brought so many pairs of clothes like to Chicago, like so much shit! So much shit! And then over time I was there and I was like, “why do I have all this shit that I don’t use?” I was like I literally have friends who like “Don’t do that!” They just don’t have all this shit and I was like “why do I have it?” and so I decided to think about, “okay what are the things I literally wanna have?” and I was like “Okay I can get rid of some stuff,” and I was like “I can share it.” And I—I could go to clothing swap and give away some clothes and like at the time it felt like a big thing and I was just like I have all these clothes and I need it. Where I’m from it means a lot like—the community that I’m from, Atlanta where it means a lot you have new clothes every week and go out. I was just like “Why do I care about that shit?” when now I care about conversations with people or the people who are supporting me, or getting clothes that actually makes me feel good and make me feel—like I feel like how I wanna look and like you know I can exist this way. And It was such a small thing but it always like [sniffs] to me it’s like a big thing cause then I sort of—it made me shed a lot of stuff and for me I feel like I gained, first of all I gained a lot of damn books! Which may not have been smart because those are heavier. But whatever! I gained so much more and the stuff I feel like I got rid of—I feel like Chicago gave me that and Chicago gave me both language and also actual chosen family. Right like you know I love my, my Atlanta family and most of us are really close and now I have chosen family there too, but I think I wouldn’t have allowed those people in. In that way if I hadn’t allowed a literal stranger in—people who didn’t know—and they allowed me in [sniffs] um—yeah I think that I just yeah gained a lot.

**Schulte:** What was your favorite thing about living in Chicago?

**Ash:** Besides tacos? [laughs] Besides tacos?—wow let's see, that's a—I'm trying to think, that's a hard question. Tacos—the, the like view on Lake Shore drive it's just amazing. Yeah I think there's something in there also about like—like I should also say too that I moved there 2011. I left, I came to New York in 2016 and so I think [sniffs] at least for me for like all the folks I know in my age group that was very important, like organizing moments for us and is obviously whole histories that have lead up to many of those moments that I acknowledge. It was like a really important organizing moment and so right, I feel like it was a learning—doing a lot of stuff—in particular with a lot of young Black queer thinkers, and just like organizers and people in the city around particular time that like—I miss but also those are moments but I think I miss like the ways I was brought into stuff there. And I continue to be brought in even when I'm not there, even when I go back to visit. That for me had felt different then like the other two places I've lived. Yeah and just sort of like the urgency in which people respond to, to people they are in community with and also like respond to wanting to like wanting to see the world as better and to see that city be—it's a great city but also to see the actualize through like, through—like challenging many systems there that aren't you know being helpful to the people that live there. And just like the fire, there's like a different fire for me that exist there—just something in a different way—so I miss those things. But the food is a big one too! [laughs]

**Schulte:** What would you say the most challenging thing was—what was the most challenging thing about living in Chicago?

**Ash:** Challenging? Challenging thing? Uhh—I mean, I guess for me one of the most challenging was being far away from family, I mean I think, and this is the thing I talk to them about a lot right. Since moving to New York they'll be like, “oh! We are going to go visit you.” But then in Chicago they really wouldn't come visit me like that—like they would—like they—my parents come twice like on a—because of something for—and I was just like, “Oh! Now you all wanna visit me because I'm in New York, but what about Chicago?” It's a great place! So I feel like that I just missed them and then the guilt I think of moving at that time because I was also—yeah, I was younger and I just felt like Oh! I need to be home—even though people want me to be home I don't need to be there. But I think it was like that, just being away from them and I think to that point for people come to visit just like—I think the stigma around that and around the place really has permeated so many other places, like what the city actually is and how untrue like those stereotypes are and how untrue—right like media representations and stuff are—yeah all that shit, I think that was just hard. So I wonder how like—you know not being from there and I wonder how, and I've seen people do this even now I'll do this, some people are like “why Chicago?” And I'll just beef up and be like “what do you mean? Why Chicago?” like “here's all the ways it's great!” like “What are you trying to say? What are you watching? You watching Fox News?” like “Stop watching that! That's not it!” so I think those parts made it hard. I don't know anything about—I'm trying to think about something about the actual city right and like, it can be boring and say like the weather but also like it sucks, and I'm sort of like “I don't know, I still rather be there.” You know cause also if it's really warm I'm just like, “we keep fucking up the planet” I don't know how I feel saying that. So, I mean I guess the weather but otherwise like yeah, I don't know. I don't know what's really hard about it. Yeah I'll just that, that as great and

beautiful and loving as like all Black folks in Chicago are, I really want that city to treat folks that way and like that can be had to see. Right, like it can be hard to see the way that people are so beaten down by systems and police and fucking I.C.E there, and all those thing are hard, but you know those things also exist in other cities, they exist in New York too. But yeah nothing about the place really. I got no negatives! [laughs]

**Schulte:** Well let's bring you into the present...

**Ash:** Yeah.

**Schulte:** There's some aspects of your current life that I'd like to focus on...

**Ash:** Okay.

**Schulte:** Maybe if we could start let's see, can we discuss any organizing projects you're currently working on or with?

**Ash:** Yeah, so I feel like I'm doing a little bit of organizing here and there, just cause life has taken on—so my main—I mean this part—I think part of [inaudible] part of bail work, so I work at the Brooklyn bail fund. And so you know it is a none profit here, so like I am paid to, paid right to do the work I don't make money bailing people out of jail, but I am paid for that. So I do feel that I exist in this like larger, bail I guess like maybe like movement or maybe like organizing work that's been—I think to my view has gotten bigger over the past like three—three years or so I would say maybe. So that's a lot of what I do, and then I'm doing [inaudible] New York, which I feel like I haven't really had the time to focus on, and I want too. I think what I've been most—the most part's that I've been able to do have been corresponding with folks who are inside. Cause I also have a car in New York which is rare giving people rides to like, to Bedford to the prison to visit folks. Which again it's important and important to our organizing, like I would just like to focus on it more. I'm on the collective at SROP we are [inaudible] projects. Right now I think one of the main things—I'm still trying to figure out my place there, just cause I'm one of the new folks there on the collective. What I would like to do there is to be a part of more like the mobilizing work [sniffs] and work specifically around folks who are in and folks who've just come out. I'd like to figure out what that's like. What else am I doing? I feel like I'm doing something else and I don't remember—I don't know. I'm probably doing other stuff but don't remember. Oh! I recently too I've gotten into and this is something that I really want to be doing. Like I also really wanna do—I've gotten—I've gone to a few workshops previously and I went to one recently about how to support people who like cause harm...

**Schulte:** Um-hmm.

**Ash:** Which is you know one of our—and like it should be one of the world's greatest mentors—like Miriam [inaudible] talks about a lot, and I feel, at least to my view and I'm sure she will probably agree too right, there's, we need to be talking about violence in particular and also like if, if we, and I'll say she and I, share a commitment to not using [inaudible] sort of both logic and

also tools to deal with folks in communities when harm happens. Right like we have to be actively practicing ways to address those harms, and for me this also feels, why it feels important to do, as a person who mostly identifies as a masculine person right. Like how to support people who have caused harm—it feels like the work I wanna lead into, and not because I have too but just it feels important to me and also cause like people that I know and people who are close to me have caused harm and I sort of have been like, there needs to be something that happen right, like one on one—trying to figure out how to do that but not really feeling I’ve had all the tools too. And I think at this point in my life I feel more capable of gathering more tools, so I really wanna do that and I think I’ve just been a person who is maybe a little better in like individual sort of work. Right like I feel like I can support a person, like a few people. I don’t feel that I’m a super loud voice right, I hate talking in front of people. Right I’ll do it if it’s important, it’s someone important to me like really asked me too, but I think like those—even ways of talking to one person or two people I think are super impactful and because of all the work that I do confronted with people who have, most of the time people who have like actually caused harm to people and so I think for me—for over the past couple of years I’ve really been thinking about those questions and now I feel prepared to do some more work around it. So that’s what I really wanna do. And also, I wanna do some more work with young people. I don’t know why I’ve recently been thinking about middle school, maybe there’s something about what I said before about just like that some sort of transition point that happened for me. Where I’m just like thinking about being in middle school and feeling weird and like I don’t know people are always like, “why not high school?” and I’m like “high school cool!” and we all need support and we all need people to be there. I am just like what about middle schoolers? That like—people say that are super annoying, what about them? Like maybe I’ll hang out with them or something I don’t know. So yeah—those are stuff I’m doing but also stuff I wanna do yeah.

**Schulte:** Can you talk a little bit about your current academic endeavors and what those consist of?

**Ash:** Yeah so I’m supposed to be getting a Ph.D. [laughs] It’ll happen! [laughs] It’ll happen. So my school is UIC, University of Illinois in Chicago [sniffs] I’m in a criminology program and so—yeah I moved to get a masters and then I didn’t know what I wanted to do after that and then—but also was like I think I want to be a professor one day possibly, so I’m going to try and get a Ph.D. And it actually has been—it’s both really good and both super hard right, I feel like I’ve gotten to like read, and think, and learn with people in ways that I don’t know how I would have been able to do that. I think you can do that without school obviously, but for me like I’ve been able to do it and it just hard still doing it and I’m still not done. And so I study—my overall project is hopefully going to be on just like public surveillance on queer and trans people and by sort of like public I mean like public transit, like this is obviously deriving from personal experience, and also experiences from you know people I am in community with. Experiences of like airports security and stuff. And I like the DMV so who people are getting their ID’s changed or gender markers changed and stuff like that. So it’s both about the ways the state is policing and surveilling us and also about the way that we as people, people in the world are doing that surveilling and policing. And you know sometimes like other forms of harm to each other. And I just want to talk to people I’m in community with and talk about their experiences and write up a thing that hopefully will

be usefully for actual people in the world, and not just people who have like tenure. Though maybe I might have to use that thing to get tenure but who knows I'll probably have it, but yeah that's my overall project. Trying to do the interview soon, which I think will be the fun part yeah. [Sniffs]

**Schulte:** Are there any other professional or workplace contacts that your part of right now that you want to discuss maybe in addition to the bail fund, or just explore more about the bail fund?

**Ash:** In addition to—I would say no—I think maybe too something about the bail fund to me which I think—so want to just highlight I think some of the work of people are—so some of the organizing work from maybe—like I'm going say bail out and stuff like that, that have been made more explicit interventions on my conversations around like gender and bail work. [Sniffs] Those have—like I've always been important like super important—and are also things that I think about and like in learning from and I think one of the [sniffs] someone also told me, I forgot who and when—but they mentioned years ago that either Marsha P. and also Sylvia Rivera were trying to start a bail fund or like sort of informally started one right because they needed to, to get people out and I think that I also have been thinking about sort of recently and the way—I don't know at times when I really want my work to like make sense and for it to not just be none profit work, right like how does this make sense? And why does this make sense for me? Right like on multiple levels, so like obviously if—not just like—we know and we do know who's incarcerated and who's surveilled right, and those are people that both look like me and have life experiences that I haven't had and I don't share. But I think often times for me at least in the bail context right like there can be a lot of conversation around both race, as it should be, and poverty, as it should be, but they'll like, those conversations around like gender in like a really expansive way like for me I only often hear from—I only often hear from queer people, I don't hear those from people in other bail context. [Sniffs] And so yeah, feeling that for a while like when I would go to things around bail work—like a lot of times I felt I was the only—I'm the only Black queer person in this space right, and which is true and not true right—cause there's people who aren't me and who are paying bail for people who love and cared about all the time right. And have an understanding and have [inaudible] all the time right in the specific sort of [sniffs] as this more movement-y works started to expand out, I would often feel that and now I can honestly say I don't feel that way right. There—like I've seen people do this work and many places including in the south, including New York and, there are people who like there's like Black queer people there. Also being a part of the more I guess formally like movement parts of it that I like always asking super important questions and also posing alternatives and also talking about—yes, talking about gender in really important ways and yeah for me it's been one of those recent things where I'm just like, “Okay, if Marsha P. was talking about it and I've been doing it, and my life sort of makes sense.” I just didn't just fall into this like it, it also like apart of trajectory, and like a history that has like really helped me recently. Yeah to just think about. [Sniffs]

**Schulte:** And if you're ready maybe we can talk about New York City? [laughs]

**Ash:** I'm ready. [laughs]

**Schulte:** Alright.

**Ash:** Thank you.

**Schulte:** What's hardest? About living in New York City?

**Ash:** So like one thing? What's the hardest? [

**Schulte:** However many things you need to say.

**Ash:** Yeah I think maybe some of it is, I'll try to say this in a nice way cause also like, like some of it is came here—so I had visited New York like I said when I tried to go to grad school. Once I came with family to like, like—we went to Time Square and all that stuff once—we were here for maybe two—one or two days, so that was like my New York exposé. So, to place that in my thoughts around New York are not the reality at all—so that part is on me, I think that what—one of the things that's hard around here is just like how massive this place is. And like not really knowing that I was just like, "Alright! Cool! So like Brooklyn, the Bronx I'm going to hang out in all these places!" Absolutely I am not! It takes so long to get from where I live in Brooklyn to the Bronx, and so but that's like a whole day excursion like I went to Queens a few weekends ago, and I'm just going to go to Queens for the day and I had to make it a day. And I know people probably have to commute and people probably have to do the commute from Queens to wherever for their job. Right I—you know don't have too. So yeah just thinking that the mobility thing I'm just going to go all the way around and like it's that. And that, that ties for me—things just feeling really tiring here, and feeling really like I can't keep up and then also questioning why do I want to keep up? Or what is in the keeping up? What am I gaining by doing that? What am I losing? And so that's been hard like how to get around [sniffs] —yeah I think—what else is about New York? Yeah there's just so much fucking people here all the time and sometimes people just—I just—you know I'm—I'm an introvert and you know I just don't really need people around all the time, but yet people love it! That's why people love New York! So that's on me right like why would you move to a place with so many people and then be like, "why don't some of you all move?" That's on me and also part of that is, "Alright I'm a gentrified, I get it!" I shouldn't feel that way, so probably that's on me but it is hard—what else is hard about here? Yeah I feel that those are probably the biggest things. Yeah, if I would have been asked that question like a year and a half ago I would've had a laundry list. Now I have—the list isn't that big, I think I'm just more in a groove and more comfortable being, you know I appreciate some things about this place and also like it's cool for it not to feel like my place and I do feel like I've learned a lot specially. Like I've opened up in the past year and a half and I have learned a lot. I think those things, like some of those things, there's nothing to do about it right like zero things but yeah.

**Schulte:** What's it like being trans in New York City?

**Ash:** Yeah it feels—so I think at once it feels like—I'm trying too—so I feel like most of the places I go [sniffs] maybe not by my house, but anyway most of the major places I go here like usually out clock another person who is, who's like like under the trans umbrella or at least who I assume

is right or I think the world probably reads as even if they don't identify as such—and in many ways that can feel good right. I can just be like “okay cool!” there's more of us and so, sort of like, I guess maybe that sort of familial sort of experience can feel good. I think also [sniffs] I guess to the point being such a big place too there's so many different pockets of the trans community here at least to my view that like—figuring out which ones I want to fit in or I can fit in has still felt a little like “I don't know.” Right I feel there's some artsy folks and then there's some party folks, and there's organizing folk, and then there's none of the above folk. Just like people who are living...

**Schulte:** Um-hmm

**Ash:** And there's parents and you know that's everywhere in the world. I'm just saying that all the options exist here in my view and so I don't really know what exactly—where I sort of fit in there—I think too and I want to say something I think it's like—I'm not sure how to say it correctly, but it's also I feel this way that being trans here is sort of cool-ish in this way to particular people that I don't really like right it's cool like NYPD to like about trans people or some shit and I'm just like, “that's not cool! You're not helpful to us. You're not helpful to anyone.” So like something about that right and how marketable it like feels. Right even people who both idea or just read as or just branded as trans in this, this place right like as a big global market. I don't like—yeah right like sometimes I'm just like, “I don't want to be visible” Right, but then like, yeah I just see like a poster or an Ad and I'm just like, “God! Like leave us alone!” Or do something that actually would like, you know like really deeply impacts trans folks lives, not trying to sell me some perfume cause that's not going to do it for me. Perfume can be cute and also they make it free! Or like whatever so just like stuff like that I think makes New York hard and yeah makes New York hard for me. In particular, I think there's also a way that, like [sniffs] I was talking to someone about this today too, I think like—so in Georgia right you kind of public transit is different and like—I'm also just thinking about my project and the work I want to do. People and like that sucks right like there should be public transportation, so Atlanta need to get it's shit together. So, right there's a different level of anonymity then if I'm in a car and I'm able to drive right. Like being here and I'm on public transit and I'm also moving through like—yeah, I'm also you know moving through neighborhoods for me that means walking, for other folks you know like, you know maybe moving through in a different way right that isn't walking. You are just visible, like people on this street and people differently and especially when I first moved here that was a lot of like, like anxiety right just sort of like, “Alright everybody can see me!” And I can see you and I can see all of you in your best day, and we can see each other on our worst days. And that means when like, whatever your experiencing that has nothing to do with me, but then it's projected on to me cause you don't like me or whoever I'm with or you don't like what our gender is doing or whatever. Then I get to feel that, right here on the side walk—those sort of very public part of living here yeah.

**Schulte:** Are their particular communities in New York City that have been especially important to you? Since moving here?

**Ash:** I'd say the Chicago people that moved here to New York that's very helpful. I feel like now there's a little contingent of us that work together on certain things. That's been very helpful. I, I've made some really close friends that like in—yeah that have been in sort of like, like Black lead organizing spaces. Yeah and so they, that's been very good. Yeah I think this year, I sort of also, I turned the corner a little bit in sort of in need to—not need to but I want to—also just to get to know random people, and when I say random I mean random as in people I would just walk by everyday or like maybe we have the same route where we're going, or we might got to the same bars, or like don't really speak. And I'm just like I want to get to know those people too because now I've sort of been labeled to be here enough and be like I've seen people enough and sort of evaluate my own sort of comfort, and so maybe I want to get to know some new people. But I think—yeah mostly the Chicago people, people that have moved here and other young Black radicals that are here but yeah.

**Schulte:** Are there aspects of trans community in New York City Past or present that you would want especially remember?

**Ash:** Ooh past or present? Yeah I think people, I mean this is cause subculture I feel that folks have done and are doing and I'd like to continue to see, continue to lift up all the folks that—like Marsha P and Sylvia Rivera that done so much work. Yeah that have done so much work. Those folks I think there's like I don't know, there's a way I feel like too and I don't know all of the—yeah I don't know everyone's name but I don't know some sort of way that we can also always, and people who do—I think about ancestors and always bring them in and to bring in those folks who's names we don't know and who also did a lot of work but also didn't have to do a lot of work just were trying to be themselves and thrive in this city in many moments from past till present I'd like to be remembered. I think—yeah I think maybe presently—there—I think there's like—yeah New York just to me feels like so, just can be so hard and people who are really just trying to like live and like this bunch of cities but this city in particular is trying to like not make that possible. I want those people to be remembered and to be to be remembered why they are still here too. Yeah and like those of us who, you know try to support and hold those people and also who try to do a lot of like abolishing work here like I like us to be remembered too. Yeah and I think I—I just [inaudible] before but there was a person in Chicago who also there's, sort of, not the same person but like a very like parallel person in New York who did this to me like the first person that I ever met who asked me what pronouns I wanted was a person in Chicago was a trans fem in Chicago and then when I moved here to New York was one of the first people here in New York to just be like—when I said that I would like he/him pronouns or they are fine they were like, “if you prefer they why don't you just say they?” Right they were just sort of like “go by the one's you wanna go by not by the one's that seem easier.” And people have said that to me before but that was like the first person here, so I feel that people like that especially elder people who like for me give me just so much license to see myself, and to think about myself, and room to just do all the things. And younger people too who also do that, yeah so I just feel, yeah there's so many, so many people, who also—and yeah people who throw parties here who are like trans folks and do all that good work, and like do or don't donate that money to people fucking rent or like help people get out of jail and stuff like that, I want all those people to be remembered too. Yeah.

**Schulte:** Let's move into our last section of, of themes.

**Ash:** Okay.

**Schulte:** This is themes of identity.

**Ash:** Ooh.

**Schulte:** And you talked little bit about this before, but maybe if you want to take up more space by addressing these things—what aspects of your identity are most important to you? Right now? And what has shaped your sense of who you are? Like this moment?

**Ash:** What aspect are important to me right now and what's shaped a sense of who I am? Yeah, so I do, I feel like I said this in the beginning like it's warmer out like my gender feels like a lot more important to me. Maybe cause when it's cold I'm just like, "please don't look at me" cause I have all this clothes on or whatever. There's something about it when it gets warmer I'm just going to be like, "I'm going to give you all a bunch of options." So you can just figure out. [inaudible] So right now both gender and—both gender and always race feels so important to me right and then I think the southernness too like I'm about to go to Atlanta at the end of the month and it's, it's, it's closely on my mind. Yeah it's just like really close on my mind and so those seem super important to me but yeah I think, yeah. But I think in this moment and obviously part of this conversation I feel the race and the gender piece feels super present, and I think the second part of the question was how do they inform something about me? Oh! What has, what's shaped my sense of who I am? Right? That's a good question, what's shapes my sense of who I am? Yeah I guess, I don't—I guess all those things. I guess all those things I think the one, I guess maybe the gender one because it is, it feels, now it feels but it is the most for me like fluid and movable. I feel I'm always like—yeah that [inaudible] I'm just like alright, "how do I feel like I want to show up as like a, a like a trans man?" Right and I'm always like "how can I cultivate masculinity?" And like I'm still doing that and then there was a point—okay so not just that right that also tied into the many parts for me that I name and I don't think they had to be named as feminine. Right like how am I shaping that in a different way? That is not what people like ascribed to me or forced upon me before but like those ways that I want to name for myself, and I want to do for myself. I'm always shaping all that, yeah. Yeah I don't know those, that's what feels present right now.

**Schulte:** How do you think being trans related to other aspects of your identity?

**Ash:** How does it relate? Yeah I feel like I want to right now in this moment just think of a really good lines for other people like recite them but I can't then people—I'm like there's always been this thing that has been so poignant. I don't know like yeah I don't know who wrote whatever this is I'm thinking about this small article *Becoming A Black Man*. And it was just about trans masculine—a Black trans masculine person and his experience of just like—I think one thing that he wrote about was just about being pulled over right. I also remember the first time I was pulled

over post—when I decided to go on T and have top surgery and stuff I remember that. Right so like—and I also remember, and I’ll always remember before that what it meant to be a butch lesbian in the world, and to look a certain way and people be like “Why do you want to dress like that?” Like “what is that about” or to be dating someone and like, “might as well date a man.” And all these other things right, so I remember all of those things, like for me there—there’s always going to go together and for me part of—some of that is super important to me as like—that I have that memory. And I have all those memories, and part of it is writing them down but also like, yeah wanting to do this—is like those memories are important for multiple reasons and so—yeah both of those things are always tied right. I’m always in support of Black people, always right and I’m also sometimes right harmed by Black people right. And many of those times—they can be people who are closer to me or people who I don’t know, and I’m, I’m also like I support you and I support all of our liberation and also though like damn! That is also tied to me being able to exist even if you don’t want me too. So I can’t ever separate any of those things and I think there’s another piece for me at least right like about being trans and at least to my experience, experiences again post T, and all that stuff like different. I guess conversation isn’t the right word but like, like how people also like—we don’t teach people about gender and sexuality period. I think as a world and so when people conflate those things, and then like how people also preserve my sexuality which also a lot of times I’m fine with. But also then tied to them being like oh! It’s, it’s never fully like now, like I’m, I can be read as multiple things at multiple times now right. [Sniffs] And so I feel like that piece has been also a new piece, the sexuality piece like pre T is was just sort of like people thought they understood what my sexuality was, what my gender was even if they hated it, and they always understand my race right. Now it’s sort of like “we don’t really know what your sexuality is. That changes at different moments, like what are you doing? We sort of think we know what your gender is, or we think we are going to assign you one no matter what you, and we always know what your race is.” So it is always like—yeah—it’s always this multiple layers of peeling and unpeeling and like me playing with them, me playing with people sometimes too, and them not knowing what’s happening, and me just being like “well you’re not going to know.” Or me being like “I’m going to tell you” but I’m going to evaluate my risk right those things are tied yeah. [Sniffs]

**Schulte:** So you mentioned something briefly I’m wondering if we can go there for another moment what have your experiences with police or law enforcement been like? What does it look like?

**Ash:** Yeah so I guess over my—over—I’m trying to think how—yeah so I feel like as a, like as a younger person before I would say I started to like IDing as trans right I had—to be honest I had experiences with police and law enforcement mostly through other adults in my life. And those were either cousins or my parents and stuff like that. And yeah mostly through them and I think then as an adult, and then coming into transness there was like, like things—there was a definite sort of switch. Right so like I was either—like I remember being police for being a young person being out at night. Not just a young person, I was a Black person out at night. Then I remember there like times when—like people in public—again to you know—largely men asking questions like the young women I was with and I was a young person, then that being an issue. And then if there was going to be an altercation then police are involved right, and then who is seen as the

aggressor in those scenarios right. I yeah, I was saying being pulled over after I started T and then I remember this cop comes to the—this is like—this is before I had top surgery I think. Like comes to the window and sees—like he—he was like, “okay this is some Black dude or whatever like locks in a car.” This is in Atlanta—my parents drive expensive cars right. So I’m in the car and he comes to the window and sees me and he had this whole—like I can tell he had this whole moment of like, “I don’t really know—like I don’t really know what to make sense of you, but I pulled you over so I’m going to like keep doing this thing.” Right and he—he would use multiple pronouns of me in conversations where I was like, “interesting, so people can use different pronouns huh! Okay!” But it was like you know it was fucked up, and it was hard I was a couple of blocks from my parent’s house, or whatever just right down the street. But that was an experience that I was like, “Okay, you pulled me over because you thought I was just some Black guy in an expensive car and then now you continue to pull me over because you don’t know—you’re trying to put me in a box and you don’t know what box to put me in. And so that’s why we are doing this.” And it’s not about anything else so I was like okay cool—yeah, and then being on public transit and also like act—like going T and like transition stuff and just like the way—like taking the same route everyday mostly in Chicago to get to school there was so much anxiety about that too right. I’m going to see the same people and they’ve seen me for a while I look this way, and now like my voice is a little different I’ve got some hair on my face like what, how are these people going to react and a few times it was just like uh. And for me I don’t identify as a GNC person, to me that was a sort of like—there was a period of time I think that people would have read me as GNC that to me was like—at least for some medium part of my life where I was just like, people don’t know where to place you and then they got angry and then what happens from there is like violence can happen, or usually does happen it can be verbal or physical or whatever. And that’s from everyday people but also like cops that was also from like, “what are you doing? You sort of are wearing a blouse but you have a mustache. Like what is this?” Type of thing or calling people on the phone like I remember calling someone—I had to call somebody for something who was on the inside and like talked to—they were having an issue with a C.O. or something this was for work, and then I called and then I spoke to someone—and I spoke to an officer that worked in the jail and they couldn’t place my voice and that made them mad. That they didn’t know who I was and it was like, “ma’am” and I was like “it’s not ma’am.” And they were like “are you a sir?” and I was like “does it matter?” and that made them angry they didn’t, like they were just like “what?” So just shit like that and even now again with the question about you know—my multiple identities like being always together and now it’s also—it’s like those things but also like some very different things of like, “oh now you’re like a gay guy sometimes right?” and so them cops are like “what is that?” like “what are you doing? Why are you dancing on the sidewalk? There has to be some reason you’re doing this! You don’t get to exist here.” Yeah so I feel there’s like a range of fucked up yeah shit yeah.

**Schulte:** Yeah which kind of leads to the follow up question which is, what are your everyday safety concerns?

**Ash:** Ooh, that’s a good question. Yeah I was thinking about that actually recently too! As it gets warmer right, and I was talking to someone, a Black fem person and like, I was just like, she was just like, “Damn! I love New York, but I hate New York when it gets warm.” And I was like

“that’s real!” and I was just like, because for me now—yeah I yeah—my safety concerns yeah—like choosing too—first of all for anybody right just being either fem or like practicing fem right like that brings a whole set of, yeah a whole set of things that I wish didn’t exist and so choosing to do that in public [sniffs] for me means that I also feel I have to and unfortunately have to just be looking out for any possibility—and that means for me sometimes like share my location with somebody so they know where I’m at. And yeah, especially like you know I’m going to be outside more it’s going to be hot. I run hot, like my body heat so I want to wear less clothes! And there’s just certain clothes that people think only certain people are supposed to wear, and I’m just like okay so when I do that I feel like I got to prep myself for what could be, what could happen. And that sucks I think yeah and that means from cops and into like other people too, or when other people have an issue and cops are brought in. That really yeah that really sucks. I think it’s mostly that. I think it’s also being with friends and making sure we are like, you know we all try to do that thing, I feel like my mom always does this, it always feels southern to me but I think it’s just like anybody who probably cares about somebody in this way. They’ll be like “I’m just going to walk you to the door” or like “I’m going to make sure you get in the house.” Or like “I’m going to message—text me when you get home.” Like those little things it feels like yeah, it feels really southern but also people just do that. Yeah I feel like those are sort of like safety measures or cause I also don’t want to feel like I can’t move around in ways that I want to. Also understanding them right, I’m not from here I don’t have ownership over the neighborhoods that I visit and go to right. And also like, you know I want to be able to like move around to, but yeah.

**Schulte:** Taking another direction now. How do you think trans issues in politics have changed over the years? As you’ve understood them or learned about them.

**Ash:** How they’ve changed? Yeah—I don’t know I guess like, I guess like maybe again it just feels like a both like a—I don’t know the right word but I guess main stream-y way I don’t feel that those have changed. Right I feel that people still just really trying to fight for like, “we want to be visible.” And we really like if there is some white actress making like a million dollars we want to make a million dollars too. I’m just like okay! Or if like “they all get to live in gated communities we get to live their too!” Or we should get to live there right I think there’s that and then there’s other stuff like people should be able to have jobs, and not get fired from those jobs, and those are you know really important things that I think people are fighting for too. But can also be like main streamed I guess if that’s a verb too but that—but those are important I think that for me at least like way differently. And then there’s always been, and I think always will continue to be like many of us who also are like, “stop talking about making prisons and jails better for trans people.”

**Schulte:** Um-hmm.

**Ash:** Like this is old we’ve been talking about this, right like in—and to not shit on people from like years ago who also like—not to like shit on that. You know cause context matters too like I’m in a different time period, and context so I’m not going to completely shit on that. I am shitting on people who are doing that now so I am doing that—and who have been doing that for like several years like contemporary in the contemporary context. So yeah I feel like there’s being

sort of like obviously leaning on, on the end that I just spoke about right. I feel like there's a lot of like, for me like—always like these real competing messages within many of trans sort of like circles or like adjacent circles that I'm part of. Or even the whole military shit like, “we need to be in the military!” and I just was like “literally what the fuck—why the fuck do you want me in the army? Or the Navy?” like “why do you want me to—what is this about? Why are we doing this?” Cause also many, like the trans folks I spoke about earlier, like had analysis around militarism and war. And why are we doing this? Why do we not learn? Or is it that we have learned and we do know about this right but also money is involved, and people's jobs are involved. So, we are willing to compromise things that are obviously killing us—yeah so I just feel that there's both those sort of like, at least for me, worlds that I see and obviously one that I lean towards. Which is one in our liberation and not about you know just making myself look pretty even though I can do that. At the same time that I can be like “fuck trying to sell me expensive girls' makeup! Make that shit cheaper! Why are you doing this?” anyway! [Laughs]

**Schulte:** Can you tell me about a time when you felt seen?

**Ash:** Ooh when I felt seen?

**Schulte:** Um-hmm.

**Ash:** Oh my goodness! That's a hard question.

**Schulte:** However that means to you.

**Ash:** Yeah [sniffs] that's a hard question because I feel that a lot of my life is about like me wanting to be seen but only in like certain ways, like I wanna be really discreetly seen...

**Schulte:** Um-hmm.

**Ash:** Like I wanna look across the room and someone knows I'm thinking of things or we are sharing a thought and so that makes me feel seen. But I don't want to be seen in like—I don't know [Ash and Red laugh] I don't know! Um—a time I felt seen though? Lets see, lets see, lets see—time I felt seen? I'm trying to think about a recent time—there—there have—there are times I just can't—I'm trying—I'm having a hard time placing one [sniffs] hmm—yeah I don't know—I'm not sure.

**Schulte:** Okay.

**Ash:** But, yeah there's been times. [Ash and Red laugh]

**Schulte:** How do you see your self in this moment of increased trans visibility...

**Ash:** Yeah.

**Schulte:** But maybe can you locate yourself in this moment?

**Ash:** Ooh! How do I see myself?

**Schulte:** Yeah.

**Ash:** Like how do I see myself representing or something?

**Schulte:** Um-hmm.

**Ash:** Ooh! Um—I don't at all.

**Schulte:** Okay, Okay.

**Ash:** Um yeah, and I think—yeah I guess it's the visibility thing for me too like—a part of a challenge I really take for certain people is I'm always also like okay, when I was XYZ age or XYZ time that was really important to me and so I know it can also be important, it can do a lot for particular people right. Like I said in high school I had a crew of Black, mostly lesbian identified like queer community at the time so—but then when I was a trans person out in the world like when I was reading or whatever that was super important. Right so I recognize I'm in sort of a different place on that spectrum, so I think that those things can be important. I think though the way that I keep seeing it happen in like largely—and not just like the like I guess subgroup sort of like community I am a part of. The way I see it largely for me it's just not really helping.

It is about a lot of times at least to me about—and I'm using pretty in like expansive—like who's the prettiest, who's body is the best, who can fit into the categories well and neatly. And that shit is not cool right, right like you shouldn't just need to see me as a human like see my humanity right. If I just get like if I fit either box right, like woman/man like that's not what it's about. Also the class box too right, like we gotta all aspire to be rich, and we gotta all be rich, and we gotta do all this. We gotta have families in this particular way and all this stuff. I feel like a lot of that, even when a lot the young trans kids like some of those folks that I see a lot—a lot of times too like the one's that get highlighted. Yeah not the ones that just exist but some of the ones that get highlighted. It's just sort of like, you gotta—you gotta do it a certain way, you gotta do it right, and that, that's not a thing, like there's no way to do it, there's no—the point is to be able to choose. Yeah so the visibility thing is hard for me—yeah and it's like so like being fabulous! Feels great! Can be great! If you want that and also being like, “I just wanna chill” and I don't wanna have to perform for nobody, and like I just wanna be like tired! Or like I have a lot of anxiety and I'm a trans person and I just wanna have that. I don't want to just be cool trans all the time, that shit is like annoying—yeah but I do feel like sometimes, and not in a way that's helpful, like I do feel that we—in the past—maybe—maybe a year to me at least [bumps into something] excuse me—that there's bee something super marketable... And like quote “cool” about marketing like transness that is for me doing a lot of people a disservice and it is really much like muting the experiences of like Black trans folks and like trans folks of color. Like actual lives and lived experiences because we are highlighting and making shit cool but we are not goanna highlight, and show the realities of our lives. We're not going to do that we're just going to make it cool

and I hate that shit. And you know, I imagine—and if I had like—yeah there are young people in my life too that also just like you know—I—I think it probably is important to see many different types of like, to, to see many genders and gender expressions that exist and I’m like they can also do that. I can take them to a Black march and they can see that there. So Yeah.

**Schulte:** So let’s move into our closing section...

**Ash:** Okay [sniffs]

**Schulte:** If you wanted people to hear one thing from you what would that one thing be?

**Ash:** Wow! Um one thing from me is that [sniffs] I guess—I guess because we’re in New York I’ll say that—and because this is the place where you know a lot of trans history and organizing is held I also want to say that we can all and should all look to other place also for other histories, and other stories, and other lessons, and other, and just other forms of joy that trans people have, and for me that obviously means looking to the South and always like respecting the history that’s here as well, and other places too. Yeah I just feel like being able to move around my—like I feel that I’ve been able to like—in some ways like round that out for myself and I think that like, I hope that we continue histories and, and route those in places that abolition and love. And healing and [sniffs] abolishing and creating new systems that actually work for us. Yeah I would say that.

**Schulte:** In that same vein, if you wanted to be remembered for one thing what would it be?

**Ash:** Oh God! Remembered for one thing? One thing? One thing? I think I would want to be remembered for—it’s not like doing a specific thing or anything, I think I would just like to be remembered for my commitment to growing. Yeah and having really expansive community and like multiple places. I guess that was two things. But it’s more that right! Like I—it always feels like a cliché but I really do believe that when people are like [sniffs] people will remember how you made them feel and the connection you’ve made with them. That feels really important to me and like right that—those are like also obviously—for like you know like routed real—yeah routed in the things I talked about like both like transformative justice and abolition and those things like that it’s routed there. But like how I made someone feel. Or the conversations we had, or how we got to know each other. And not like about—you know and that can be tied to like a thing we worked on, the thing we did but—more that—I think that feels more valuable to me and—yeah also feels like it connects me to like the south in a way to like I think that just bringing people in and make them feel good and like and longevity in that way.

**Schulte:** Is there anything else you wanted to add before we close?

**Ash:** Anything? I don’t think so, I talked more than I thought I would! [laughs] It means I had a great interviewer! Um-no! Uh thanks for the opportunity! Yeah I didn’t—I guess I’ll say—I don’t know—I’ve always like I’ve listened to a bunch of these from different places and for me it was always like, “you do something like this when you’re like 75!” So, like it’s just cool to like—oh

cool! I can do one now! And then I can also do one later! When like I've made my life! That's just cool so yeah, just like think about that.

**Schulte:** Thank you so much!

**Ash:** Thanks!

**Schulte:** Thank you so much for your stories and for your experiences.

**Ash:** No Problem!