

GENERATIONS: AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY IN SOUTH FLORIDA

ATTICUS RACK INTERVIEW

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PLACE OF INTERVIEW: FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA
INTERVIEWER: FRED FEJES



Atticus Ranck is the Director of Transgender Services at SunServe. He was born on February 13 1989 and raised in Lancaster, PA and graduated from Slippery Rock University in May 2012 with a degree in Creative Writing. He graduated with his Masters in Gender and Sexuality Studies from Florida Atlantic University in May 2015. In his current position (March 2016), he is an educator, advocate, and case manager helping transgender adults as they navigate a world that has no place for them. For his

work, SunServe has been awarded “Best Place for Trans Folks” by South Florida Gay News (SFGN) magazine. In addition, Atticus is proud to be included in SFGN South Florida 2016 OUT50 as a prominent leader in the local LGBT community. In his free time, he enjoys restoring furniture.

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FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY, SLIPPERY ROCK, COLLEGE, SUNSERV,
FORT LAUDERDALE, TRANSITION.

<p>YOUTH AND FAMILY BACKGROUND</p>	<p>[00:00:00] Fred: Okay. Tell me your name.</p> <p>[00:00:02] Atticus: My name is Atticus Ranck.</p> <p>[00:00:04] Fred: Okay. Where were you born?</p> <p>[00:00:05] Atticus: I was born in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.</p> <p>[00:00:07] Fred: When?</p> <p>[00:00:08] Atticus: 1989, February.</p> <p>[00:00:10] Fred: So tell me some of the stuff about your background and your family.</p> <p>[00:00:13] Atticus: I have a mom and a dad, and they met in church and then they got married and had four of us, and my mom had one kid a year for four years. So there's only four years between my youngest sister and my oldest sister.</p> <p>[00:00:33] Fred: And where are you in between?</p> <p>[00:00:34] Atticus: Yeah, so it's my sister Nicole and then my brother and then me and then my sister.</p> <p>[00:00:39] Fred: I see. Okay. Great. All right. So where did you go to school?</p>
<p>LIVING IN LANCASET PENNSYLVANIA</p>	<p>[00:00:46] Atticus: I went to school at Brecknock Elementary, and then I went to Garden Spot Middle School and High School. That's in New Holland, Pennsylvania.</p> <p>[00:00:56] Fred: So what was it like living in New Holland and Lancaster?</p> <p>[00:00:58] Atticus: Well, I didn't know. It was different, because it's where the Amish are from. The Amish and the Mennonite are mostly there, and I didn't know it was, you know, unique or</p>

	<p>anything until I got older, and I was like, “Oh, there’s not Amish people everywhere.” [laughs] It was fun. It was rural. Yeah, it’s like never went into the city or anything. The closest—Philly is like an hour-ish away.</p> <p>[00:01:22] Fred: So what did you do in school?</p> <p>[00:01:25] Atticus: Well, I played basketball in elementary school, and then I’ve been playing softball since from second grade until I graduated high school, and then I was a runner. So I started running track in seventh grade, and then I ran cross-country, indoor track, outdoor track from seventh grade until I was a junior in college, and I played softball until I graduated high school.</p> <p>[00:01:52] Fred: So what was it like in high school? Was your high school big?</p> <p>[00:01:54] Atticus: I graduated with—no, it wasn’t big. I graduated with like 330 students. So there was like 1,200 in the whole senior high school.</p> <p>[00:02:03] Fred: So tell me more, like in terms of how you were experiencing life at that age.</p> <p>[00:02:10] Atticus: I was pretty happy. I was, like, a really content kid, you know. I didn’t want for much. We didn’t have a lot of money, but I also didn’t know we were poor until I got older, because we used to get, like, free lunches and stuff, and I didn’t know that we had the free lunches. So I think that was really good on my parents’ part.</p>
HIGH SCHOOL	
FAMILY	<p>My parents—in Lancaster, you don’t really get out, like once you’re in Lancaster. Like literal generations and generations of my family have lived in Lancaster. So, yeah, my parents met at church and my mom’s parents were the youth group leaders at the church, and then my parents were the youth group leaders at the church, and they met there. My dad was twelve, my mom was fifteen when they met at church, and then they got married in that church, raised us in that church, and they still go there. So I was the only one who got out when I went to college.</p>
RELIGION	<p>[00:03:01] Fred: What church were you with?</p>

<p>BEGINNING AWARENESS OF GENDER IDENTITY</p>	<p>[00:03:04] Atticus: It's called Grace Fellowship Church. It's considered nondenominational independent. It would be closest to like a Baptist.</p> <p>[00:03:12] Fred: So in terms of your own sense of yourself as a man, how was that evolving when you were young?</p> <p>[00:03:22] Atticus: Well, when I was a kid, I didn't know. Like, a lot of trans people will say that they knew from a very young age, and for me I didn't know, and I think it's because my mom practically encouraged me to be a tomboy, you know. She always said that she wanted all boys, but she had three girls instead and a boy. But she, like, wanted boys. She thought they were easier to raise. My mom was a tomboy. My mom wasn't a very—she's not a very feminine person. So if I wanted—like, she practically encouraged me to wear boys'—clothes from the boys' side, you know, and it didn't matter. So I would wear really baggy clothes and play in the dirt and play sports. Me and my sister, we played a lot, and my brother and I played a lot, and so I was very much like a little boy, but it wasn't a big deal. And then I hit puberty, and I remember all the girls started wearing flares, you know those flare jeans.</p> <p>[00:04:16] Fred: Yeah, right.</p>
<p>COMING OUT AS LESBIAN</p>	<p>[00:04:17] Atticus: They were popular in the early, early 2000s. And so all the other girls started going through puberty and wearing these jeans, and so I remember I bought a pair. I tried a pair on at the store, and my dad and my brother were like, "They look good." I was like, "Really?" And I was, like, really uncomfortable. But they, like, thought they looked good, so then I bought them. And then I was only, like, feminine, like, my high school years.</p> <p>And then I came out as a lesbian when I was seventeen. Well, I didn't really come out so much as I was caught with another girl. And then a couple years after that I, like, cut my hair off. And as a lesbian, it's completely acceptable to be gender-deviant and to be hailed a masculine lesbian, and so I still didn't know for a long time that I was man, because I just accepted that I was a lesbian and a more masculine-identified person.</p> <p>[00:05:11]</p>

<p>BISEXUALITY</p>	<p>Fred: Where did your knowledge about being a lesbian—I mean, how did you know about being a lesbian? Where did that come?</p> <p>[00:05:20] Atticus: When I was in high school, you know, like, gay or lesbian people didn't exist to me. I didn't know anyone who wasn't straight and married, you know. Like, divorced wasn't even a thing, like it just wasn't. Everyone was just straight and normal and whatever.</p> <p>And then I remember one time when I was in high school, I said something about—I can't believe I said it, but it was in high school I said, "Bisexual people just can't make up their minds." And I can't believe now that I would have said that then. [laughter]</p>
<p>FIRST RELATIONSHIP</p>	<p>But how it started with the lesbian was like I didn't even know that two girls could be together like as partners, like husband and wife for life. I didn't know that was a thing. And then it was I had my best friend Karen, at the time, had a good friend named Becky, and Becky had a brother or Becky was dating this guy who had a sister, and so then Becky started hanging out with this girl Yanni [phonetic], who started hanging out with Karen, and therefore I met her through that way. So through friends I met Yanni, and then we just had like a—you know, the sexual tension and the sexual chemistry and things were very, like, exploratory at first. Like, our friendship was there, and then she would, like, sleep over and I would sleep over, but we would begin like just kind of exploring each other, and we would both pretend we were sleeping, but we weren't. So we just started kind of exploring, and then it led to kissing and sex and, you know, everything. It was over a couple of months where it just got more and more intense. It was very much an infatuation, literal like 180 of my life, because I was very involved in the church and I liked the church and I liked going, and suddenly I was, like, with this girl. But because it was so exploratory for so long, I didn't even know what it was. I didn't know we were really doing anything wrong, because we weren't doing anything really.</p> <p>And then I was kissing her, and then my best friend, Karen, was there at the time, and, like, she caught us kissing, and then she was like, "What are you doing?"</p> <p>And we were like, "Well, I don't know." [laughs]</p> <p>And then she was like, "When I get back, you better have an explanation."</p>

<p>HIGH SCHOOL REACTION TO RELATIONSHIP</p>	<p>And I'm seventeen at this point. This is the summer before my senior year of high school. I'm seventeen, Yanni was fifteen at the time, she was a freshman, and then Karen, well, she had just finished her freshman year.</p> <p>And then my best friend, Karen, went down and ended up telling my mom and calling her friend Becky, who was like the biggest blabbermouth in the whole school, and my parents split us up and I couldn't see my girlfriend anymore. She had to go home right away that night. There was a big ordeal, lots of crying and yelling.</p> <p>And then by the time I came back you know, the rest of that summer was just hell, like I think I lost a lot of weight and I would just like hide out in my room. And the only thing that really saved me was running, because I was still on the team. But I remember my coach called me before practice one time, and he was like, "I heard about this," and I was just horrified, you know, like, "Why does my coach know anything about my sex life?" [laughs] And I didn't even realize that Yanni and I were a couple until we were broken up. I was like, "Oh, my god, that was my girlfriend, you know." Like, that's what that was.</p> <p>So then I come back for senior year of high school and, like, everyone knew because Becky knew and told everyone. You know, my coach had called me, so he knew, and so everyone knew. I was never physically harassed, I wasn't assaulted, there was nothing like that, but no one talked to me. It was like all my friends—I never was popular, but I was well known and I had friends and I was, like, a runner and an athlete, and I had lots of—you know, I wasn't in a clique. I was friends with lots of different people, and then Karen and I were kind of our own team, you know. So I come back for my senior year and I just simply didn't have any friends anymore. It was just no one was my friend. And I think, you know, I sat at the lunch table with my sister and her best friend and my girlfriend Yanni, who completely was—and asked me in school after that, and then she'd be such a jerk and would ignore me in school, and then every day would be like, "Can I sleep over tonight?" Because her mom had passed away and things weren't good at home with her. And so she was like such an ass to me in school and then she would want to sleep over at night because she didn't want to go home. So it was just—and I think that even though I wasn't, like, assaulted or anything like that, I think that being ignored is its own kind of torture, you know.</p> <p>So that's kind of my experience with the coming out, but it wasn't until I was a freshman in college.</p>
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<p>LEARNING ABOUT LESBIANS FROM MEDIA</p>	<p>[00:10:29] Fred: One question is that while you were going through all of this, did you do a lot of looking for information about—</p> <p>[00:10:38] Atticus: Yeah, kind of. Yanni and I, Yanni ended up—what happened was after my parents split us up, because things were bad at her home and I think my parents also, as the Christian people that they are, they ended up a couple months into the school year, she ends up moving into my house where I lived, so she shared a bedroom with me and my sister and Yanni were all in one bedroom. And our physical relationship was on and off for a little bit, but it ends up petering out to just a friendship, a very unhealthy friendship, but it was a friendship.</p> <p>So, anyway, we would go to Blockbuster after practice, because she was also a track runner, and we would go to, like, Blockbuster and we would rent every DVD of <i>The L Word</i> that existed, and we would watch it. She introduced me to it, and we would watch <i>The L Word</i>, but we would hide the DVD under the couch cushion in the basement. And Yanni would hold the remote, so as soon as someone came in, because we could hear the garage door before the basement door, and so she would quick change it, and we'd have like something preset to the TV, like, oh, clearly we're watching this show on MTV right now. So that's how—that was kind of my first real introduction to lesbianism outside of the relationship that I had.</p> <p>The other thing that Yanni introduced me to was <i>Buffy the Vampire Slayer</i> had Willow and Tara in their lesbian relationship on the show, and so we also used to rent <i>Buffy</i> from Blockbuster, and we would only watch, like, the Willow and Tara scenes. [laughs] We'd skip ahead.</p>
<p>FANFICTION</p>	<p>She also introduced me to fanfic of Willow and Tara, so, you know, online people would write fan fiction of them, so we would read—she introduced me to that, and I would read that, and I would read it at night in my bunk bed. So I had a bunk bed and my little sister on her bottom bunk, and I also shared a room with my other sister, so it was all three of us in one room. Anyway, so I would pretend I was studying for something, but really—so I'd have, like, my science notes right there, but really I'd be reading fan fiction of Willow and Tara. [laughter] That was my research.</p> <p>[00:12:53] Fred: Did you go on the web, online or anything?</p> <p>[00:12:56]</p>

<p>DATING AN AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN</p>	<p>Atticus: No, I didn't really. At one point when I was in early high school, there was a virus on our computer, and we used to get porn, like porn viruses would come up. But I just felt bad every time I did. I didn't even, like, search it out. It was just like it would pop up, and I'd always feel like really bad, because I was very Christian, so I'd be like, "No, that's bad." So I'd close it.</p> <p>[00:13:16] Fred: So how did you decide where to go to college and all that?</p> <p>[00:13:19] Atticus: Well, what ended up happening was senior year—and my parents, years later, but recently from now, would tell me that my senior year was really difficult for them because I didn't talk. And I didn't. I don't think I talked to them about much of anything. And my mom said later that I was the easiest child to raise and we had such a good relationship and that I never gave them any problems. And it's true. I was. I was so good. I didn't even swear. I didn't drink. Like, I didn't party. I didn't do anything. And suddenly I was like the problem child because I was dating a girl. Not only was she a girl, but she was also black, and I think that that kind of—</p> <p>[00:13:54] Fred: That really crossed the lines. [laughs]</p> <p>[00:13:57] Atticus: Yes. So there was like five black people in my whole high school, and I dated one of them. [laughs] So I think that my parents were—I think the girl factor overrode the black factor, though.</p>
<p>SELECTING A COLLEGE</p>	<p>So then, anyway, so for a long time, my parents wanted us to go to a Bible college in New York called Word of Life Bible Academy, because it was where they went. They went there and a lot of people from my church go there. A lot of family members have gone there. And what happens is you go there, you meet your significant other, and then you get married. That's like how it works. [laughs] So they wanted all of us to go there, and my older sister, Nicole, went there, but my brother Shane, who was two grades ahead of me, did not. He didn't go.</p> <p>But for a long time I assumed that I was going to go to Word of Life first and then I would go somewhere else, so I never actually applied there, but I did apply to—I forget the name of it. It's another really Christian college in Pennsylvania, and the plan was that I was going to run on their track team. It was like</p>

<p>GOING TO SLIPPERY ROCK</p>	<p>Division 3, so it wasn't a big deal, but I was going to run on their track team after my year at Word of Life, blah, blah. But then I ended up, like, at the last minute applied to a couple other places. I applied to Slippery Rock University and F&M, which is Franklin & Marshall in Lancaster, and that was kind of it.</p> <p>My plan for a long time was never to go to college, because my dad went to Penn State for a year and ends up dropping out before they went to Word of Life, and, you know, my family is very blue-collar working-class. My dad is a concrete—he works concrete, and he's been doing the same job since he was in high school, with a couple breaks for college. And my mom's a self-employed interior painter, so she, like, paints walls and stuff. So they do not value education at all, like it's just not something they care about and it's never something they encouraged. They practically discouraged it because they didn't want to pay and because I think there's a lot to be said when you work with your hands, and I don't think that they cared.</p> <p>So anyway, so it wasn't until shit hit the fan in senior year, and I was just like, "I just want to get out. I want to get out." So I was just biding my time the whole senior year.</p> <p>So I ended up applying to a couple places and visited a few places, but when ends up happening was, at the last minute, it was basically, like, I'm going to go to Slippery Rock University. So I got accepted there, but I had, like, missed the financial aid deadline. You're supposed to, like, apply by like February 1st or something, and I didn't apply till like March, and, like, so I missed out on all this financial aid. And so I ended up calling them and was like—because I was a good student, I had good grades, like 4-point-something or like a 3.9 or some shit. So I ended up calling them, and they were like, "Oh, you missed out on all this," blah, blah, blah.</p> <p>And I ended up—they were legit tears, but I started crying, like, "All my four years down the drain and you're not going to give me anything?" [laughter] So they ended up getting me some money, and my parents, luckily, were poor, which actually helps federally, because they never set aside money for us because it just wasn't what they cared about. So anyway, so I ended up getting some money and I got a scholarship and whatever.</p> <p>So I end up going to Slippery Rock, and I visited with my parents and I met with the coach. He's the one who walked me around. And I was not a recruited athlete. I was good. but I wasn't good enough to be recruited as a runner. So what</p>
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<p>BEING A LESBIAN AT SLIPPERY ROCK</p>	<p>ended up happening was he walked us around and whatever, but you can run on the team without a scholarship. So I ended up running on the team.</p> <p>I met with the coach. And I remember my mom and my dad walking us around. It was like in June, right before the semester would have started in August. We visited the campus, and I remember my mom asking, she goes, “Do any of the athletes, any of the girls on your team, do they go to church? Do you guys like—is that something that you guys do?” And I remember coach was saying how a couple of the girls would go to services sometimes, and sometimes they did, but that’s not—</p> <p>Fred: That wasn’t what this was about.</p> <p>[00:17:52] Atticus: No, it’s not at all what that was about.</p> <p>And I remember—so anyway, I don’t even know how it happened, but it was pretty fast that I was like, “I’m going to go here.” So I went to Slippery Rock and I ran on the team.</p> <p>In hindsight, I picked Slippery Rock because it was in Pennsylvania, so I had Penn state—or Pennsylvania tuition, you know, in-state tuition, but it was four and a half hours away, so it was on the other side of the state. It was above Pittsburgh, and I was closer to Philly. So it was four and a half hours away, which meant that it was within the state but far enough that I didn’t have to come home if I didn’t want to, and that was pretty much, I think, why I chose it. So that way I didn’t have to go home if I didn’t want to.</p> <p>[00:18:35] Fred: How did you find Slippery Rock in terms of being a lesbian?</p> <p>[00:18:38] Atticus: Well, I didn’t know it at the time, but I found out after I was there for a year or two that they call Slippery Rock—outsiders call it “Slippery Rock, where the men are the men and so are the women.” [laughter] It turns out that there’s a lot of lesbians at Slippery Rock, which I did not know until I got there.</p> <p>And I remember I met my first—there was this woman in my English class and she would always stare at me in class. I still had my long hair and stuff, and she had, like, green hair and she was very like kind of punk. But she would, like, stare at</p>
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<p>COLLEGE LIFE AT SLIPPERY ROCK</p>	<p>me in class all the time. So I ended up talking to her one time after class. She ended up living in a dorm close to mine. And I remember being like, “Are you a lesbian?” And she was like, “Yeah.” And it was my first lesbian I met outside of my high-school relationship.</p> <p>So I left my high-school relationship, and Yanni ends up staying at my parents’, living at my house even while I left for college. Yanni ends up being an awful person, just, like, stole money from my parents. I think she still lives in Lancaster somewhere. We don’t talk anymore.</p> <p>So I remember my first lesbian, and that was a big deal because I was, like, so excited that for the first time I met someone else outside of this girl that I liked in high school, and that was a really cool moment. But I still wasn’t officially out to myself, really, even at that point. Because I remember one time after shit hit the fan when I was in high school, my brother asked me, like, “So do you like men or women?” And I’d say, “Oh, totally men. Like, don’t worry about it.” [laughter] Because I just didn’t want—I didn’t know.</p> <p>And I remember Karen, before she actually caught us, caught me and my girlfriend at the time, Karen asked me—who was my best friend for a couple—we were pretty much inseparable for years, and she had asked me at one point if Yanni and I were a couple, because people were questioning. I guess we weren’t very good at hiding it. And I was like, “No.” Like, “What?” Because how are you supposed to answer that question? You’re not prepared for that, you know. I didn’t know what to do. So I just lied. And I think that afterwards she said that she wasn’t my friend, not because I was a lesbian but because I lied to her about it. And I was just like, “Okay. What was I supposed to say?”</p> <p>Anyway, so it was my freshman year in college, I’m on the cross-country team, and there’s a lot of parties, like party scene, and we worked really hard but we also played really hard. And there was a guy on the team who, like, thought I was really cute and wanted to take me out on dates and blah, blah, blah, and I thought for the first time, I was like, “If I liked men, this would be the kind of man that I would like.” He was wholesome and blond and athletic, and he was just like all around a really good guy. But it was at that point where I was like, “But I don’t, don’t like you and I don’t want you.” And if I was a straight girl, then that’s what I would have wanted, but I simply didn’t and I don’t. So that’s when I actually came out, really, to myself. Even though everything had gone down in high school, I was just biding my time, just kind of waiting. So it wasn’t until my freshman year and that boy liked me.</p>
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<p>LGBT STUDIES AND COMING OUT</p>	<p>[00:21:51] Fred: So what was the rest of your college like?</p> <p>[00:21:57] Atticus: Well, I started out as an athletic training major, and it turned out that my sophomore year, when I had to actually start, like, watching people practice, it was so boring. [laughs] I was like, "This is dumb."</p> <p>So anyway, so I ended up switching to English, and that's how I met a professor of mine, Cindy, and I ended up finding out about they had an LGBT group on campus. And I had gone, like, once or twice as a freshman, and I remember my friend Kevin, who is the guy that liked me when I was a freshman, and two other girls on the team, Kayla [phonetic], who ended up being my best friend for a couple of years in college, and then Kim, who was the captain of the team. And Kim helped me come out to the team, so I came out. What happened was—it's kind of a convoluted story, but it's circling around.</p> <p>[00:22:44] Fred: Okay.</p> <p>[00:22:45] Atticus: So Kim—I ended up I came out to Kevin first, because I was like, "I like women, you should know. That's why I don't like you." And then I told all my freshman female teammates individually after that. Like one at a time I would say, "Hey, I'm a lesbian, I want you to know." And it was good. It was good. It was kind of like such a huge relief from what I experienced in high school.</p> <p>So then after I told all the freshmen individually, all the freshmen girls, I went to Kim, who was the captain of the team and very, very cool, very open kind of person, just someone that you want to be around, and so I ended up saying—Kevin and I told her together that, "Hey, I want to come out to the team. How can we do this?"</p> <p>So we ended up doing—we had a lot of girls' nights with the team, and so on one of our girls' nights, we played Two Truths and a Lie. So all the girls would say two truths and a lie, and then we'd all guess, like, which one was the lie or whatever. So I had my two truths were that I had never broken a bone and that I was a lesbian, and the lie was that I was dating Kevin. And they were like, "Oh, my god, you're dating Kevin!"</p> <p>And I was like, "No. I'm a lesbian." [laughter]</p>
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<p>WOMEN STUDIES</p>	<p>And it was the most awkward moment, I think, of my life, because they were just like, “What?” Like, they didn’t get it because everyone thought Kevin and I were dating because we would, like, hang out. But at the time, Kevin was like the only one who knew, and he was okay, and he would still—like, we still hung out and it was okay.</p> <p>So after that, I remember my friend Julia turned to the girl next to me and was like, “Beat that.” [laughter] It was really, really awkward, but in the end, it was really, really good because Kim helped orchestrate it.</p> <p>And then I remember—I forget her name, but another girl on the team was like, “Cool!” And then it was kind of fine after that, you know. And I think after that, people, they needed time to process it a little bit, but it ended up being—western Pennsylvania is not very LBGT-friendly kind of area, especially—Pittsburgh is kind of, but not north of that.</p> <p>So anyway, so that’s how I came out to my teammates, and then together Kevin and Kim and my friend Kayla, who was one of my freshmen teammates, we went—the LGBT group was having a bonfire that I had heard about, and so I was like, “I want to go,” but I didn’t want to go alone. So the four of us went, and they supported me and we went together. It was really nice.</p> <p>But I remember that was the first time someone asked me if I was a lesbian, and at that time I still thought “lesbian” was a scary word. I mean, it still kind of sounds like an STD or something. So I remember someone asked me, they’re like, “Are you a lesbian?” And I was like, “Yeah,” but it was really uncomfortable.</p> <p>And I didn’t really get very involved. I remember my freshman roommate came with me to another meeting at one point, but I didn’t really get very involved.</p> <p>Then it was when I was a sophomore I met Cindy, who’s a professor at Slippery Rock, and she was a student advisor of the LGBT group at the time, and I ended up taking a class with her. She was an English and Women’s Studies professor. So I ended up taking a class, and I basically fell in love with feminism, and it was kind of through her and through that organization that I started to get involved with the LGBT group on campus in a leadership role, because their secretary—what happened was they ended up impeaching the president at the time and a new president had stepped in, and they were lacking a secretary. So I ended up basically doing secretarial roles, and I was really helping them do programming for</p>
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<p>PRESIDENT OF LGBT STUDENT GROUP</p>	<p>Awareness Week, which is the LGBT all sorts of events for that first week. And so I stepped up and was doing all this stuff, and it was really exciting.</p> <p>And then it was the beginning of my junior year that the president at the time was leaving, and it was just sort of like, “Well, Ashley,” you know, my birth name, “Ashley stepped up,” so then I was nominated president and suddenly I was the president of the organization. So it was my junior-senior—and I ended up being at Slippery Rock for five years because I was in athletic training first for a while, and then eventually I graduated with my degree in creative writing with minors in Women’s Studies and communications.</p> <p>And then I ended up being the president for three years, for junior, senior, and my super senior year, of the organization, and it was amazing. And I really saw it grow, and I was like <i>the</i> lesbian on campus. There were a lot of other people who were not straight, but they weren’t involved. But I was, like, the involved lesbian with the short hair. I ended up I still had my long hair all the way till the beginning of my senior year of college, is when I finally cut off my hair and started identifying. It was my freshman year that I went from wearing my flares and my girl jeans into the more masculine jeans. I bought a pair of guy jeans from the guys’ side, and I never looked back after that. It was like girl jeans were gone. I, like, never put them back on. [Fred laughs.]</p> <p>So then the male clothes came, and then suddenly the hair didn’t fit anymore. I mean, “suddenly,” like four years later, the hair needed to go. But I resisted it for so long, because my mom liked it.</p> <p>[00:28:02] Fred: What year did you graduate in?</p> <p>[00:28:03] Atticus: I graduated high school in 2007, and I graduated college in 2012. Yes, then the hair came off the beginning of my senior year.</p> <p>[00:28:15] Fred: So how was your family through all this?</p> <p>[00:28:17] Atticus: Well, so they sent me off to college where things—I had had that girlfriend and then she was living with us, but I hadn’t dated anyone or anything after that, boy or girl or anything. And then it was when I came out to myself and then I came out to my teammates, whatever, so this is like early</p>
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<p>COMING OUT TO PARENTS</p>	<p>October now of my freshman year, so early, like, October 2007 or whatever.</p> <p>And then six months later, I was home for my birthday in February, February the 13th is my birthday, and I was home and my mom wanted to take me out to Red Lobster. And if felt like one of those moments where you're kind of trapped, like your mom wants to take just you and her, like that. And she took me out and she asked me how I was doing with the girl issue. And I was like, "Well, everyone knows that I'm a lesbian, you know. Everyone knows, and I came out," and whatever.</p> <p>And she started crying, and then I started crying because I'm an empathetic crier, and then the poor waitress was like, "What do I do?" She had no idea, because we're both crying, like not even eating anything.</p> <p>[interruption]</p> <p>So that's when I actually came out to my mom officially, and then I gave her permission to tell Dad, and then together they told my siblings, my two sisters and my brother.</p> <p>[00:29:57] Fred: Did they eventually accept it?</p> <p>[00:29:58] Atticus: No, it was never easy for them. There were so many moments, because then the summer after my sophomore year of college, I had an internship at Out for Work, which is an LGBT—I think it's a nonprofit in Washington, D.C., which helps LGBT people transition from college to work, so, like, coming out on your résumé, job-friendly, you know, LGBT-friendly jobs, all that kind of stuff, and then they have, like, a job fair, whatever.</p> <p>So I was living in D.C. and helping organize this, and when I told my parents that Out for Work was helping college students find work, which was not a lie, but they ended up—somehow when I was at college, they learned how to use a computer and, like, Googled Out for Work or something, and then they do that thing where they corner me. They always do that, and they were like, "We know that this organization is LGBT," or whatever, which I was like, "How do you even know that acronym?" But they were like, "We know what you're doing, and we don't like it. We don't approve of it."</p>
<p>DATING IN COLLEGE</p>	<p>So, no, they never really accepted it, but there were—it was my junior year I ended up dating this girl, kind of the first girlfriend really after my high-school girlfriend, and ends up</p>

<p>INTERNSHIP IN WASHINGTON D.C.</p>	<p>bringing her home at one point. So she came home with me, and my parents were nice. They were nice. A year later, I dated this other girl, and I brought her home one time to meet my family, and she also had a daughter. And anyway, my parents, I remember, after she had came home, my dad asked me if Laura, who was the girlfriend, had a good time, because my dad said, "We wanted to make her feel comfortable." So that was like progress, you know, was being made, so it was kind of nice.</p> <p>[00:31:55] Fred: You said you went to Washington.</p> <p>[00:31:57] Atticus: Yeah, Washington, D.C.</p> <p>[00:31:58] Fred: How long were you in Washington?</p> <p>[00:31:59] Atticus: Just for the summer.</p> <p>[00:32:01] Fred: What was your experience there? Did you find it—</p> <p>[00:32:02] Atticus: Yeah, I loved it. I didn't really make, like, a lot of, like, LGBT friends or anything like that, but I went out to all—because all the museums, almost all of them are free, so I worked Monday through Thursday, and I lived with my aunt and uncle, and then Friday, Saturday, Sunday I would drive my car and get on the subway and go out to all the museums. I remember one time I took a nap in the National Mall. Like I just was like—it was pretty awesome. It was very—felt very independent, you know.</p> <p>The only—it was an unpaid internship, which was really shitty, and my aunt didn't charge me to live, you know, didn't make me pay rent, but I had to, like, help her clean and stuff, and she's like a clean freak. So I had to, like, clean that floor every single weekend. I was like, "It looks the same like from when before I start cleaning it to after. It doesn't—." Whatever. So I had to do that and stuff. But I liked D.C. a lot.</p> <p>[00:32:58] Fred: That was your first experience in a big city, right?</p> <p>[00:33:00] Atticus: Yeah, mm-hmm, yeah. And I was there, I got to see RuPaul at the D.C. Pride. That year RuPaul was, like, the big entertainer, so that was pretty cool.</p>
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<p>APPLYING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL AT FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY</p>	<p>[00:33:13] Fred: Oh, good. So what happened after you graduated? No, first of all, is there anything else in college that you felt really happening in college that really—</p> <p>[00:33:23] Atticus: Not really. I was really just a lesbian and then cut off the hair and then dated a couple girls. That was kind of it.</p> <p>[00:33:31] Fred: So what happened afterwards?</p> <p>[00:33:32] Atticus: Well, then afterwards I was applying to all these places and I wanted to do Women’s Studies, so it was very much I’d become an active advocate kind of person, and so wanted to do Women’s Studies. And so Cindy, my professor, helped me, you know, apply and figure stuff out or whatever, and I got accepted to a few schools, but I decided to go to Florida Atlantic because it was the only school that paid, that offered the graduate teaching assistantship, which helped me pay for school. I got accepted to Rutgers and I really wanted to go there, but they don’t offer any M.A. students money, so that was kind of crappy.</p> <p>So I was like, “Florida?” I mean, I don’t even like the beach that much. I was like, “What? Why do I even—?” And Florida, FAU ended up being like a last-minute application. I was just like, “I’ll do one more,” you know, so I sent out that one. I also got accepted to a school in Chicago, but they didn’t pay, so I went—</p> <p>[00:34:24] Fred: Which school in Chicago?</p> <p>[00:34:25] Atticus: DePaul, which has a really good program too.</p>
<p>FIRST REACTION TO FLORIDA</p>	<p>But I end up coming down here, and it was my first time flying alone, like when I got on my flight down here. And anyway, I had my visit down here and it was awful. I was like, “I hate it. I hate it here. This is disgusting.” But then they had a good program and stuff, so I said, “Okay, I guess I’ll go here.”</p> <p>[00:34:48] Fred: So you came here—</p> <p>[00:34:50] Atticus: That would have been fall. I started fall 2012. There’s never been a break in any of my colleges.</p>

<p>PROSTHETIC PENSISES</p>	<p>Yeah, so I just came as a lesbian, and I was still Ashley and whatever, and I ended up my first semester with Barkley [phonetic]. I had a Queer Studies class. And after the final paper, I wrote about prosthetic penises, so I wrote about these penises that you can buy that you can wear all day and pee with, stand to pee with, and have intercourse with, depending on the type of penis that you buy. And I found this online. I don't know where or how, and I was like, "I want to theorize that." So I took that product and I theorized it. I used Butler and Halberstam and Donna Haraway, and I started theorizing it about what it really means when you can take it on or off, you know, and the ways in which it functions better than a biological penis, and all that stuff.</p>
<p>AWARENESS OF MALE IDENTITY</p>	<p>So I wrote this paper, and then afterwards while I was writing it, I was like, "I really think I want to buy one of these." So I waited till after Christmas and used my Christmas money, and I bought one. And basically it was really fast after that, that it was sort of like I just started gradually becoming like more and more male. Like, I look back at pictures now, just recently I was looking back, and it was like I was started to be called "sir" more and more often before I even knew that I wanted to transition. So it was like some sort of energy. Something was happening. Like, my hair was short, but it was, like, long. Like, it was a couple inches, you know, and then I just—shorter and shorter.</p> <p>And then I started wearing this penis, and I would wear it almost every day. And then I was dating a girl at the time, which was a fucked-up relationship because she was engaged to a guy, but, like, we were in a relationship too. But in private, she would call me male, male pronouns, and I really liked that, and then I would have her call me that, you know, in private, and it felt really good.</p>
<p>SELECTING A NAME</p>	<p>And then I was like, "Ashley doesn't fit anymore," so I was looking up names online to be called instead, and I kind of wanted an androgynous name because I kind of thought of myself not really butch but androgynous. I never considered myself like a butch type or anything. So I started looking up "A" names, and I was like, "There's not a whole lot of good ones that I really like." There's like Alex or Aaron or whatever. And then I came across Atticus, and at the time I just texted the girl I was seeing and was like, "What about Atticus?" because she knew that I was looking for names.</p> <p>And she was like, "Yes."</p> <p>I was like, "Okay," and that was it. That was it. I was like, "Okay, I guess I'm Atticus now." It just happens to be</p>

<p>FAU SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT</p>	<p>coincidence that Atticus Finch from <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> is one of the best literary characters ever. So sometimes when people ask, “Oh, did you choose it based on <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i>?” sometimes I’ll be like, “Yes,” even though it wasn’t really. It was just kind of I wanted an “A” name because of “Ashley.” I wanted the same initials.</p> <p>[00:37:56] Fred: So how did you see yourself sort of transitioning into that identity? Did you meet other people? Did you meet other [unclear]?</p> <p>[00:38:03] Atticus: Yeah. So I bought this product, and because I was surrounded by so many feminists now, so now I’m in grad school studying Women’s Studies, so that’s like all I’m doing, and I’m meeting all these other, you know, mostly female feminists, and so I would show them the product and I was working on the paper, and they’d be like, “Man, that’s really cool. Like, this exciting,” or whatever. So I had so much support, so it didn’t feel strange, you know.</p>
<p>BEING A MAN</p>	<p>But I remember the first time I ever—I met a friend of mine and she was a lesbian, she was the only other lesbian that I know of that taught English just like I do at FAU, and the very first time I met her, she said, “You’re going to be a man.” And I remember I laughed at her and was like, “What?” [laughs]</p> <p>And there was a lot of moments when I was wearing the new penis in those couple months where it was like, “Do I want to transition?” But it was always like, “No,” because I was like, “That’s going to fuck up the parts that I have now. Like, why would I want to mess up what it is?”</p> <p>But then, like, I would get called male, you know, by the girl I was seeing, and that felt really good, and then, you know, I would just experiment a little bit with the hair, and I would just go shorter and shorter and shorter, and that felt good.</p>
<p>FACIAL HAIR</p>	<p>And then I remember ever since I was in college, I used to be jealous of guys’ facial hair, because I was like facial hair is so cool. Like, you can have it any way you want and look different. Because if a guy has really long hair, a really long beard, then shaves it off, like, it changes the whole appearance of the way you look or whatever. I didn’t know that most guys can’t always grow a beard. I didn’t know that at the time. [laughter] But I just thought that it was given that all guys were going to have beards.</p> <p>So, I don’t know, I think my energy just became more and more masculine, and because I was in such a supportive</p>

<p>TELLING LESBIANS ABOUT MALE IDENTITY</p>	<p>environment, it wasn't really a big deal.</p> <p>[00:39:58] Fred: So there were no lesbians or others who basically said your being a man is [unclear]?</p> <p>[00:40:04] Atticus; Not at the time. I mean, there were strangers kind of like—I was drinking a lot at the time, and I would go out to, like, lesbian bars, like the one that's [unclear], and I would tell people that, like, "I'm thinking about it," you know. And there was a lot of hesitant—anywhere from like outright hatred about it to like, "Why?" You know. But those were people I wasn't really concerned about. But there was a lot of, like, "Why would you want to do that?"</p> <p>And I ended up writing a paper, kind of. I did a presentation on, like, lesbians in the FTM community, which is in Halberstam's book, <i>Female Masculinity</i>, and she has a chapter about the border wars and how for some reason lesbians think there's only so much masculinity to go around and that they're losing all their butch lesbians to transitioning. And so I knew—I kind of went into my transition knowing that that might happen, that I could lose some lesbian—but even when I was in college as, you know, a lesbian, I had lesbian friends, but there was a whole core group of these lesbians that I wasn't friends with, and I think that they—for some reason, we didn't get along, and so it wasn't really like a big upset that I was losing lesbian friends. But I did, you know.</p> <p>[00:41:34] Fred: Was there a moment when you sort of like knew and decided that this was the way it was going to be?</p> <p>[00:41:42] Atticus: Yeah. There was no one moment, but I remember, like, when I would go to the bank and the teller or the grocery store and the clerk or the cashier, like anytime—or restaurant and the waiter—like, that they would say, you know, "How are you doing today, sir?" or whatever. It was like, "That feels really good," you know. And it started to be like anytime that they would say "ma'am," that I would be like, "Ew. No. You know, that's not right." And so it was kind of in that moment where it was like then I need—I need to be the man to validate how I feel.</p> <p>[00:42:25] Fred: So where are you at right now?</p> <p>[00:42:29] Atticus: Well, right now like in my transition and stuff?</p>
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<p>STARTING TESTOSTERONE</p>	<p>[00:42:33] Fred: Yes.</p> <p>[00:42:33] Atticus: Yeah. So I'm fifteen months. I started testosterone December 13th, 2013, and today is March 20th, 2015, so just passed fifteen months on testosterone. And I just had my top surgery on February 23rd of this year, so I'm just shy of one month post-op.</p> <p>[00:42:56] Fred: I see. I saw the photos. That's great.</p> <p>[00:43:01] Atticus: Yeah.</p> <p>[00:43:01] Fred: Great. So what are your plans then for the future, then?</p> <p>[00:43:04] Atticus: As far as transitioning or surgery or—</p> <p>[00:43:04] Fred: Well, both. Everything, transitioning but also like, you know, are you going to stay here, are you going to move on, are you going—</p>
<p>PLANS FOR SURGERY?</p>	<p>[00:43:14] Atticus: Well, as far as like transitioning and stuff, I don't have any other surgery plans at this point. I know that the options are out there, but they're not—kind of depends. Maybe a hysterectomy, maybe a bottom surgery or some sort of something, but right now I don't have any plans for that because I'm trying—one, I don't have any money. I don't even have money for my top surgery. I don't know what's—hope to God someone hires me when I graduate, because I don't know what I'm going to do. [laughs] So, no plans for surgery at this point, but it's possible in the future, you know, but I'm not, not right now. And as far as, you know, I will keep doing the testosterone, and I love all the changes that have happened on it. I love it.</p> <p>At first when I started to transition, at first I was like, "Oh, maybe I don't want to go like super fast on the transition, just kind of ease into it." But as soon as I knew and I wanted that testosterone, it was like I needed things right now. [snaps fingers] I needed the facial hair. I needed the muscles. I needed the boobs gone right away. It was very much like I hate being in limbo, so as soon as I knew, I was like, "Let's go all the way."</p>

<p>PLANS FOR FUTURE</p>	<p>So as far as the rest of my future, I graduate May 1st with my master's, and right now I've applied to, like, seventeen jobs so far, positions like I have an interview on Monday with a University in Michigan for Assistant Director for the Center for Diversity and Inclusion. So positions like that, because there's a possible position open at Slippery Rock that I really want, working with Cindy, who's been there. She's my professor who was a professor, mentor, advisor, friend—you know, transition into friend—and potential colleague now. So anyway, there's a position there, a position, potential position that could open up, so I'm looking into basically lower-level administration positions in like diversity, multicultural affairs, LGBTQ resource coordinator, program developer, etc.</p>
<p>WORK AT SUNSERV</p>	<p>[00:45:16] Fred: Great, great. You work over as an intern over at Sunserv.</p> <p>[00:45:21] Atticus: Yes.</p> <p>[00:45:21] Fred: What have you been experiencing there? I mean, what do you deal with over there?</p> <p>[00:45:27] Atticus: Well, I love it a lot. At first it was—it's a very different world because it's a nonprofit world, and I am not used to nonprofit. I've only ever been in academia. So that was kind of—</p> <p>[00:45:35] Fred: What's the big difference?</p> <p>[00:45:37] Atticus: Well, for example, like there's some HIPAA stuff I didn't know about, which is, you know, privacy and confidentiality, and at first I didn't think it was a big deal. Like, I'd say someone's name or at first I had clients together in one room talking about some—and then they were like, "You can't do that."</p> <p>I was like, "Why don't you tell me these things?" You know, I don't want to break confidentiality or whatever. There was just things I didn't know.</p> <p>The other thing is so many things are grant-funded or everything is about fundraising, and no matter how much they might like you or what you do, essentially they're like don't—he said, just my advisor, the executive director said today, he was</p>

<p>HELPING PEOPLE TRANSITION</p> <p>STARTING TRANSMEN GROUP</p>	<p>like, “I would hire you in a heartbeat, but we can’t. There’s nothing—we don’t have anything for you.” I mean, they barely have anything now, so.</p> <p>[00:46:25] Fred: What about the people you deal with as clients?</p> <p>[00:46:27] Atticus: I really like it. So I’m basically—Arianna Lynn [phonetic] is the Director of Transgender Services and I’m her intern. And Katie Yankey [phonetic] is the supervisor, because she works—she’s kind of the liaison between me and the university. So what I do is I basically help mostly trans people with the name-change process, because I have legally changed my name this past summer, and my gender marker, so now I’m “that guy.” I mostly help trans women, for the most part, trans men too. And I’ve also started a Trans Men’s Support Group, which is really exciting because the first meeting, we had six guys. In this past meeting, we had thirteen guys, which was really exciting, and they’ve requested it. It was once a month because we didn’t know what the turnout was going to be, but they have both meetings requested that it meet more than once a month. So now we’re going to up it to bimonthly, first and third Wednesday.</p> <p>[00:47:21] Fred: Fantastic. What kind of issues? Is there any kind of like common issues discussed in there, or is there just a range of—</p> <p>[00:47:26] Atticus: There’s a range of issues. The first meeting was really interesting. We talked kind of like about disclosure and at what point, like within dating. Like once you start passing as a male, it becomes kind of a weird conversation to have to be like, “Hey, I’m a guy, but, you know, there’s this thing you should know about, this thing that, you know, I don’t have, you know, that you should be aware of.” And so we talked about disclosure and at what point do you decide to tell someone. And I think it’s an issue for all people, about, like, finding someone who likes you for you, but it’s really hard when you’re trans. But I think that in some ways it’s really good, because it kind of weeds people out right away, you know. So we talked about that.</p> <p>We talked about, like, we were doing some product reviews, like right now, like about packers and like the prosthetic penis that I wrote about. There’s better products all the time out there, so we were kind of talking about that and sex toys and stuff. So we talk about that and relationships. We ask about family.</p>
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<p>RELATIONSHIP</p>	<p>And some guys, it's really cool because we've got—the youngest is, like, seventeen, the oldest right now is fifty-seven, so we have a really wide age range, and it's really cool because some guys aren't on testosterone yet and some guys have been. I think the longest, we have one guy who doesn't want to do "T" and won't be, but has post-op seven years, so it's kind of a pretty cool transition thing, a nice range.</p> <p>[00:48:48] Fred: In terms of being connected with anybody, is there anybody that you've been connected with or been connecting with or have been connected with?</p> <p>[00:48:56] Atticus: Like sexual, like relationship-wise?</p> <p>[00:48:57] Fred: Yeah, relationship-wise.</p> <p>[00:48:57] Atticus: Yeah, there was this one girl at the beginning of my transition. I was about three months in when I met her, and I met her through a student. She's one of my former students' sisters. And so I ended up, when we had this really intense, really passionate relationship, and it was really, really good. Like, I thought she was the one. It was very—we connected. She saw me as a man and all this stuff. But it ends up that alcohol became a part of it because I was drinking too much, and she started to miss, like, a biological penis. So things kind of came to a head, and so we ended up breaking up, which was really shitty because I really, really liked her. But things came to a head where it was about mid-April of last year, where suddenly I was pulled over for drinking and driving, but, luckily, did not get a DUI. I don't know why they didn't give me one. They should have. So that happened.</p>
<p>ALCOHOL AND RECOVERY</p>	<p>Then my girlfriend broke up with me. And then because I was drinking and driving, then the person I was living with kicked me out, so suddenly I was girlfriendless and an alcoholic and homeless. And so it ended up that I found somewhere to live and got sober, and I've been sober almost a year now.</p> <p>[00:50:15] Fred: You're in AA?</p> <p>[00:50:15] Atticus: Mm-hmm. So I go to AA and I'm sober now. And I think that the only reason I really wanted to mention that is because, you know, being trans absolutely played a role in that. I just didn't know it, you know, at the time.</p>

ALCOHOL AND
TRANSITIONING

[00:50:27]

Fred: What do you mean, played a role in that?

[00:50:28]

Atticus: I mean that 25 percent of transgender people use alcohol or drugs specifically to cope, and so because I was such a high-functioning alcoholic, I didn't know for so long. And it's also like you're drinking and you're drinking and you're blacking out all the time, but on the surface, everything's fine. Like, you're relatively happy, you're healthy, you know, your academic career is moving along, things are fine. And so on the surface, it was like, "I don't know why." On paper, like, there was no reason to be so drunk all the time and so unhappy.

And then it was sort of like, not that transitioning is the end-all, be-all to everything, because I don't want it to sound like that, because life still goes on, but that like once I got sober and once I started passing as a man, it was like things were really different and it was really better. Because, like, when shit hits the fan, I still remember that, like, it's okay because I'm a man, and, like, so I never have to, like, take that for granted.

[00:51:24]

Fred: Okay. Is there anything else you'd like to share?

[00:51:29]

Atticus: Transitioning is awesome, and I really like being a man now. I like me better now. Everything's better.

[00:51:37]

Fred: Okay. Good. Okay. We'll stop now.

[End of interview]