

AJ_Oral_History

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SPEAKERS

Carson Savoie, AJ Ziegler, Library Intercom System

C Carson Savoie 00:01
We are here on January 20, and, we are here with...

A AJ Ziegler 00:06
My name is AJ Ziegler.

C Carson Savoie 00:08
All right, and um, Okay, so I have a couple of opening questions, if that's Okay,

A AJ Ziegler 00:13
Absolutely.

C Carson Savoie 00:14
So how do you identify? And what are your pronouns?

A AJ Ziegler 00:18
I identify as a trans man. My pronouns are he/they, and I also identify as a drag artist.

C Carson Savoie 00:28
What is your occupation? Or what do you do to earn a living?

what is your occupation? Or what do you do to earn a living?

A AJ Ziegler 00:32

I'm currently working in retail.

C Carson Savoie 00:37

When did you discover that you were apart of the LGBTQ plus community?

A AJ Ziegler 00:42

I felt something for a very long time for most of my childhood. And it wasn't something that I could quite identify with, like identify. I would say that it was around the age of 12, that I really found the language to identify what I was experiencing.

C Carson Savoie 01:07

Have you always lived in Louisiana?

A AJ Ziegler 01:09

Yes, I have. I've lived here in Lafayette, and I've also lived in New Orleans

C Carson Savoie 01:15

Can you describe your upbringing to me?

A AJ Ziegler 01:24

Very isolating, very lonely. Being a trans individual growing up, I didn't quite feel that I had a place within hanging out with girls that I didn't feel like I really fit in hanging out with guys. So it made it very difficult for me to have friends or be accepted by other people. So, um, very lonely.

C Carson Savoie 02:01

How do you think being LGBTQ plus has affected your development as a person

A AJ Ziegler 02:07

Entirely. Entirely. I would say before I was able to have any sense of label, it was still affecting my life. I would say though, after I found a label or labels, and I found...I came to terms with my identity. I began expressing myself and dealing with a lot of criticism towards my self expression. So from the beginning, it affected pretty much every aspect of my life, and still very much.

C Carson Savoie 03:03

Could you describe some major events in your childhood that have shaped your worldview?

A AJ Ziegler 03:08

Yes. Not positive experiences. I think as far as my identity goes, when I was in middle school...Okay, Well, when I was in middle school, there was one, there was one event that really kind of shaped my worldview. And that was when I was in classroom. And by this point, I had been expressing myself and I was very visibly queer, but I wasn't necessarily out, however it was kind of just something that everyone knew. And there were a group of guys who were sitting next to me and started getting into dialogue about a lot of transphobic and homophobic dialogue. And it got to the point where they were insinuating the praise of murdering queer people. And I remember that was the first time because I dealt with, like, the bullying and stuff. But that was the first time that I really heard the violent side of it and being very direct, because it very much felt like they were the way that they had like, positioned themselves and sat and like, did it right next to me, it very much felt like they were talking at me. And that was a really scary moment. And that kind of, as far as my identity goes, that kind of created a sense of fear. And that was one of the first times that I've really experienced that. And it was stuck with me for a long time, and still does.

C Carson Savoie 05:08

Describe your relationship with your family during this period, if you're comfortable doing so

A AJ Ziegler 05:18

My mom was the first person. Okay, that's not true. I was gonna say my mom was the first person I came out to. But oddly enough, it was my aunt, who I came out to first. And it was really interesting, because we were, we went on a walk together. We were talking, and I don't remember exactly how it got brought up, but the topic of being Queer got brought up. And I think it was because of the way that I was dressing it was very, I think it was very targeted, that she was trying to have that conversation, and I don't think I properly understood that at the time, I was about 12, at this period, and by that point, I had kind of come out to myself, but I wasn't out to anyone else. And she started talking about, you know, I, I was upset with what she was saying about queer people. So I came out in that moment. And it was, it was just kind of like, I just, it was just like, I was so fed up with that, I was like "that's me," you know? like that, like, who you're talking about is me. And she started she started talking about how, you know, like, I was gonna go to hell. And she started actually praying over me in that moment. Which was just like, like that my first time, like coming out, you know, that's the reaction I'm

getting. So I just started, like, she kept praying. And I kept trying to, like, I was trying to stay strong and try to hold it together. But she just kept going, and I I broke down, like, I just started crying and like just sobbing like uncontrollably. And then she just continued with it. And when we made it back, because I think it was it was for holiday event, it was. And when we made it back inside, we were like with everyone, and I was really scared because I was like, Oh no, is she going to tell everyone you know, like what's going to happen, like I just like outed myself on impulse, you know, and I didn't know what the response to that would be. And we were like sitting at the dinner table with everyone. And I'm like, having this intense emotional reaction. And she started sending me links to how, like, on my phone like to how you can change and you know, like how you can overcome, you know, being queer and everything like that. So I'm like having this event where I'm having this like really traumatic experience, I'm having to just like, hold it together, you know, because I can't talk to anyone about it, or else I'm outing myself, you know. The next person I came out to in my family was my mother. It was a terrifying experience. But I think that she actually handled it very Well. And at first I came up to her as pansexual. So it wasn't so much a question of my gender at the moment, but it was, it was, you know, it was kind of like, for me, it was like the first step to there's more to it. And then I eventually told her that, you know, I wasn't ready to come out. But there would probably be a period in my life in the future where I wanted to transition. My father did not handle it very Well, when I came out to him. And I originally just came out to him as pansexual. I mean, there were always questions, though, about my identity, because of the way that I presented myself, the ways that I dressed, the way that I kept my hair, you know, like all the all these little things. So there were always kind of questions, but it was kind of something that was like we just didn't talk about. And when the topic of me being Queer was brought up. It was not. He wanted me he wanted - my father wanted me to keep it a secret or keep it to myself, which made it really hard to come out because there was there was like a level of like, I see it, I understand it, but you can't tell anyone you know. And I remember he told me he's like, you don't want to be queer because being queer means you're gonna have a really hard life. And I remember in the moment being like, you know, you're one of the people making it hard for me. When I came out as trans with him, which I'll like, I'll talk more about that. But when I came iout as Trans with him later in life, I didn't come out to him until I was 16. And that's when our relationship...he became, he did not have a good reaction to it and he became abusive in many ways. screaming at me, throwing things at me and it would all be, you know, revolving around my identity, you know. My stepdad, he was just very quiet at first, he kind of retreated. He didn't really feel comfortable with it. From what I heard, my sister would tell me that he would make homophobic, transphobic remarks about me behind my back. So it became, I think that was his way of dealing with it was joking about my identity because he couldn't accept it. My sister though, as far as my family, my sister was very accepting. And that was probably, she was one of the people that I was able to confide in. But even in the beginning of my transition, when I told her when I was around, like 12 or 13, and I told her I was going to transition. She had a hard time processing. It was really difficult. I think everybody had this moment of grieving. Who they, who they assumed I was and who they assumed I would grow up to, like grow up to be. So that's how it was actually described to me was, especially when my father, like he told me he was in a period of grieving. So that's all Well, my family



Carson Savoie 11:45

Tell me about some difficulties or hardships that you face as a transgender man.



11:45

A Aj Ziegler 11:54

Quite quite a lot. I think some of the hardest stuff I dealt with, or the stuff that really stuck out to me was when I was in the beginning of my transition, so around me just like 12, to 17. Before I was on testosterone, I was referred to, quite commonly as- with the D slur, that became a very common occurrence, because they were seeing me as, I was being perceived as a masculine woman. So it was kind of complex, because I was dealing with that. So that was more what I dealt with, like in public was, was that terminology. Which was interesting, though, because like, sometimes, like I would have, like, I'd be like, I used to go on walks around the neighborhood. So I'd be walking around, and sometimes like cars would like drive by and like, you know, yell out, like the F, slur, the D, slur, the T slur, you know, so those were I don't know if this is the right way to say, but I got very comfortable, very young with harassment, like it just became like a, you know, like, this is just how people refer to me because of the way that I'm expressing myself. I think hardships as well, I dealt with a lot of pushback from many religious people. And a lot of them would, you know, it became a thing that people were telling me like, you know, you're going to hell, you know? So that that greatly. That was a big hardship that I faced as Well, and it greatly impacted me.

C Carson Savoie 14:07

What role has religion played in your life?

A Aj Ziegler 14:24

It's hard because it's like, it's hard to answer that because my first instinct is to think about all the negatives because I would say that most of the homophobia and transphobia that I faced, was directed at me with a religious undertone. Especially in my earlier years, because I didn't mention this but I was at a Catholic school for elementary and middle school. So it was seen as like being in that school it was seen as like a taboo topic. Like it wasn't, it wasn't, it wasn't even so much that it was like, you know, we, we hate people like you, you know but it was like, you know, it's so bad that you don't even talk about it, you know, like that would get shut down. The only times that it was talked about was in a negative sense, you know. And even then, you know, they felt that it was too inappropriate of a topic. My family was religious, when I was a child. And they also they didn't talk about it with me, like, that's how it was referred to, to, you know, you don't talk about this experience, you don't talk about this. However there have been religious people in my life, who were also some of the most gracious people at this time. One of the first people, it was a friend of my dad's, worked for the Catholic Diocese. And they were one of the first people that really, like, kind of sit down with me and told me, like, it's Okay, you know, like, you're valid, like, you're, you're gonna be Okay. So it's kind of a mixed bag, I don't want to entirely say that religion has had a negative impact. You know, but the majority of my experience, at least around here with religion has been used in a hateful sense towards me, or, or not as hateful, but also ostracizing. A lot of my family can't seem to connect with me, this is something to as far as religion goes. One year, the same aunt, so she was one of the only people in my family who knew I was queer. Although everyone kind of had suspicions about it, like it was kind of... she, she wrote me a letter for my Christmas gift, and it was essentially talking about, you know, it was the same kind of stuff like, you can change, you can be healed, you can be fixed, you know, and she included, like Bible, scripture, and all of that. So I would

say overall, my experiences with religion, have not been very positive. I resented religion for a very long time, organized religion. I resented the idea of a god I resented the idea of... I resented the idea of all of it, because I felt so ostracized from the religious community.

C Carson Savoie 18:02

How would you describe the current environment for transgender individuals?

A AJ Ziegler 18:09

I want to say it's better than it's ever been. And in many ways, I'm very happy that I can live in this period where while it was not easy, it while it was not easy, I still like I personally have access to testosterone, I have access to I had access to getting top surgery. And I had access to you know, having my name legally changed and everything. And I also have my gender marker on my license change. So there's a lot that I'm thankful for. But obviously, I'm still not content with where we're at. I still feel very ostracized, I still do it with uncomfortable encounters daily, you know, and on a larger scale. I always have a deep fear of my rights being stripped away from me and I also still fear very heavily like violence, the harassment I can deal with, but the violence scares me. And that's something that you know, not just not just something that I've, that I deal with, but I also have friends who are also trans. And we're kind of all, we're kind of all in the same space with it where you know, it's it's really scary and you know, you always hear like Like, I feel like the only times that I really get to hear about trans media or trans individuals in media is when there's violence enacted on us.

C Carson Savoie 20:27

What changes do you think needs to be made to make the country safer, more inclusive place for trans folks?

A AJ Ziegler 20:35

We need laws that actually indefinitely protect us. I think that that will be that is extremely important. I also feel that we need more and better access to healthcare and information. I think that those would be steps in creating a safer environment. I think we also need more representation, more positive representation in media. Because I think that that would help other other individuals who don't struggle with, you know, being a trans individual having having just more knowledge, on our experiences, having more knowledge on how like how we identify even, because it can even be as I mean...That's my answer for now.

C Carson Savoie 21:53

Do you feel that being a Trans man has affected your politics?

A AJ Ziegler 21:50

AJ Ziegler 21:59

Entirely. Entirely, I don't feel like I have the ability to just like look at stuff and just be like, oh, like, this sounds good, this doesn't sound good. You know, like, when I'm like, doing research on like, who I'm gonna vote for, like, what's happening? I'm constantly concerned of like, Are my rights being taken into consideration? Are my friends rights being taken into consideration? Are the other, just members of my community? Like, are our rights being taken into consideration? And not only that, but I mean, it also affects my politics with with like, women's health care, as Well, and how that's taken seriously. Because I do still have a uterus, you know, like, I still have periods, depending on where I'm at with my hormones. Sometimes I have them sometimes I don't, I can go periods without not having periods. So all of that is taken into consideration. When it comes to my political beliefs

C Carson Savoie 23:20

You mentioned that you identify as pansexual as well.

A AJ Ziegler 23:23

I do

C Carson Savoie 23:25

Do you think as a pansexual person, do you feel viewed differently than the rest of the LGBTQ plus community?

A AJ Ziegler 23:37

I do. I think it's I think in my experience, like when, like for me, I understand that because it's my identity. But I find that other people have a hard time understanding that and especially like, when I first came out as trans. There was this, like, hyper masculine persona that got pushed on to me in the beginning. And it was everybody being like, Oh, Well, you like girls, because you're a guy, you know, so then I was already dealing with, you know, like, these heterosexual, like, cis-het norms being pushed on me when that wasn't something that I could meet, you know, and then there's people who, like, I felt like I've had I've come out to people as pansexual. And they were like, Wait, I thought you were trans? you know. And so it's kind of like I'm both, you know? I feel like pansexuality is not something that's talked about enough within the community, and it doesn't deserve. I mean, it doesn't get as much recognition as it deserves, as an identity. And I also feel like people a lot of the time, are more concerned with my gender identity than my sexuality. And I feel like both are big aspects of my queer identity.

C Carson Savoie 25:02

What's your perception of the LGBTQ plus community in Lafayette today?

A

AJ Ziegler 25:18

I've had good experiences, I've had bad experiences, I think I primarily feel still ostracized, quite often being being transgender. I don't feel like I'm even very accepted into the community and even when I am, I find that there's a lot of questions that come up about my identity. And I have this issue where I don't know, like, I just don't feel connected. And I don't feel like there are many places where I can go and express myself or, you know, find my sense of community. So I still feel very, I feel very lonely when it comes to my community, which is odd, because I know, we're here. I just don't know where we are, you know, I have a hard time engaging with my community

C

Carson Savoie 26:28

Talking about this difficulty with engagement and this, this loneliness that you feel, do you think that's connected to a larger inter community struggle that we're facing?

A

AJ Ziegler 26:48

Absolutely. Absolutely. I think primarily, especially here, when you think of, and I think it's still because Lafayette has a more conservative culture to it. So when people are even talking about, in my experience, when people are even talking about the LGBTQ plus community, oftentimes, they're really only referring to lesbians and gay men. Cis gay men. So I feel very, very left out.

C

Carson Savoie 27:49

To build on that, do you think there's a lack of support within the LGBTQ plus community in regards to race and class?

A

AJ Ziegler 27:59

Yes, absolutely. Again, a lot of the people at least around here, a lot of the people who are getting the regoc-recognition..

C

Carson Savoie 28:11

Recognition?

A

AJ Ziegler 28:12

Recognition, thank you (laughs). Primarily, in my experience, it's white cis gay men. And I feel like everybody else just kind of gets thrown to the side and doesn't properly, there's no there's no voices, you know, that are being shared.

C Carson Savoie 28:45
What can you share about your experience with queer spaces in Lafayette?

A AJ Ziegler 28:52
So I lived in, So before, when I when I first came out, because I started my transition here in Lafayette, when I was 17, my medical transition. I had top surgery when I was 18. That, that was in New Orleans. I'm sorry, could you repeat the question one more time I want to make sure I have it.

C Carson Savoie 29:18
What can you share about your experience with queer spaces in Lafayette?

A AJ Ziegler 29:22
Ok, So I feel like I did not have any queer spaces when I was like growing up here, and especially at the beginning of my transition. I really like again, it I was really dependent on the friends that I had within the community, you know, so it was just like, we would hang out we were together. We didn't we really didn't even go out much because we didn't even feel like there were many spaces where we could just go express ourselves, you know, go, be open, go celebrate our identity, be a part of the community. So I never felt like I had those spaces. I moved to New Orleans and I kind of experienced a similar thing. Which is interesting, because I really had just hoped that I would move to New Orleans. And, you know, everything would be sunshine and rainbows and it would be perfect. And then I moved back here. And I started going to Bolt which is the only gay bar here that I know of. And it's been kind of a lot of ups and downs, there have been periods where I feel really accepted. And I'm, I'm really glad but then there are periods where I still feel ostracized, you know, and I don't feel like it's the proper place and while a bar is like a wonderful thing and a wonderful space. And I'm still very thankful that we have that, I feel like, you know, there's no just like, nice calm place to be able to connect with my community. So I feel very much a lack of safe queer spaces here

C Carson Savoie 31:28
What was the process of coming out, like for you?

A AJ Ziegler 31:33
Very difficult, very difficult. I remember like, in the, in the beginning of it, like it was so like, I couldn't like I remember there was this heaviness on my chest when I would think about it. Or when I would have that feeling like I'm about to come out to somebody, like, you know, my palms are sweating, like, I'm like, I'm stressing so much that I'm giving myself a headache, you know, like, I it made me feel physically sick, you know, to be able to express myself because I

was so afraid of the reactions. I had very supportive friends. With my family, I came out to them it was so it was kind of like that, but I didn't, it kind of distanced myself a lot from my family during that period. Because even the support that I was gonna get just, it was so difficult for me to even accept the support that was being given to me and I was always afraid, that... You know, also afraid of letting everyone down, being a disappointment, you know, because I knew that's not what they wanted from me it was really difficult coming out at school. Primarily people just had a lot questions for me. And especially since, you know, I came out just like like officially officially came out as trans, like, sophomore year of high school. It was kind of this big deal, you know, because it's just like, here I am telling everyone you know, so just a very overall daunting experience and it was a lot. It was a lot for sure.

C

Carson Savoie 33:50

Would you say that you've noticed a difference in the attitudes of others towards LGBTQ plus women versus LGBTQ plus, men?

A

AJ Ziegler 33:59

Absolutely. Absolutely. And I feel like I feel like I've kind of experienced both sides of it in a way because before I had started my medical transition... when I, a lot of people since I was dressing masculine and everything. And in high school I had a girlfriend at one period. And that was like right before I had officially come out to everyone. So I was assumed to be a lesbian at the period or that was the identity that was put onto me. Although I never claimed it for myself I dealt with a lot of men fetishizing that um, so I dealt with being very fetishized as being perceived as a gay woman. And then after I transitioned or I came out that was a little bit of a different situation, I still dealt with a lot of a lot of being fetishized and a lot of being objectified. But I'd say there was, there was a small period of time, when I was in New Orleans, where I had been on hormones, I've had top surgery, and I was passing at that period of time. And I didn't like tell anyone, you know, for the most part, I didn't tell anyone that I was trans, I was just perceived as a gay man, which was also an interesting thing, because I've never really been perceived as straight, you know, or being perceived as, like, I was always, always been perceived as some form of queer, you know. And I remember, like thinking, like, I'm, like, I'm being treated so differently, you know, like, even the attitudes people had towards me. And it was interesting, because in high school, when I was perceived to be a masculine woman, people thought, you know, I needed to keep up that like, I have to be super masculine. And then when I had come out, and I was living as just a gay man, I was thought of as like, you know, like, I needed to be extra flamboyant, you know, like, I needed to be kind of like, like, that was what people wanted from me. So I never felt like I was just getting to, like, during that period, like, I never felt like I was really getting to just be myself, like, I felt like I was having all the stereotypes thrown on me and I was, you know, kind of being made to fulfill them for people or else, you know, like, they didn't, they didn't know how to treat me, they know how to, or what category to put me in. So I would say I, I also, I think it was more of a threat of violence when I was being perceived as a gay man, rather than than a gay woman. And that's all I'm gonna say on that for now.

C

Carson Savoie 37:33

Do you think representation in media is important for an LGBTQ plus person?

A

AJ Ziegler 37:39

Absolutely. I remember, like, I remember when, when I was a child, and especially since I just was able to identify with being queer, whether I had the language or not at the time, I was able to identify with that so early, I was always so upset with the lack of representation. And I would go out of my way to try to find the representation, you know. And especially being a Trans man, I, especially being like a very queer Trans man. And, you know, I'd never and I still struggle with this, I never felt like I had any real form of representation, you know, there would be that I could look at and be like, oh, like, I That's me, you know, like, I see that, like, I identify with that. I think it would have been completely different. If I would have had that representation growing up. I think it would, I mean, I still I think it would even be different now, if I had that representation. Now. You know, I feel like I feel like I'm kind of going through this and experiencing everything, and I don't have anything to reference it to, you know, I don't have anything to help me identify how I'm feeling. So I think I personally think representation is immensely important. And I think it would also not only help me, but also help other people who are not a part of the trans community. Be able to recognize some of our experiences, and that may stop some of the ignorant questions that we hear over and over and over again, you know?

C

Carson Savoie 39:43

How do you feel the media engages with our community both positively and negatively?

A

AJ Ziegler 39:51

I rarely see positive Trans media, rarely, and the only times that I do see trans media on like um, is, again, it's when they're talking about the violence that has been enacted on our community, or, you know, when they're trying to slander us, or when they're trying to talk about, you know, the rights that we're losing, or the controversy or our existence. So...

C

Carson Savoie 40:45

Talking about this negative coverage of not only the LGBTQ plus community as a collective, but specifically as directed towards Trans folks. How do you think that this negative coverage affects the way that the Trans community views itself

A

AJ Ziegler 41:04

it's hard for us to have a sense of pride. And that's, that's such a, that's such a big part of the goal of, you know, being LGBTQ plus is to be able to have a sense of pride. And it's like, how are we supposed to feel that? You know, that's something that I struggled with, you know, there's always, it's still kind of pushed on us, you know, I mean, I get asked, often, like, don't, do you wish you were born cis? you know. And while I would like to have a sense of pride in my identity, I still struggle with that. And that's really something that I hope to get to. But I really

think it, this lack of representation, and this lack of positive media. It's hard for us to see ourselves in a positive light, you know, because it's like, does anyone else see us that way, you know, and it can just be emotionally and mentally draining. To never have that positivity being shared. You kind of have to go out of your way to find it. And I mean that on, like, all aspects, like not just media, but even just day to day life, you know, and I'm lucky enough that I have friends who are also trans, and we're able to be there for each other, but it's not, it's it is not by any means easy. It's hard, and a lot of the time, I mean, you'll get calls from your friend in the middle of the night being like, wow, like this is just too hard. Like, how do I keep going? You know, like I'm struggling.

C

Carson Savoie 43:08

Again, I want to thank you for doing this interview. And if there's any questions that I ask, of course, that you're not comfortable with, please let me know. How do you feel about the recent political action taken against LGBTQ plus people in Louisiana, so book bans, legislation, or sports bans, etc.

A

AJ Ziegler 43:39

It's hard. It's really hard to just see all of that, to hear all of that. And it's not just, you can't just turn your phone on and turn your phone off and like, pretend it's not happening. You know, it's like this, like, weight, this like immense weight, that just sticks on you, you know, where it's like you just want to be considered like a normal person, you just want to be seen, like everybody else, you know, and then when your, your community is being used as a controversial point, you know, like, "do we deserve rights?" You know. It's exhausting to see that constantly, like over and over again and then and then have people to have like, these politicians, literally sitting there fighting against your rights when like, you're just like, like to them. They don't, they don't think about us as people. So it's very, like witnessing all of this and this happening during my lifetime. It's very, it feels very dehumanizing. You know, like, I feel more like a controversial topic point than an actual person, you know, and it can be really hard for me personally, when I really, a lot of, you know, like, every time I hear something like it just like, it just, I get this like, knot in my stomach, you know? And it's, and then it's not only, it's like, you know, like, it's not only how am I feeling? It's like, how are my friends feeling? How's the rest of my community feeling? And it's like, and then it's also like, you want to be there for everyone, but like, there's no sense of community, there's no place for us to, you know, knowingly gather with each other. So we're all kind of mourning, you know, and we're all kind of like grieving this. This like, the idea of like, a positive future, if that makes sense. Like, in that moment, it feels like there's no hope, you know, and and it's, we can't just, there's no spaces where, at least in my experience, or we can just come together and support each other. So it's also a feeling of like, Am I doing enough? What can I do? You know, and then it's also like, why are other people standing up for me? You know, why aren't other people being there? You know, why? Why do I feel so alone right now. And I think especially like, I keep coming back to that. So I think that's a really big point for me is that it feels very lonely, being Trans. And if I'm feeling that way, I can only imagine that there are a lot of other people in the community also feel that. I will add one more thing, and this is a little personal. But when I started really hearing about the legislation, and everything, I had issues, it was it was it got to me so much that I was suffering from like suicidal ideation. Because I felt so unwanted, you know, on a larger scale of community, not just, you know, my queer community, but just, I didn't feel like I had a place I felt like I was

being pushed. So I mean, like, during a, there's a long period where I didn't want to get out of bed, I didn't want to function, you know, and then I feel like I already have this like stigma on me of being like a useless member of society. And then I really feel like I'm not able to function, you know, and then it feels like it's only kind of, it's kind of giving them what they want. You know, they want us to just disappear. And it's hard when you feel like, nobody wants you.

C Carson Savoie 47:38

This next question, asks, "How do you think we got to this point?" Which is not to suggest that this type of controversy, and adversity has not always been here, but in this new... in this new way?

A AJ Ziegler 47:53

I don't know how we got here. And it's interesting, because I kind of mentioned this earlier. And I still feel like as a trans person, this is the best it's ever been, you know, so for me, I'm not even thinking how do we get this way? It's been this way, you know? I still feel like our rights and our life and our stories have never been properly heard or recognized. So it's kind of it's more of a question for me of like, how are we still here? You know, why haven't we progressed past this point? What's holding everyone back from seeing us as people?

C Carson Savoie 48:49

What do you think that LGBTQ plus folks can do to combat this?

A AJ Ziegler 48:55

We're fighting, We are I see it. I think we really, as a community have to come together, and we got to stand up for each other. You know, we've got to be there for each other. It's not it's not even just about standing up for each other, but it's about we need to have we need to, while we're not necessarily wanted to create spaces, we need to make spaces where we have the ability to come together and support each other. I think that that's very important. And I think if we can really celebrate all aspects of ourselves. I think it's about if we can get to a point of really celebrating ourselves, you know, and celebrating our identities you know, because that's something they like with the pride like if we can have a sense of pride, that's not something they can take away from us. They can take away our rights. But they can't take away our sense of self. So having spaces where we're able to have a sense of self and have the support that it takes to get there. I think that's what we can do.

C Carson Savoie 50:10

You mentioned pride, which brings up the question for me. Do you attend any Pride festivities?

A AJ Ziegler 50:10

Aj Ziegler 50:19

I do. I do. Anytime I hear about an event, I try to make it a point to go. I think pride is very important to me. Pride celebrations are very important to me. And I think they're really important for our community to attend. However, I will say that every time I go to a pride celebration, there's always the fear of being in danger, you know? Because it's like, you never know how other people are gonna react to that. You never know, you know? I mean, there's already violence that happens against us, you know, when we're on our own, so when we're all together it's scary, but it's also beautiful because we're all together, you know? So it's, it's, it makes us stronger. I think Pride celebrations are extremely, extremely important.

C Carson Savoie 51:40

Talking about pride, and then these forms of positive expression, I think earlier, you mentioned that you're a drag artist?

A Aj Ziegler 51:50

I am

C Carson Savoie 51:55

How do you feel that relates to pride?

A Aj Ziegler 51:59

The last pride celebration I went to I was in drag. I think drag is such an authentic form of queer art. And it's so important. And it's so expressive, you know, in my experiences with it, and in the community, it's, it's, it tells a story. It's very emotional. You know, I mean, people, if people can't connect alone to just the words, it really, it brings out the art of it. It's very emotional. I feel like it's something that people can understand. I think it's very important for it to be a part of Pride celebrations, because again, it's just queer art. It's authentic queer art.

C Carson Savoie 52:56

Can you discuss your experience in performing drag art?

A Aj Ziegler 53:00

Yes. I deal with a lot of harassment when I do drive a lot of harassment. And I... I actually haven't like really gone out in drag recently, because the last time I did it was a very bad experience. And I just, I couldn't I couldn't handle it. When you when you're in drag, like people don't always necessarily understand it as the art form that it is. So I feel very, again I feel very dehumanized sometimes by the way that I'm treated when I'm in drag.

C Carson Savoie 54:15

A lot of folks have expressed the sentiment that drag brings both the LGBTQ plus community and the local community together. Do you think this is true?

A AJ Ziegler 54:25

I think so. Again, I think it goes back to it's an art that we can celebrate. However, I still find that the community of Lafayette doesn't necessarily always understand it as the art that it is. And I find that sometimes it gets considered as this whole separate thing, you know, and the essence of it just being like, again, like authentic queer art? Like, I feel like sometimes that gets lost. And I feel like it's not wanting to be seen that way, you know. But again, but I do think again, it's it goes back to like people can understand art people see that and it has emotion to it, you know. I do think it brings the community together, but I still feel like a larger community aspect is that it's not it's still not fully respected as much as it deserves to be.

C Carson Savoie 55:46

To switch tone here for a moment. What do you think is the best part of being LGBTQ?

A AJ Ziegler 55:54

The community, and the people. It's a very beautiful community. And the spaces that I have found, which are not primarily just like, places that I can go to more like, friend's houses, events, you know, little things like that, they get thrown, it's that moment of just like when you're really able to be there, and be with other people who understand a little bit of what you've been through. It's nice, and it's and there's a, there's a vulnerability level to it, too. It's that I don't find many other places like even even when we're all struggling, you know, when we're all struggling together, there's something beautiful about that. And that's, that's beautiful.

C Carson Savoie 57:02

Where do you see yourself as a part of the LGBTQ community in the future?

A AJ Ziegler 57:09

I'd really like to do, to get more into drag. I also feel like there's an under representation of like, trans men in the drag community. So that's very important for me. I hope that I get to a place where I really fully embrace pride within my identity. And if I can be there, for other people in the way that you know, in the ways that I didn't have.

C Carson Savoie 58:07

Carson Savoie 58:17

You mentioned that there's, within the drag community, there's an under representation of Trans men. Why do you think that is?

A

AJ Ziegler 58:18

(laughs) I think. I think the more we do drag, specifically feminine drag. There's kind of this, this idea where people who don't even understand our identity are kind of like, "you transitioned to be a man, why do you want to present as a woman to tell a story on stage" you know? And they completely miss the whole artistic aspect of it, you know, and all that entails you know, and then also that not only that, but then it's it's, it's questioning our identity. So it's very vulnerable to put yourself in a place where your identity already doesn't feel stable, you know, like from how people are perceiving you. So then you know, how are, you struggle with respect, you struggle with being seen and that you're just not taken seriously.

C

Carson Savoie 59:49

What is your hope for the future, the LGBTQ plus community, in terms of Lafayette in terms of SWLA in terms of Louisiana statewide and beyond?

A

AJ Ziegler 1:00:01

I just hope it keeps getting better. I hope that-

L

Library Intercom System 1:00:12

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A

AJ Ziegler 1:00:26

I hope that, I hope that there's more education around it, easier access. I hope that there is easier medical aspect like access, especially for other transgender individuals. I just hope we get to a point where people aren't having to deal with harassment on the streets, you know, hope that we have spaces where we can come together and celebrate our identities. And I really love if there were more than, if there was more than just one gay bar. That would be nice, too. I just hope we can come together. I hope we can continue to progress. Find places where we feel safe.

C

Carson Savoie 1:01:38

This is not included in my list of questions here. But what is it... How do you perceive being interviewed about these types of questions and this, how do you feel about this whole process?

A

AJ Ziegler 1:01:58

It's hard, in some ways, because I find that I really don't have many opportunities to reflect on my identity. I feel like it's just like, I'm just going and going and going, you know, just like moving with my life. So I don't feel like there's really a lot of time that I just get to sit and think like, you know, how am I feeling? What is my experience, you know, because it's like, I'm not thinking of it as like this, you know, this is my experience, I'm just like, it just it just is you know, it's just who I am what I go through. I think it's a wonderful thing that these interviews are taking place, I think it's really important to have these experiences not only being told, but them have, like other people having access to this. Because, you know, for me, at least personally, it might have helped me if I would have had the resource to be able to access other people talking about their experiences. So I think it's very important. It's very emotional, though. At the same time, it brings up a lot of feelings. And I feel like there's still some stuff that I'm not completely comfortable sharing. There's a lot more to it than I could just give in a short interview. Overall, I'm happy that this has happened. And I'm really glad that this is happening. And I think it's an incredible thing that anyone's even taking interest in collecting parts of our history and what we experience.

C

Carson Savoie 1:04:03

As a final question to you, especially in the context of what you just shared, is there anything that we haven't covered that you would like to include

A

AJ Ziegler 1:04:19

I want to say, it always gets better. You know. I'm really glad that I didn't give up in periods when it was difficult. I want to say that I'm thankful every day that I can wake up and exist and be myself. And I want to say that I have hopes that it will continue to get better.

C

Carson Savoie 1:05:12

Well, thank you for agreeing to this interview. We really appreciate all of your input.