

NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

RYANN HOLMES

Interviewer: Sir Knight

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Sir Knight: Hello my name is Sir Knight, and I will be having a conversation with Ryann Holmes, for the New York City Trans Oral History Project in collaboration with the New York Public Library's community oral history project. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans identifying people. Today is May 14th, 2019, and this is being recorded at Mid-Manhattan Library. Ryann we're so happy to have you here. Again the New York City Trans Oral History Project is a 280 archive of transgender resistance, resilience, and survival of New York City. BlackTransTV's goal is to share the narratives of people look like us, love like us, love like us, this interview will be a collaboration between the two, so Black Trans TV and the New York public library to highlight the brilliant oral history of black folks of trans experiences so you can please start with your name and your pronouns.

Ryann Holmes: Yeah, my name is Ryann, and my pronouns are they/them for the sake of this interview.

Knight: Sounds good sounds good. I know you personally, so...

Holmes: —Yes.

Knight: I was like this is gonna be a great time interviewing you. You are from Maryland as well so I wanted to know if we could get a little bit in to that. Like growing up in Maryland, how was baby Ryann?

Holmes: [Laughs] Yeah baby – baby that's a really good question nobody's really checked in about baby Ryann in a minute. Yeah baby Ryann was cool, I feel like my younger self is really similar to who I am today. But yeah, I grew up in Maryland like you said. I was born in Washington DC. For a really short time lived in Forestville and grew up in Largo for people that are really familiar [laughs]. And you know there were like really great times in my childhood and there were also like some challenging things for me. But for the most part you know I grew up with a great family, there were five kids in the house. So, it was like really never a dull moment. And then you know I just I was just like really outside like playing a lot just really enjoying being a rough tomboy, is what they called me at the time, but at the time I was just really being myself so just a really active kid. Probably a little anxious but I didn't really have language for that yet just had a lot of energy was just always trying to move and like be in my body.

Knight: How would you describe the word tomboy? Like I feel like a lot of us especially masculine centered assigned from birth people are called tomboys and its acceptable and its okay. How do you feel like you were treated when they realized you weren't just a tomboy?

Holmes: Yeah, I feel really, I feel like I really remember that moment where questions about like you know where's your boyfriend? Or [laughs]

Knight: —Yeah.

Holmes: You know put this dress on for church, and like different things like that started to become a issue when I was probably turning like thirteen fourteen. You know the five of us in the house, it was three, I had three older sisters, so it would've made sense for me to kind of fall into like doing the things that they were doing but that just wasn't happening. So, it was weird like I feel like my mom was kind of cool with it in a sense cause she thought it would keep me from getting pregnant, you know. [Laughs]

Knight: They all think that.

Holmes: You know she's like "Aight, aight yeah this tomboy thing is cool." Cause you not in these streets and I don't have to worry about you." That was like you know a big thing and so I feel like my dad maybe has some issues with it, but we were able to get through it a little bit cause I was in sports. So he was able to support me like running track so there was like a reason I was I was like you know dress down and doing me and that was all kind of like qualified by other things but it was a tense thing like they definitely have an idea of who I should have been and I just didn't ever like transform into that.

Knight: Now you said there was five of you.

Holmes: Right.

Knight: Is there anyone else in your family that's queer?

Holmes: Hell yeah man, honestly I would say most of my sisters are like [inaudible] yeah so I have step sisters who have like had lovers you know and everybody wants to talk to me about this shit cause I'm probably like the most visibly queer person [laughs] but yeah definitely a couple of cousins and then like nieces. I feel like I was definitely feeling like it was just me when I was younger and I didn't know that anybody in my family was even to like having those experiences or you know I didn't know I had like gay family before me like I just didn't I just didn't think it was possible.

Knight: So, you felt like you were all alone in the scenario of life I'm just different maybe I'm just different but maybe I'm not different cause I'm a tomboy and it's acceptable and two different type of girl.

Holmes: Exactly.

Knight: So, when was the moment you felt like it was more than just tomboyism? And yes, I just said tomboyism.

Holmes: [Laughs] Yo, you better cut — yo sir just quoted tomboyism I heard it first. Yeah like I think I don't know I think like honestly when I noticed sort of like what I now kinda call dysphoria like I mean I was kind of a small kid so I didn't really develop develop but when anything was happening I was like I don't know about that you know I would try to hard to have my little neenie they was small.

Knight: What do you call them?

Holmes: I shouldn't have said neenies.

Knight: [Laughs]

Holmes: My little neenies they was small they was small at the time trying to really like cover my chest. And then it was weird cause I was not I wasn't sure if it was because like how I like identified or if I started to notice how you know younger young girls around me were starting to be objectified and that made me really uncomfortable so it was like a new thing at play for me at first you know I mean or I was like I don't really want that type of attention also I don't really I maybe would have experimented more with different stuff but I was like nah I'm good laughs I ain't showing nothing I want everything loose you know plus it was like the 90s so it's like really in style you could do that the late nineties.

Knight: So, you're figuring yourself out you're like I'm not comfortable wearing these clothes I know I'm different when did you start exploring that actual identity, they call lesbianism? Because you're in a body that's not yours that's a whole different sector when they identified you as a lesbian when was that moment for me, I know is when I started dating women.

Holmes: Yeah, I was probably getting that before I was even like having a girlfriend or anything like that but yeah, I started dating probably like yeah High School. Maybe like 9th, 10th grade, yeah like 10th grade but it was still real like low kind of on the low and I had my little in with the Catholic school you know [inaudible] right? So, I had like, three or four different [inaudible] relationships through the years.

Knight: Tell people more load about Seton/

Holmes: Seton was like the old girls Catholic school or it wasn't like what you're thinking it was like a lot of black girls from all around the way but you know it was still like a diverse situation but it was just like really gay there was a lot of just lesbianism.

Knight: And you ballin' and stuff like that.

Holmes: Oh yeah, sports and you know all that stuff. Whatever the correlation between queerness and sports is you know that was definitely like how I was meeting people. But yeah, I'll say like pretty early as soon as like most kids. Most as soon as a lot of kids are dating is when I started to.

Knight: And then through dating is that how you discovered that you were even more different than you thought you were because I think it goes from being a tomboy, being perceived as a lesbian, you're dating women. When was that moment for you okay maybe I'm not lesbian I'm queerer than that, and how do I identify myself?

Holmes: Yeah, I feel like I always sort of felt those things, but I really didn't really have language to it until I move to New York way after that.

Knight: Okay cool get there we'll get there you're in Seton you're playing ball.

Holmes: I was in track.

Knight: Athletics okay, you're in track, you're dating. Did you feel like that culture at Seton helped facilitate safe space for you?

Holmes: Actually I was saying I dated a few girls from Seton I actually went to Largo which was also a very gay environment for whatever reason there was a lot of gay kids there, but I didn't really like fit in you know I didn't feel comfortable being out I felt like it was a super-hot topic. I was like spied on, outed and like just talked about a lot, by like coaches' other kids, other parents in the community cause I was also learning really well I had a lot of attention on me from track and stuff like that. And people were just deep in my business about it. So no I didn't really feel supported and I felt really alone and I felt really shamed at that time in High School and then I had this other little pocket of friends where we would just like living our wild gay life you know but I felt like this almost like devilish sneaky thing that I was just doing that made me super happy. But literally all other aspects of my life including like influences from Christianity, or like my parents, or my classmates telling me that everything I was doing was wrong so yeah was so high school was great and shitty.

Knight: Can you talk about that a little bit? I know you talked challenges while growing up and religion, and being black, and being queer, and then now knowing that you were actually queerer than what they thought. How does religion play in your life today and how did it play back then?

Holmes: Yeah.

Knight: What are your thoughts about that correlation blackness and religion?

Holmes: I have a lot of like real kind of like conflicting thoughts and beliefs around religion. I have never I think there was like a period of time that I felt like religion was helpful to me in my life. I like to be in community. I like to pray. I like the act of Prayer, just like that meditative sort of practice for ritual, feeling proud of myself committed to something there were lot of aspects of it that I liked. But there were always these moments where they still had to revisit feeling really ashamed whether there wasn't like an exact verse in the Bible that's like you're not supposed to be doing this, or you know, this like barely tolerant kind of rhetoric, or you know, just different stuff, not feeling like it was really for me. So, I don't practice any religion. I feel like I lost religion I practiced was Buddhism, and I haven't recently but it was, it resonated with me. But you know yeah, I just feel like I appreciate what it brings for certain black people. There's a lot of black people in my family whose life religion has really saved. Who were like drug afflicted or whatever or other type shit. Yeah I personally don't feel like it is for me and I feel like the basis has always been control and so you know I'm working every day on the

opposite side of that I'm trying to get me and my folks free on all levels and feeling liberated on all levels so I just don't. I try not to diss people, because I appreciate all those things that I said that the reasons that have connected with me before but like yeah, I'm good.

Knight: So, do you think that you've created your own religion with Bklyn Boihood?

Holmes: —Oh my god.

Knight: And can you tell about what Bklyn Boihood is and how it came to be? [laughing].

Holmes: Damn I really never thought of it in a sense I mean not that—

Knight: This community gathering—

Holmes: — Yeah.

Knight: Liberation everything that you said that you felt like religion should be, you didn't get that—

Holmes: —That's true.

Knight: So, I feel like that's what you created with Bklyn Boihood, so first start off with by telling people what Bklyn Boihood is and how it came to be.

Holmes: So, Bklyn Boihood is, we're a collective of queer and trans people of color. Really queer and trans black folks who, you know, worked to cultivate safe spaces, celebratory spaces. We really believe in like storytelling and controlling our own narrative, so we have an anthology outside The XY, and queer black and brown masculinity which is to me the first of its kind.

Knight: Where can people purchase that?

Holmes: All over on our website which is Bklynboihood.com. You know, but also on like Amazon or whatever.

Knight: I mean plug yourself! Plug yourself! Plug yourself! [Laughs]

Holmes: [Laughs] Yeah and I think we know started out really just wanting to make a project that felt representative of us and felt like something we could look at every day, so we made a calendar that was like analog with us. But it sort of put us on a map as leaders in terms of presenting a diversity around like masculinity as it relates to trans people and also just like doing it really well like we work really hard to get photographers that work really good and could like work with our folks and community. You were a model; you were in the very original. I remember that shoot I remember when you came as early as fuck. It was early in the morning and you came in and you was so you had so much energy. You were dancing to Beyoncé I think and duck walking all the way across my living room. And I was just like "Yo, this is about to be

amazing.” But you know even now make creating a space for you to celebrate yourself is important to us. And yeah now we're about to be year ten and were thinking about like you know owning space, and you know creating space that our folks can retreat. So, we're like moving into the different phase but essentially the core of it is you know things like intergenerational work, so we're really like in community with our young folks and our elders you know. Learning the history and also like keeping fresh perspectives. But yeah we do a lot of stuff and I think the collective has, will hopefully like this included I hope that the narratives that we bring up through it and also like the experiences that we all get to have in the spaces that something like people get to know about for years and years to come. Yeah it is our religion lowkey.

Knight: It is it is, and that's why I just really love you man.

Holmes: I love you, too.

Knight: You know when I first moved to New York I was trying to find community, and I had knew nobody, literally nobody and when I came across Bklyn Boihood, I was just like “Wow what is this?” Like that's where I met to Tashan, you know love more and I'm just like this is what community is about. This is what family's about. This is my religion, so it's like okay wherever Bklyn Boihood is I know it's a safe space I can go there I can get free I can just be who I am. I mean I used to wear floral tights, and booty shorts, and tank tops with no nothing underneath like I literally was just my free-est in the spaces that you created. And now like you said it's been 10 years, Black Trans TV's been 2 years, and we came, we birthed from Bklyn Boihood. So, if there were no you, there would be no us. And that's why I said we gotta pass the torch, but we also have to remember who gave us that torch so that this is the moment that is amazing for me.

Holmes: I appreciate that.

Knight: Back to Bklyn Boihood, so you said that you're planning something for 10 years, so we have something to look out for. In terms of visibility and representation cause you were talking about the calendar and having these spaces. What is important to you in terms of visibility and representation? What does it mean to you to be visible? What does it mean to represent for your people?

Holmes: I think when I, when I think about visibility now... Because there's, even though there's like more and more stories that we get to hear about and more more narratives and more visuals and stuff like that. There's still so many folks and communities that are like in isolation. They're still... That's why I love what y'all do cause most folks are roaming through life are not loving themselves. Just with so much negative self-talk and lack of motivation to like really create a life that, that feels good every day. And I think, you know, so like for me visibility is less about my identity these days and more about like what I represent in terms of, you know, the possibilities of like living in kind of making a living and being able to still be like involved in things that you feel passionate about. And you know the fact that I get to be in a community where people are loved every day. So I just feel like yeah it really could pull somebody out of a

dark place to find a common thread, and your story or someone else's story I just think about those moments for me and that the times that you know my life has pivoted because I saw my reflection in somebody that I was like "Oh I can reach higher," you know "I can go further, I can challenge myself to love myself even more." Like so yeah, all the possibilities.

Knight: So, does your work with Bklyn Boihood, is that your greatest source of joy and if not when do you feel the most alive and joyful? What are you doing, who are you, with what does it feel like, what does it taste like, smell like? Whatever give me all the senses of your joy.

Holmes: I think I can't even really rank things, but Bklyn Boihood like I definitely have moments of bliss every single time that were organized and doing anything. Whether it's a bike ride or a party. Like there, I definitely always take a moment, at some point that I'm just like, this is crazy, and I feel totally blissful and thankful and grateful for like everybody for just you know making sure that like — I could be in that room by myself. So just like relieved being in that moment. So, it's definitely a place where I feel the most joy also, I feel a lot of joy when I'm playing... outside so... [laughs]

Knight: What do you like to do outside?

Holmes: Yo, I love riding my bike. I love playing flag football. I love just like you know going hiking and jumping on rocks. I really love to play, and I really feel really liberated. I feel really like thankful and grateful to my body and in those moments, I feel like my kid self so yeah that's like a really another place I would say is just like when I'm playing spending time with my loved ones my family and friends. When I'm traveling, when I'm looking at beautiful shit. [Laughs]

Knight: Yeah, yeah.

Holmes: Whether that's art or landscapes I've never seen. So, I have there's so many, you know I'm also like a little moment person. If I look up in the sky and it's beautiful, I might just start crying, in the streets like I have a very like, just open heart and I feel a lot of gratitude for that.

Knight: And I know oftentimes the narrative about transness is about your body right and I know you talked about the dysphoria a little bit as a child. As an adult do you feel dysphoric? Or have you found so much joy in life and in those moments, you just spoke about that you don't think about your actual physical nature as often or it's not as terrifying for you to navigate? Because you're like I'm whole and I'm one with the earth type situation.

Holmes: Yeah, I feel lucky in that I have like tools that I can access whenever just people in my life that make me feel affirmed that I'm in therapy, and at the moment on anxiety medication or whatever so. All those little things I feel like along with this whole journey have helped me a lot, but I still have my moments obviously there days where that little voice is just gonna like take over you just have to kind of bounce back but I feel good I feel like my transness is represented and at first I didn't really feel like a lot of validity for that as an identity you what I'm saying you know cause well I'm not on hormones or I haven't done this or I haven't done that at the time so I felt like but yeah I feel more and more every day I feel more and more comfortable.

Knight: And in one word how would you describe yourself? I think often times societies like “Oh there's a trans man, there's a trans person,” right? How do you describe yourself? You're taking back the power, you're saying I am, you can just say I'm Ryann, if that feels most peaceful for you. But what is it for you, what is that one word that you can say that boom that's me? It could be a color.

Holmes: I don't know why but I keep thinking about like a plant, or a tree, or some shit. That was like, you know, first word association type thing. I feel like I don't know it's really hard for to like really resonate with the terms that I've sort of been selected. You know, and I think plant, or like just like life in a sense started to pop up for me cause I feel like I'm just sort of evolving so much all the time. You can ask me yesterday how I identify; tomorrow might be different. I don't feel linear in this way even to like those terms I don't feel like linear I feel like more branchy.

Knight: Yeah, and it makes sense. So, I guess in that sense the binary doesn't really exist for you right? So, is your transness more vast than male and female?

Holmes: For sure, and I more often identify as nonbinary just to try like you know contain, give it a container for people. My birth name is Ryann and my mother, and astrologer we talked about this a lot. Not to like totally gender names and stuff, but I do feel like throughout her whole pregnancy term, they were like “Yeah you're definitely having a boy,” and then for me to be assigned female at birth I just love the fact that she kept us keep Ryann as a name, added an N on it. Just like some black mom hood shit. I feel like it was a cool little nod, you know that always made me feel like always on purpose—

Knight: —like saw you?

Holmes: Yeah, before even really meeting me. Her spirit was like “Nah, this [inaudible] Ryann.” I've always just felt really fluid in that aspect.

Knight: How do you feel navigating as a non-binary person, so you say my pronouns are they/them. Do you feel like you're respected when you say my pronouns are, they/them? Or do you feel like people forcibly put he or she on you according to your own ideology?

Holmes: I don't even um, you want to use he/him, I use she/her, I use they/them. That's not my kind of like, it depends on the space I'm in. I remember my nephew wanted one of Chino's sons was on the phone the other day, his whole life he's called me he/him and he called me her the other day on the phone and we were both kind of shocked he's like “Oh Ryann I don't know I did that.” You know he is used to checking people's pronouns, and “I don't know I just did that,” he's about to be 12.

Knight: —and you basically raised him too.

Holmes: And I was like “Yo, Chino it's actually cool, I'm not sure what energy that made you want to call me her, but I use her too.” He was like “Oh right cool.” So, I feel like when it just depends on the spaces, I'm in how I feel and like whatever, but I feel pretty fluid terms of pronouns.

Knight: Do you feel like if you were to exclusively use, they/them that, that would cause perhaps more anxiety for you?

Holmes: Yeah, yeah, and I probably avoid it because I don't want to hear how that's plural, or whatever type of argument.

Knight: –Especially in the black community.

Holmes: Right and I do have to question I do ask myself are you that comfortable, and people challenge me with this all the time “Are you really that comfortable with any pronoun? Or not any with these particular pronouns, or are you making space for people?” So I revisit it, and I do take notice to when like, only I feel like it's so hard to make other people understand when people say a certain pronoun like that feeling you get where it's like it don't go right with you it's just a feeling

Knight: –Oh, I know.

Holmes: I really cannot explain it. You know–

Knight: –it hurts.

Holmes: It's like, yeah, maybe it's pain, but it's also like just a discomfort, almost like a little bit of shame mixed up in there. And usually it ain't got nothing to do with you. It's that person projecting whatever. So, I try to really pay attention to when that happens for me. But yeah. For the most part I'm pretty, like all over the spectrum.

Knight: Would you like to share a moment where that's happened, where you felt that discomfort?

Holmes: I mean, it's countless moments, but yeah, I don't know. I can't even like pinpoint some of the microaggressions probably like four times today. That's why I like, probably if I could choose, I would just, you know, tell the world that like, let's just shift from even using pronouns

Knight: Got you, got you

Holmes: You know what I'm saying? But I know some people feel really good identifying with certain ones.

Knight: Speaking of pronouns, so what does the future look like in terms of family and being a parent, if that's something that you're thinking about and how would your kids identify you and—

Holmes: Yeah, yeah. I definitely feel like a dad.

Knight: Okay. For sure.

Holmes: So, if I were to have kids.

Knight: He/him dad with kids—

Holmes: I think I would. Yeah. Yeah. Or just some sort of like, cool, you know take on dad. Yeah, I think I give like a lot of dad energy, and I embrace that.

Knight: Are you thinking about that in the future, close?

Holmes: I mean, Imma be real. I in this moment, I don't see it for myself anytime soon, but I do feel this like I have a feeling that I'm going to adopt, but I feel like it's going to be a little later in life and I feel like it's going to be a young person who's probably, I may have already seen this person cause that's, I talk about this often. I feel like there's somebody who's gonna find me if we gonna find each other when I'm a little older. But besides that, yeah, I'm cool with being like auntie, uncle Rara.

Knight: I like that. I like that. That's [inaudible], that's [inaudible]. So, you have been thinking about it. Cause I do think that people think about that monolithic ideology about transness, right? So, like this trans person, is like, "Oh well you lost your reproductive rights," or "You can't have a family." And so, adoption is a normal thing for people to consider when it comes to being parents.

Holmes: And if you're on hormone therapy, they, I don't know if other people's doctors do this, but I feel like my doctor was very like, "Well, are you going to give or do you plan on being pregnant? Like, are you sure you're not going to plan on being pregnant? You positive?" You know what? And I'm just like, "Why the fuck do you keep asking me that?"

Knight: See how they're safeguarding your body? And it's kind of saying like, well, you were assigned a certain way, so you should utilize all capabilities that you have.

Holmes: And also, like trans people, like how do you, there's not even enough research to say—

Knight: —That's what I'm saying

Holmes: How do you even know?

Knight: The medical industry is just very weird cause they're like, "Oh my god, what they call a woman. is not able to have a child. It's like do whatever you want aesthetically but we might have repercussions, you might be very sad later."

Holmes: Yeah, I'm just like what the fuck is that? I was like I've never wanted to give birth that I'm about to be 35. Like I don't think it's going to just all of a sudden change for me but thank you for the 30 fucking warnings that you gave me like, it's really not that serious.

Knight: How's your body feeling doing hormone replacement therapy and what method are you utilizing if you care to share?

Holmes: Yeah. You know what's interesting? I told you, you were one of the few people that I really even disclosed it to, and probably before now, like I don't know who listens to this, but there are still a few. But yeah, I feel like I've been taking—

Knight: —the whole world, the whole world

Holmes: [Laughs] It's fine.

Knight: [Laughs]

Holmes: I've been taking it [inaudible] approach to it. Like I, and I didn't really have language for, I just read this article, who I feel bad that I can't remember who wrote it, person's name, but they basically talked about like micro dosing testosterone and I was like, oh, maybe that's what I'm doing. You know, like I never really named it, but it always felt like I was on this like slow crawl. And that was the approach that, you know, me and my position decided to take. So yeah, that's where I'm at.

Knight: Cool.

Holmes: And I guess it's been months, a few, I don't even a few months now. But yeah, I feel, I feel mainly in, I'm also like in therapy, you know this other stuff at the same time, but which is helpful for me personally on my journey, but I feel good about just even making the decision, you know which you definitely helped me to get there, so I appreciate that.

Knight: No doubt. You helped me get here, and I help you get there. See how that works? For sure. Yeah. And how's your family feeling about this physical shit?

Holmes: Yeah, great question. Yeah, I haven't really talked to anyone in my blood family about it and I know that my siblings would be cool. I feel really challenged about talking to my mom about it. She's a nurse and is going to have enough to say and I'm just like, I just haven't been ready to do all the deflection right now [laughs]. Also, she might be shocked, totally shock me and be like overwhelmingly supportive. I'm not sure. But yeah, I just, at this point, like where I'm at in the journey, I haven't invited them in yet.

Knight: Yeah, for sure. So, I wanted to ask you a question and get off this topic. Something a little, little different. It's still on topic. But right now, black trans women are, you know, being murdered at an alarming rate as a black person and a trans person, what do you feel like is the biggest threat to the intersectionality of that at the end? The black and transness.

Holmes: Wow. That's a great question.

Knight: Well, how do you feel about what's happening for women's maybe, you know? Help you figure it out.

Holmes: Yeah, there's so many things at play that I think intersect. I feel like one of the major, the major things is just like blackness. You know what I'm saying? Like I feel like when you kind of, when you exist at that intersection. You know, systemic oppression is just like compounded and compounded depending on your situation. So I feel like honestly, like the lack of human rights for black folks in general, and then the more like marginalized the communities are like within that community, it's just dangerous territory, you know, to be a part of a group of people who literally, there's no investment is fucking crazy, you know? And not even that there's no investment, there's actually a disinvestment and there are all these, like there's a whole culture that supports like the hatred of femininity. There's a whole culture that supports hating black people. There's a whole culture that supports hating trans people. And so, you know, I just feel like it's just like basic human rights. Like that's one of the main things. And I don't even remember if I learned this from you all. I feel like I did or I don't even know where I saw it, but it just, and maybe you can speak to it if this was something you said, but I just remember reading, or maybe it was Erica Hart, but it was just, it was just, you know, the conversation around like, yeah, black trans women are being murdered, but like also, people need housing. You know what I'm saying? And like, that's killing black trans women or you know what it was, I think this came up in the film at the film screen.

Knight: —Miss Majors

Holmes: Yeah, Miss Majors in the talkback or the film itself. But you know, just like thinking about that is really, really intense. And you know, on top of that, like thinking about the fact that, you know, folks are trying to be loved and have relationships and in that, and in like being your true self as a black trans woman, that that could be like putting your life at risk is a crazy thought. You know? And there's just been a disinvestment across all, you know, communities that are black trans women who have been holding it down or other queer folks who've been holding it down. So yeah. There are some really like crazy things happening in the world. And it's amazing that anyone has survived. Like, you know what I'm saying? We're even allowed to talk about it. Yeah. That's pretty crazy.

Knight: And as a person that is not a woman, right, but is trans. So how do you utilize your privilege or how do you plan to utilize your privilege in order to create systems or spaces or provide education to ensure that black trans women not just survive, but thrive?

Holmes: Yeah, I think part of it in my work has been a lot about just really trying to, well, one thing that's coming to mind first is my work with like young cis men. Just like, you know, the mentorship and being a community with a lot of young cis men who identify as straight or whatever, you know, who may date black trans women or you know, or be in spaces with queer people. Like I feel like a lot of that work is important. And just hoping that the messages that I'm teaching around like breaking down the toxic masculinity that exists in all of us is something that they are embracing and also like reteaching or whatever. This is something that for years and years I've been invested in. And then just like, you know, trying to create spaces where everybody can feel welcome, which is really hard.

Knight: I can imagine. Can you talk a little bit more about the work that you do with young cis men?

Holmes: Yeah, so in more formal structures has been like mentorship programs a lot at I guess one of my nonprofit organizational homes, which is a center for new leadership. But you know, I've also worked for like cases and mostly programs where young folks were either affected directly by the criminal injustice system or had family members who are impacted. At the time I had a lot of direct family members who were impacted and so you know, just being, yeah. And most kids are from Brooklyn, Brooklyn, Queens area. So yeah, just, just doing workshops every day around like self-love, communication, you know, gender identity. We would talk about street harassment; we would talk about whatever they brought up. Like it was a really, really cool space.

Knight: How do you feel like they interact with you as a person that is nonbinary, black and trans, you know? Talk about that. So maybe first when you first met them and how it is now.

Holmes: So so dope like a lot of these young guys are like my best friends, you know, and one of like my first real connections through this program, a young guy named Alex, he just turned 25 a couple of days ago and I met him when he was 16 and I was just like, I can't even, and he is an incredible guy, you know? And he's still doing his work and he, I just, yeah. He, I always like felt a connected, a connection to him. You know, at the time he was still kind of like borderline, like streets, but I also really wanted to like focus on other things and yeah, like I just was in his corner, you know, as he grew up and now like he's my family, like treats me with the utmost respect, you know, I feel like if I call him for anything, he got me. Yeah, just countless, countless moments where I felt like you know, there's so much hope and when he came in here, like he didn't really have any contacts for any of that. But you know, was so open-minded and is still very open-minded. And honestly, like I was in a different part of my journey when we met, so he's kinda been on this aspect of it with me. You know, you know, and I had Chino with me most of the time too. So just like having that perspective. I remember when Chino deliberately was like, yes, he/him now. And it was a huge learning curve, but it became a thing where if you weren't on board, everybody was looking at you like crazy. [Laughs] So if anybody, in the space was like, she/her the whole room was like, you know, we all know, like, that's disrespectful. You late. You know what I'm saying? [Laughs]

Knight: [Laughs]

Holmes: Right, so the culture, we really did create a different culture there. I do think they take with them the rest of their lives.

Knight: Yeah. I mean, the work you do is, phenomenal. I feel like I learned something every time I talk to you like, oh, you do that too.

Holmes: [Laughs]

Knight: So, where do you think this stems from? This selflessness, right? Like at the same time you're navigating your own self, figuring yourself out, dealing with your anxiety and all this other stuff, your family, you don't even talk to about who you are, but then you're helping people navigate to the best version of themselves both within directly the trans queer community and outside. Where do you think this comes from? Like what is it about your DNA that makes you so passionate about this work?

Holmes: Yeah, I don't know. I think there's always been a, I don't know if it's in my sign or my ancestry or something—

Knight: —You want to tell the people out there your sign?

Holmes: I'm a Leo. I got a Scorpio moon in Gemini rising, it's complicated.

Knight: [Laughs] It's complicated.

Holmes: But yeah, I feel like every, every point in my life I've been advocating for something, you know. I don't know what that is like, and I guess here is, you know, here in Brooklyn is become more around my identity. So, it's a lot, it's close to home. In a sense, and it also has like, whatever. But, yeah, like honestly from a kid like I've always been like right there, I remember when there was like a little riot at my high school. My mom was mad as hell cause I was on the news talking through the fence. Like they should've never fired him talking about our like guidance counselor. Like I was always like, you know, I remember when the super got fired in my building, like trying to get I got the petition. I'm like, no, you know, we gotta fight for Hook. Like it's just, I don't know what it is like a lot of it probably from my mom. Who you know, just raised me to be proud of my blackness and to be proud that I come from a long line of people who stand up for themselves, you know? So, I think that's just like something, that resonated.

Knight: So, if time, money and energy were not a factor, what would you go after? If you knew you could definitely succeed? Cause I feel like personally, the work that you do now, if you weren't paid for it, you would still do it. Right?

Holmes: No, for sure. And a lot of times I'm barely paid for [laughs].

Knight: [Laughs]

Holmes: That's getting better though. But...

Knight: So, time, money or energy you can pick one, or three, or all of them, if they were not a factor, what would you go after? Like what would you do?

Holmes: I think I would I would be focused on so many things. Wow. Cause you already know I do a thousand things right now. But for the sake of this conversation, I think one thing that I feel like has been harder to manifest is like international connection. So, I would love to like, do a lot of the things I'm doing here. I would love to experience that in other places or help groups that live in other parts of the world, like build things up in this sense. So yeah, I think like, just branching out and connecting with the diaspora everywhere is like a dream.

Knight: Yeah, for sure, for sure. What is your favorite thing about being black?

Holmes: So many fucking things.

Knight: Tell me all.

Holmes: [Laughs] I love just being a part of our culture. I think it's like the most popular sought— after respected slash disrespected culture in the world. Um I, I love the, I love the rhythm in my speech, you know, I love, you know, I love being like, yeah, just like celebrating and dancing, and feeling like, you know, these are my people. And yeah, just love, like being a part of a group of folks who, you know, has literally overcome the most just destructive violent history, you know, one of the most destructive violent histories of our time. You know, we are able to manifest so much beautiful shit out of it. So, I feel really proud to be a part of that culture.

Knight: Do you feel like being trans is deeply, deeply part of being black or do you feel like it's two separate words?

Holmes: No, I think the fact that we're, that we're even like a little bit removed from embracing like transness or just the depth of our identities. I think that's like stuff that we don't even realize we probably got from like white culture. And like Eurocentric ways of thinking. I think we, you know, a lot of us come from community, in terms of like our ancestry. Like I think we were used to like being a community and being with each other in this way. So, like, it feels impossible to me to feel, to think like, oh, like we didn't exist. That's crazy. We been here. And you know, I read about like in that book *The Spirit of Intimacy*, how they talk about like, oh, like motherfuckers would like gateways of communication and that feels really like, that resonates now. And like, just the way that blackness and transness, there's also this intersection of like creativity and there's an intersection of like, just like forward thinking and like innovation and like all these things it, are you know, what our oppressors fear the most so that I know we're there. I know that there were like trans folks, so we don't even know we're trans that were, you know, integral to who we are today. It's the histories, the histories that impacted us the most are the ones they really want to hide. You know what I'm saying? Like Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, they like, yeah, you can have that. But those deep histories that really like bring up all these nuances and like make us ask the questions and like really get us to the solutions. Cause these moments when I'm able to build with like young cis men like, or like elders who

don't understand, like I was just in a group you know, Les Be Real was the name of the group and all they wanted to know was like, what is up with this trans shit you know, we have questions and we also relate, you know, so like these moments when you are able to like had these Epiphanes of, oh shit, I get you. The space that is now there for you to grow with that person is astronomical. They don't want us to be connected on those levels it's way too deep

Knight: They don't, they don't.

Holmes: You know what I'm saying? So, I feel like, yeah, I don't even remember what the fuck the question was.

Knight: It was just, how you feel about transness, is it part of being black to you or do you see it as two separate things, and you answered it perfectly. What are five things that you love about yourself?

Holmes: I love that I push through even if I'm afraid. I love that I get energy from people. I love that like I'm a bit extroverted at times. I love my empathy. I love, I love my like don't give a fuck attitude. Sometimes I may conflict with it, but also love it and what don't I love about myself. I love my unique style.

Knight: You're like pretty swag [laughs]

Holmes: You know, like bum chic.

Knight: [Laughs] Awesome. This is going so great so far. I had a few more questions if that's okay with you. I would like to know how dating is going for you as a person who is just super fluid with their personal identity. Do you date strictly like, you know, certain type of woman or you know, have you dated trans women or trans men or like where are you on the spectrum or?

Holmes: Yeah, I guess I'm pretty all over the place. Yeah. It's hard to say now because I've been like in a monogamous relationship for minute, but yeah, I feel like yeah, I've dated kind of all over the spectrum. That was something that felt important to my like I guess sexual liberation in a sense. To move based on like my own attraction for real. Versus like what was placed on me. So even if that means like, so you know, dating trans women, which feels more aligned I guess aesthetically for people then like dating another masc person that, so I feel like I definitely got more shade from that than anything. And so, but yeah, I think, and I also had my own internal mess cause I know at a time where I was dating masc folks, I would like treat them bad. Or like it was only a sexual thing and like you don't got your, your feelings aren't as like, you know, it was like this weird thing that I had to be checked about and I was like, damn, what is that? Is that like how I see myself? Like, like I don't have feel like it was just a real mindfuck, but also an important lesson. Unfortunately, at the expense of like being fucked up in the moment. But you know, it was like, yeah, I think I think I feel open.

Knight: Gotcha. No, I really appreciate your transparency. We just released a video on YouTube about gay is okay. We had a person that asked us like, or it was actually kind of like just spewing

lies, hatred in regards to people identifying as male. So, they're assigned from birth identifies male having sex with cis men, having sex with trans women, or there's, you know, other men of trans experiences. So, I just want to hear maybe your thoughts on that

Holmes: Yeah. This is the, like we had this conversation with the elders too. I'm glad that people are fucking and they're happy.

Knight: Thank you, thank you.

Holmes: And I'm sad that it makes other people so unhappy. And I don't know why—

Knight: [Inaudible] other people in their bedrooms and their genitals, it's really weird to me.

Holmes: I'm not sure. It starts to feel like high school when people talk about stuff like that in this way. And I'm just like, and I can't even say high school, like that's discrediting my young people, you know, like they probably off that, like people need to really open up. But you know, sex is, as much as we want to think, we're like a liberated country and like, things aren't taboo. It's so taboo and ain't nobody talking about nothing, you know. Not nobody, but especially like cis het spaces not in the same way. So, yeah, I think as people become more liberated in their identities, like those kinds of conversations will happen more and more that people will realize it's cool, um but it's sad that people, it was so sad about that.

Knight: For sure. I mean, I just brought it up for the sake of, when people think about transness, right. And especially black people when they think about transness and they always think about our body. So there, how do you do it? What are you doing to it with your body? Those are the first two questions. That they're so concerned with. It's been tough to be black and trans myself and I know that we resonate with, you know, being from Maryland, the religious upbringing, parents that just don't understand. How are you feeling now? Are you at peace with yourself?

Holmes: On most days.

Knight: What brings you the most peace?

Holmes: Um, I think like the fact, honestly, like this probably goes back to another question, but I have, I have the relationships in my work is sort of healing. So, I think, you know, being able to like organize about, about these things means I'm like in conversation with people that get it, often, more often than not. So yeah, I think just like shaping my life so that I'm surrounded by like people, places and things and that make me feel good about me are helpful.

Knight: Cool. So, what do you hope for in the future for people who look, love and live and express themselves like you?

Holmes: I hope for people to, just really see that there, that it's going to sound cliché, but like that possibilities are pretty limitless, you know. In terms of like who you are, who you want to be, what you're doing, where you're at, like the fact that we can have everything.

Knight: For sure. What does legacy mean to you?

Holmes: I think less about, I don't know if it's different, but I don't even, I just want like, I just think there's so many important things that, that people need to remember so that we don't have to like keep starting from scratch.

Knight: [Laughs] Yeah, yeah.

Holmes: You know I think there's so many tools and like gyms and there's more of a path. We always feel like we're forging our own, but there's people that have forged it a bit before us. When we get to know about it, we get a lot of lessons in that, so...

Knight: What advice would you give to your younger self, any age?

Holmes: Hmm I would, I would tell... [Laughs] I don't know I would probably let it rock, I needed those lessons.

Knight: [Laughs]

Holmes: I can't even think. I'm like...

Knight: No, that's fine.

Holmes: Yeah.

Knight: Or was something that you learned when you were younger that you are grateful for that experience if you take it that way?

Holmes: Um yeah. I would say... I learned that you really have to like move based on your own. I would just, that I have agency, you know what I'm saying? Knowing that earlier, maybe. To like make choices for your life like that they don't have to be shaped by other people's influence.

Knight: Who is your greatest inspiration?

Holmes: Oof um....

Knight: We're winding down now. These are just the things—

Holmes: I would say one of them is definitely my mom, yeah.

Knight: And why is that?

Holmes: She, she just came up at a crazy time and you know, she managed to do you know, with like I half full cup pour herself into her kids and her family. Then you know, provide a life

for us and yeah, she's just been working hard honestly since she was like eight or nine years old.

Knight: That's really awesome.

Holmes: It's crazy. [Laughs] So I really, she inspires me, mainly to like, you know, we both need to like hook our moms up so they can put their feet up somewhere.

Knight: You ain't telling me nothing. Was there anything else that you want to tell the people who may tune in and you know hear this and really resonate with your story? Is there anything that you feel like we didn't cover that you would like to share at this moment? Go ahead.

Holmes: No, I mean really, if anybody's listened to this that's dope, that means that they're like open-minded or this story resonates. And I would say just like keep digging, keep, keep learning about, you know, as many perspectives as possible. And that's like, that shapes us to be better people, man.

Knight: Awesome, just remind them one more time of your name, your pronouns, what you do, Bklyn Boihood and all that, a little bit.

Holmes: My name is Ryann Holmes and my pronouns are they/them—

Knight: —We kept the, we kept the they/them.

Holmes: We're gonna keep the they/them. Yeah, is this going to exist for like hundreds of years? What if the internet doesn't exist?

Knight: Yeah, forever.

Holmes: Word, if Google still exists.

Knight: [Laughs]

Holmes: Yo, get in them archives.

Knight: It's a library, archive [inaudible]

Holmes: It's a fucking library. Go look, look up, also have the XY is probably in here. I'll put a secret message on page 60.

Knight: [Laughs]

Holmes: But yeah, I don't know. Like we were here, we been here if I'm still alive and it's like mad years from now, hit me up.

Knight: Sounds good. Well thank you so much for your time Ryann. I am so happy that you exist, that Bklyn Boihood exists, because now I exist as my greatest self creating content and gathering community. You are a warrior. You are amazing, you are brilliant. And you know, just keep doing what you do. The people need you, brother. We love you so much.

Holmes: Love you, too.

Knight: Alright.

Holmes: This was dope.

Knight: Yeah, good times.

Holmes: So cool.