

NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

EDDIE JAREL JONES

Interviewer: Sir Knight

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Transcribed by Matthiew Chen

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Sir Knight: Hello, my name is Sir Knight, and I will be having a conversation with Eddie Jarel Jones for the New York City Trans Oral History Project in collaboration with the New York Public Library's Community Oral History Project. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans-identifying people. It is May 29, 2019, and this is being recorded at mid-Manhattan library. Eddie, we're so happy to have you here. The New York City Trans Oral History Project is a community archive of transgender resistance, resilience, and survival in New York City. BlackTransTV's goal is to share the narratives of people who live, love, and look just like us. This interview is a collaboration between BlackTransTV and the New York Public Library to highlight the brilliant oral history of black folks of trans experience. So Eddie, thank you for coming today; it's a pleasure to have you. Um, can you please start with your name and your pronouns?

Eddie Jarel Jones: Hello [laughter], my name is Eddie Jarel Jones, and my pronouns are they and them.

Knight: Awesome. Um, so I'd like to start off the interviews with what life was like for you as a baby. So, tell me about baby Eddie.

Jones: Well, baby Eddie doesn't remember anything [laughter]. No, I'm just kidding, I'm just kidding. Uh, being a baby, I was born in Cleveland, Ohio, uh, more specifically, a part of the greater Cleveland area, Warrensville Heights, Ohio is literally like a suburb right outside of Cleveland, so like the end of my street is literally technically Cleveland, like I could've went to Cleveland schools. So um, I went—I lived—I lived in the same house from the time I was born literally all the—all the way till now; my mom still owns that house; I still go home and visit; it's been a while, which is like so crazy to me; I haven't been home in a year. I've been living in New York for one year. But um, growing up in Cleveland, Ohio was rough, like it was rough, man. Um, there wasn't any space to be yourself, there wasn't anyone that I could really relate to on a personal level other than like familial relationships or like friendships; of course I could relate to those people, um because we had similar economic and environmental experiences, but as far as like who I was deep down inside I really didn't have anybody that was like me or that I could see that was like me. So that was rough; I was in the closet until my freshman year in college, which like literally coincides with not having that space back home. Um, so, I really didn't have that many friends—I was always a friendly person, always had people that, you know, I could hang out with, but people that I could like consider my day ones I really didn't have that, um, at a young age. Uhh, I kinda had like a group of guy friends that our moms were close, so we were just around each other a lot, like we played Little League, baseball; funny story about that—uh, I hated it [laughter]. That's the story.

Knight: [laughter]

Jones: It was one time I was playing in a game and they would always put me on left field or right field because I wasn't about to run around and do anything like that. So I um, just laid out in the middle of the field [laughter] on my back, and I was so—I was just looking at the sky; I don't even like grass like that, but I was over it, so um, that was my last game. Then, we started bowling, like

we had like a little bowling team. And a group of guys that I was cool with I'm still cool with them to this day; I still see them; we went to like the same high schools, um, we find each—like, like we would find each other at the same like parties or kickbacks; we'll be speed, we talk, we kiki. They don't call that kiki, but, you know, we catch up, and that's that, and they're like really cool about everything, but I really met my group of friends that I still have to this day, which we call ourselves The Crew—I met them in high school, and I met my best friend in eighth grade; we lived together here in New York, we both moved from Cleveland, we basically like travelled this whole world living together, and we're only twenty-five, so it was pretty fun. But um, yeah, I have those group of girls, I met them in high school, and they became like my safe space. They always knew who I was, but I still was never open with them about my sexuality and how I felt about my gender identity, but they didn't care, like they just loved me for me, they let me do me, they let me mind my business, I have all the fun in the world, I would try on their Trinity uniforms, and we would—we would all have fun; it was like I was just one of the girls. It was like, they would always be like, "Eddie's just Eddie", but not like meaning in a derogatory way like more so like, we're not—like they didn't even classify me as a boy because that's not how I acted, that's not how they saw me, so, I think that's why we're all still friends to this day and that's why like, they just—they're like experiencing this transformation with me and they're like loving it, cause they're like finally, bitch, finally. But um, yeah, growing up, my family, I really wasn't that close to my cousins because I'm in the middle, so it was like you have the entire group of first cousins, and I'm like the youngest of the youngest, so there was already a youngest. And then years later came me, and then all of my first cousins had kids, so, I'm not close enough to their kids; I'm like, they were done clubbing by the time—

Knight: Yeah.

Jones: —I was like in high school, like you know what I'm saying? So I really wasn't able to experience like growing up with them, so I was kinda like a lone wolf in my family sort of to say. I mean everyone loves me, we all support each other, don't get me wrong, but as far as having those like tight, tight, tight, tight, tight bonds with your cousins—I don't. Um, there are a few that, you know, we do have tight bonds, but it's like more so of a like "I was their baby"; it's not like a "Girl, remember when we was at dadadada, we was running the streets," it's not like that, so I wasn't able to grow up with them and allow them to get to know me growing up cause they just had business to take care of.

Knight: Yeah. Do you have siblings?

Jones: So I do have—I have a sister, and we're fifteen years apart—

Knight: Oh copy.

Jones: Yeah yeah yeah.

Knight: That's why you say cousin instead of—

Jones: Yeah.

Knight: Okay, got you.

Jones: So, so, I have a sister, we're fifteen years apart, um, on my dad's side; I'm my mom's only child, but, I mean, my sister—my mom and dad divorced at a very early age, so that's an important part [laughter].

Knight: Yeah.

Jones: They divorced when I was like three-and-a-half, or like three, one of those two. So, they um, my dad and my sister moved out, and then it was me and my mom, so it was very like single parent home, dad lives in Cleveland, sister lives with my dad, so we, we got closer as we got older.

Knight: Gotcha.

Jones: Because of um, we were able to build a bond outside of our parents. So, now me and my sister are like this. Ever since I could do anything by myself, I was always with her, so we were always like this. Um, I love her, damn. But like, she always knew, but again, she just more so respected me and not, like forcing me to disclose information, or, be somebody that I wasn't necessarily comfortable being in a space that I was in. So that was like, baby Eddie, that was like very, um, you know, in the closet, weearing Hot Topic, because you know, it was a little spicy—

Knight: Hot Topic! Yes.

Jones: —it was a little spicy, but it wasn't too much, you know, might not get clocked, but uh, I mean, I was—I'd—I would get clocked from left and right; I never really had any traumatic bullying experiences, but I did get bullied. It was more so like um, teasing, jokes, like um, people want to call you fat, they wanna call you the gay boy, they wanna call you, um, a pawn, soft, sweet, all of those things; didn't really bother me; I wasn't somebody that was really bothered by words, I don't know how, I don't—I don't know where I got that mindset from, cause it's not like I had this like traumatic upbringing where it was like "Oh, I just got this tough skin, I'm just naturally a person that just really doesn't care that much" [laughter], so I'd just be like all right. I mean, it hurt, because it's like dang, I just want people to be chill, like why can't you just be chill? So, that's a lot of reasons why I um, was in the closet as well. It's because like it was just like—I just felt like it shouldn't be that deep to like need to come out, like "Oh, this is it, everybody's already like teasing me, calling me this, when am I gonna come out for?" Like—

Knight: Yeah. That's something I find interesting, right, is that when you're different you have to come out, right?

Jones: Mm hmm. Yeah.

Knight: But, everyone else is just who they are and it's associated—like heterosexuality—

Jones: Yeah.

Knight: —is associated with who they are naturally, right? Like—

Jones: Yeah, and it's like—

Knight: —why do we have to come out—why can't I just discover who I am? Cause honestly I think that a lot of heterosexual people are still trying to figure out who they are.

Jones: Yeah.

Knight: But just assume boys like girls, girls like boys. So that's the route you going, but if—if people see anything feminine in a boy they're like "Ah, I don't know..." And it's like—

Jones: And I hate when people do that.

Knight: —perhaps, but perhaps that little boy's just feminine, right?

Jones: Yeah! And that could be his thing, like, he could be ready to marry, his wife could have 50 kids, and live a honest life, and make a honest living, and be fully themselves, and love flowers, and love pink—which all of these things have been gendered. They really have no fricking gender like dances, smells, color tones, none of that has gender. It's all B.S.

Knight: For sure. And in terms of visibility, what difference do you think that would have made for you as a young Eddie? Like, in elementary school, middle school, seeing somebody who was genderfluid and just free and who maybe shifted from a male aesthetic to a femme aesthetic, like, or a masculine to a femme aesthetic. How would that have changed things for you?

Jones: I think if I would've been able to experience or see someone I could relate to, um, and have that presence whether it be on TV or rather had been like a teacher, or somebody that worked at a coffee shop, just somebody in my life that I could see—hopefully more than once [laughter]. Um, I think I would have started wearing my mom's heels out the house way younger! [laughter] Cause I would always—oh that's another thing—I would always wear my mom's shoes, like once I became a latchkey kid, I would let myself in the house, and I would just like wear my mom's clothes, I would wear her shoes; she never knew; I would never touch the makeup because I always tell people "Makeup is hell to clean up," so—and I knew I would—I'd just—she was gonna know. It was gonna be glitter somewhere; it's gonna be something on my face, she was gonna say, "What?" And I was gonna be a dead giveaway. So, I used to wear her clothes and stuff all the time; I used to wear her shoes all the time, and now people are like, "You know how to walk in heels better than girls!" And I'm like, "I've been doing this since I was like 10, 12, girl!" [laughter] Mastering the stairs, the strut, everything. Not playing with nobody. Stilettos, block heels.

Knight: That's awesome. Um, but in—on the, the topic of visibility, right?

Jones: Mm-hmm.

Knight: Um, I know that you do a lot of media and representation and things of that nature, um perhaps we can get a little bit into that, tell people who you are, what you do, and why that's important now, that you're on the other side, right? So, baby Eddie didn't have the visibility of people like yourself, and now you are that for little boys and girls out there, so, perhaps you can tell us a little bit about what you do.

Jones: I would love to! Um, so, I moved to New York City in 2018 in March. Uh, I had been out of school for almost a year, about 10 months, I had been out of school; I graduated from Lincoln University, the first HBCU, in Pennsylvania.

Knight: Woo woo! [laughter]

Jones: And I graduated with a degree in Mass Communication and Digital Broadcast, and I minored in English. Um, smart girl! So, I got home...well actually, I graduated high school and I was already working at Fox 29 Philadelphia. I had interned there a few times, then I, they hired me for a subcontracted position where I would be managing the social media of one of their in house entertainment shows "The Q" show. So I did that, and the contract was over in about July, so then I went home in August, and I was home until March, and while I was home I was just going crazy and I was just trying to figure out like, "What am I gonna do? How am I gonna make an impact?" I had this TV reel where I had done like interviews and stuff as a intern and I covered Philly Fashion Week, cause I'm always like a go-getter, I'm always going above and beyond, doing stuff I'm not really supposed to be doing. But I just—I needed to benefit me. So, I had this reel and I—it was—it was cool, it was dope, I was wearing makeup, but I wasn't really necessarily femme-presenting; I was more so doing like TV makeup, with the lash. So it—I just—I felt like it was cute, for what it was in that moment, but it wasn't really what I wanted to present to the world and what I want people to see...me represent. You know what I'm saying? Like myself, like if I'm—if, if I wanted other—if I wanted to have that type of representation when I was younger, I had to be fully myself and represent myself in that nature so that other people can have what I didn't have. So, I was home, and I decided that I wanted to move to New York, and, because that's where I could see...a majority of people that were like me and people that I liked, were. And they were doing the work. You know, people were in LA, but the majority is here. So, I moved out here, and I got in contact with Slay TV and so many other outlets like The Phluid Project and so many different companies and networks that really support the LGBTQ+ community and really want to highlight queer, genderfluid, and trans voices. So, I got in with them and I just started working really hard, being as—being as available as I could, and what I hope that does for people that are watching—so I get messages in my DMs all the time; I get messages in my email all the time, so I've got my email on Instagram, which is annoying sometimes, but I mean, it's there; I need it for bookings [laughter], but, um, you really see a lot of people saying "Wow, I never thought that I could do this wearing makeup." I get a lot of like, young boys or young genderfluid queer youth and they're like "I never—I never thought that I could really do what I wanted to do; it was just

always a dream.” And I’m just like, “Really? Like, it’s 2019, you could do whatever you wanna do.” But when you’re not someone that...is able to experience different things like going to college in Eastern Pennsylvania like 45 minutes away from Philadelphia—I was able to see a different way of life. I saw how normal certain things were, and they just weren’t that way back home in Cleveland and I’m like, “If I’m from Cleveland, that’s like, one of the top 20 metropolitan cities in the world. If I’m from here, there are a million other people from, you know, the countryside, from, you know, places that are way less fortunate, they have way less exposure to the arts and, and, and to people that are just being free. They’re not just living this routine lifestyle that has like been set up for them. So, that’s really what I hoped that people...and mainly the youth; I love my youth; I hope that my queer and trans youth can really look at the things that I’m doing and look at the things that a lot of genderqueer and trans and LGBTQ+—and—people of color; I have to add that in there. I love for them to see what we’re doing, and I really hope that they can see themselves in that, and say, “I’m gonna go for it. I’m gonna just do it now, I’m gonna go for it.” That’s one thing I love about visibility, and I’m very proud to be a part of it, is because, I just hope that somebody else can...identify who they are—way sooner in life, like you don’t have to wait—I was—what, like, 18? 19? You don’t have to wait until you’re 18, 19; you can do that when you’re younger because you miss out on certain experiences like, going to the store with your good-good girlfriends and trying on makeup and trying on perfumes and trying on different clothing, and...then you like, you’re 18, 19 and then you’re like, “Oh yeah, well, this is who I am, this is how I wanna present,” and then it’s like you’re—you have to start like you’re a 13-year-old girl, and you have to like grow in that, and um, and so, funny, since I moved here, uh, cause even when I was back home I really didn’t wear hair, and once I moved here I started experimenting in hair more and I—I love it!

Knight: Yes.

Jones: So um—

Knight: I wanted to talk about that [laughter]. It’s been a crazy year for you.

Jones: It’s been a crazy year. And it’s so funny because, like, even you, you said on so many different occasions, oh my god, like, I’m just watching you grow up and I’m like yeah, it’s like happy in my eyes too.

Knight: It’s so beautiful.

Jones: Thank you! So yeah, that’s why I really hope people in the youth can, really, grasp when they see the work that we’re here trying to do is that, you know, explore you way sooner, identify who you are way sooner, experience yourself and all of your different, beautiful, many facets sooner so that you can just start to grow into who you are.

Knight: For sure. Um, I know you said you wanted to move to New York City. So, who inspired you, and like, could you say there are certain people that you saw, that you saw yourself through them, right? So, could you name some of those people that inspired you and said, “New York

City's where I need to be, because I see so-and-so...doing their thing, and I need to come here and do my thing too."

Jones: I got you! So, um...I hate that I keep saying "um." But, I—

Knight: [laughter] That works.

Jones: —I got into...a email thread; it was Slay TV, when I was back home after I had come home from Fox 29 in Philadelphia. I was home, and I was just emailing, emailing, emailing, and I got in touch in them and we started a thread and they were like "Hey! We would love for you to come out," and—they didn't know I lived in Cleveland. And um, cause I still had like my Philadelphia address on their everything, so they were like "Yeah, we would love for you to come on up to like Black Pride, this was 2017, and, we just wanna get some coverage, we want to do some interviews, we want to get like some fun, funny moments," and I'm like, perfect! So I sent them my reel. So I went up there, and I drove nine hours all the way to New York City with my best friend Shay, and, I went to the gig; that's where I met Sean Torrington and uh Terry Torrington, and I was able to work for Slay TV in that moment and that whole day, it was just an experience being able to see everybody on Coney Island being themselves, living in their best moment, and I was there doing what I wanted to do, but it's so funny; I was wearing this leotard, cause it was on the beach. I was wearing this leotard with a pair of shorts and I just felt so at home, and I told my CEO, literally, as we're leaving the event I'm like, "I'm moving to New York City next year. I'm coming here, this is what I'm gonna do, this is what I want to do, and I'm gonna do this with Slay TV. So, um, months after that they just, they—he didn't even know that I had like driven up from Cleveland like when I told him he was like "Oh, you about to go home?" I'm like yeah, we got a long trip back to Cleveland. He's like "What?" So, he booked me for a few more events, and I kept my word and I moved out here in March and um, that's really like I'll always say "Slay TV is the reason that I moved to New York," because I was gonna move to LA. I was gonna move to LA and I was gonna be a boujee girl, and I was like, I'ma get some followers, I'm going to red carpets and, woo, woo, woo, woo! And, that's not really how it played out, and once I got to New York and I was able to see how Slay functioned and how...the different media outlets like, BlackTransTV, and, like all of my non-binary, genderfluid, trans people of color and friends that I've met, I'm like this is where I need to be cause this is where we're getting the work done, and when you move to New York, what people don't understand, you could move to wherever you wanna move to, but you, if you wanna do anything in media, entertainment, or anything that involves a sickening hustle, you need to move to New York first. You need to get beat down. You need to grow up, and then you can go somewhere else, and slay the game because you will leave New York with a hustle like none other, like the city never stops, like it does sleep, cause you have to, or else you will get burned out, but it doesn't stop, so while you're sleeping, somebody else's dreams are coming true. So it really teaches you like this intense hustle, um...what's the word I'm looking for?

Knight: Hustle mentality.

Jones: Mentality! Yeah! And, and, and you really get to the money and you get to your goals. So that's what—

Knight: Where'd that—where'd that hustle come from though? Like—

Jones: My mom. [laughter]

Knight: Okay. Because I know that you said that you, you know, you grew up and she kinda raised you as a single mom, so you—you saw her hustle.

Jones: Yeah. That's all she did was hustle.

Knight: Got you.

Jones: My mom has so much going on; it was—it was a really trying time in her life, like, me growing up, my adolescence, and, it wasn't my fault, but it was just life was happening at that period and point of her life, and I was growing up watching that, so I was able to see her hustle; my mom, um, I just went from, you know, seeing her, you know, six, seven figures, I don't know which one it was at that age, but I know the girl was making coin, and the recession happened, and she got laid off, and this was when I was like maybe—she got laid off the first time maybe I was like 8 or 9 or...no, maybe I was younger, and I just—she started, you know, her side business where she hustled and she planned events and she sang, like my mom is a immaculate singer; she's a soprano, so she would sing at events, she was an event planner, and she was just really getting into the money; she was, uh...doing like marketing for people, marketing for companies, all while, you know, looking for that next position and that next opportunity; she got a great opportunity, like, a year later, got laid off from that, cause, you know, the recession was terrible! So um, you know, it was just a lot, it was—it was credit card bills went way up, and, you know, I would always be afraid to ask for like new shoes; my mom would kill me because I just didn't wanna—I didn't wanna be a bother; I didn't wanna add to the problem. So I'd never ask for new shoes; I would let my shoes be way too tight; I wouldn't really ask for new clothes—I'd—that wasn't my thing at all growing up at all. It wasn't until probably like maybe college until I got into fashion, cause I was in the space to do so. But um, yeah, it was rough, and then, in the midst of all of that, like literally in the midst of those years of two layoffs, she was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer. Like she didn't get diagnosed and the cancer grew and got worse. She got diagnosed when she was about to die. Like she got diagnosed with stage 4 kidney cancer. I think she came home for a week and they had her scheduled for the next week for surgery, like to remove her kidney, cause they were like, if you leave this hospital, and your kidney bursts, that's it. Cause it's just gonna spread everywhere, like, cause the cancer's just gonna spread everywhere in your body. So she um, she was done with all of that, and through all of that, looked good, you know, was always a nice person, was always kind, and, she hustled, like we—I'd—I wouldn't have known what was going on if I wasn't so damn nosy. But I was nosy, and I was an only child, and I was a lot like my mother, so I talked a lot, and she talks a lot, so I knew a lot that was going on, but um, I think that's another thing parents have to remember—their kids can handle information. You don't have to tell them like, oh, what you're afraid of, but kids can handle information because, I was

able to watch my mother literally hustle and understand what was going on. You know? So that was um...that was where I learned most of my hustle from. And then she stayed active in all of her organizations, in church, choir, school board, like she just was always an active person, she—she didn't let anything get her down, so, that's where I got my hustle from.

Knight: Well how she doing now?

Jones: She's amazing! She's that girl, she's President of the school board in Warrensville Heights, Ohio. So proud of her, amazing job. She is still event planning, she's getting her LLC now.

Knight: Okay, mom, okay!

Jones: She's taking everything to the next level. She's like, she's lit, and I just—I can't wait to give her the things that she gave me when it comes to like, support and investing in somebody that you really believe in. So yeah, that's where I learned the hustle from.

Knight: That's beautiful. Um, I wanna talk a little more about going to a HBCU—

Jones: [laughter]

Knight: —and being non-binary, and and you saying that you discovered yourself there, in terms of like fashion and things like that, so can you talk a little bit about that?

Jones: Yeah!

Knight: Cause, I've been having conversations with people, like should we advocate for black, you know, trans, queer people to go to HBCUs? Because, the toxic masculinity, and, you know, homophobia and transphobia, so, I'm just really interested in how that worked for you...in, yeah, just, just gimme a little background.

Jones: Got you!

Knight: Yeah, please.

Jones: Well first, I will say I definitely think that we should continue advocating for our queer youth to enroll in HBCUs, because, the honesty of the situation is: college is college no matter where you go. You're gonna experience terrible things if that is what people want to do, no matter who they are, what race, and, and, and, and gender and color they are. I do know that, you know, in the black community there are a lot of, lot of lot of lot of lot of reasons why queer people stay away, and a lot of it comes from the black church, and the hood and just the whole—our whole systematic racism...effects and consequences that we have to carry. It just really plays into wanting to stray away. But, you can also find some of the most supportive people, and that's really how I was able to come into myself; when I first got there, me and my best friend, we went to Lincoln University together. And we went on a Track Scholarship, and, uh, at track practice one

day, this girl, Bianca, she was just like...I guess I wasn't there, but she was with the girls' team, and she was just like, "Yeah, Eddie, you know, the gay boy, dadadada!" And my best friend was like, "Who?" And she's like, "Did he say that?" Cause I wasn't out yet. So she's like, "What, girl? Like I didn't think he was in the closet." She was like, "No, well, if you didn't say it, that's not the tea." So [laughter] literally like the next day, I heard what had happened, and...I went up to Bianca, or she came up to me, I can't really remember, but we had the conversation, and from that point on I was just...out! It's like I didn't necessarily come out to anybody at my college because it was so soon of me getting there, like nobody really knew me. So I just—I just decided, well, if this girl can peep it, and it's like not this huge deal or anything; I'm in a new space, I'm in a new point in my life; why—why not just start over? So, I just was myself. From that point on, when people would ask, I'd be like "Yeah," or I wouldn't say anything and that it would just serve as a yes, cause it's like it's not your business, but um, that is how I kinda inched myself out of the closet. Then I of course called family, called my best friends, and, told some people over that first Thanksgiving, and the person that I waited the longest was my dad. So that's—that's how my HBCU helped me in that point—it allowed me to meet somebody that um, really was comfortable with themselves to think that I was comfortable with myself, cause they liked what I was giving, and then we ended up being friends to this day; I just saw this girl like a week ago; I was in Philly. So um, through that I was able to join a modeling troupe, and I was able to express myself there, but that was also very controversial because they were very—uh very heteronormative, so they wouldn't let boys walk in heels. Only girls could walk in heels; mind you, I was the runway director. For girls! So I'm teaching the girls how to walk, but I can't myself go onstage and pump in pumps! So that was like, very, very very disheartening; that was hard to deal with. But I did it. I put my bootstraps on and pumped and taught them how to pump, and, what else did it do? It allowed me to kinda see that sports really wasn't for me; I was using sports as a outlet, I was good at it, but I was using it as an outlet and kinda like a cover up so that people could identify me more with track and field than who I was. It was kinda like a mask. I was still—I was able to be myself, but not have anybody question me as like, they could be comfortable and focusing on, "Oh yeah, he runs track," not like "Oh, yeah, the gay boy." So, my HBCU allowed me to meet a lot of girls, a lot of guys, that were just comfortable with who I was, and as I was in college and grew in college I began to wear makeup, probably maybe my sophomore, junior year, I got my makeup done for a show that we had, and I was just like, "Oh, this is the look." So I started wearing makeup then, that was probably like 2014, 2015, and then...I—again, never wore hair but the first time I ever got up in drag was in college, and that was like my senior year; I did five years. So that was my first senior year, and...

Knight: It's okay. It's okay.

Jones: I got—I got in full drag like 22-inch lace front, um, like stripper heels that were like 9 inches, and I was the black Moschino Barbie. That was like when the black Moschino Barbie had first come out, and they had like previewed it and it was a big thing, and I'd literally make the outfit; it was identical; everybody loved it, and I got the looks from people like, "Oh, does he want to be a girl now? And dadadada," all because I just had on clothes, shoes, hair, and makeup, and I had to explain to people like well first of all, no, second of all, this is spirit week, and you know, everybody's playing dress up, but you're saying that because you know who I am, and you're

trying to put pieces together that just don't match. So, that was the first time I got up in drag, but then again, a lot of people were very supportive. A lot of people were like "Yes, baby, you are beat, and dadadada, and your hair looks amazing," which it did.

Knight: Yeah.

Jones: I don't know about beat. I'd—I'd—I don't know about beat. But I know my hair looked good, cause the same girl that does my hair now, she did my hair then, um, it's my friend Bianca's sister.

Knight: So, it looked perfect, then. Yeah.

Jones: Yeah. The hair was—the hair was fab. I know that for a fact. But the makeup, I don't really know. So um, yeah, my—my HBCU really helped me gain a good consciousness of how the world would be. Because you had people that stared, you had people that would talk behind my back, but then you also had people that were very supportive, and I'm like, well, if this is how it is at this HBCU, I know I can go out there and tackle the world, because I know my people. So that was—that was life at a HBCU for me, but I was able to grow. Most HBCUs are like arts schools, but you just don't say anything, cause everybody is so damn talented. So um—

Knight: Yeah. I mean, black is brilliant, right?

Jones: I mean, black is brilliant! So, I was able to experience all of that and yeah, I would definitely advocate for our queer people of color and our youth to definitely enroll in a HBCU; find the right one for you; you have—there are HBCUs now that have repu—uh, reputations of being like, oh you know, a lot of gay boys go there, which I don't necessarily agree with to feel like it's okay, but I think the stigmas with HBCUs are changing a little bit, and it's forcing the students and the faculty to see what's happening, and, there's still a lot of issues, there's still a lot of problems, I know, with a lot of our trans women and trans men when it comes to fraternities and sororities and certain organizations that have, um, gender rules or that BS; it's—it's still hard, but, it's a journey.

Knight: I mean, Spelman College is now accepting trans women. But it's problematic because they're saying they have to be post-op.

Jones: Yeah, see, you can't do that.

Knight: Yeah, which, and then, yeah, and then you have Morehouse saying—

Jones: Cause operations don't validate your gender identity at all!

Knight: It doesn't! It doesn't!

Jones: They don't!

Knight: It's super problematic so we're—we're trying to work with eradicating that whole litigation that they have going on at Spelman College, but also Morehouse just announced that they're allowing men of trans experience to come to the—to the university and there's no, you know, litigation, like you have to do this, you have to do that; it's just like, if you identify as male, you can go, so, I don't know, I think it's definitely a shift for HBCUs.

Jones: That—that's another thing, now that's another thing when it comes to like, men being granted certain things that women aren't. It's like, even though you're trans, yes, that's—that's one quote unquote strike, but then it's like, well if you're a trans man...okay, come on in, but then you're a trans woman and it's like, well you gotta pass this test, you gotta qualify here, you gotta do that, you gotta check that off, you gotta check that off, you gotta check that off for you to be considered in this situation, and that's so unfair.

Knight: Well let's talk about that, all right? The standard of beauty. Right?

Jones: Mm-hmm.

Knight: Um, I think...well I know, women are held to a certain standard, like if you don't look a certain way, especially you, if you are a trans and queer, right?

Jones: Mm-hmm.

Knight: If you're not passable or attractive, then people aren't gonna accept you as much. Like, do you think that there is, um, something that happens within the community even—and and beyond the community, right? So like, people are like, "Oh, you're...I don't know if I'm okay with your transness, cause you don't really look like that, but then, oh, you're slang, you're doing your thing, so like, I'ma embrace you, and then even society, the greater society embraces you as well. Um, how do you feel about the standard of beauty? Do you feel like you're...you feel pressured to look a certain way when you go femme? When you put on face, when you put on hair, do you feel that pressure to look a certain way, or are you just giving Eddie? Eddie just slays. That's just what it is.

Jones: So I'ma be honest. I do feel the pressure. Ooh, I just sat on my hair [laughter]. Speaking of beauty—

Knight: Talk about [inaudible]! Talk about [inaudible]!

Jones: So, I um, I do, I—I definitely feel the pressure. It's stressful at times. And I would honestly say it's been up until recent, like maybe the last 3 or 4 months, like, of this year. I finally feel comfortable like, if I have on hair, not feeling the need to completely beat my face because I need to pull off this hyper femme look in order to be like, not bothered, and just to feel like, "Okay, people aren't staring, okay, people are gonna say I look nice, okay, I could just go through my day minding my business," and it's been until recent and it's been like a lot of people that I've been around that I've just been able to see how they function and move through life and see how

people interact with them and see how they see themselves and I'm like, "So this is all in my head," and it's like it really is; the world really tries to plant seeds in your head, and they do grow, but you just have to make sure you're watering the right ones and throwing out the wrong ones. So there's def-there's a huge, huge pressure put on...people that are genderfluid but present femme or non-binary femmes, and trans women, because you are literally...put in this space where it's like, if you aren't looking just like a woman, there could be nothing but violence coming your way, there could be nothing but wrath coming your way, you can have access taken away from so many things, like literally like housing and insurance and being able to serve in the military, and and when you're seen as passable, it's like people don't even question it. They just think, "Okay, you could just do whatever you want to do, like a regular person." So that's where a lot of that pressure comes from, is just wanting to live life and be free and have the same rights and equality as everybody else. But that's still not right, because you have a lot of women, and it's no shade to cis women. But you have a lot of cis women that don't wear makeup, they don't wear eyeliner, they don't get their hair done, they don't care if their outfits match. And that is okay! That's fine, you shouldn't have to if that's not what you're into, don't be into it. You might have a spotless house. I don't! I like making sure I look good. You know what I'm saying? So everyone has different things that they enjoy doing and – and how they enjoy presenting themselves whether it be in the house or out of the house, and I just feel like...people should just be able to be granted and access the same things in the world, no matter how they look, and no matter what—how beautiful you think they are or not, because I have plenty of people tell me, "Oh my god! You should just wear hair and no makeup. You look so pretty, you look so femme," and I'm looking at myself like, "Mm, are you sure?" Then I have so many people that are like "Oh my god, girl, you are beat, you look so good, dadadada!" So it's really just like a constant mental battle with yourself and in really looking in the mirror and getting comfortable with who you are. And I think even cis women, cis men, trans men, genderfluid people, no matter who you are, you have to go through that coming of age when it comes to beauty and and how you see yourself on the spectrum of beauty. Like do you see it from the inside-out? Do you see it from the outside-in? If so, you know, what does that mean for you? Is it fashion, is it makeup, is it hair? Uh, some people really view beauty as personality and, and, and how you make other people feel. So you really have to come to terms with beauty within, and then you can portray yourself in the beautiful way you see fit. But yeah, there's still a lot of pressure put on trans women and genderfluid femmes.

Knight: Yeah, and on that note, um, when it comes to dating, right?

Jones: Mm-hmm.

Knight: Because you are non-binary—

Jones: Mm-hmm.

Knight: You don't always present as femme.

Jones: Right.

Knight: So, how is that, navigating the dating scene, where you are non-binary? And some days, you might feel, like, I just wanna be Ed—Eddie, and then I wanna be Mulan, like, you know what I'm saying? Like who are you today, in the next relationship and who you gonna give, so how is dating for you?

Jones: Dating for me—well, I'll tell you one thing; I haven't dated since I got to New York. I've met people. We've, we've talked and—but I've never like consistently dated, like I've never gone on a date with anybody in New York, nothing like that, just maybe like one of two hookups. But that ain't a date! I'ma let y'all know right now, that's not a date! Uh, the last time I was in a relationship, my boyfriend, he was accepting of it all, like I could wear hair, I could wear makeup, I could have no haircut, I could have a fresh fade, he didn't care; he was in love with me. And that's one of the things that I am going to take with me no matter what relationship I'm in, is that the person that I'm with, has to be in love with me, the person inside, like the personality; they have to laugh at the jokes, cause I'm gonna be the most annoying person if you're not laughing at the jokes. They have to understand how I process thoughts. They have to understand how I come to conclusions. They have to understand that sometimes I'm gonna jump to conclusions. Like they really have to love me for me because I am going to be a different person every day; I'm just one of those two-spirited people that, one day it's over here and one day it's over there, and I'm not gonna control it and I'm not gonna put myself down and dim my light to make somebody else feel comfortable or to please someone else's attraction. You know what I'm saying? And it's really easy is—people think it's not, but it's so easy to like filter out the people that wanna deal with you because it's just like a sexual attraction or sometimes it's like a fetish, and it's like I just steer clear of those people; I really don't put myself in those situations because, I just keep myself busy in my career and that takes up all my time, so dating right now was like a no-go. But...it's—I don't think that it's gonna be that hard for me to date, to find people to date. Maybe. But once I'm dating, I'm really good at like keeping energy and making sure that somebody's really in it to win it, so, that's dating while you're non-binary. You have to find somebody that is going to love you for you, not for your parents, not for beauty, not for anything other than your personality and your heart, because, that's the only thing that's gonna stay the same, you know?

Knight: Yeah. And on that note, I know that a lot of women of trans experience and, you know, non-binary femmes are harassed and harmed and murdered because of their appearance; people have a desire for them, an attraction towards them, sexually, and then if they do emotionally get involved with them, they feel a way, right? About their manhood.

Jones: Right.

Knight: So, do you ever feel scared? I—I know that we've communicated before about things but I—I'd—I never really asked you, like do you actually feel scared when you put on your makeup, when you put on your wig and you go present your best self? Because, you present a threat to other people's insecure masculinity. You know what I mean?

Jones: Right. Right. Heck yeah! Like, definitely, I'm not even gonna lie, I think a lot of people are like no, because it's gonna hap-like, no no no no no. I'm gonna be honest, I'm a human being; it is scary as hell, even when you move to a city like New York City, everybody thinks that, "Oh, this is just the land of the free and the land of the brave," and that's not the tea; it's just a lot of people here hustling [laughter] and that's all. That's the only thing; it's not even a cute situation; it's very gritty. And um...like for example I was followed on the train one time; it was—I was coming back from Atlanta, and I had to go to a gig; I had an interview that I had to do with Slay, and I was the last one there and I had to go all the way to the last stop in Harlem which is like, what way—like what better way to tell this story, like I was going to the last stop in Harlem. So, [laughter] and I was getting followed on the train; it was just like well, I gotta stay on the train. So I was on the train and, this guy just kinda—was trying to like—the train had stopped, and it was on a delay, so the doors were open, it was on a platform, and the door stayed open until it was time for it to go, just in case, you know, people have to like evacuate or leave or do anything. So this guy just kept walking past, and I had my head down, I'm going over my questions, I'm making sure everything's organized. And I see him trying to like signal me like to look at him or to give him attention. So I look up, cause you know, I may know the person, so I look up. I don't know him. So I look, and then he like signals me to get off the train, so I just shake my head and now I put my head down. First thing, that is one of the scariest moments when a male is like, catcalling you or signaling you, and you are a person of trans experience anywhere under the trans umbrella. Because...you don't know if that no—like it could literally be as simple as a no. A no could...flip somebody off, and they just...are violent towards you and it's like a really scary situation cause it's like, "Do I go listen to what this person has to say?" Like, of course I'm not getting off the train, but like, if I'm walking down the street, do I stop to listen to what this person is gonna say? Because, if I keep walking, they may get violent towards me or they may try to follow me and not leave me alone. Or, if I do talk to this person, what if they didn't, you know, clock my tea, and then they clock my tea when I'm talking to them, and then they haul off and cut me or they haul off and hit me or beat me up or whatever or getting me jumped around. You never know! So somebody could be trying to set you up. So, he ended up getting on the train as soon as my train was about to pull off. He was not getting on my train before. He was waiting on another one. So he came and stood over me; I'm standing—I'm sitting in the corner and he's just—he's standing over me and I'm just like gagging. I'm like, "Oh my goodness, oh my goodness, I don't have service, I can't tell anybody to meet me, like at the station, so that we can walk together back to—back to the set. And I just literally was sweating bullets. And I was literally almost no makeup, just had like my eyebrows done a little light, like every day foundation and then I had my hair on, and I'm just sitting there, and I'm just like really nervous, because I'm only like 125 pounds; the wind could blow me over, and...this guy just was like he ke—he kept trying to talk to me. So I had my headphones in, I'm not talking to him, not talking to him, I'm just thinking, "Oh my god, he's gonna get off of this train; he's gonna follow me or he—or he's waiting until it's like not that many people around, so he can do something." So I'm like trying to text and I was finally able to text my producer and tell him what was going on and I'm like being very clear what I'm doing, like I want you to see the message so you can understand like, this isn't going how it's going, so there are so many situations that happen, and um, he ended up getting off the—like, the—off the train, the stop before I got off, because you know, a lot of trains will let you off in the same area that you're gonna be in, but I guess he really thought that I was gonna talk to him and and he was, he

was, he was high or something. But it was just a really nerve-racking experience, and even when I'm like leaving my house, sometimes, uh, I cross the street if it's like a huge group of guys; I think that's something all girls do, no matter what, and even some people that just don't like walking through groups of people. But for me and my experience and my perspective, I'm like walking through...this group of...toxicity. Like, mas-[laughter] toxic masculinity. And...if they clock my tea, if they don't clock my tea, it's gonna be a problem either way. But I'm not somebody that's out here trying to walk through life as passable as possible; that's not my goal; my goal is to just express myself. So I'm always expecting people to know and understand everything that's going on with my presentation and know what's going on with me. So I just expect the worst in a lot of situations. And I cross the street because I just don't have time, you know what I'm saying? Everything—everything I have on costs money. It could be two dollars.

Knight: [laughter]

Jones: It could be two dollars. But it costs money, and I'm not about to waste my time, energy, and coin on a situation that I can avoid. Is that fair to me? No, I shouldn't have to cross the street and cross back over when I get to the sidewalk, but I mean, it is what it is. And a lot of guys, like during the summertime, I'm walking down my block, whether I'm femme-presenting or butch-presenting; they cool, they speak either way. But you never know—it could be that one extra person there and it's like when the group is too big or it's too rowdy or you can tell they been drinking or doing whatever, I just don't have time, so it's still really scary, like, and then you hear the stories and you see the stories and you read the stories, like Malaysia. She was literally bet on, to beat up, and then, because the police didn't do their job because they didn't care, she was murdered a month later. So, you you—there are all these things that are going on in 2019 that people probably didn't think would still be happening, and um, that's one thing that I don't feel like has changed one bit. I don't think that that has gotten any better. I think that there are mm—I just think it's so much...corruptness when it comes to like the reports and when it comes to the media about it. We don't know half of the murders that have already happened. We really don't.

Knight: We don't.

Jones: We don't know how many people of trans—

Knight: It's just reported, right?

Jones: Yeah. It's just, if it's—it's reported and it's if the police report it to the media; see, I first interned at a um, civil hall—uh, civil, mm, not civil hall, city hall in Warrensville Heights, Ohio. And, what happens is, you have a communications director inside of city hall that is making calls to the local news station and local police departments, and it's like this back and forth, we're trying to figure out—the news agents are trying to call the uh, city halls and police departments to find out what's going on, city hall is calling the news people and networks to put out, uh, public statements, to let people know what's going on sometimes, so it's this back and forth thread that happens and if they are dealing with a murder or an assault that is dealing with a queer or trans

person, they have—like it's—they don't have the right, but they can literally not say anything about it, and they can do the paperwork, file it, and boom! That's it. It's been filed.

Knight: Wow.

Jones: That is not sealed. It's just been filed. And no one's asking and no one—a lot of times, you know, people may not have family that are supportive and they may not have a support system that is saying, "Where is this person? What's going on?" So we really have no idea at what rate this is really happening. We only have the people that are on social media that have a following, that have family, that have people that support them that are able to say something happened or something's wrong or this happened and it's not gonna go silent. We don't—we have no idea at what rate our people are really being murdered and assaulted and, and having all these hate crimes done because I am not—I'm too grown to believe—I've worked in news, I've worked in city hall, I know how it all works and functions; you can't tell me anything to make me believe that we understand what's really happening with our people; we don't.

Knight: Yeah. Well how do you feel about social media, right? Like you have a big platform; we have a big—big platform. I know that personally, it's hard for us to post the murders.

Jones: Mm-hmm.

Knight: Um, we would rather post success stories, and, you know, our people thriving, but we do wanna make sure that there's a good balance so people tune in; they're aware that these things are happening. Um, what are some things that you do on your platform to share and, you know, these stories, even if they're not, you know, happy, cause I think that we wanna show the good parts, right? But, how do you balance that, when these things happen?

Jones: Well, I'll say it is hard to share them, but I do. I...I don't share all of them because if I'm seeing that everybody in my social arena—and that's people that I follow, people that follow, people that I follow, people that follow me, um, if I see that like the majority is already talking about it, I more so make a statement about it, rather than necessarily posting exactly what happened because, I read this post the other day, and it's so true. Our minds are not equipped to handle all of the human trauma that we can see and hear now because of the Internet. Because of the Internet, we know when a group of people are murdered in...Taiwan. You know what I'm saying? Like we just literally would not know that if we didn't have the Internet and the media the way that it is. So, I don't—I don't want to, you know, add to the pain or the hurt, I do wanna add to the solution, so I always post about it; I may not necessarily post pictures or whatnot, but um, like when Nigel Shelby, when that happened, I—I posted a lot about that, because it was very deep to my heart, because it's just like...

Knight: Little black boy...yeah.

Jones: Little black boy, just trying to find himself, and was able to you know, do more than I think a lot of people were able to do when they were in school that are older than him, so, you know,

seeing the younger generation is a huge inspiration, I'm like, "Oh my god, yes," you know, kids can express themselves and be gender neutral and be trans and be themselves, be gay, be bi, be lesbians, and and just live life the same way heteronormative people and cisgender people walk through life and are able to develop and find themselves, and I have to wait until they're 30 or 40, so that is like a huge accomplishment and a huge inspiration to a lot of people in my community and to see that happen to him; it was just hard because it's like, is this all like, is it fake? Like is it not really what we're thinking it is? Are people just wanting to see us visible so that they can harm us, so that they can bully us, like, do they just wanna know so it's like, they can eradicate us? Like, it's just—it was mind-boggling to me. So I—I shared that one on everything, but, I just try to keep people aware of the violence that comes to our community, the hate crimes; I love sharing the success stories; I love sharing where we're getting more representation like *Pose*, and different makeup brands, and different companies really bringing us into their campaigns and the runways, and—so you know I'm big in fashion and media, so like those are normally the things that I'm invested in. So I really like sharing those accomplishments when people in our community are able and given the access and work hard because we're hard workers; we are the culture. When we're giving—when we're given that platform to basically own what's ours, and um—another thing that I do that I don't see a lot of other people do, but it's something that I wanna make sure that I'm currently developing so that when I get 30, I'm really abreast of what's going on in politics and world issues, is now I'm always reading somebody's scene. I was always reading like stuff, but I never read it to digest it; it was more so something happened, and I read it, and then I may like end up in another article here and another article there, and then it's like oh, well, okay, well I know how to surf the web. Great. But now I'm actually making sure that I'm active in reading what's going on in U.S. politics and Europe—uh, Europe's politics, and—cause a lot of—a lot of things happen in trends, so it was like something will happen here and then another happen over there, and some things—

Knight: It's all connected.

Jones: Yeah, so you have to know what's going on everywhere because sometimes you need to know what's coming your way, and I share a lot of like policies that are being drawn up; I share a lot of things that are being passed, like policies that have been passed, because a lot of—a lot of times people will travel to a state and not even know the laws in that state and get there and gag, and they're like, "No, I have the right to dadadada," and it's like, honestly, in this state, they've literally singled out queer people and said, "You cannot do that" or "We have the right to deny you here, here, here, and here," like the Bathroom Act. You have to understand what's going on in all of these different places because we don't live in a world where people stay in one space anymore, like peo-travel is way easier. Finding out what's going on and moving from point A to point B is way easier. So um, I like to share a lot of the informational things that, that, that our community is going through and dealing with when it comes to like politics and world issues. So that's kinda how I use my platform to try to keep people abreast of what's going on all around. Positive, negative, and policies, goodness gracious.

Knight: For sure. I'ma get off this; it's a little heavy, but I just wanted to ask about your family.

Jones: Mm-hmm.

Knight: When they hear about these things, do you share this information not just on your platform but with your family or are—is your family following you, and do they check in on you? Like do they ask you—ask like how you’re feeling? Cause I know my mom does that; she’s like baby, I know things are heavy right now. How are you actually feeling?

Jones: Yeah. When, when—it’s so crazy, when the Jussie Smollett thing happened, my mom called me; she was like, “How are you?” And uh, she kinda did that, the—the, uh, the “How are you feeling?” But um, being honest, no, when things happen in our community my family doe-doesn’t reach out; I think they just try to...I think...what they try to do sometimes is not necessarily ignore it, but put it to the side, because they don’t want that to be a reality because I think if they digest it as a reality then they have to constantly be afraid for me, which is not true—

Knight: Well you would think it’d make them want to do the work to help save people like you, but...

Jones: Right, right right. But again, it’s a lot of where I come from; I come from Cleveland, Ohio where they, they aren’t able to see that...everyone is regular, like—

Knight: Back to visibility, in in that area. Gotcha.

Jones: You know what I’m saying? They don’t have the visibility to, to see like, oh crap, this is happening to an entire community of people, not just this one trans person over here, this one trans person over there, this one gay male over here, they—they see it as very like situational, and they’re not understanding that, in other parts of the world literally like one and two hours outside of Cleveland, Ohio, there are huge communities of people that are living their lives, and, and and I think a lot of times a lot of families, uh no matter the race, they kinda put in their brains “Well, you know, we may not agree with everything, or we may understand that the LGBTQ+ community is...very diverse and dadadada, but, you’re our baby. You’re our baby, like you know what I’m saying? Like we don’t have to necessarily care about the rest of your community. We don’t have to accept the rest of your community. We don’t have to accept homosexuality. We don’t have to accept—accept transgender people. We don’t have to accept non-binary, genderfluid people, but we accept you, baby. We love you.” So, I’m not saying that that’s what my family does, but I feel like that’s how they’ve processed it whether they’ve known it or not. They kinda just look at me and they’re just like “Oh, well we love you,” but when things are happening in my community, I don’t—

Knight: It’s still their community!

Jones: Yeah! Uh yeah, yeah, I don’t think they understand how direct that could be to me, like honestly you’re just looking at me, but that girl could live right across the block from me, and because, it wasn’t me, you’re just trying to like “Oh man, that’s so sad that that happened, you

know, I'm—I'm gonna pray for that family or, or whatever, but I'm not gonna necessarily check in and see how Eddie's doing."

Knight: For sure.

Jones: So, you know, you get used to it though; I think a lot of queer people, I think we just—we just have that thicker skin, whereas like you know, a lot of things we're gonna have to deal with on our own, and that's why the-our community is so important to us because we kinda come together and build our own families and are able to kinda go through those hard times together.

Knight: Yeah. Community is very very important. And I'm grateful for people like you, you know. You help me grow so much because you know I'm on the opposite side of the spectrum. I've been navigating my masculinity the whole time I met you. So I've been stepping into this whole new realm; you've been stepping more into your femininity, so I've been watching you grow as well, but you've helped me be very conscious of my privilege and my manhood, right?

Jones: Mm-hmm.

Knight: And how I treat women and femmes. I can't say I love women and not give love to femmes. I have to be very inclusive, even with the way that I speak, because I am walking around as a black man. And I know that there are black men that are causing harm to my sisters in totality, so I have to be very cautious with how I navigate with my privilege, because people would just see male. They don't know trans men exist! You feel me? So—

Jones: That's the thing. I remember we were having our conversation before and I was like, "Wow, I never really thought about it in that way," like of course, you know...

Knight: Because think about advanced issues.

Jones: I thought about it but it's like I didn't really—

Knight: Yeah because think about all the events you go to right? Like Slay TV and it's-it's no shade to anybody, but it's just people pick who they are familiar with, right? When you are assigned male at birth, those type of people will congregate together. So in the queer community, it's very binary in the sense of like how you are assigned.

Jones: Mm-hmm.

Knight: So you see a lot of femmes, or femme-presenting humans around normally gay men.

Jones: Mm-hmm.

Knight: But they never include men of trans experience.

Jones: Right.

Knight: And then when I step into that space, then they're questioning everything like, "Well, why are you here?"

Jones: You're like—right, like "What are you doing here?"

Knight: And before I was looking like a man, they really were like, "Shook, like why are you in space?" So it's like, there's not even inclusion within the community, so I think that's something that I'm really honing in on, because, I'm—I deserve to be in that space. I'm a man. I deserve to be in that space. I deserve to be in every space that is for my queer people but it's very...separate. And it's unfortunate. But um...let's switch the subjects. I wanna talk about something that more, more, more light.

Jones: Yeah. I was gonna say yeah, the community is very segregated at times.

Knight: Yeah, I know. It is! Um, I mean, we can talk about that forever.

Jones: Sure can. [laughter]

Knight: But I would like to talk about something a little lighter, because I'm just happy that you exist, and that you're living-

Jones: Thank you!

Knight: -and that you're thriving, and all the work that you're doing; it—it resonates with so many people that may or may not identify as you do. And that's the—the brilliance of your work, right?

Jones: And that's the goal.

Knight: That's—it's it's a human experience. It's—it's a human journey. Like, people tune in because they might like makeup, or they might like your wigs, and they like your fashion, it doesn't—it's not because it has to have-

Jones: Wigs? I don't wear wigs.

Knight: Oh, I'm sorry—[laughter]

Jones: Naw, I'm just playing! [laughter] I'm just playing! I'm just playing!

Knight: [inaudible] I'm sorry!

Jones: I'm just playing!

Knight: Momma taught—my mom taught me not to say that, and I'd say that.

Jones: I'm just kidding!

Knight: Now, um, but you know, I think that's the beauty of it, when people start to tune in to people, cause they're just into that person, and they're not thinking about how you have sex and who you date and things of that nature. So I wanna know, five things you love about yourself, or five things that you want people to get from...you, like who is Eddie?

Jones: Okay. I love my, um, positive outlook on life. I'm all—I'm always a positive person, like, I'm just always a positive person; I always try to tell people, "Bad days are a choice." Um, literally everything that's thrown at you, you may not understand why it's happening, but by the end of the day you're gonna be like, "Oh, see, if that wouldn't have happened, I wouldn't have did this and I wouldn't have did that, and gotten that amazing opportunity, and ended up in the right space at the right time." So my positive outlook on life is one. My sense of humor is my second one because I love making people laugh; I'm a Virgo, so I'm a people pleaser, so I just love making everybody as happy as possible. Other things that I like about myself...I like my ability to love; I'm a very hard lover, like once you are a friend in my eyes, or someone that I'm, like dating exclusively, or family, or like if you go from friend, to being family, is—is my ability to love is crazy—I will always—I always look out for people before I-me, so like, we could be in this situation, and it'd be as simple as, we have three stops to make; I—and my stop is one of them; I don't care if we stop there first, second, last—I don't even care if we get to mine; I just wanna make sure everything happens in a way that everyone is happy. So um, that's my ability to love, and my last two are...my...two-spiritedness. I love that about myself. I love that I have the freedom within my gender to really ride the spectrum wherever I see fit, um sometimes I'm very androgynous and it's like, very Grace Jones about the situation. Other times I'm like hyper-femme, other times I'm butch. It's just—it's—it's fun to me one, and two, it's—it's really freeing to really just explore yourself as an entire being, like, I have all of these things in me, and I hone them...and it's like amazing—it's feels amazing and I just—I honestly feel bad for a lot of people that don't explore themselves in entirety. I think that's crazy. But um, let me see, and my ability to understand. I'm a very understanding person, like I'm very forgiving—now I'm not gonna say being forgiving is one of my favorite qualities about myself [laughter] because it's not. But being able to understand where people are coming from, being able to understand different perspectives, and communicate within those...different avenues, it's like once you can understand something, you literally have full power of your role in that situation, cause you get to choose if you're gonna deal with it, if you're not gonna deal with it, what needs to change, what you may need to change, is—is being able to understand things is amazing. And it's so funny, cause Kylie said a few—Kylie Jenner said a few years ago; it was like—I think it was like 2016; she was like, "This is like the year of like really understanding things," and I'm just like yeah girl! Yeah girl, it sure is! It's always the year to understand stuff, so—

Knight: Yeah! Every year! We're trying to understand, we're trying to grow, trying to elevate, right?

Jones: Every year. Every year.

Knight: So, with the world being so heavy, right? Let's—let's we, we, we putting the shade on that right now; what brings you the most joy? Like, what is joy, what does it look like, what does it smell like, what does it taste like, what are you wearing...what is joy, to you?

Jones: Joy to me is...complete transparency within our world. I feel like we used to be that way thousands and thousands of many thousands and thousands and thousands of years ago, history that isn't even documented anywhere, that's been erased because people wanted to be in power. But pure joy, for me, is complete transparency between every human being, being able to be completely be yourself, being able to go in a school and see queer teachers and Asian teachers and black teachers and heteronormative teachers and cisgender teach—just everywhere and on—on television, your newscaster, your weatherwoman, your librarian, your auntie, your uncle, and not having these family secrets and “Oh yeah, you know, your uncle is your uncle, but he used to be your—” like all of that, like I just—I cannot wait until our world is at a complete transparent moment and everybody can be as unapologetic as they freaking choose to be. They can be themselves and not have to apologize for any ounce of them. That is pure joy to me.

Knight: That is brilliant, and beautiful.

Jones: That's when I can walk around, and be like “[inaudible], y'all.” [laughter]

Knight: I wish—I wish for that day; I think that's what we're all working towards collectively. What is some advice that you would give to your younger self? You can even make it a Dear Eddie letter, if you want to. Really just talk to people that were like, you know, baby Eddie, and and and let them know that there is hope and there—there can be a future, cause we talked about Nigel Shelby, right? Like, talk to Nigel. Someone that is that young, who's free and who's—knows who they are, and they're...not able to be who they are because of their environment. Yeah.

Jones: Right. Um, what I would tell to—I'm sorry, um, a younger me or a younger person like me, is to trust yourself, first and foremost. Trust every feeling that you feel; don't feel like you're crazy, don't let people tell you that you're crazy, don't let people tell you that you gonna pray it away, don't let people tell you anything other than they love you. Trust yourself. Find yourself. Be open with people. One thing I would tell someone that was a younger me, if you have a loving family, which my family is very loving, they're very supportive, nobody in my family's ever treated me bad or negatively. If you have that type of situation in your life, please, please please open up to those people. Please allow those people to get to know you, because, it hurts on both ends when you are coming out to your family and they've gotten to know you for this side of you and then when you come out, it's like, they kinda feel like, “Well, dang, I didn't get to know the other side of you, like you held that from me without giving me a decision,” so if you have a family that's supportive—if you—if you have friends that are supportive, it would definitely be to open up to them as soon as you can, as soon as you feel comfortable, don't wait; as soon as you get the angst, just blurt it out, text it out, email it out, post it out. We have so many different platforms and avenues to share our thoughts and—and share who we are and share our

experiences. And I would say to use them, with discretion: you don't want to put yourself in harm's way, when it comes to bullying and violence and all of that, but if you have that support system, don't hide it from those people that love you. Another thing that I would tell them is to, you know, build that tough skin because everybody in the world isn't gonna love you and like you the way that your family, your friends do and that you love and like yourself. You should be loving them liking yourself, and, to really...explore yourselves younger. Don't wait until your 20s, don't wait until your 30s, don't wait until your 40s, because those are years that I won't say are wasted because you experienced, you lived, you laughed, you loved, hopefully, but you don't want to wake up one day and say, "I'm gonna be who I am," and, you—you have this conflict where it's like, "Well, dang, 30 years have gone past." It's just a type of regret that nobody wants to live with, and that you don't have to live with, I think, anymore because now we do have the Internet. We do have social media. You can find groups; you can find people; you can find the support. There's a lot more access for people like us. There's a lot more resources for people like us. It may not be perfect, we may be going through a lot of back and forths when it comes to policies and laws and this and that and the fit, but it's a whole lot of worlds of difference than what it was 10, 20, 30 years ago. So, please just start sooner, just be yourselves as quick as possible; as soon as you find yourself, be yourself, explore yourself, love yourself. That's what I would tell a younger person like me.

Knight: That was beautiful. Um...I would like you to take this moment to tell people about anything that's coming up that you would—

Jones: Oooh!

Knight: -like to share, you know, self-promo, do your thing.

Jones: Yes! A little soft plug. [laughter]

Knight: Yeah! Have fun, yeah.

Jones: All right, so again, you all, my name is Eddie Jarel Jonesx, with an x on the end; that is my branded name. Um, it's the same as my name, it's just the x on end cause I'm extra. Duh! Uh, and my social media on everything is eddiejareljones. That's e-d-d-i-e-j-a-r-e-l jones. Um, think that's, pretty regular. [laughter] But some things that I have going on and coming up, of course it's PRIDE season right now! So, I've gone to a few Prides; I've travelled to a few Prides; I've been able to, you know, make some great acquaintances and meet people and really find out about different things that are going on in different cities and what they're doing to progress and move forward, move their communities forward. But, right now, I have a World Pride 2019 collaboration out; it's a eyewear collaboration. It's sunglasses, so they are Pride sunglasses; they have World Pride 2019 inscribed on the inside of them, and then, they have Pride on the outside of them, which is a different type of transcription because like you can see through it; I don't know the exact term for it; it's in my email, but um, [laughter] you can like see Pride through the arm of the glasses, so that's a lot of fun, and that's a collaboration with King Children, all of my frames are available in the six different colors of our beautiful rainbow flag, and they also come with like different

lenses; you can get like mirrored lenses and stuff; they're available online and they'll be available in The Phluid Project in June, so that's exciting! And, as far as Pride and the things that are coming up, oh my goodness, it's things that I literally can't talk about that are like done, they've been filmed, they've been like literally...resting for like in limbo for like weeks now and I'm just like "Hurry up, hurry up, hurry up, put it out, put it out, put it out!" so I can share with my audience and share with my friends and family. Really excited about those things, but I am going to be at every single Pride event; I'm hosting damn near half of 'em, and that is a blessing; I've been working my butt off to really, really hustle in my industry and really make sure that somebody like me is seen on the stage, is seen in front of the camera, not just behind the camera, not just producing, making sure that we are on these red carpets and that, we are getting to ask the questions that we wanna ask, and getting our perspective out there in the media, and in mainstream media, because it's—it's beautiful that we have a—a queer media that is like really developing right now, but it's also just as important to infiltrate mainstream media because they—they need the information too, because we can't just be bossing ourselves up, and then hit the front lines, and they're still confused about what's going on. They need to know, this is what's happening, this is what's popping, this is what we're doing and we're here to stay. So um, really inserting myself in mainstream media this Pride season; I cannot wait. I am—what are things that I can say right now? I'm going to be...doing social for SLAYFEST, so that's coming up; I'm a part of that team, so SLAYFEST is really gonna be huge this year. Make sure you following us, and following me, so that you can really—cause I repost everything—that's gonna be a huge festival. I am booked for Westchester, but I'm trying to think promos that are out already. I am performing at Westchester Pride June 3rd, so you know, if this is up by then, that's this Sunday, I'll be there. I am performing at MOBIfest; that is June 15th, um, I am speaking at an event June 8th; it's called SpeakOut; it's at the Center for the LGBC—uh the LGBT center, in Manhattan. What else is already out that's going on?...I don't know! But I'm about to post this like little NYC Pride Tour like Eddie's Pride Tour, different events that I'll be speaking at, being at, appearing at, and hosting and MCing, so that, you know, people that support and that wanna know what's going on, and that wanna have a little bit of fun, and really enjoy this season and be around people and be in places that they can feel safe. I'll be sharing that with everyone. So, that's what's going on, so mainly if you follow me on my social media, you will know what's going on, but those are like the things I can remember off the top of my head, which is a lot.

Knight: Yes. And that's Eddie: E-d-d-i-e—

Jones: J-a-r-e-l-J—

Knight: Jones.

Jones: Jones. [laughter]

Knight: With an x on the end!

Jones: With the x on the end! Honestly once you type in my first and second name, you'll get me. [laughter] But um, yeah.

Knight: Oh, you fathered it. No-

Jones: You know, I try, I try.

Knight: I'm just so proud of you.

Jones: Thank you!

Knight: Like you, you came to New York, you had a plan, you are moving through your realm of authenticity; I feel like your like, you're you're there, like you are you, like the person that you always wanted to be you're you-

Jones: Yeah, I am. It's so much fun. [laughter]

Knight: -while, while doing so much work at the same time

Jones: It's a lot, man.

Knight: You are thriving.

Jones: It's a lot.

Knight: Like-

Jones: There are times though, there are times, that are very hard and uh um, I know a lot of people can attest to this and relate. It's a lot of-of mental work that goes into finding yourself and being yourself and being able to present yourself as you see yourself, like that is mentally debilitating right there because you're constantly breaking yourself down; you're constantly self-reflecting which, self-reflecting and being self-aware is a tough, tough tough cookie, sometimes, because you learn things about yourself that you may not like, and that-and that you wanna change, and sometimes those changes don't come as fast as you'd want them. And then, also balancing, you know, the pressures from the industry and the career field that you're in; that's also something that is super tough, and I have like really bad FOMO, like fear of missing out, when it come-not parties and stuff; I'll miss out on the party, I'll chill at home in a minute and get my wig ready and my-my wig outfit and makeup ready for the next day. But, when I like miss-when I feel like I missed out on like an event, even if it was just to go networking, I just feel like "Oh my god, I didn't meet the people that I wanted to meet or bump into the people I was hoping I was gonna see, and, you know, rekindle some relationships and some-and really nurture some business relationships and networking relationships. But, I've learned and you know, what's for you is gonna be for you, and as long as you're focused on all parts of what that is, it's gonna come to you, so, yeah, it's has been crazy.

Knight: I-I can fully agree, and this is a beautiful time to be trans, to be black, to thrive.

Jones: Mm-hmm.

Knight: Um, I wanna leave the people with one word that they can remember you by, if it's not your name. If it is your name, that's cool too. So Eddie is:

Jones: Unapologetic.

Knight: All right, well, thanks so much for this opportunity to talk to you, and sharing your voice.

Jones: Yeah, thank you for having me here! And having me speak!

Knight: Yes. This was brilliant. I appreciate you.

Jones: Thank you!

Knight: All right.