

NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

NOAH FOSTER

Interviewer: Sir Knight

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Sir Knight: Hello my name is Sir Knight and I'll be having a conversation with Noah Foster 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 experiences of trans identifying people. Today it is January 30th, 2020 and this is being recorded at the Brooklyn Community Pride Center. Black Trans TV has teamed up with the New York Public Library to ensure that black POC folks of trans gender non-conforming experiences are archived as well. Noah, we're so happy to have you here to share your story so let's start off by telling the people a little bit about you, where you come from and [inaudible.]

Noah Foster: Hey, I'm Noah. Um, my pronouns are they/them. I am 25, a leo sun sign. I'm from New Orleans originally, so I'm from the south and generally I consider myself an artsy person. I like art and design, that's like the things that really drive me and what I'm passionate about. I also love animals and random things [laughter] like that. So my early life, my childhood, it was I guess like I don't know, I won't say typical because what's really typical but I grew up adopted as I was a child, a baby. Me and my brother were twins, um so...

Knight: You were twins or you are twins?

Foster: We are twins [laughter.] Yes, I have a twin brother, his name is Chase. And so growing up, like things were pretty good for the most part um aside from being in the south was a little bit different, like being here in New York now it's like very culturally different but I enjoy it here more than there. But childhood, had my mom and dad raised us things were pretty well. Like we had it pretty good considering you know being black and in the south, of course there was times when I started to learn my sexuality was not straight and that started to like make a rift in our relationship, me and my mom we were really like — we've always been very close but in that moment, around like the age of 16 is when things started like, I started to like say that I was like bisexual, um and it was still like hard for her because she wouldn't really talk to me about it like face to face. She would just like send me voicemails or slip letters under my door. And you know, I maybe a bit of an outcast and I was also raised Catholic and I went to private, all girls school so all of that, you know hidden me and I'm not even sure what gender is, you know. Growing up you still think, "Oh it's just binary." Until I started watching things like YouTube, and then I started to learn like "Oh transgender is a thing too." I mean, it's still like a word that, not necessarily I go back and forth with but being non-binary is like a whole other thing, but at that time I was still like, "Ok, well that's maybe a thing but I just pushed it to the back of my head." And then as I you know, got to college, I went to an art school so I had a lot of opportunities to meet other queer people at least, when I was growing up I don't think I had that around me. Everybody around me was talking about boys and I was like—mmmm, ok well. I don't know if that's necessarily what I'm 100% here for so, that you know informed me of what one way of living could be but as I... Like I went to school in Savannah, Georgia and I mean it was still the south but it being an art school there was people from all over the world that went to that school so I encountered so many people, you know. And I feel like it was very much like a monolith that they wanted me to live in the south, or at least in that very religious black mentality. And I'm not trying to shit on it but like, we all know that it kind of just wants you to be this one way or this other way. So, then when I moved to New York things very much opened up my eyes, like just people walking down the street like being themselves, and you know... Of

course there's that in the south but I think there's a lot more fear in, in doing that because there is people that will say, call you names you know? Like it happened to me and I wasn't even super outwardly queer to what I knew in Savannah, and it was like what, I was just walking down the street and this person just said the F slur and I was like "Was that for me?" But I was the only one walking down the street so things like that but...

Knight: In terms of growing up in Savannah, Georgia you said. Did you ever see reflections...

Foster: No grew up in New Orleans

Knight: Oh, I'm sorry, New Orleans. Um, did you ever see a reflection of yourself? Like, did you ever see someone who you were like, "Wow that..."

Foster: I mean I did see a lot of I guess, I could frame it as studs or lesbian masculine people, but my mom would always make slight remarks like, "Oh I can tell that's not a man, looks at their neck, they don't have an adam's apple." Just things like that and I was like "What?" You know, I just think I remember we were at, we were like having dinner at a restaurant and she said something like that, about how she couldn't really tell if that waiter was like a man. So I just had like a negative viewpoint of these people and of course, I'm definitely have said some homophobic and transphobic things being that was my environment too. But here I am a trans, non-binary person so it was like, there's no excuse to unlearn too.

Knight: For sure, for sure. But I guess um in terms of community, you didn't find community out there at all?

Foster: Nah because it was more so just like, I guess you can have, you can feel out like "Ok this person might not be straight." But it necessarily wasn't like, I would go to uh queer and allies meeting. That wasn't until I went to college when I had my own freewill because I really felt like I was just living under my parents roof... And literally my mom would have like a monitor on our phones when she would be able to read—I don't know how much but she would be able to read things and that was how my identity, my sexuality came out not through me telling her but through her reading things and then she got upset and I was like, "Well you didn't make me feel like I could tell you." We were raised like so Christian Catholic it was like, it was never said it was negative to be queer but it was also just like I just knew that was on the back of everybody's minds. So, no I didn't have any community until I got to college.

Knight: So would you say that you felt peace and joy and freedom when you got to college that you never felt before?

Foster: Yea, a little bit. Mmhmm and then I also had a trans friend too like this trans girl she just walked up to me and started talking to me and we became friends for a while. I don't know where she is now but... That and she kind of saw me in a way that I didn't see myself to and it was like "Oh, okay so you see me as this other person?" Even tho I may not like, 100% see in me and I also started binding in college, although I was using my parents money but that was... I

just had to find my way to get it to another type of card and buy it and that was really affirming too.

Knight: Just describe binding, the process of binding.

Foster: Um, so... Really it was through YouTube that I discovered how it happens and I saw all these trans people, mostly white to be honest, but you know okay, wearing binders from like uh, underworks which I didn't really love but it's just to compress your chest if you're, if you have boobs or if you're assigned female at birth, whatever you want to call your stuff. Uh, and so it can be harmful if you don't do it right, of course. That's why I chose to get a binder, although it was still restricting cause it was like a whole torso binder it wasn't just like the top part so that was a whole thing but, it made me feel good cause like, I never saw myself with a flatter chest and it just gave me a little bit more of a masculine um, aesthetic that I liked so I kept that up, I still do.

Knight: And you said you met a friend when you were in college, um and she saw you, can you describe a little bit about how it feels to be seen? When you don't yet see yourself?

Foster: I knew like terms like, b-o-i, boi that I actually identify with now but I just, I would in my head I just thought it a person who was more androgynous and I was still trying to come into my aesthetic because when I was living with my family I had to wear what my mom bought me. I couldn't just like, oh let me go wear these baggier clothes or whatever. So when she like, would say things like, "Oh, you would look like such a cute boy," and things like that it was just like, wow, okay. [laughter] Uh, I think that is what I am. [laughter] So that progressed into I guess me like really questioning my gender because she was the person in my life at the time who was like not conforming to what was assigned to her at birth, and that was like, oh this is a possibility. And so that made me feel really good.

Knight: That's awesome. And I want to go back to family life, early childhood a little bit. So, you were raised in a household laid out like mom... that whole structure? Who's in the house with you?

Foster: Yea... my mom she's Creole and from New Orleans and my dad's a black man from Texas so you know a real southern house. My brother and I are twins—we're middle-class, you know my mom's a teacher, my dad, he was working for like a newspaper, things like that. So growing up we, we had a pretty nice life can't really lie things were pretty good. But wasn't until I guess like puberty and all this I don't it was like, things just started shifting around and you know, attitudes started coming out and lashing out and all you know—so many things happened to my childhood to honest like, there were moments when I was fearful because there was a time when my brother was I guess, doing drugs and things like you know just made him lash out more when he was coming down. So that affected me and there would be times when things would be broken in the house and that was like traumatic, you know? And sometimes I don't even be thinking about it, but it was like damn, okay. That is trauma, so in those moments I just felt really like, fearful and I don't know, I don't know what I'm supposed to do in this situation?

Knight: In terms of puberty, so you say you have a twin brother so how did it feel to be assigned female and birth while navigating and trying to figure out your body and yourself while having a brother, with I guess more of a presentation, a masculine presentation that you would desire like how did you feel?

Foster: Well actually, I mean at that time I wasn't really even thinking about it like I hadn't really come to that realization and I guess I wasn't exposed to like all the knowledge of like queer people and trans people so I really didn't even know that it was a thing to be queer, trans. I just knew gay and lesbian and everything else is like, very bad so they say. So, I mean growing up it wasn't so bad I mean, I was... I remember one time, this very random but it was like, my period may have come and I was like, "Oh there was blood in the toilet." And my brother, I told my brother, I told him and he was like, "What? [inaudible]" I don't know but that was just some random thing that I just remembered. But I mean I don't know I'm not, I wasn't envious or anything like that I just knew, okay this is what I have to go through I guess and... If I had the option at the time to maybe go on puberty blockers maybe I would have. But I also feel like being socialized the way I was as a "girl" quotes, like it does like inform you of the fucked shit that the opposite goes through too so I appreciate it. I'm not like upset.

Knight: In the terms of identity so you said that you weren't really questioning in early childhood, perse and you were just going through what is normal, right?

Foster: It was like, people would say, "Oh do you have a boyfriend?" and I would just be like, "Mmmm, no no no." And that would always be the question you know? But after awhile they would stop because I would always say no and it would just be things like that where's it's like I'm not telling you that I'm queer but I'm also not telling you that I'm straight.

Knight: Got you, got you. Dismissal of the question in the sense, yea.

Foster: I never really came out, like I never just said I'm [blegh] until I started identifying as trans and queer and nonbinary.

Knight: And when did that happen, when did the shift happen when you actually started to identify yourself.

Foster: Uhm, I would say probably like when I was 22 and I'm 25 now. So like, a few years ago really when more people would expose me to the knowledge of these words. I mean, trans I knew but it still didn't feel 100% me. And it's not to say that I need that label, but it does help finding other people like you who are with similar like understandings about gender so that's where that happened. It was here in New York, actually but...

Knight: Okay, and speaking about that so in terms of finding and identifying your gender and finding community, like talk about that a little bit.

Foster: Well when I was in college, like of course I did have queer and a trans friend and eventually I moved here and I lived with two gay men but they were all black. And being with them like it did open my eyes a little bit but you know, still the queer part was a little bit missing. And did go to Tinder and I would start dating around. Now I'm still identifying as like, uh did I say I was queer? I probably did say I was queer at that time but I was still using my old name and pronouns were still not the ones I use now so it was still like, questioning. But I found with, engaging with other people like I still exposed myself to more like, more opportunities of me like unlearning what I thought was in the past of like binary and realizing that you know, you can actually express yourself anyway and still use whatever pronouns and gender. And that's still something people struggle with nowadays but it's like, I'm constantly trying to tell like my brother, "Oh, you can't just assume what someone's gender is just because they dress this way." You know, or pronouns or anything it's just, you have to ask or just I don't know approach it in not so gendered way. So trying to find community was just really like, virtual honestly. Instagram is like *the* way, especially nowadays but back then it was very much like my only way. Going to parties, queer centered, black, poc parties, things like that helped me out too.

Knight: And then how have you found community online? Cause I know that you say, you say instagram. Did you ever go to YouTube, I know a lot of people say they found resources through YouTube...

Foster: I mean YouTube I did as far as like, knowledge of you know safe binding practices or I don't know how to make your facial hair more prominent with makeup or something like that, you know? But I felt like it's very, very, very mainstream on YouTube and I feel like Instagram is a little bit more, you can be a little bit more like social and interact with people like one-on-one, whereas YouTube it's like millions of people see those videos or thousands and I don't know. I feel like, me I love Instagram and I always have so it's just my go-to app always. So with, also using hashtags now that people follow hashtags that helps me too, and I realize that people follow them and and follow me and I don't know them at all but it's like, "Okay, I guess you can really fuck with what I'm saying," you know? So that, that's a big part for me.

Knight: Yea, um and in terms of your identity, how does being trans, non-binary um relate to other aspects of your identity? Is it the most important aspect of your identity, what would you think you know, about the intersectionality of being black and being trans, so you know talk a little bit more about that.

Foster: Um, I mean also, I am half-white so there is another aspect of it to just like, not feeling black enough sometimes, not feeling trans enough sometimes and it's like, at the end of the day I just know that I really think that like, you have to look at the person as a whole being and not just like, "I'm this one entity." And I know a lot of times we do focus on our transness, but you know it's important like you said for people to see us as human beings that fall and get cut and bleed and have joy in life and not just turmoil, you know? And obviously being black has that part too of like, okay it's constantly like feeling like I'm down about something but, you know having to remind myself that this life experience isn't all negative.

Knight: And how would you say that your understanding of gender or sexuality has shifted since living in New Orleans to now in New York City?

Foster: [laughs] Oh definitely different, like I said I thought it was just like you were gay or lesbian because that's all that I really heard. And it was all negative, so to live in a place where it's not seen as something negative, to date people who you know see you, like truly see you and use your pronouns and not trip over it or call your genitals what you call them not what they think it is or just, anything you know? Like standing up for you when you get misgendered or something and maybe you just feel uncomfortable and don't want to do it. You know, things like that where it's like... When I'm back home, I feel disconnected a bit cause it's like, I love this place cause I wanted to experience what else is out there, you know? And I don't know if I would've stayed there what my ideas would be like but I also do know because my brother has lived there for most of his life and we talk all the time and there's disconnects all the time. Like I always have to reign him in like, "But you can't say that," or "maybe you should try to say this." So I know that I'm grateful to live here and that, yea...

Knight: And what do you love the most about New York City?

Foster: Um, I love the most about it—that there's just so many people with so many like, ideas and like, brainpower and just like, artistry and I just love connecting with people, being a leo, like I do love that part of just like, I feel like I can just stand around and someone can just walk up to me and start talking to me like that literally just happened the other day. I was just standing outside and this woman just started having this full blown conversation with me and I'm just like, "Okay, I'll just continue to talk you know. I don't know you, I don't know your name, but cool." And I just like connecting with people so this is definitely one of the places to be.

Knight: What's the hardest thing about living in New York City?

Foster: Uhh... [laughter] Let me see, there's a list. Like, rent? [Laughs] No, but I think the hardest thing is just like, for me, the hardest thing is like, I do have to get over my fear of like going out into public, even though I love connecting with people it's like, I do curate where I go because I don't wanna like, I just don't wanna be in a situation where it's like, all these people are assuming what I am and that's not who I am. And so I do find myself trying to go into places that I don't normally go to, you know? Just to go out because I don't want to be in queer spaces only, like there's life outside of our bubbles. But I do yea, I have that anxiety of going outside sometimes.

Knight: What comes with that anxiety or what comes from that, like why are you so anxious?

Foster: I think being on T has shifted like obviously the way people treat me and how people interact with me and being non-binary is like a whole other thing about it's like, well I'm not a guy but oftentimes people do see me that way so then they'll not hold the door open for me or not hand me my bags when I'm checking out or you know, I'll thanks and they won't even say anything back or just things like that and it's like, damn. But you don't even know me, you know? So I don't know, just socializing. But that's why I appreciate having queer people in my life to like, remind that I'm not what other people say I am.

Knight: Sure, sure. So who do you hang with? What community have you built while being out here?

Foster: I mean, I find a lot of the community that I hang out with is like people that I either have connected with one-on-one just through like mutual friends or events that we go to. Or there's like something like sit down conversations or you go to a party. Um, and there's reconnecting on Instagram that's like the other way to like really like, for me to reign in the friendship and then if we keep communicating on Instagram it eventually will turn into, "Okay let's hang out at this party," or "Let's hang out and do that," you know, not just parties but...

Knight: Well speaking of parties, where do you party? Who do you party with or anybody you wanna shout out say, I love these parties, these are great parties to go to in New York City cause we want people to listen to this and if they do visit, that they know who do to reach out to on Instagram or stuff like that so, yea...

Foster: Well, Joy Day Party of course, um. I do, uh... let's see, really Joy Day Party. I mean, there's [inaudible but check 22:40] always has events there so that's like a great place to go to for black and poc specifically and, a lot of times there's really—oh there is a new party coming out, a ratchett realm which [inaudible], you know. Uh so things like that I haven't been but I'm going to the next one that's coming up so... catch me there. [laughter] But yea... I kinda really just find a lot of things on instagram, or just by word by mouth

Knight: How do you see yourself in this moment in increase of trans visibility. You said there's a lot more events and parties to go to here in New York, how do you see yourself fitting within that, you know, this extra visible bubble that we have, especially in New York City, where do you fit? Where's Noah?

Foster: Where do I fit? Um...

Knight: Like what work are you doing to help other people be visible? Or like how you engage with folks?

Foster: Yea I do, I do find that my page is probably becoming more like, an advocacy or ... I don't want to say activist but like I do advocate a lot for trans people and black trans people on my instagram. So I'm thinking really deeply about just having it be that, and also like the graphic design that I'm doing with my career like it's, it's kind of more so getting towards like a more radical activist standpoint of like infographics that explain things about just like social justice and things like that but in a way that's digestible. So like that, that's kind of where my personal work is going to, just like advocacy and activism. And I really fuck with that, just being like with trans visibility there's still endless crimes and murders happening so it's still important for people to talk about things because it has been said doesn't mean it can't be said again.

Knight: In terms of activist work, how do you propose that we... I guess continue to say the names of you know the women that have been murdered, the people that have been murdered, um that are in our communities. What, what is some things that you know, you think we can do to better promote that their lives don't go in vain?

Foster: Yea, I think... I like what the Marsha P. Johnson project does and how they have like, curated their page where it has pictures of the women...

Knight: The institute?

Foster: Yea, um the institute. Um yea I think things like that would help like really where to people can just like share it and not have to type it out every time because that can be emotionally exhausting and just like physically, because it's happening rapidly unfortunately. Like I do feel that having pages dedicated to, you know not just the downsides of what could happen but the upsides of being visibly trans.

Knight: So you mention Marsha P. Johnson Institute and other pages that you are, you know I guess, have an affinity towards on instagram?

Foster: Um, there is like Salty World I appreciate like that they have stories written by people who are writing like, you know if you're reading a story about a queer trans person, a queer trans person is writing it, or just like anything. I also appreciate, there's a page called ThemsHealth that is like basically saying fuck the binary, we're just going to talk about your health, we're not going to have it in this very gendered way talking about genitals and just bodies and all that, so I like pages like that that are advocating for like, reframing the way we talk about bodies.

Knight: Did you ever see yourself become an activist?

Foster: No, but I mean, I don't know if I would necessarily call myself an activist but I do think that I like to stand up for people like me and if that is what it comes to then so be it, you know? I do like to talk so there's that part.

Knight: Do you feel like it's our responsibility as people of experience to do work to advocate for ourselves or do you feel like people that aren't like us need to do..

Foster: I think it's both, you know, because to be a human being, to want good for humanity is just for all people regardless. I mean, now it's not to say that there should be like a [laughs] white, cishet pride celebration, I mean you have the world in your hands but you know, just advocating for people who don't have as much as you and like understanding that we're not saying that you're just a bad person but like you have to understand there's shit that we don't even have. Like, it's called equity and so before you get on your, you know, soap box about what's unfair, you just think about it. I literally, this is a whole other side topic but, I was on my way to Philly during the end of November which I won't call "giving." But anyway, um [laughs] I was on my way and I ran late so I had to get the next bus and I sat next to this white man and

at first it was good, you know? We're just chilling. It's a packed bus, there's probably like maybe a seat or two open and it's cold so I have this big ass coat and he just starts nudging me in my side and I just like kind of ignore it because I'm like, "Whatever I guess he's just adjusting." But it just goes on and on and on and he starts saying it's unfair, and like why, can't you move or like, I don't have any room and it's like dude, you're on the outside of this. You're manspreading and I'm up against the wall so it's just like shit like that where I don't even really know if this is because I'm black or it's because or it's because I'm a queer, I don't know. But it's like this, that shouldn't even be happening. A whole other white person switched their seat with him and apologized on his behalf because it was that fucked up. Like people were looking and everything, it was loud. He was saying, "What the fuck!" Like it was just insane.

Knight: Do you feel like that happens often to you?

Foster: Not to me, but it was weird and it was so... What was even more weird was that I knew it was going to be some weird shit and I recorded it. Like the audio, I recorded it because I just knew that this man was going to say something. And then he acted like nothing was wrong like he just switched a seat and he was just chilling. And then he got off before I did, like why was that?

Knight: I'm sorry that you had to deal with that but I knew that a lot people, that's why there's anxiety towards stepping outside because of things like that, right?

Foster: And this is like really close encounters, you know? We're sitting next to each other and he's arguing with me and I can't move.

Knight: And that energy stays with you, yea.

Foster: And the person in front of me is telling me I should just move over there, like trying to make it better but I'm like, "I'm not moving. I'm not moving, I'm black, I'm here, I'm not moving." So no, he moved.

Knight: Yea, and systematically what are like some trans issues and policies that you feel need to shift to make the world a better place for people like us?

Foster: Well, definitely bathrooms because that's still something I'm struggling with navigating. Like, I've used the men's room, I can count it, the number on one hand cause I don't like going into restrooms anymore out in public unless they're just neutral. Me personally, and that's something that people don't get if they're not trans or queer. Because they're just like, "Oh, what? You know, you gotta go, you gotta go." But, it's like if I go up in there somebody confronts me with anger or confusion it can go from zero to a hundred and all I had to do was pee, you know what I'm saying? Things like that or how South Dakota just passed a bill about trans kids not being able to access HRT and blockers. It's like, well that's clearly an attack cause I mean if there's no health risks why, why is that you know? Things like that you know, human rights. I should be able to do what I want with my body without it causing me harm. If it's not

causing me harm, why can't I do it? Abortion laws, all those things, you know? Very much related to trans people too.

Knight: Can you talk more about how that is because I think a lot of times people don't understand how abortion laws directly affect people like us.

Foster: Yea well, I mean when you are assigned a certain thing at birth or even if you're intersex let's talk about that too. Like having a uterus, being able to have a child, whether you're a trans man or nonbinary person, agender what have you, like it still affects trans people regardless. Period. Queer people and so when abortion are in tact and they say you can't it's like well, what if there's instances where I do have sex with somebody that I love but I can't get an abortion because there's all this gendered, also there's this gender binary into it too and it makes you feel like maybe you don't even want to go to this facility because they're going to completely misgender you. Or just, just also human rights again, you know? So that ,that's something that people to just like unlearn with like the period thing too of just like, this quote-on-quote female symbol is actually was referencing botany, it wasn't actually people so... Like that's not representative of what a person is like, you're womanhood isn't a female symbol.

Knight: What are some of the biggest challenges you've had of being yourself?

Foster: Um, I guess just constantly having to remind people who I am and not allowing it to go by just like, oh okay they messed up that one time. Alright, cool I'll just let it slide. No, like you have to advocate for yourself because that goes to other people too. Like if I don't tell you that my pronouns are they/them and that I'm nonbinary and I'm trans and you misgender me you're also going to misgender my friends and people you don't know, especially. So I don't want that you know, to be the situation. So that, that's the thing for me of just constantly having to like reign people in. But I don't mind it cause at least I'm helping out the next person.

Knight: What are some tactics that you've learned to denote, "Hey, my pronouns are they/them." Do you just out the gate say, "My name's Noah, my pronouns they/them." Or do you wear pins or buttons or what is some advice that you'd give to someone else?

Foster: Yea, I mean you know if you want to be more subtle you could just wear your pin or just tell people who are your closest friends, these are my pronouns. Um, I'm trying to start doing that more just saying "Hey, my name is Noah I use they/them pronouns." I have it in my email signature and my bio on instagram and my website, across the board so like you shouldn't forget but if you do, yea I'll tell you again. I used to wear pins a lot but now I just don't like how it looks aesthetically for every outfit so yea. I also don't want holes in all my shirts so there's that too, but...

Knight: Have you ever been discriminated against because you are nonbinary? And if so can you describe the time or the times this has happened?

Foster: I mean, that moment with that man on the bus is really unclear what that situation was about so I do feel like there was some kind of misogyny, black, anti-black something going on

like, transphobia, queerphobia, I don't know all that going on and maybe, just in moments of like me telling people who I am and they just like, looking at me very confused. Or even just strangers looking at me perplexed, like "Oh never seen a queer before?" Like you know, it's like damn I didn't even tell you who I am but why do you... is it the highlighter on my cheeks and the mustache that's throwing you off? I don't get it you know? So it just, it's very subtle instances I can't really say that there has been a very specific moment and I also realize that I've avoided traveling like via plane because of the TSA and that's going to be happening soon and I'm just like, shit.

Knight: What fears do you have when traveling?

Foster: I mean, I didn't even know that they had the buttons up until maybe last year. I didn't know that they press a button and it was like, pink or blue and from there they have whoever come up to you and pat you down. And I also think like damn, that I've had moments when they do that to me often and also when they just check my bag randomly and I never even thought that that's maybe the reason but now I do because like uh, all my shit says F and my deadname but here I am with uh you know, a goatee and mustache and shit like that. So it's like I think that's probably the moments when I was being interrogated for being me?

Knight: So what do you do to cope with that anxiety you have with going outside, and if you're in the house what do you do...

Foster: I mean I try to go out with friends at that very least or really just channel my inner Beyonce and just blast my in my ears and just not fucking care about everything else that's going on. I try to zone out, like that's that's what I try to do because there's goods and plus, pros and cons to New York and one pro is a lot of the times people mind their business so like, that's nice too. So I can just be in the corner of the train just jamming out and no one cares.

Knight: Do you often feel like you have to choose between expressing your gender identity and safety? Do you feel like sometimes you have to adhere to like being more masculine in certain spaces and places, around certain people or...

Foster: Yea, I do feel like when I'm with certain people to, it's like when I'm with someone who is much more feminine than I am it's like people assume that I am "the guy," I'm "the dude" I'm the, the boyfriend or something and it's like, well actually I'm very feminine too so that's not necessarily you know my dynamic. And even when I was like, at the time I was identifying as a lesbian I still felt that way like even the slightest more masculine person is with even the slightest more feminine person people just assume, "Oh they're together" or "that's gay" or something and it's like, no. So I do but I'm also learning to not give a fuck as much as I can to just like me and not try to change up who I am or the way I interact with people just because I look this way. Like there is a moment during the end of November where someone's family member, a dude, came up to me and he was bout to shake my hand and I went for a hug. And it's like things like that where oh I don't care like that's what I do I'm not just going to like shake every dude's hand because that's what "dudes do" in quotes because that's not just... So I haven't really been trying to change up who I am. And I advocate for other people to do the

same too cause code switching is also very testy. Also being black and code switching in workspaces.

Knight: So how would you identify your masculinity and your femininity? Is it 50/50s [inaudible]

Foster: Yea I think it's about a 50/50, yea.

Knight: So you just embrace both energies?

Foster: Mhmm, yea.

Knight: That's beautiful. So I'm going to go back to your work, your job um cause that brings you joy. So speak more about being a graphic designer, how you got into that and things of that nature.

Foster: Well when I was growing up, um I realized I could draw so I thought that that was what I was going to do for my whole life, just like be an artist. I mean I still identify as an artist, designer but drawing itself I don't really do hand drawings as much as I did back then. So when I went to college I initially thought I was going to be an illustrator and then I saw what my best friend was doing. And he was doing graphic design, more computer things and I do like technology too so I thought that would be cool to combine like the artistry and then the technology in graphic design. Because graphic design, it is design but it can also be art too so I just like the combinations of it all. And so I just started like, you learning more about typography and just like logo design and all the basics of graphic design when I was at SCAD. Oh I guess I just name dropped. [Laughs] It doesn't matter, ok and uh, so when I moved to New York I really loved the street art aspects of it a lot and so that really made me feel more like, "Oh this is a great place for me to live." And so I started, you know, finding more art and designs friends and people like me. Maybe people who are also queer and trans, you know? And that, that's great too because we can connect on many levels, so.

Knight: And, what would you say is one of the I guess most interesting projects that you've worked on in terms of graphic design?

Foster: Um, well I just recently like I guess around fall of last year was in contact with a group called the "Radical Communicators Network." RadCoNs for short. Um it's run by Chanel, I can't remember her last name but forgive me. Chanel, and she does amazing work with activism and it's global actually so like for me to have done an infographic for her was like really nice also because she is black and queer too, so all of that was like very so like, "Okay, this is like my calling, to be a designer." And to also do the work that I did so I can continue to activate, I mean to be an activist for anything like not just queer and trans people but you know, like food politics or anything that relates... I think everything is interconnected, truthfully so if you want to talk about one thing you really have to talk about all the other things that lead up to it and what comes after that too.

Knight: For sure, for sure. And when you speak about community in New York, right? Um think about how it's interconnected in terms of your work. So you had naturally rode into activism even tho you wouldn't say that you are an activist, but naturally just being who you are is a revolutionary act, right? The work you do, finding your purpose, living authentically, you being able to build a community, now you're like how can I work with you. You think it's important for us together so we can branch out beyond this little bubble of, you know what I mean? I think that's super important so I'm that you're to do that. I'm going to switch courses a little bit and talk about healthcare and if you are choosing to medically transition what that means to you, what that doesn't mean to you and things of that nature. So um, basically I want to ask you your experiences with healthcare here in New York City.

Foster: Yea. Um, my experiences have been pretty positive. Um, I go to APICHA so they already have their like understandings of trans people, impact, intact. So going there they already know my pronouns. Like we had to go to this orientation sort of thing where they just tell you what this comes with and like what you can expect and what your healthcare providers and things like that. So I gave them my name, you know. Not just what's on my birth certificate which is like most of the time that's what it is at any other doctor. And pronouns and just like gender identity and things like that I felt really comfortable sharing my intimate experiences with my doctor cause she's not going to judge me or anything like that it's just simple things like, or even just having to get my genitals looked at that doesn't make me feel as uncomfortable as if I were, in the south let's say cause this space is already very much heavily filled with women and so it just already puts this taste in my mouth like, "Shit this is how they're going to treat me too." And getting T was actually so much simpler then what I thought it was, I don't know what I thought it was.

Knight: And what was through that process?

Foster: I just, I mean it was a long time coming for me to realize that I wanted to start T, but when I did I went, I scheduled an appointment... or maybe I even had an appointment. I just talked to my doctor about it. And then she just gave me this waiver and I went out to the lobby and I looked and I read it and I checked everything off. And I find it and then I got my testosterone! Like maybe the next week or so like they had to teach my how to administer the shot, um which obviously like woooooo [laughter.] But luckily, you know at this point I'm ten months on T so I understand how like, what to do with my body and how to ease myself over that anxiety of "Oh I'm about to do my shot." But the healthcare part like, it's been really good to me to be honest.

Knight: That's awesome I mean cause not everyone has the same experience so it's a blessing indeed. I actually go to APICHA as well. Um so, I want to know five things you love about yourself, I know we focus a lot on the activism and the things you do for work but tell us more about Noah. What does Noah love about themselves?

Foster: Um, well I've started taking more selfies even tho that's just a leo thing but I love the changes that are coming with my body and like how I'm just constantly evolving. Um cause I just looked at myself one month on T like today and I was like, "Wow I look a little bit different,

and my voice was different, like much different.” Um, I’m a kind person, like a genuine person. Like I am loyal as hell, like if I’m not then you really must’ve really fucked me over. But I’m generally like just a really kindhearted person, like always hold you down. Like you know, I’m just like a very happy-go-lucky person but I haven’t always been this way. Like when I was growing up during those times of like my mom not seeing me or not wanting to see me, I did cut myself and there was moments where you know, self-hate was a very big part of my life and now I don’t feel as bad. I have my moments but it’s not nearly as what it was then so I’m just trying to like reign in this sun energy. You know what I’m saying? So just not trying to be in negative headspace, despite everything that’s happening in the world. But just remembering that there’s people that love me and like me for me, and that’s important.

Knight: Um, what is some things that you do to love yourself?

Foster: Um, I enjoy smoking weed, I do. Um, listening to the same five albums on repeat probably.

Knight: What albums are those?

Foster: Well I really like Tinashe’s new album, although I can’t remember the name of it. [Laughter] Um, I know Feelings is the first song. But um, I really do love Beyonce, I like most [inaudible] probably. Alicia Keys, I love Alicia Keys. And just a lot of 90’s R&B and just various soulful, soul and funk jazz albums, you know? And just, I just enjoy like being around like-minded people and it’s just an understood, we’re just like chillin like we don’t even have to go anywhere, we can be like having good energy conversations and that’s good for me, you know? So that’s...

Knight: That’s how you love yourself, awesome. Um, if wanted people to hear one thing from you while listening to this audio, what would it be?

Foster: To live authentically and to not allow other people’s opinions whether it is good in their mind or negative in your mind, like despite what their intentions are like, just know that you have to live your life for you and it doesn’t matter what other people think, you know? Like there are times when I remember I would like, I would start adventuring into makeup and I would up to somebody and be like, “Oh what do think about this?” But end of the day, I can’t do that because that’s not going to give me affirmations. Especially if that person doesn’t see me how I see myself. Like, “Oh I don’t think lipgloss would look good on you.” But it’s like, uh well I’m going to do it anyway, you know what I’m saying? Like that also fuels my fire, my leo fire like, “Well if you think I’m not going to do it I’m just going to do it.”

Knight: And I want to backtrack a little bit to the relationship with your mom. I don’t remember you speaking much about your dad, if you’re comfortable?

Foster: Yea, I mean it’s just like naturally when you grow up and you’re socialized as a girl to, for me, it was to just go to my mom for everything so I just would go to her for everything. My dad has always been in the picture we just don’t really, like we really don’t ever talk about queer

trans issues at all like, he met my trans friend in college and of course I had to give them the whole spiel of like, "She's a girl, she/her pronouns what have you etc." and they were, at that time they were more accepting of things because I mean, my brother is also gay so there's that too. It's just like well, what are you going to do? Are you going to accept both of us? I mean you adopted us, you know what I'm saying? That's, that's a whole other thing it's like... So just having to reign that in.

Knight: In terms of identity, I didn't realize that you were adopted. So this opens up a whole other portal so, discovering you were adopted how did that happen? When did that happen for you?

Foster: Um it was like, me and my brother we were about six or seven or so and it was just like a movie came on and a person was adopted and my brother was like, "Oh, are we adopted?" [Laughs] But it was just a random thing that I guess didn't, you know my parents didn't think that was going to happen and they just said, "We'll have a conversation." And then I guess they told us we were adopted and then later on they told us that we were half white and they showed us all these pictures of our birth mom, she's no longer alive. But um, and then they showed us a picture of our older sister who's a year older than us and she's also mixed and then we have a set of twin sisters who are younger than us, they are all white. Um, so learning all of that information, of course that's very much eye opening like, wow. And that makes me, it made me realize okay, there are things about me that make me different from my other black friends. And sometimes I'll be like, "Why are they picking on me? Or why are they saying weird things about me? Like white, you're white blah blah blah." But it's like, what the hell? I'm not white. It would just be some silly shit like that where it's just like oh okay, you really wanna point out my differences here?

Knight: And your relationship with your, you just refer to them as your parents, right? So um, your mom, how's your relationship with her? Do you often go back to visit or how's that?

Foster: Um, like I used to go back when I was in college I would go back everytime we had the holiday break. Um, being here you know it's a little bit further away I would try to go back for the holidays but it depends on if like if I'm in a relationship and if I go with that person and their family or whatever. But I haven't been since last year, but I do plan on going this spring. Um and my mom and I, we have a really good relationship but I've come to realized that she's still really a work in progress because I know that I, I tell her like my pronouns and my name and there's always moments where she slips up. And I'm not mad, I just would liker her to do it less, you know? [Laughter] But not being around her, I know it's a part that it makes it a little bit more difficult for her to really like reign it in but she also hasn't seen me with all this facial hair and all the changes that came with T so there's too. Because like I've said I haven't seen her since last year, in person so...

Knight: And how do you cope with that? Like how does that make you feel? Are you okay with not having her in such a long time?

Foster: Oh, I mean of course I would like to see her more but I'm okay with it because you know, it's just like a love hate thing with going to New Orleans. Like yes, I love it, it's a great place to be. Food, music, everything. But there's all these people in my past, you know who still want to call me things I don't identify with and it's like, but I don't want to hide myself from them. It's just like, I have to be that person who's like, "This is who I am."

Knight: And I know you spoke a little bit about, uh the possibility of seeing, seeing someone and then going to their parents or their family and stuff for the holidays. Um, how are you navigating um, relationships, romantic relationships today?

Foster: Well, I'm currently in a relationship with someone new and things are going pretty good, can't lie. They're also trans, black. So it's like that whole thing of like, you already get me in a way. Like I don't have to explain my pronouns, we use the same pronouns. You know what I'm saying? Uh, it's just cute, you know? But navigating dating has been interesting being nonbinary because a lot of times it's very binary. And Tinder perse, like you still have to choose whether you want men or women to see you, but it's like that's not even how I identify. So that doesn't even make sense whether you even give me the option to put nonbinary is just one step. So I found that there's actually an app called Lex, Lex app. And it's a dating app specifically for queer, trans, nonbinary etcetra people. And it's very much flourishing in New York and that's the app where I found this person, so.

Knight: Success!

Foster: Name drop again! [Laughter] So navigating dating has been interesting but luckily it has not been negative. I've tried Grindr for a little bit and that was weird, so I'm not doing that again. Oh god.

Knight: I hear you. But in terms of the community, I think oftentimes people that are not in community they see is either lesbian or gay, right? So to be someone who is transgender, or nonbinary right? How would you say you fit in? Like, do you feel like you fit in? I personally don't feel like I fit in all the time because being straight and being in a community, it doesn't really align. So, um how would you say you identify and even as a person just of experience? How how do you feel when you're in community? Do you feel like you're actually with community, I guess?

Foster: Um, sometimes. Like there are moments where I have conversations with some queer people and it's like, [sighs.] Male privilege is the thing but, it's almost like when you start identifying as like transmasculine or even something generally like "I'm on T" and people approach me as I'm masculine. It's like, sure yea there is a privilege in it but it's almost as like, I have so much other shit that I have to navigate, it sure doesn't feel like a privilege to me. So it's like that where I really disconnect from some people cause it's like I don't, I don't want you think that oh, just because I present this way then that's just my entire identity and I'm not going to say that doesn't grant me privileges because it does, I'm not using it. I'm that sure I'm not but I understand, you know. So that's why I try to get going to spaces that are specifically queer, black, trans centered because if it's not it's going to be some like, all womens or all lesbians and

it's like, that's y'all even get what the binary is? Like, you're living it you think that's the only way there is to live.

Knight: Yea, I found that to be a very interesting, how community is super binary often. It's like, we're here for the women, we're here for the men and then everyone else or, or if you are assumed to be a man, a cis-passing man in a queer space and we don't want you here because you're violating our territory. And it's like, hold up, wait I'm trans masc. But then people don't ask the right questions, it's like how do you even go about asking those questions because I haven't even figured that part out. But it's like a weird space to be in when the community that once saw you as one of them, you no longer reflect who they want you to be.

Foster: And then it makes you think, "Oh should I start wearing different things? Should I presenting differently? Like are you going to see me then? Am I not androgynous enough to be nonbinary, like what? You know?"

Knight: And have you encountered that a lot? Like people wanting you to reflect both masculinity and femininity at the same in order to quantify what is nonbinary?

Foster: No but I felt like it was implied. Like, oh why are you wearing that? Oh why don't you wear this instead? Oh, you just things like that. Or oh why did you get your haircut? What? Like it's just, all these things is just very much so why the construct of gender is just bullshit because it makes people feel like literally... I just remembered when I was in college there was a friend of mine who was like questioning why I wore panties because I identified as a stud lesbian. And I'm like, that is problematic. And that's just the one of the reasons why it's just bullshit, but.

Knight: Do you find power in accessories, like makeup and jewelry and clothing?

Foster: I do, because ironically I never really wore it when I was growing up because in my head I think a lot of times when you start saying I'm not that, I'm this then you just have to go full-force and I have to be so masculine I can't wear any makeup I can't do anything like that. I can't wear dresses, I can't wear accessories that are dangly or glittery or just, and that was my mindset for awhile. And then I just had to realize well I do like these things and just because someone said I can't do it doesn't mean that I can't. Like I'm going to go and buy this lip gloss that somebody told me I couldn't because I want to, like. But a lot of times it's like why are you in a space where people would accept that too and that's a big part why being in New York, of course I'm privileged, I am able to just be me most of the time and not feel like people are going to bother me.

Knight: So you're happy to be here in New York? And you found community, you're finding love with other people through the app, Lex. We'll drop that again for y'all, Lex is the app. And I don't, I don't use apps but I'm all for everybody utilizing apps. Um, is there anything else that you wanted to add to your story you feel like we skipped? Or, you just want to sprinkle it in there you know.

Foster: I mean, top surgery is one thing that I do want and...

Knight: Okay, you wanna talk about that process of getting to the point where you know you definitely wanted to do it?

Foster: Yea, well that's the thing that I've always known I wanted and just needed and need. Like I just feel like that's just going to lift, literally lift some weight off my chest. But it just makes me feel a little overwhelmed thinking about all the money and oh I'm 25, I'm going to be 26 this year. What insurance is going to cover? You know it's just all of these things and I know that's a lot of, a big part of like keep some other people away? It's just like, it's not accessible to everybody. So navigating it, I'm just trying to figure out like crowdfunding situation, that's just like where I'm going to go. I did talk to my mom about it and she didn't want me to do it because she doesn't want my business to be out there but it's like, "Mom, I need people to help me out." I can't go to everybody individually and ask them, that's exhausting.

Knight: That's the thing about black parents, they want everything on the hush hush. Like do what you need to do but don't broadcast it. I did crowdfunding for my top surgery as well and my mom was like "You sure you want to put it out there?" She's like, uh....

Foster: Cause my mom is really on Facebook all the time and it's like, I'm sure she doesn't want to see it. But it's like, I don't are you afraid that people are going to talk about me? Cause at this point I don't care, like.

Knight: Yea, yea. Do you feel like she's ashamed of you or?

Foster: No, I just think that she doesn't want people to say anything negative about me.

Knight: Got you. You don't, don't give them the opportunity to say, comment. Okay, I understand.

Foster: But it's like, well they're going to say it mom. You know? Just cause you go to church with this woman don't mean she ain't talking about me behind your back, like you know? And also I just don't know how she interacts with people who bring up my deadname and other things. I think that she still goes along with it which is unfortunate for me, cause I always have to be like, "Well actually my name is Noah and my pronouns are they/them." And it makes it seem very confusing, I'm sure. But that's life, just learning and unlearning.

Knight: Yea, for sure. Um, want to discuss religion and how it played a role in your upbringing and where you sit now with religion or spirituality?

Foster: Well, religion, I grew up raised Catholic. Um, God was everything. [Laughs] It wasn't forced down on me like, it wasn't... I went to church every day but I went to church every Sunday. Um, and then I grew up in all these Catholic Christian schools. I never went to public schools until like Hurricane Katrina hit and then we had to go to Texas, and we just have to go to the school that my cousins went to cause where else are we going to go, you know? But religion, like up until I guess college is when I started questioning things like, "Um, so this isn't the only way I can be according to these like, test... uh Ten Commandments." But that's, you

know going to school too you still read about, you have religion classes you know. You go mass at school along with going to mass on Sunday. It's a lot of church. A lot of standing up and sitting down and standing up and [laughs.] So, for me I just learned like that's not the only way for me to be like, I can respect that you go to church and all that and I respect that that's what you want to, if that's who want to praise but me personally, I don't even know if I identify with any type of religion or spirituality. I would say that I'm spiritual just because I have an appreciation for humanity and nature and animals and life and just like, the elements. I have all the appreciation but, I don't necessarily identify with one religion but that's to say that everything's beautiful, you know? As long as you ain't saying that you hate somebody you know? And trying to say that this is religion is like hateful, it's the people in it you know?

Knight: So, you're a lover of the elements and life. What is an element that you want people to think of when they think of Noah?

Foster: Sun, yeah.

Knight: Sun, awesome. Well if there's nothing else to add, we'll wrap this up. So thank you so much for your time. I appreciate you sharing your story and I hope it resonates with at least one person, but I know it's going to resonate with a lot so thank you so much.

Foster: Cool, thanks!