

Interviewee: Keri (K)

Interviewer: Tripti Pillai (TP)

Date: 10/18/2018

Location:

Transcribed by Valerie McLaurin 1/2019

[About 2 minutes of silence in the beginning.]

TP: The project is coming out of Athenaeum Press in collaboration with the global ambassadors who are a students from Edwards College and we are working on what we're identifying here as a project about trans individuals' experiences within the local community and the many perspectives of people who are in the local community, trans and non-trans individuals' perspectives on how they intersect and how they might not. What the eventual shape of the project is is still being determined. In some ways interviews like yours are getting us the direction, which is why whatever shape it takes your interview will be a central element to the project because since both the creative and the critical and the social impact, so again, thank you. So I'm going to refer to as Keri, is it fair to ask what pronouns you prefer? Because that way when we write something down, we will refer to you using those pronouns.

K: (03:40) Sure.

TP: Okay, excellent. So could you tell me a little bit about yourself? What brought you to Myrtle Beach? To Coastal?

K: (03:52) Okay. After I graduated high school I kind of had a little struggle with finding a college to go to. I got accepted into like four or five colleges and went to some of the orientations and it was just like, "Mmm, I don't think so." The first college I went to was Charleston Southern University, which is in Charleston in, that was a private Christian college. And I kind of wanted to kind of broaden my horizons a little bit. Originally I didn't even want to go to college so that's kind of interesting I guess. But my mom told me about Coastal and she kind of encouraged me to apply, and I applied. I came here, they had a philosophy major program. So that appealed to me. And so I got in and I decided to come here.

TP: I did not know you were a philosophy major.

K: (04:52) Yes.

TP: That's fabulous, wow. Your students are so lucky. Really the whole spectrum philosophy and English coming together, it's really [inaudible] I understand.

K: (05:04) Yes.

TP: So, what would you say, thinking about your past experiences and how you are today, your present life, what would you say are some of your major milestones?

Personal accomplishments, victories, but also some challenges that you might have overcome or that you're still struggling with, but working towards? Just looking back, what would you say?

K: (05:29) I don't think I've accomplished a lot to be honest. I would say maybe my biggest accomplishment was transitioning. I guess that's all that really comes to mind right now. Getting hired here at Coastal as a teacher. That's really about it as far as accomplishments and milestones are concern.

TP: Well they're both pretty, pretty solid accomplishments I would think. And I can say that because I don't have personal experience of transitioning, I can talk more about the condition that most recently had of becoming a lecturer.

K: (06:22) Yes.

TP: That's very, if I may be so bold, at such a young age, that is really a great thing. So Congratulations.

K: (06:28) Thank you.

TP: Congratulations on both. What about challenges would you say? I mean, are there challenges that you have experienced that have impacted you, that you feel affect who you are, your sense of who you are?

K: (06:46) Challenges transitioning. My entire identity. That's been a constant challenge throughout my life. I think I'm kind of getting through college was a bit of a challenge just because it wasn't really where my heart was per se and so, it was interesting the experiences trying to get through that process. Also just really kind of defining and discovering who I am as a person. Altogether that's probably been the biggest challenge of my life. And it's still a bit of a challenge, still learning more every day. But I guess I'd say those are the big ones.

TP: Yeah. When you say getting through college with a bit of a challenge because of where your heart was, may I ask where was your heart? Away?

K: (07:50) When I graduated high school and you know, my dreams were like super farfetched and everything, I had dreams of writing scripts and books and creating concepts for like TV shows and movies. And I was really passionate about music, so I was interested in singing and like producing and stuff like that. So, that's where my heart really was, but that wasn't really considered practical. So, college was sort of considered more practical. It was considered more grounded I suppose. And so it was kinda tough, just kind of, not so much killing the dream, but putting it on pause and doing something that I wasn't as passionate about.

TP: Yeah. But that's such a profound way of putting it, putting it on pause as opposed to just killing it. Were there, even in the present, but also looking back at when you were

growing up, um, what are the key influences people or events or incidents that really had a solid impact on you or even a subtle impact, that you carry with you?

K: (09:09) Could you elaborate on the impact part?

TP: So if you think about who you are, your sense of who you are, what you're working towards, what challenges you face, have there been people or organizations or just events, incidents that have taken place in your life that have really helped you or, or have troubled you, discover who you could possibly be or a potential to fully realize yourself? Does that make sense?

K: (09:47) Yes it does. I don't think that this is a good answer because I don't really think it really answers your question. I wouldn't say that anyone or anything particularly impacted me or had a major impact on myself. I feel like a lot of it was kind of internal. From a young age, I hope this doesn't come off conceited, but I just felt like I had a lot of potential. And I think the potential is kind of what kept me going even through my struggles and my challenges. Just knowing what could be or what was possible was what kind of inspired me to just keep calling and just, I just kind of tried to tell myself that, you know, it will get better eventually or, you know, once I get older I'll have the tools and the freedom to really achieve and to aspire to the things that I want to be.

TP: Yeah. That's not conceited at all. I sometimes wish more people would have that level of faith in themselves, right? Or confidence that things can get better and will get better. But that's very well put. Would you care to talk about your childhood and growing up? What was that like and where did you grow up?

K: (11:09) I was born in Charleston, grew up in Summerville, which is not too far. It's like 20 minutes. Although with traffic nowadays it's probably about an hour drive. But yeah, I grew up there, only child, mom and dad there together and all that stuff. Being an only child it was, you know, had its pros and its cons. But one of the cons I guess, was just kind of feeling lonely a lot. So maybe that's why I rely on myself a lot with, because that's really all I had been during some moments. But I did have, four cousins who are all female and we grew up together so they were kind of like surrogate sisters or something like that. My childhood was pretty good. I'm trying to think of like specific things to talk about. I've always been creative and I've been singing since I was two. And so I was kind of very show business-y in a sense. I did performing, singing, dancing, acting, all that stuff growing up. So that was where the passion kind of started. I think overall things were kind of good for the most part. I think I had a pretty good childhood. As far as struggles and challenges and all that stuff, I think from the time I was two or three, I knew that something wasn't quite right. Where it started if you don't mind me explaining? Okay. So when I was a kid I thought as far as like the whole sex, like male and female thing, I thought that people, humans were born neutral and they got to kind of decide what they wanted to be. And so at two I was like, "oh, I'm a girl." And the adults in my life quickly shut that down. And they were like, "no, you're not. Girls have this and boys have this. And as a result, girls do this and behave this way. And guys do this and behave that way." And so when I was told that everything just immediately just felt wrong

because I felt like, "no, that's not how this feels." And then growing up with all my female cousins and we were pretty close and everything, it was sort of a struggle because they got to do things that I couldn't do. And, I felt like I was constantly kind of reminded that something wasn't quite right with me. And so that was a bit of a struggle and I kind of put a lot of that into performing and music and stuff like that. I think around the time I was maybe four or five, I kind of took it upon myself to kind of rebel a little bit. I had a very, very strong imagination at a young age, so I sort of created my own world and in my world, I was who I wanted to be and I kind of internalized that. The way that I felt was the way that I acted. And so I think that might be why my childhood was pretty happy because I kind of just did my own thing despite everything. But eventually it sort of became a problem because my family is very Christian and my dad is, you know, a "man's man" and gender roles were very strict and all that stuff. So there are times where it really did become a problem. I think around the time I was 10 I think I finally accepted the fact that things weren't the way that I felt they were. I kind of realized that who I was was sort of having a negative effect on the relationships that I had with family and friends. And so I just decided to try and be what everyone wanted me to be: a boy. The first year was actually pretty good. That was like 2001, I think. That was an awesome year because I felt accepted. I felt like people liked me and I felt like people were proud of me and all of that stuff. So that was great. And then the year after that, it was literally like, I went to bed happy one night and then woke up the next day just wanting to die. That was around 11 or 12. I think until 21 I felt that way for the most part. During that entire period I suffered from depression, suicide, all of that stuff. It was rough to say the least. But around the time I was 21, I finally came to terms with everything and then things kind of took off from there. But, as far as childhood, that's kind of how it was.

TP: Thank you for sharing. That resonates so much with difficulties people have when they deal others. Others who wants to love, who wants to be there for you, but they cannot bring themselves to understand who you are on your terms. Maybe some way down I'll ask you about what you think of others perceptions. But for now, what struck me as you were talking about your childhood and growing up was, the experience of the South, right? So you were born in Charleston, which of course is a very urban, very cultured place but it is still considered the South. I'm wondering does being of the South, living in the South, does that have any role to play in your life? Does the fact that you are from the South, has that impacted you or influenced your identity in any way or do you think life would have been different had you been born or raised or had you been working with someone somewhere else in the country or world?

K: (17:36) I don't think the South impacted me significantly. I mean it's definitely a part of me and I embrace that for the most part I think. But I don't think the South had a big part in defining everything. I think being in the South and being religious was the biggest part and religion definitely played a big part in everything for me. Just the whole idea of being like Southern Baptist, I think that that probably had a lot to do with my experience more so than just being in the South.

TP: Did it give you spiritual courage? So when you say being a Southern Baptist, having an affiliation with the church, how did you grow up with that? Did it have a positive influence?

K: (18:36) I mean my parents and family instilled faith in me at a very early age. However, even from a very, very early age I hated going to church. I hated it just because I think as a kid at first it was more so about being cooped up in a church like all day on a weekend and not really being able to go out and play and stuff. But then it sort of became, I don't know, it kind of had a negative impact because I realized how judgmental people could be at church. I kind of realized from a very early age that there was sort of this hierarchy within church. And not only that, but church was also a lot about, appearance and perception. So it wasn't just, you know, going to church to showcase your love and your belief in God and to worship and praise. It was also about looking your best so that people thought well of you and also kind of keeping up appearances. Trying to look happy, even if you weren't. Trying to appeal to people and trying to appease people that you probably didn't even like, just because you saw them every Sunday. I think it just kind of instilled in me the whole idea of who you are isn't necessarily okay if it doesn't align with what's in the Bible or with what the pastor preaches or what people in the church or the congregation think about you. And I think that stuck with me for awhile. So, even from a very young age, I feel like I kind of was resistant to the institution of church, but I still definitely had a strong belief in God up until college.

TP: Yeah. So when you moved to Myrtle Beach, did it feel like a big change? Can you talk about what that was like and what's Myrtle Beach like? Is it the South? Is it something different?

K: (21:13) To be honest, when I came to Myrtle Beach, it sort of reminded me a little bit of Florida. Because Florida is in the South, but it's not really considered the South. So that's kind of what it felt like to me because it was so different from what I was used to. Myrtle Beach was definitely a big change for me. Because, one thing about my childhood as well, my parents were very strict, very sheltering, they were smothering at times and super duper over-protective. So, I'd always been around family all my life. Elementary to middle school I had friends and stuff like that, but I only had friends within the context or the confines of school. Never really outside of school. And when I went to high school that just plummeted to almost nothing. So I kind of relied on my family a lot because they were who I was around a lot. So that's what I was used to, and Charleston Southern was literally 20 minutes away from my house, so I was still around my family. So I'd never really been completely separated from my family and I didn't have any family or anything in Myrtle Beach. So when I moved, everyone was kind of I'm scared that I was going to come here and I was just going to self-destruct or something like that because they thought that I wouldn't be okay by myself. They even teased and kind of picked on me like the last few weeks before I left because they were like, "we don't want to see you every weekend, we don't see you don't try coming home because we don't want to see you." And so I think I kind of took that and kind of held onto that and came to Myrtle Beach and it was a bit of an adjustment at first. I stayed in my room quite a lot the first semester. But I started to meet people and I started to find my footing. And Myrtle Beach

became sort of became a haven in a sense. That's kind of the way it's been for the past nine years.

TP: Is it a haven because it's also Coastal, it's where you work it's where you studied? Or is it the local community outside of Coastal also is a haven, a safe space? What are your experiences with encountering people on an everyday basis from students and colleagues to people at the grocery store?

K: (24:06) To me, in my experience, I feel like Myrtle Beach is a bit more laid back and a bit more, not liberal per se, but just a bit more accepting, than Summerville/Charleston. When I moved here I just felt a little bit more comfortable and I think the experience with Coastal, definitely it played a big part because the school is also very accepting and very diverse. I felt like I was meeting people from all walks of life and the fact that people from all walks of life were accepted and they felt comfortable being able to express themselves and embrace themselves and to embrace the things that they were interested in kind of encouraged me and gave me a sense of peace. I think that that was definitely part of it. But if I'm being honest, the other part was just being away from my family. That I just felt like I could be myself a lot more and I could discover myself and embrace myself as I was learning more about myself, so that also kind of made it a haven for me.

TP: I must say it's really good to hear that Coastal has been supportive, that you felt that this is a place where different identities within peoples can come together and not feel completely alone. That's really good to hear. Has your family understood that about you, that you have really found a haven in a place where you feel comfortable, and do they appreciate that?

K: (25:56) I'm sure that they definitely notice that Myrtle Beach is sort of my haven because like at this point, I haven't been home in a year. So that's part of it. But even throughout the past few years, I stay here a lot. I don't typically go home a lot, so I think that they noticed that. Whether or not they appreciate it, I don't feel like I can strongly answer that just because my family is kind of weird. They're kind of close knit but kind of not. As I was saying, my family's always been sort of protective of me. So I think the fact that I'm away and that they can't keep tabs or they can't just be around I think that that bothers them sometimes. And the fact that they just don't really get to see me that often. So, I think that they're happy that I'm in a place where I'm comfortable and I'm settled. But I think as far as appreciating the other stuff I'm not so sure about that part.

TP: What would you say about your social life, your work life? Are there things that stand out as positive, are there things that we wish were different?

K: (27:24) I feel like my work life and my social life have kind of integrated. Because a lot of the friends that I've made here they were either during my undergraduate or during my graduate when I was here in the masters program. So, I still have those friends. Now some of those friends work here too. To me it's kind of one in the same for the most part. But I really love that because, I love Coastal and I just feel like it makes the work environment, to me, a better place to work. It doesn't always feel like work and when you

see people that you know and that you can hang out with it makes the experience and it makes everything just a lot better and just a lot happier. Did that answer your question?

TP: Yes. In terms of outside of Coastal, do you feel like you have a social life? Do you feel comfortable and supported outside, let's say if we were to go out to dinner or something? Would you think that a place like Myrtle Beach is?

K: (28:42) Yeah. I don't feel like I have much of a social life outside of Coastal so much. Because I'm quite introverted and I'm a bit of a hermit sometimes. But when I do go out, go out to eat or just go like walking or just exploring, my experiences are, usually for the most part pretty positive. Which at first was a major surprise to me. But yeah, I feel comfortable. Sometimes it's almost a bit weird because sometimes I feel a little bit too comfortable because things seem a little too good and too ideal, sometimes. Too positive. But I would say, yeah, my experience outside of work is definitely a positive.

TP: That's really good to hear. I hope it stays that way. So if you could think about future directions for say the community in terms of not just the LGBTQ community but the local community at large, what kind of steps can we take to further our understanding of different identities, different genders, different sexualities? What would you think can be done to make experiences for children, for young and growing adults, more secure in their own selves?

K: (30:31) I feel like that's a little bit difficult to answer. Just because, I guess my opinions maybe differ from maybe the majority. Things definitely need to be done, but I'm not so sure that it has to be like exposing people to diversity per se. I feel like within this generation, it's definitely great that we are kind of learning to respect and accept people's differences. But I think, what's also important is that we realized that even though we all are different in some way, we all have similarities. And I think maybe focusing more on the similarities would bring more people together and help people who maybe aren't educated or informed, it would give them the opportunities to converse and meet people from different walks of life and kind of realize that they're not that different from them. I know with my experience, with being trans with meeting people, my experience for the most part has been there a lot of people who haven't really been exposed to trans people. Or, if they have been exposed to trans people, the experience kind of perpetuated misconceptions about trans people. What I've heard from people who've met me or who have encountered me or befriended me, they've told me things like, "you know, I've never really been around a trans person before and you're normal. I didn't expect that." Because a lot of people usually just see the depictions of like drag queens or the drag queen persona or just in film and like media, like men dressing up as women and stuff like that, impersonations and stuff, they see that. And so a lot of people kind of visualize that and just think that that's what it means to be trans. And so I think the fact that not so much that I'm normal, but I think the fact that I'm laid back and that I just kind of do my own thing. I think that that gives people a little bit of ease when it comes to getting to know me or being around me for the most part. So, I think if maybe if those people were kind of in those situations, maybe it would make educating them and maybe informing them in making the community stronger, if that makes sense.

TP: Absolutely, that's so well put. Which actually leads me to think of this hypothetical question. If you were, say, to speak with individuals who for whatever reason don't or don't want to, cannot, understand who you are, what your identity is, what would you share with them about your life experience?

K: (33:49) Honestly, I mean I'm pretty open about my experience. I'm pretty open to talking about it. If anyone is curious or has a question, I don't really mind them asking me questions. Because, you know, I think that it's admirable to me for them to even ask me because it means that they're interested in knowing. I hope that this is answering your question, but I think sometimes people are afraid to ask questions because they think that it's going to be offensive or they're afraid that the person is going to take it the wrong way. I guess I kind of welcome questions because I'd rather them ask me and actually get the information from me as opposed to getting it from somewhere, you know, not so great or not so informative or factual. As far as my experience, I think I would just kind of explain what it was like growing up and what it's been like transitioning and kind of the challenges and the struggles. Also kind of explaining the idea of transitioning, because I think another misconception that people might have about trans people is that they're crazy or that something's wrong mentally. And while it's definitely classified as a disorder, I think based on my experience when I've talked to people about it, I've kind of made comparisons to certain things. For instance, I've kind of used metaphors such as remodeling a house. Maybe you inherit a house that is not really your dream house, it's not the house that you wanted, but it's the house you were given and it's all you have. So you can either sit in your house and be miserable. You can get rid of the house. Or you can remodel the house and make it what you want it to be. It'll never be the exact house that you want it to be, but if you can get it to match your ideal and match your vision or your heart, then it would make living in that house way more comfortable than it was before. I've even used, I'm not sure if it's an analogy or metaphor, but a bodybuilder. I spoke to a body builder one time about my experience and I kind of used the example, for instance, before he was bodybuilding, he was really skinny. And I was like, people could say, "you can body build as much as you want, but you'll always be a skinny person because if you were to stop bodybuilding you'd just go back to what you were before." But, you felt in your spirit, not so much in your spirit, but you didn't identify as a skinny person. You didn't identify as a small person. You felt something else. And so rather than sit in what you are and wallow in it, you decided to do something about it. You went to the gym and you dieted and all that stuff, and now you're the person you want to be. And so it's the same thing for me just on a higher scale, I guess, or higher level. Those are the experiences that I would talk about just to sort of related to people a little bit more so it's a little bit easier for them to kind of understand what it's like. Did that answer your question?

TP: That did. That was really insightful. If I were to guess, I think so much of the misinformation, the lack of information comes from what you I think they very rightly pointed to as the lack of ability to, or lack of interest in questioning, asking questions. Just the fear that you might not be asking the right thing. Or it might be too personal. I'm thinking of children and future generations and I think if you have the opportunity to talk



with children who are possibly thinking like you were when you were very young, or who

*[Recording cuts off. Re-recorded ending begins.]*

TP: Okay. It is on, yes. Hi. Hello again. And I'm sorry that this has to be a rerecording of some of your answers to the questions or technological glitches, but hopefully this time we'll prevail. Again, thank you for doing this a second time around. It's very, very generous of you. So as I was mentioning, where the recording kind of paused or had its glitches was when I had asked you both about what you feel others' perceptions of you are in the local community and along with that had asked you to consider what you think, say an organization like Coastal or just the LGBTQ community in the area or just the community at large can do to further our understanding, people's understanding of diverse identities, different identities in terms of gender, sexuality, but just identity in general?

K: (01:07) Okay. So I believe, [inaudible] I think I remember seeing that. I don't necessarily feel that there needs to be a strong movement per se. I think it's moreso about kind of letting people know that we exist. And even if you don't think you've met a trans person, you probably have you just didn't know. Also with the project that you're doing right now, I think showing diversity within the trans community is another way to kind of showcase it a bit more because going off of what you said about perceptions. I think people have perceptions about who they think trans people are based on what they've seen or what they heard. And so I think just kind of showing trans people from all walks of lives, trans peoples are teachers, they are doctors or lawyers. They're not just like drag queens or prostitutes or anything like that. So I think showing diversity is a way to kind of encourage people to be more open and diverse with their perceptions and with their acceptance or respect of people from the LGBTQ community. I also think what we talked about too, was kind of trying to not so much target children, but also targeting parents and adults and not so much teaching, but just giving them some tools or giving them ideas on how to navigate. Whether their child is trans or there's someone in their neighborhood or community who's trans just so that they kind of know how to kind of deal with it, and what it means and what it doesn't mean. So I think doing those small things I think is helpful. I don't necessarily want to put it on trans people because I don't think it's like our obligation or anything. But I think what I also said was sort of rather than telling people that we should be respected, rather than telling people we're normal or telling people you know, who we are or what we deserve, I think it's more important to show that. And so I think sometimes focusing less on the movement and focusing more on just the humanity of everything. I think that in a lot of ways can be very convincing. Because I think I was saying before too, I've met quite a lot of people recently in this community. I dealt with some people who at first maybe didn't really know what to make of me and by the end I maybe changed their perspective or they just felt more comfortable around me and as a result maybe felt more comfortable with the idea of trans people. So I think kind of showing people who we are as opposed to just telling and expecting results. I think that that might be helpful as well.

TP: That's very good insight. Insofar as advice you might have. And I remember I had asked you about advice you might have for future generations of children and you had said that it might, well, I would like you to say what you had, I don't need to remind you (laughing).

K: (04:47) I think I was saying I think the focus is more on the parents than the kids because I think kids intrinsically, they're kind of free of judgment for the most part and a lot more accepting than adults in a lot of ways. So I think I would encourage them to explore who they feel they are just expressing themselves through, the stuff that they want to wear, the stuff that they want to do. And I would focus more so on the parents and the school system and just the community at large in sort of kind of informing them about what it means to be trans and just navigating. With the school, I think we talked a little bit about, not that it's a perfect plan or anything, but I think talking more about sex education and having a window where teachers or people can talk about sexuality and the fluidity or the vastness of sexuality. I think that that might help. I think also bringing in counselors and maybe having them speak in classes about esteem and about identity and all that stuff. I think that that would maybe encourage kids if they do feel something that they could go to someone to talk about it. And then the counselors could kind of go from there and bring in the parents and the community to sort of come up with a way to make it comfortable for the child to express themselves and also to just exist in that space. So I think that those might be a few small steps. They can be taken.

TP: Yeah. Between the last time we spoke and today I have set up interviews with principals of schools. So I'd be really interested to hear what they have to say insofar as what the community can do and what education at a middle school and high school level going to do, or even earlier on. What kind of issues of esteem and humanity are being brought up. I will let you know what happens. The final thing that I wanted you to address, this stems from your suggestion you had made when I had asked you, are there any suggestions or questions that you think I've not asked that I should have? And you had said that perhaps asking about the individual transitioning process was important because it's different for individuals. So would you mind returning to that and maybe talking a little bit about that will be the last question.

K: (07:55) Okay, do you just want me to talk about why people should? Or do you just want me to talk about my transition?

TP: However you want to address it. So the question I had asked is, do you have any suggestions for questions I should ask or anything that I should know or should be knowing that I'm not already asking you?

K: (08:22) Yes, so I said that maybe asking people if they're comfortable about their transition just because people with transition differently and people have different goals and different outcomes, etc. And I think some people aren't really informed about what transitioning entails. So I think that that could show some variety and diversity in that as well. Simply because, not to get too political, but I think in a lot of ways society sort of takes the trans person's transition and they sort of make it cookie cutter and it's like you

have to do these things in order to be validated as the gender or sex you are. And I know personally that there are a lot of trans people who don't really follow that path. Sometimes they can feel like they're being invalidated or they can feel like they're being devalued simply because they didn't take this step or because they want to take this step. So I think showcasing the variety of transitional periods, I think that that would give more insight and context to the Trans Project. And as far as like my transition for instance, my transition was a little bit, unconventional I would say maybe. Because when I decided to start transitioning I didn't take the necessary approach. For instance, I decided to self medicate at first. Luckily that worked out for me, but I know a lot of times that doesn't work out for a lot of other people if they're not getting their hormones from the proper places and stuff. But I decided to do that and then my transition was also a little bit more unconventional because my changes happen a lot sooner than they were supposed to, or a lot sooner than they have for other people. So I didn't anticipate coming out for years. And people noticing changes and the different perception that I had once people kind of noticed and acknowledged the changes it sort of made me feel like, well, I can't really keep this hidden for much longer, so I should probably just come out with it. So I decided to do that. I guess the main thing about my transition is that I really took my time with it. Eventually once I started teaching at Coastal, I started to kind of move a little bit faster. I decided to have my name change and made plans for procedures and all that stuff. So, I was pretty ambivalent about things in the beginning with my transition and I kind of took the unconventional approach with the hormone therapy and therapies and all that stuff. I guess something else I should state too, is that the reason why I took my time with transitioning was because I wasn't really sure how far I wanted to go or how far I was comfortable going. And I feel like sometimes trans people, trans kids, feel like they've got to make drastic changes immediately. I guess maybe with my story, I would just kind of say that it's kind of okay to kind of, you know, it's okay to choose to transition, but it's okay to also take your time and sort of explore things and see exactly how you feel. Because I wouldn't want anyone to like decide to transition and decide very quickly and then once they're finished or halfway through they realize that it wasn't what they wanted or something like that. I took my time, so that was my experience. I think showing different transitional periods because they're all kind of different, I think doing that would add a little bit of diversity flavor to the conversation.

TP: Absolutely. And as I mentioned to you that time that, I was kind of being gingerly in part because I did not want to come off as being just curious without sensitivity. But you're right that maybe a lot of the ignorance that remains in the community comes from that sort of we want to mind our own business approach. But that approach doesn't necessarily translate to equally respecting everybody across the world, which is a very large part of the problem. You know, as you were talking the thing that occurred to me was about medical health. Do you feel there is enough of that available in our community in terms of access?

K: (13:41) Yes and no. I would say yes in the sense that there are doctors out there in this community who can definitely help. But I would say no just because when it comes to transitioning and when it comes to, I'm going to use the medical professional terminology, but, being transsexual is classified as gender identity disorder. And so there

are certain laws that are in place. They say that it's meant to protect us, but I kind of feel like it makes things more difficult because in order to start hormone therapy, you'll have to have a therapist and you have to go to an endocrinologist and they have to prescribe it for you. And the issue can be if the doctors don't have any experience with trans people and they might not be comfortable with giving the prescription or if it goes against maybe what they feel or what they think about trans people, they could also disrupt the process for the trans person. And so there's that. But it's also the fact that it's really, really expensive to transition. So I think educating people in the medical field is definitely important, but I think it's more so about the costs and the access and because it's so expensive and because you have to jump through all of these hoops to go from point A to point B and eventually to Z, a lot of trans people decide to go the back route and they do things they could be dangerous to their health or to their bodies or to their mentality. I don't know the ins and outs of like how the finances and all that stuff works, but I think if more doctors were educated about it, but I also think if the laws were more considerate towards trans people and their circumstances. What is it called? The employment rate within the trans community is extremely low. It's very difficult for trans people to find jobs. It's hard enough finding a job. But if you don't have a job, how are you going to pay for hormones? How are you going to pay for surgeries? How are you going to pay for therapies and procedures and all that stuff? I think it's more about cost and access than it is about education, so to speak. I think that's definitely important, but I think it's more so about the cost and the access. I'm not sure if answers your question.

TP: No, it absolutely does. I promise this will be the last question.

K: (16:54) No, that's fine!

TP: Because you brought up employment. You are at Coastal, and I know in the previous interview you talked about how coastal has been a safe space and understanding and embracing environment. But what are your impressions and thoughts about employment? The crisis of employment for trans people? What would you say about that? What do you think is going on to make this difficulty?

K: (17:34) I think it kind of goes back to the misconceptions in the perceptions of trans people. I think that's part of it. And so I think that can make it very hard for trans people because there's some trans people who are educated but maybe they can't find a job. And then there's some trans people who may not be the most educated, but if they want to be able to work somewhere other than like Walmart or something, they have a job that's not really paying them well. Or even in a sense, and I'm just throwing stuff out of here at this point, but sometimes people who are hiring, they're kind of afraid to hire a trans person because they're not really sure how their customers are going to like react to it. How their customers are going to feel about it. Or maybe they're nervous about having the trans person represent their brand or their company. I think that those are just a few things. I'm sure there are things that I'm not aware of, but I think that those are a few reasons why. But I know that because it's very hard for trans people to find jobs and to pay for their transitions, many trans people resort to prostitution. That's, that's a whole 'nother topic. So a lot of people end up doing that because that's really the best job that they can get and

it's fast money so they're able to transition a lot faster. I think the employment issue is more so about, and I could be wrong, but I think it's more so about like the fears and the misconceptions about trans people.

TP: Yeah. I think you're, you're right about that. I will thank you again because I have taken up a lot of your time and I will once again ask if we have follow up questions, may I email you once again? Thank you. Thank you very much.