

Queer Newark Oral History Project

Interviewee: Andrew Moreira

Interviewer: Adam Varoqua and Esperanza Santos

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Vetted by: Kenneth Morrissey

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Adam Varoqua: All righty. Good afternoon. Today is February 22, 2020. My name is Adam Varoqua, and I'm interviewing Andrew Moreira at Rutgers University, Newark, Conklin Hall for the Queer Newark Oral History Project. Thank you so much for joining us today.

Andrew Moreira: Thank you.

Adam Varoqua: Thank you. When and where were you born Andrew?

Andrew Moreira: I was born at Englewood Hospital here in New Jersey.

Adam Varoqua: Okay. Where did you grow up Andrew?

Andrew Moreira: I grew up pretty much all my life in Jersey actually from North Bergen to then Fairview, to Ridgefield, to Newark.

Adam Varoqua: North Bergen, Ridgefield, and Newark, you said?

Andrew Moreira: Mm-hmm.

Adam Varoqua: Okay. How long did you live in North Bergen for?

Andrew Moreira: Probably the first seven years of my life I would say.

Adam Varoqua: Where in North Bergen?

Andrew Moreira: I don't remember the name of the complex, but it was by the park.

Adam Varoqua: Alright. Okay. Was there any monument by the park or any statue or anything?

Andrew Moreira: It's a big park. We were on the opposite end of it, but on the other side, there's this massive lake that you just literally walk around. It's about a mile long, or might be maybe two miles long of a walk. Then there was a playground in a different part, but it was a big park.

Adam Varoqua: Oh, okay. How long were you living in Ridgefield for?

Andrew Moreira: Uh. Actually, I have a document that helps me with this.

Adam Varoqua: Oh, okay.

Andrew Moreira: Let me see. Here we go. So Ridgefield from 2013 to 2018.

Adam Varoqua: Okay. For about five years, then?

Andrew Moreira: About.

Adam Varoqua: Okay. When you — how long were you living in Newark for?

Andrew Moreira: Huh. I would say, well if I factor in when I was an RA, since 2017 technically, if I factor in when I was in RA.

Adam Varoqua: Okay. An RA for, well, which university here?

Andrew Moreira: For Rutgers.

Adam Varoqua: Rutgers okay.

Andrew Moreira: For University Square.

Adam Varoqua: I noticed that you've lived in a couple of places throughout New Jersey. What was it like for you to just move from place to place?

Andrew Moreira: I mean, it was emotional moving into Ridgefield, but I eventually adjusted to and I got used to it, but it was better when I came to Newark, mainly because I was more independent and I was able to do what I wanted to do.

Adam Varoqua: What was your home life like?

Andrew Moreira: Uh. I mean, I would say like any other family. There were good moments. There were bad moments. There were moments where parents argued, but I would say since I moved out, it's better, way better.

Adam Varoqua: Okay. Who raised you primarily at your home?

Andrew Moreira: Probably my mother, and then weekends my dad would be home. After work, my dad would be home too, but my dad was the one that, I guess you could say, was the breadwinner of the family. So, yeah.

Adam Varoqua: Okay. Any siblings?

Andrew Moreira: Yes, a younger sister.

Adam Varoqua: A younger Sister. Okay. What was growing up in these towns like for you both in North Bergen and Ridgefield?

Andrew Moreira: North Bergen, it was nice being by the park. Ridgefield, I was closer to my best friend at that time and I had a car, so I was partly independent. You know? It was pretty convenient where a lot of things around were at like the Walmart or Target or Edgewater to shop. It was convenient.

Adam Varoqua: Okay. Well, what were the schools that you attended?

Andrew Moreira: Elementary and middle school, I attended Our Lady of Grace, unfortunately, and then high school, I went to a public school, Cliffside Park.

Adam Varoqua: I know you said for Our Lady of Grace, it was unfortunate.

Andrew Moreira: Yes.

Adam Varoqua: What was your experience like there?

Andrew Moreira: I guess similar to the general conception of what a lot of queer and trans people face when it comes to being treated as different, being bullied, feeling out of place, feeling like a sin. It just wasn't the environment for me.

Adam Varoqua: Okay. How would you characterize your experiences there? Was it overly negative? Was there bullying as you mentioned? What was it like there?

Andrew Moreira: I mean, it's weird 'cause at that time I really still enjoyed my experience. I still saw the positive things, but then I look back, and I'm like, "Nah, high school was way, way better." I don't know. I just know my kids would never go to a Catholic school. Absolutely not. So I think that could sum up my feelings with going to a Catholic school.

Adam Varoqua: That's understandable. What was your r— how was your high school experience like for you? I know this was a public school, right?

Andrew Moreira: Mm-hmm. It was way better. It was more diverse. It was significantly more diverse, more open-minded, and the curriculum was different because now that it's a public school for New Jersey,

which is a predominantly liberal state compared to the traditional, conservative, private religious school. It was a very good change. It really opened up my eyes into appreciating diverse bodies and minds and really being able to want to continue to be exposed to that, which made me obviously was one of the bigger reasons to why I wanted to come to Rutgers-Newark because of diversity.

Adam Varoqua: I see. What were — would you say these were some challenges that you faced in elementary school and high school of just trying to overcome bullying and just looking for diversity within a community?

Andrew Moreira: Where, what do you mean?

Adam Varoqua: Would you characterize these as challenges that you were trying to just overcome, so to speak?

Andrew Moreira: I guess, in a way. At that time, I just saw things differently, but when I look back, I'm like, I see it different now. I don't know how to explain it, but — I don't know. In middle school, I didn't really see myself as being bullied. I just saw myself as an outcast. In high school, I just was still closeted, but the more friends that I had and enjoying the high school experience, it was definitely a more different educational and a better experience for me altogether.

Adam Varoqua: I know you've mentioned how part of that high school experience was the reason why you went to Rutgers Newark. I know you said you went there in 2017, right?

Andrew Moreira: Well, 2014.

Adam Varoqua: 2014, I apologize. What was your first experiences like here in Newark?

Andrew Moreira: I loved it. I mean, there's just a lot of stigma in terms of how Newark is seen as a dangerous city and you shouldn't go to Newark, things like that, which I — granted, Newark did have its troubled past, and we can still see a bit of a reflection to this day, but what's to say that's not the same about any other city. What about New York City? Look where they're at now.

I do feel like there's a lot of potential for Newark to, you know, continue to improve, but I love it. I enjoyed my time being in Newark. When I graduated in 2018, I just wasn't ready to leave Newark yet. That's why I'm still living here to this day. I think out of all the places where I had to move out from, I think

going into Newark was definitely the best choice for where I'm at in life now.

Adam Varoqua: Oh, that's really awesome. I know you said you went to Rutgers-Newark. What were you majoring there?

Andrew Moreira: Marketing.

Adam Varoqua: Marketing. What was your experience like studying here?

Andrew Moreira: It was great. I loved my college experience more than my high school experience. I just think that there was a lot more independence, especially as a student, and the population was obviously more diverse. It was just altogether a better experience. I just enjoyed it. If I had to redo my college experience, I personally wouldn't. I'm very happy I went to Rutgers-Newark.

Adam Varoqua: Okay. How has Newark changed since you first came here?

Andrew Moreira: Halsey Street. Easiest instance. God, like the new Prudential building wasn't even put up yet, and the Hahne's building was still abandoned. You just see a lot of the changes, especially when it comes to the campus, when it comes to all these renovations. I'm still seeing all these renovations to this day with the new HLLC building going up or Halsey continuing to be — “growing” is the best way to put it.

Adam Varoqua: In terms of development, so to speak, or?

Andrew Moreira: Yes, but I'm also cautious and mindful in a way to also not idolize gentrification because I know that that is still one of the issues that Newark faces and one of the things from its past that I highlighted is still somewhat reflected today. Personally, I don't agree with pushing people out of where they've been for decades, possibly even generations, for some.

I think that all bodies contribute to the identity of Newark. I think it's a bit upsetting to see downtown Newark where it's just gentrifying, bringing in more of the rich white people and kicking out the poor Black people, Black and Latinos. Its — I just know that there's a lot more potential to this city that integrates all bodies, not just those with money, wealth, power, and the white skin color. So—

Adam Varoqua: I know you mentioned you were an RA too. What was that experience like for you?

Andrew Moreira: Oh, I loved it. I loved it. I made sure to make the most out of my college experience, and dorming was definitely one of them, but I did not wanna deal with the housing costs. So I just decided to be an RA in my last year. It was, honestly, one of the best decisions I've ever made, honest to God

Adam Varoqua: What building were you RA-ing in?

Andrew Moreira: U-Square.

Adam Varoqua: U-Square. Okay. I know that you've recently graduated. How does it feel just to be out of college and living in Newark now outside of a college setting?

Andrew Moreira: [Sighs] It feels so good to make money. Oh my God, it's just more independence. I realized I have a lot more control in terms of not just decisions but outcomes and being able to have that. I don't know. It's a bit scary having that independence, but it's also something that anybody has the power to control instead of it controlling you. I'm still learning, being a young alum, being freshly out of school, having officially gotten out of that mindset of being schooled for, what, sixteen years of my life to just all over sudden just working and, you know, doing what you define as adulthood. It's rewarding.

Adam Varoqua: It sounds like independence is a very big thing for you at the moment.

Andrew Moreira: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Adam Varoqua: Okay. Where are you working right now in Newark?

Andrew Moreira: I'm actually working for Rutgers, the medical school up the hill.

Adam Varoqua: Okay. What's your position?

Andrew Moreira: I'm a public health representative.

Adam Varoqua: How's your experience been there?

Andrew Moreira: It's really great. I have a very great team. I have an extremely wonderful and receptive and open-minded and supportive supervisor, one that really sees my strengths, that I feel listens to me. I just think that's the best first job out of college, so living in Newark, working in Newark, still great to feel home.

Adam Varoqua: What is some of the work you do in your role?

Andrew Moreira: I do free HIV testing and counseling services to the patients that go on to university hospital.

Adam Varoqua: That's really amazing. That's awesome.

Andrew Moreira: Thank you.

Adam Varoqua: How long have you been doing this for? I know you graduated 2018. Was it straight out of college?

Andrew Moreira: Almost. September, 2018 was when I started.

Adam Varoqua: Wow. What — how has working in that public health role shaped your perspective of Newark?

Andrew Moreira: I get to meet more of the people of Newark. I meet a lot of the residents that go into university hospital because, because for a lot of them, it's one that they're familiar with or one that works best to them and however that's deemed fit to them. You just have conversations sometimes, and you get to meet some of the folks and know some of their stories. It just continues to be an eye-opening experience for me, and it's definitely something that I enjoy doing.

Adam Varoqua: Okay. Making these connections through your workplace and at school, how — my apologies.

Andrew Moreira: No. No. You're fine.

Adam Varoqua: How has these experiences sort of added on towards now just living in Newark outside of school?

Andrew Moreira: I think — well, for one, I got to continue experiencing living in Newark, which is something that, you know, I wasn't ready to leave out of here when I graduated. There was that period between May and September when I wasn't working in Newark, and it's just like when I would drive down the I-95, and then you see the skyline of Newark from a distance to your right, and it's just — and it was summer, so obviously going down the I-95 to go to the Jersey Shore and just seeing Newark — I missed it.

I don't know. It was just such a very interesting feeling to have, even though I was just like, "I could just take this exit and take the 280, and I'm in Newark in ten minutes." But it's like — It just didn't feel like I was a part of it anymore, not being a student, but now living in Newark, now working in Newark, it just adds on to that feeling of I'm home.

Adam Varoqua: It sounds like you found a sense of belonging within Newark, then.

Andrew Moreira: Yes.

Adam Varoqua: I know you've been living in Newark for a while now. What places in Newark would you associate with the LGBTQ community here, if you had any places in mind?

Andrew Moreira: There's a few. Do I have to pick just one or?

Adam Varoqua: Pick as many as you want.

Andrew Moreira: Okay. Absolutely, The Intercultural Resource Center.

Adam Varoqua: Is that located in Rutgers or?

Andrew Moreira: Yeah. The Newark LGBTQ Community Center, AAOGC, Twister's [00:20:15]. What are some other ones?

Adam Varoqua: You mentioned AAOGC. What's that community organization?

Andrew Moreira: The African American Office of Gay Concerns.

Adam Varoqua: Thank you. Have you been involved with all these places? Have you gone to any events? These are physical locations?

Andrew Moreira: I have to the extent for the Intercultural Resource Center. Having been a student, I've worked obviously very closely. The Newark LGBTQ Community Center, when they used to be on Halsey, and when I was a part of RU Pride as co-president, when I wanted to do more outreach. Unfortunately, to the extent of that outreach with the community center wasn't that much 'cause my tenure was almost up anyways. I was trying to prepare the succeeding leadership as well as — well, for AAOGC, I would say I had a little bit more experience working with them compared to the community center in terms of — I remember we brought in an individual. Her name was Aminah Washington.

She came to one of the RU Pride meetings to talk about PrEP and then—what was it? Then it was another — there was a study. This was two summers ago where it was like forty dollars —oh God. Now I remember. It was definitely two summers ago 'cause I had forty dollars. I was still unemployed after college, after graduating, and I was like, "Any money that I can find anywhere, I need it." There was a study for HIV, and it was getting tested as well as filling out a questionnaire. The questionnaire was so lengthy, but it was at AAOGC, got tested with one of their counselors. I did the questionnaire, and I got the forty dollars, but that was my other somewhat extent. Oh, what was his name? Gary Paul Wright. Yes. I've met him a couple of times as well.

Adam Varoqua: Who's Gary Paul Wright?

Andrew Moreira: He is the director and founder, if the title is correct, of AAOGC.

Adam Varoqua: Were they doing the study there or?

Andrew Moreira: Yes.

Adam Varoqua: Where's AAOGC located?

Andrew Moreira: It's closer to downtown Newark. I can't remember the name of the street. I think it's close to the Teachers Village, I think. God, it's been a while since I've gone there. I think so.

Adam Varoqua: Okay. You mentioned Twister's also. What's Twister's?

Andrew Moreira: Twister's is a gay, predominantly Latino bar deep in the Ironbound, on the opposite side/end of the Ironbound.

Adam Varoqua: I know you mentioned that you were a co-president of RU Pride. What was your experience like there?

Andrew Moreira: I loved it. It was a very, very rewarding experience. I would say it really taught me humility. It really taught me how to be a better leader and how to be a better person. It was just very rewarding 'cause my focus, obviously, was social justice and I wanted to collaborate with as many folks as possible because at the end of the day, social justice is not just an "I" or "me" initiative. It's a "we" initiative.

There's just a lot of different factors that come into play with social justice, and what better way to tackle them than to collaborate with departments, with professors, with student organizations, with

community partners. That's just summing up some of the many groups that I've partnered with, but it was definitely a very rewarding experience having had the opportunity to be co-president for RU Pride.

Adam Varoqua: That's really awesome.

Andrew Moreira: Thank you.

Adam Varoqua: I know you said you've — I noticed emphasis on collaboration between departments, other orgs, and community organizations around Newark. What were some of the events that you were organizing?

Andrew Moreira: One was the PrEP Truvada [00:25:06] Workshop with Aminah Washington and AAOGC. Another was we brought in an individual, Amir Ashour [00:25:15]. He is the co — no, he's not cofounder. He's the founder of IraQueer [00:25:25], which its sole mission is to address LGBTQIA issues within Iraq and Kurdistan, I think it was. It can't remember. I think so.

We brought him in because one of the professors or adjuncts reached out to us saying, "Hey, so I have somebody who's actually really interested in wanting to do something. Come help us out. Let's figure something out." We organized that. Oh God, we continued the collaboration with The Indian Student Association when it came to celebrating Holi.

Adam Varoqua: What's Holi?

Andrew Moreira: Holi is a celebration that focuses — oh God. Damn, I even remembered the description the other day. It just blanked on me now.

Adam Varoqua: It's okay.

Andrew Moreira: Its — I mean I guess the quickest way to sum it up right now on the spot is it's a celebration. It's a celebration of who we are. Oh, it was something about good over evil succeeding, something along those lines. I can't remember. For me, I saw it as a celebration and just appreciating who we are.

Adam Varoqua: These really sound like really awesome events too.

Andrew Moreira: Mm-hmm.

Adam Varoqua: What was it like for you doing these events within the Rutgers University community and just — was it open to other people, just people outside of Rutgers just from around Newark?

Andrew Moreira: Yes. I mean, a lot of them, yes. Some were specifically for Rutgers students. In terms of working with the greater Newark community, I do believe that, you know, we're in Newark of Newark. I believe that it's crucial for us to continue to be a part of that integral system and work with it in a way that brings in all bodies because, again, it's all a community effort. It's all a group effort. We're all in this together. Newark has such a unique identity that it's really crucial for us to make the most of it with what we can do.

Adam Varoqua: I'm hearing this recurrent theme of inclusion of community. How would you describe your interactions within the Newark LGBTQ community here?

Andrew Moreira: Like the LGBTQ community as a whole, within the city, or?

Adam Varoqua: More so within the city.

Andrew Moreira: Okay. It's nice to see it emerge again 'cause I remember when Christina Strasburger, she put up the Queer Newark History by her office, and I was so intrigued just looking at it. One thing that I learned was how there was a vibrant gay — well, LGBTQ community in the city with having gay bars and clubs. I'm just like looking. I'm like, "Damn. None of them are here anymore?" Don't get me wrong.

It's absolutely great that we have Twister's, but I just don't like how they're so far away, and I've told them that. I was like, "If y'all were closer to Newark Penn Station, you all would be doing way better with business," 'cause for me not having a car anymore, it's harder for me to just walk especially in the cold or Uber 'cause that's money. I have walked before. It's an hour walk from that place to my house, and it's like —

Adam Varoqua: That's not easy.

Andrew Moreira: No. It's not. I told them that. I absolutely love, love, love the meaning behind Twister's because it really does embody that part of Newark, especially in the Ironbound where it's predominantly Latino predominant — well, predominantly Brazilian, but not just Brazilian or Portuguese. I don't know. It would be nice to see more of those types of businesses.

Adam Varoqua: Would you say there's lack of businesses within Newark or?

Andrew Moreira: Yes, yes. I mean, in terms of health centers or community centers, I do believe that there are options for people, but in terms of gay clubs, it's easier for me to go to Six26 in Jersey City 'cause I just take the path from Newark Penn and literally just right off Grove Street, it's a block away. It's easier and cheaper for me to get into Six26 compared to Twister [00:30:38]. But again, if Twister [00:30:40] were closer and if there were more bars with different options as well, I feel like it would be better.

Adam Varoqua: How — What are your thoughts and the intersectionality of being LGBTQ in Newark and also just coming just from this town and just incorporating so many different races and also ethnicities as part of that identity?

Andrew Moreira: I think that's why I love Newark because it is very diverse. It does partly take me back, though, to the concern of gentrification and pushing diverse and marginalized communities out because they're seen as an inconvenience. But if gentrification weren't a thing, if people — if all bodies were still a part of Newark and not just pushed out, not left homeless out on the street, it would definitely be better without the gentrification but see nor grow, it's definitely an experience to say the least.

Adam Varoqua: I know we've been talking about the LGBTQ community here. I wanna ask, how would you describe your sexual orientation or gender identity?

Andrew Moreira: I identify as a cis-bisexual male. In terms of the Kinsey scale, I would say five out of six, but yes.

Adam Varoqua: Okay. How did you first become aware of these aspects of your identity first?

Andrew Moreira: Catholic school. Never really had the environment to learn, but I just knew I was different. I think that's why I appreciated high school more because there was that more exposure, there was that more discussion, and being that it's a state funded school, public school, that really exposed me to a lot more and eventually made me more accepting. Then Rutgers-Newark just slammed the brakes on that zero to sixty in terms of just me appreciating who I am and not really tolerating BS from anybody else. Absolutely not. Oof. Nope.

Adam Varoqua: Oh, and I know you mentioned before you weren't fully out in high school. Would you say you were more fully out in college or?

Andrew Moreira: Oh, 100 percent. I wasn't out in high school until a couple of months before I graduated compared to college where one of the first things I did that September as a freshmen was go to the open house for the — at the time — LGBTQ and Diversity Resource Center, and then RU Pride's first general student body meeting of the year that following Wednesday. It was just a jump from the bat. I still remember a friend 'cause I wasn't sure. I got the email. It was August too, and I was like, "I'm not sure if I should do it." She was like, "Well, if you don't like it don't go back." Those words really just stuck to me 'cause I'm like, "That is so true." Fast forward to today, I'm just very grateful to have done what I have done, especially partly because of her.

Adam Varoqua: I'm hearing how this friend was very close to you, very encouraging of you.

Andrew Moreira: Mm-hmm.

Adam Varoqua: Okay. How did other people in your life become aware of your identity, aware of your sexuality?

Andrew Moreira: I mean, high school, I had to come out. People were actually surprised. They were like, "What?" Then compared to just college where, you know, I went to the first RU pride meeting. I became very well-known at the center and — I don't know. People — I don't feel like I have to necessarily come out anymore in terms of like — I'm talking to you. I guess I'm just — people see it, and they assume, which I don't really care. But if anything, that makes it easier for me. But — no. I've just been more open about it. I've been more casual about it. You know?

Adam Varoqua: Okay. It sounds like, how would you describe it for yourself being LGBTQ here within Newark and being a student on campus? How did that shape your experiences here?

Andrew Moreira: I've never had a negative experience. The only negative experience I had was when I was with, actually, another friend who, he was harassed by a group of teenagers for his outfit, 'cause he's out-and-about gay. He's very proud. I was with him. That was a sense of fear and powerlessness that we felt because it was a group of teenagers. And it, you know, It all happened so fast that my friend was just telling me to walk out.

He was just like, "Let's just keep walking out. Keep walking that way, keep walking that way." That actually happened in Conklin, first floor. It was at nighttime too. There was literally nobody else in the building but us and them. They were just being assholes. They were just being immature kids. That, for me, made me invest in Mace, but thankfully, I've never needed to use it, but I still have it just in case. I think that was really the only negative experience I had as a queer person, and that wasn't even to me directly.

Adam Varoqua: How was your — what are the rest of your experiences here? I'm guessing they were positive or average in a way?

Andrew Moreira: Yes, because there was always some type of support network somewhere. You just had to keep your head and find it somewhere. Regardless, especially having been a student, there was always this — I don't wanna say safety net, but there was always someone there to talk. Besides that incident that I mentioned, I cannot think of another negative experience that I've had in Newark.

Adam Varoqua: Okay. Did you find any challenges being in Newark here or anything that you felt like you had to overcome, in a way?

Andrew Moreira: I think grocery shopping.

Adam Varoqua: [Laughs]

Andrew Moreira: Granted we have Whole Foods, but I ain't got that Whole Foods money. There's ShopRite. There's Walmart, but there's no public transportation that I'm aware of that could take me from point A to point B easily, especially if I have a massive grocery shopping day and I have a ton of bags. That is the challenge, but, I mean, I'm still pretty well fed. I'm still here today. Is it a challenge? Yes. Is it impossible to overcome? No.

Adam Varoqua: How has being LGBTQ — how has being bisexual made your life different from the way it would be if you did not have this identity, would you say?

Andrew Moreira: I probably wouldn't have much of an appreciation towards diversity. Feeling like an outcast really pushed me to not want to see the same for others. It motivated me, in a way, to continue to fight for inclusion and fight for equity and justice for all. Yeah, I would say, yeah.

Adam Varoqua: It has sort of shaped your perspectives on what do you wanna give back or what do you wanna do for the community, in a way.

Andrew Moreira: Basically. Basically.

Adam Varoqua: Okay. Are you involved — I know you mentioned AAOGC, The Newark LGBTQ Community Center, and a couple of other places in Newark. Are you still involved with them, especially within your role as a public health representative?

Andrew Moreira: Uh. With NJCRI, in a way, 'cause I know that they have the Pride Center by Halsey Street, and I have a friend that works there. In a way, we do have a professional connection from time to time.

Adam Varoqua: What's NJCRI?

Andrew Moreira: The North Jersey Community Research Initiative.

Adam Varoqua: What's sort of the work they do?

Andrew Moreira: What work don't they do? They have spaces for LGBTQ folks, whether you're young or older. They do STI testing. They do their needle exchange program. They also offer — I think they offer some type of medical services. I don't know if they have doctors. I never went inside their main building, but in terms of research, in terms of partnerships, in terms of having a friend that works for NJCRI, this is what I know from the outsider perspective. I know that they are definitely very out there in Newark.

Adam Varoqua: You said they have a pride center in Halsey Street?

Andrew Moreira: Mm-hmm, by Halsey Street, not on Halsey Street.

Adam Varoqua: Is it separate from the Newark LGBTQ Community Center or?

Andrew Moreira: Yes.

Adam Varoqua: In what ways would you say they're different?

Andrew Moreira: Well, for one, that Pride Center by Halsey Street, it's geared towards—how did he say it? It was eighteen and up or twenty-one and up, but for those that are younger, they have a space by their main building by Central Ave. The Newark LGBTQ Community Center, I see it as a one space for all. I'm not necessarily saying that there are pros or cons for either, or it's just, I see the differences in terms of the immediate populations that they see at a specific location. Yes.

Adam Varoqua: What was your experiences collabing and working with these organizations?

Andrew Moreira: Uh. I haven't had much of an opportunity to collaborate with them, to be quite honest. I mean, I was close with collaborating with NJCRI, but some last second changes and certain factors made the partnership fall through, which it wasn't necessarily saying it was our fault or their fault. It was a different factor that affected that partnership.

So I really can't say much in terms of NJCRI, and then the community center, I can't say much either because it was really by the end of my tenure as co-president when I brought people over to when they were on Halsey Street and they are giving us a tour of the space. We met some of the folks inside. They showed us the meeting, the conference space that they keep open to the community. I mean, from that small experience, it was still pleasant. It's just not enough for me to really go off about my relationship to them, almost like acquaintances, so to speak.

Adam Varoqua: That makes sense. Would you say you mostly collab with AAOGC or the Intercultural Center here in Newark?

Andrew Moreira: Mostly the resource center.

Adam Varoqua: Mostly the resource center? Okay.

Andrew Moreira: AAOGC from time to time, but having been a student here, it was obviously significantly easier, and they were right there, and we both worked under the same umbrella, so it was already an advantage to working with the resource center when it comes to getting a lot more things done, in a way.

Adam Varoqua: Would you say there was more of that support network they were offering?

Andrew Moreira: That's predominantly part of the way 'cause obviously they had a closer professional working relationship with the Office of Student Life, and the Office Student Life was the office that technically, quote/unquote, "oversaw" us, so to speak. Whenever we needed to meet with an advisor or whatever we needed to get things done, especially if we needed to expedite it, the resource center would be an ally.

Adam Varoqua: It sounds like just really this source of support of just guidance, in a way, if that makes sense, what was it like for you just to discover these support networks at your time here?

Andrew Moreira: What do you mean?

Adam Varoqua: I remember you mentioned before about the importance of just finding support networks, and how would you — what was that experience like for you, just discovering that within Rutgers-Newark?

Andrew Moreira: It wasn't that hard. It was new people, especially the resource center having been a big factor into already having had those relationships and adding onto those connections, whether it'd be with the community center or with Christina or AAOGC. But there was still a lot of options to work from. It was definitely a buffet of choices.

Adam Varoqua: How has — What kind of advice or just support would you give for the current LGBTQ community here in Newark, if you had any observations to make?

Andrew Moreira: Huh. What advice would I give? If you don't already know it, know your community because there are resources available, whatever they may be. There is something or someone ready to help. Then, obviously, if possible, make the most of it because you only really have your childhood once. Obviously, I know this partly comes in terms of privilege 'cause I know not a lot of people have that ability to be who they are. But there are still resources or just — I don't know. It's tricky to give advice 'cause it's not advice that would work for all. Really, I think that the best thing I could say is just know your community and know your resources.

Adam Varoqua: Okay. Just harping on that theme of just connection, in a way.

Andrew Moreira: Yes.

Adam Varoqua: Okay. How would you like to see Newark change within the next few years or so?

Andrew Moreira: Well, for one, I don't wanna see more people pushed out. I want to see more support for the homeless population, especially when it comes with resources geared towards housing—well, shelters and not just that, but also — lemme see —additional mental health resources as well as other health-related resources and places or opportunities for them to really be able to gain the skills that they

need to support them in getting the leg up in life because everybody has different barriers.

I can't speak on behalf of all barriers, but I know for — that there should be resources. But then in terms of the city itself focusing on the LGBTQ aspects, I think that there should be more queer spaces, not just bars. Maybe coffee shops, maybe bookstores, maybe bookstore/coffee shop — oh, that'd be amazing, that are also more accessible. God. I would just love to see Newark Pride probably just be more — more.

Adam Varoqua: I agree. More of an audience, more out there?

Andrew Moreira: Yes. Yeas, Yes. Don't get me wrong. The culture and the climate of the current marches, you really get to see that Newark spirit because since there's less people, you get to really see more of those identities, and you really get to experience it, compared to New York where it's just crowds and crowds and crowds and crowds. But it's like we have an identity too. We should celebrate that. We should make that known. It should be a case where it's like, "Oh, you missed Asbury. You missed New York. Oh, come to Newark. Newark is happening in July. Come here next." I would love to see that grow.

Adam Varoqua: That pride, that spirit for the city, in a way?

Andrew Moreira: Yes. Yes.

Adam Varoqua: Those are definitely great observations. Any last final words, messages you have for us or just generally your experiences from here in Newark?

Andrew Moreira: I guess the last thing is in terms of my perspective, my views and experiences, I would say, contribute to privilege. I would say the privilege of being a white Latino or the privilege of being a cis-gendered male. I know that a lot of what I say is not the end-all, be-all, but what I really enjoy doing is why I appreciate diversity is because I get to see from different perspectives besides my own. I get to listen to other narratives. I get to understand other people because my experience is absolutely not the same as yours or yours or the person across the street or the person upstairs or whatever, but it's still a unique experience to each and every one of their own. So I definitely wanted to also emphasize — well, share that as well and emphasize, yeah.

Adam Varoqua: Okay. I wholeheartedly agree and also thank you a lot for joining us. We're happy to have you, and thank you for doing the interview. Thank you.

Andrew Moreira: No problem. Thank you for having me.

Adam Varoqua: Of course.

Esperanza Santos: Hi. Is it okay if I ask you a few questions?

Andrew Moreira: Sure. Yes.

Esperanza Santos: This is Esperanza Santos, for the record. Just, is it okay if I follow up?

Andrew Moreira: Absolutely.

Esperanza Santos: Yes. Okay. You said that you identify as a white Latino. What does that mean to you?

Andrew Moreira: Well, my skin color, definitely something that the previous director to the Intercultural Resource Center Yoleidy, had me learn is the difference between race, ethnicity, nationality 'cause I never really understood why there would be the two types of questions where it's like, "Do you identify as Hispanic or Latino? Then what's your ethnicity?" Then it goes Black, Asian, Native American. I'm like, "Why are these two questions separate?" So, you know, over the years, I came to understand that. I also know that, for instance, my skin color, I'm white. There's no debating it, but my upbringings, you know, I'm very Brazilian.

That's something that I'm absolutely not ashamed of. That's something that I celebrate. I love the culture. I love the food. I love going to Brazil. I love being in Latino spaces. It's really the best of both worlds, so to speak, in a way, in terms of two different experiences merged into one. That was another thing too that I noticed now that I think about it, where for years I was even trying to figure out who I am in terms of that because I could go into a predominantly — well, I can go into a Latino space or I could go to a white space and I would still feel like an outcast. There are some times where people tend to make me feel like an outcast, but not bullying or trying to push me out, but it's like they probably unintentionally make comments or something that it's like, "Damn. Okay."

Esperanza Santos: Can you give me an example, or is there a moment or a memory that stands out to you that's something like this or no? If the answer's no, that's okay too.

Andrew Moreira: I can't think of a memory, but I know, for instance, where it's being told that I'm not Latino by literally either a white person or a Latino. Or — I would say that actually does bring back a fond memory of someone who I've known years ago. He was just constantly trying to correct me, "You're not Latino." I'm like, "You're not even Brazilian. Who are you?" I would say that would be a case where I was trying to figure out who I was, but I eventually came to terms with, "Yes, I'm a white Latino. If you've got a problem with it, the door is right over there."

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. For you, I think a lot of people — Newark is a pretty diverse place. I think you have mostly Puerto Ricans and Dominicans in the north side, or at least Central Americans. In central and south Newark, you have a mostly Black population. Then on the, I guess the west side, you have a lot more Brazilian and Portuguese communities. Do think that there is like — do people mostly stay in their own ward, like north, south, east, central or do you see a lot of connection between even the wards inside Newark?

Andrew Moreira: Honestly, I'm gonna be honest. I feel that people tend to stay more in their wards, but I'm speaking from my experience in terms of — I haven't really visited a lot of the other ends of Newark, predominantly central. The most north I've gone was Branch Brook. Then having gone as deep as Twister, but then for me that also factors in not much public transportation opportunities for me to go to those spaces as well as I'm not aware of the need to go to those spaces. I mean, if I had a friend that lived there, obviously, I would go or if there was a store or something that I just really want to go to. I would see myself more out and about, but I don't know. I also can't speak on behalf of other people 'cause —

Esperanza Santos: Just yourself, just yourself.

Andrew Moreira: Yeah. Then in terms of myself, I would say, yeah. I'm more confined into around where I'm at, but the biggest contributor is me not having a car, and I'm not too familiar or just not enough options either of the public transportation opportunities.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. Hello. It's like if I don't know someone in another ward and if it's already hard to get there, then why am I gonna wanna go? You know? There's no reason. Even if there was something in a different ward, it's probably easier, from my perspective, to get to

New York City or Union Station than to wait for a bus and take —. You know?

Andrew Moreira: Absolutely. Absolutely. I keep saying this, I've really believed that the Broad Street light rail should be extended, should be expanded, not just deep in the Ironbound, but to other parts of Newark as well. I definitely think that that is part, not the end-all, be-all, but a small part of a solution to the issue of gentrification because we're also not providing resources to people over there which feeds into the homelessness and, you know, unfair opportunities. I do believe that the light rail, oh my God, it's such an amazing thing to have. It's very, very, very limited, like only two directions, and one of them just goes through Broad Street, which is a couple of stops. It's nothing. There should be a lot more of an initiative to be able to expand on public transportation.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. I know you were talking about Twister, and that's not a place that I'm really familiar with. How did you hear about Twister, and how did you like it when you went?

Andrew Moreira: I heard about it actually from last year's Newark Pride. It was one of the events for Pride itself. How did I end up? Work was part of the reason, but no. Actually, yeah. Work was part of the reason why I went because some colleagues from the University Hospital, they were having a get together and were like, "Oh, you should come along, this and that," and I did. It was popping. Music was going off. People were dancing, fog smoke was smoking. It was a good time.

Esperanza Santos: So were you there more for more professional reasons and not sensual reasons?

Andrew Moreira: How do you define sensual?

Esperanza Santos: Like connect with people, meet new people for either your romantic interests or for your professional interests, or it could be both? They're not mutually exclusive.

Andrew Moreira: It could be both. Yeah. I would say both. Predominantly professional, but, you know, I guess my eyes are always open. [Laughs]

Esperanza Santos: Yeah, and so let's say you have Twister's. Is there any other place similar to Twister's, or that's like all that Newark has for a place that you would wanna go clubbing?

Andrew Moreira: That's the only place I'm aware of. That could also go back into the public transportation option, especially with expanding on the light rail 'cause, hell, maybe there could be a gay club or just the space in general or maybe a place that does Thursday night or Sunday night queer nights or something. I don't know, but I'm just not aware of it. Even if I were aware of it, there's really not much of an option for me to go there 'cause, just like Twister, it's hard. That's out of the way, especially for not having a car.

Esperanza Santos: yeah. The last two questions I have for you — and they're thematic questions, so we may go a little bit deeper. You said that you work in, as you said, preventative services and HIV testing?

Andrew Moreira: Mm-hmm.

Esperanza Santos: How do you like it?

Andrew Moreira: I love it. It was not something I was looking to do 'cause I graduated from the business school. I was more so looking in the marketing setting, but because of a common network that I had, he was like, "Oh, you should come into this position. I think you'd get along really well." I was like, "What do I have to lose? I'm jobless." I did it. I got interviewed. Honest to God, I didn't think I was gonna get it 'cause it sounded like the Interviewer who is now my boss had an interview before me that went really well just by hearing all the laughter that was going on in the other room. Then when it was my turn, it was just a very straightforward, no-laughter conversation. I was like —

Esperanza Santos: You were like, "Uh!"

Andrew Moreira: [Laughs] But it was an eye-opening experience. It exposed me to an environment that wasn't just business, more so medical public health environment that continues to build onto my open-mindedness.

Esperanza Santos: What's surprised you being in the role you're in now?

Andrew Moreira: I think, being that it's my first job out of college, I have an amazing boss. I have a great team. I have a work environment that's absolutely supportive to building on my strengths and allowing me to explore my talents, which I feel like it's just so rare to say 'cause predominantly not a lot of places have that benefit or that privilege. So I think literally the job that I just got right out of college just immediately exposed me to that. I'm like, "Oh my God. I love it."

Esperanza Santos: You're like, "Thank you." [Laughs]

Andrew Moreira: Yes. Literally yes. I would say, yeah, that's a surprising factor for me.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah, and so a part of — I'm assuming a part of what your work does is handing out condoms and giving some needles maybe and —

Andrew Moreira: Not needles.

Esperanza Santos: Not needles. That's another program?

Andrew Moreira: Yeah. We do not have a needle exchange program.

Esperanza Santos: Okay, so giving out condoms, doing education, testing people and then maybe counseling people, if they are positive, what are some other options?

Andrew Moreira: Yes.

Esperanza Santos: Within your role and in that field, is there anything that surprised you in what you've learned or experienced out in the community or having people come into your office?

Andrew Moreira: Wait. What do you mean?

Esperanza Santos: It's like, "Oh, I didn't think that the HIV rates were this low or this high," or like that. Or you can be like, "I had no expectations."

Andrew Moreira: I guess for me it's unique because I have yet to test somebody whose results ended up being positive. I've had it discordant once where the first test was preliminary positive, second test was negative. But in terms of my personal experience, I really haven't had much experience in seeing people whose results come up positive. But when I've shadowed, I've seen that from other colleagues and — I don't know. Even to this day, I still I'm just so astonished. It's still just the fact that I've never had a positive result yet. I don't know. It's just so weird. I've tested well over a thousand people, easily well over a thousand people. Then again, it was also expected that about one percent of all people tested will be positive, but I just think it's still crazy how I have yet to get one.

Esperanza Santos: Out of a thousand, not even *one*?

Andrew Moreira: I'm not wishing for one 'cause that's not easy news to give, but I don't know. I just think it's so interesting how I haven't had one yet, but then I've had colleagues, especially one who started two days later than me who's had a couple more than I've had, and it's like — well, I guess predominantly because where I work in the hospital you see people there — I see people who have appointments with doctors compared to those who go into the emergency department who need on-the-spot care and treatment, whether it's for a motor vehicle accident or just, you know, headaches, things like that. I don't know.

Esperanza Santos: Well, it sounds like there are different people. There are — what would you say your title is?

Andrew Moreira: Public health representative.

Esperanza Santos: Public health representative. You would probably say that there's probably representatives in the hospital, out in the community, perhaps, or in another location and at this location in your role, there's not that many, which is good because that's the goal for preventative care to not have people be positive.

Andrew Moreira: Absolutely, and to make referrals. I can absolutely attest to making a lot of PrEP referrals because that is also an integral part of what we do, but regardless, at the end of the day, it's still a very rewarding experience. Nonetheless, it's still an opportunity for me to meet with people, and then usually those opportunities where I have a sit-down discussion with them 'cause we're just so into a particular topic, and it's very rewarding nonetheless.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. What would qualify someone to be referred to PrEP?

Andrew Moreira: So certain qualifications are, if someone is MSM, or men who have sex with men, trans-identified folks, or people who inject drugs. Our goal obviously is, first off, never, ever, ever shame — absolutely not, never, 100 percent unacceptable, but to be able to support in a way that we figure out how we can meet halfway with them whether it's just giving out condoms or giving a PrEP referral or telling them where to go if they need to go to a needle exchange program or if they need to speak with a social worker with regards to wanting to go to rehab. I'm very flexible too working with them. And maybe — hell, sometimes people just don't want any services.

They could be in for an STD, and they just don't wanna deal with anything with HIV, which, at the end of the day, your body, your choice, but here are the options, if ever in the future you change

your mind, or maybe you might not change your mind, but you might know somebody else who would be interested. I still push for giving some type of resource because I believe that it's better than none. Even if they say no, I still give a business card. I still give a brochure. Just anything that maybe one day they'll just glance over and be like, "Huh," or they have a conversation with a friend or a family member that it's like, "Oh, you might need this." Really, the goal is just meeting them halfway.

Esperanza Santos: When you were talking about if they wanna go to rehab, something that triggered for me was in the '80s, crack hit Newark pretty bad, like horrible. Currently, people are actually talking about the opioid epidemic, and not a lot of people know, but some do, that within the LGBT community, specifically gay male and some trans women, meth is a pretty big thing for chemsex. When people come to you for maybe making a choice about rehab, is there one drug that people prefer, or it's just like their life isn't manageable and they need support?

Andrew Moreira: You mean in terms of the responses, in terms of drug use or?

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. What do you think people in the community are using, and what support services are out there?

Andrew Moreira: From my experience, I see more popularity towards cocaine and heroin. Really, the most that I can do — also legally too — is whether I refer them to talk to their doctor, or if the hospital has a social worker on the spot, I reach out to them and send them to the social worker or — and NJCRI, if they are in need of a needle exchange program. I try to do the most that I can, the most that my position would allow me to do. But really at the end of the day, for me, it's always about referral, it's always about what's that next step, and even if they aren't ready for that next step or just don't care for it whatsoever, it's just always giving them an option at the end of the day, whether it's a phone number or a business card or just something. I always want them to have an option.

Esperanza Santos: Absolutely, you know, like care for people and give them the power to have a choice —

Andrew Moreira: Absolutely.

Esperanza Santos: — instead of being cornered in one direction or being neglected and not having a choice.

Andrew Moreira: Absolutely. Absolutely. I do believe that everybody has different barriers in life. I will never understand all the barriers 'cause everybody — no two people are alike, as I said, but for me, it's all about listening, it's all about understanding, and it's all about appreciating, appreciating that, you know, you're different and figuring out what can you do as an ally, as a support network, as someone that could be seen as a confidant, someone who can be supportive in however that looks.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. Let me see. What was the other question I had? Just the final sets of questions where we talked a little bit about — you were super involved here at Rutgers-Newark, right?

Andrew Moreira: Mm-hmm.

Esperanza Santos: A part of that was like — you were like, "Oh, should I go to this meeting? Should I not?" Then you made the jump and decided you loved it. It sounds like you were pretty connected to — would you call it the resource center or the Intercultural Resource Center here on campus?

Andrew Moreira: Mm-hmm.

Esperanza Santos: At the time there was the LGBT Community Center on Halsey, and I think now it's inside the Newark Library.

Andrew Moreira: The Library. Yes.

Esperanza Santos: There's also, what's different is the Pride Center that right now is on Academy.

Andrew Moreira: Yes. Oh, that's the name. By Prudential, right? By Dario's?

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Andrew Moreira: Yes.

Esperanza Santos: With NJCRI, I know NJCRI funds the Pride Center, and they also fund your work, with the preventative work, right?

Andrew Moreira: Well, they don't fund us directly, but they fund their own preventative programs that they have. I don't work under NJCRI.

Esperanza Santos: Oh, that's right. No, you don't work under NJCRI. You work with the hospital.

Adam Varoqua: The medical school.

Andrew Moreira: I work under Rutgers. Yes, the medical school, yes.

Esperanza Santos: Okay.

Adam Varoqua: Is that a Robert Wood Johnson or?

Andrew Moreira: No. That's New Brunswick.

Adam Varoqua: Oh, New Brunswick. Okay. My bad.

Esperanza Santos: What would you say was the year you were most active? Your senior year?

Andrew Moreira: Yes.

Esperanza Santos: That would be 2017, 2018?

Andrew Moreira: Mm-hmm.

Esperanza Santos: You were twenty-two, twenty-three.

Andrew Moreira: Twenty-one.

Esperanza Santos: Twenty-one. Was there — how was it like for you coming into your power and being surrounded by all these resources? What was it like to be in that role, I guess, as the leader for Newark Pride? Is that what your title was? No.

Andrew Moreira: Wait. Which event are you referring to?

Esperanza Santos: Uhm. 'Cause I think if — were you president of something, or you were just very involved?

Andrew Moreira: I was co-president of RU Pride, but that was my junior year.

Esperanza Santos: In your senior year is when you were more involved?

Andrew Moreira: Yes.

Esperanza Santos: And what was your — not that you have to have a title, but if you had a title or the things that you did, if you remember?

Andrew Moreira: Well, I was an RA. I was —

Esperanza Santos: An RA is for residential adviser?

Andrew Moreira: Resident Assistant, yeah. I was a grand scribe for my fraternity, and I was co-chair to the regional annual Northeast LGBT Conference.

Esperanza Santos: Oh, that sounds pretty fancy.

Andrew Moreira: [Laughs]

Esperanza Santos: Okay. You were pretty busy, huh?

Andrew Moreira: I was, surprisingly more busy than co-president of RU Pride, but yes.

Esperanza Santos: For that conference, was it primarily focused with the universities?

Andrew Moreira: Yes, actually, across the Northeast, so from Maine to DC.

Esperanza Santos: Was it to get a delegation to go to the conference, or what was your commitment to that?

Andrew Moreira: Well, it was basically organizing the entire conference for that year, and the best way to describe it — well, y'all know FIFA, the World Cup, right?

Esperanza Santos: Mm-hmm.

Andrew Moreira: So conceptually similar to that, where it's like the conference oversight board, they would be people in FIFA, those responsible for deciding which country picks when to host a game, and then the country is basically us as the institution in terms of organizing the venues, in terms of organizing the invites, stuff like that, just making sure everything was running smoothly throughout the conference.

Esperanza Santos: How — I think what's pretty unique about you is you organized inside of the Rutgers-Newark as being the co-president, co-chair, co — what is it called?

Andrew Moreira: For RU Pride?

Esperanza Santos: Yeah.

Andrew Moreira: Co-president.

Esperanza Santos: Then you were at this pretty regional level within the Northeast, which was pretty huge, and planning conferences is no joke. Oh my gosh. People don't even know. Now you're, the present day, you're not in the university system, but out in the community making sure you're providing resources.

Andrew Moreira: Yes.

Esperanza Santos: How would you compare your role now with the LGBT community versus before?

Andrew Moreira: I'm still very involved, you know, for the Rutgers University Rainbow Alumni League. I'm not sure if y'all are aware, but it's a newly founded group or revived group, I should say, that focuses on representing LGBTQIA-plus alumni across all the Rutgers campuses. How it's structured is that there's a chair and then a co-chair at each specific campus. I'm the co-chair for the Newark campus. We actually have a meeting happening this Monday at 6:00 over at the Alumni Center.

If y'all would like to go, y'all are absolutely welcome. It's still something that we're growing on, but my focus right now is just trying to figure out the structure for the Newark team and really being able to integrate our alumni into a system that feels like home, almost like the home that RU Pride made for me. Are y'all students too? Y'all are students. You are a student. When are you graduating?

Esperanza Santos: In 2005.

Andrew Moreira: Oh, you graduated already?

Esperanza Santos: I'm sorry! In 2025. [Laughs]

Andrew Moreira: Oh, 2025. Okay. From this campus?

Esperanza Santos: Yeah.

Andrew Moreira: What's perfect is we want to be able to work with you, especially, as a student and try to figure out ways that we can bridge a connection between alumni and students, trying to — me, I'm actually working closely with Mel especially, Mel McCuin of the resource center to figure out some ways that we can be involved. I know for Rainbow Graduation we'll be there. I know for the mixer, Mel wants us to oversee it.

Oh, that's another thing I need to take note of. Mixer. I just remembered another thing. Okay. But I think just trying to stay occupied, trying to stay involved 'cause I know that there's still always work that's gotta be done somewhere. It's just trying to figure out what to do with a blank canvas. That is the fun part.

Esperanza Santos: Yeah. Thank you for responding!

Andrew Moreira: You're welcome. Thank you.

Esperanza Santos: Any other questions for us or things that you wanna make sure you get across?

Andrew Moreira: I think we covered everything.

Esperanza Santos: Okay. Cool.

Adam Varoqua: Awesome. Well, thank you so much.

Andrew Moreira: No problem. Thank you. Thank you.

Adam Varoqua: This is Adam Varoqua from the Queer Oral History Project and Esperanza Santos and Andrew Moreira. I apologize if I mispronounced your name.

Andrew Moreira: You're fine.

Adam Varoqua: We are signing off.