INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

NOGGA SCHWARTZ

Interviewer: Kirsten Adorian

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Transcribed by Kerri Hamilton (volunteer)

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Kirsten Adorian: Hello, my name is Kiersten Adorian and I will be having a conversation with New York City Trans oral history project in collaboration with the New York Public Library's community oral history project. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans identifying people. It is May 26th and this is being recorded in Crown Heights Brooklyn. So, would you like to tell me your name, age, and your gender pronouns.

Nogga Schwartz: My name is a Nogga Schwartz. I'm 33 years old. I'm transmasculine and I use male pronouns. He, him and his.

Adorian: And one was the first time that you heard the word trans or you will engage with trans community?

Adorian: The first time I heard about Trans transgender specifically, it was probably as a kid watching really shitty daytime talk shows like Maury and you know, when they would have the very scary transsexuals on television talk show. Yeah. That was probably the first instance of Trans I heard of or rocky horror picture show. Um, and so that was, that was my first hearing of the word, my first experience of trans humans, meeting other trans folks. Um, I came out when I was probably around, I think that the word finally felt applicable to me around 16, 17 years old when I found out it could be an actual thing that there weren't just transformed people, but there were also trans men and I met the first person ever, uh, was Topher Gross who reached out to me on Friendster and on planetout.com back in I think 1999 when I was a kid. So, like 99, 2000 and, he had been on that point on hormones for a while and I just started posting and he reached out to me and said, "hey cutie". And I was the first trans person ever that I had a conversation with.

Adorian: What were both of the sites like at that point?

Schwartz: Um, well, I mean, you know, we were AOL, it was the middle of the night kind of stuff. planetout.com started out as an AOL chatroom in the nineties. They had the gay chat rooms and they was playing, it was you had the bar that came up for the AOL communities and then one of those planetout.com, planetout and then it gained so much momentum it started its own website. Right. Which was amazing. And they had classifieds, like, you know, kind of like tinder, more like OkCupid. I'm online dating. And they were the first and only, at first they didn't have f to m, or m to F, or trans available. But within two or three years they were the only website that allowed you to choose trans. They had five gender options: f to m, m to f, male, female, and other. And that was back in like 98 or 1998 and nobody did that.

Adorian: Whereas I think OK Cupid, did he start doing that? What, two years ago, three years ago.

Schwartz: No one was doing that unless you went to a, a transsexual dating website, which was some deep web, you know, sex workers shit, you know, that wasn't I'm looking for a significant other kind of thing. You know, that was, people were working those. Um, so yeah, planetout.com was the only one that did it until they stopped existing and like 2004, 2005.
Adorian: That's always cool to hear about early or well, Internet communities.

Schwartz: We had also live journal. Um, which was the thing. I wasn't really, I did like the planetout thing and like Friendster, I had a live journal but I wasn't in a lot of like the like the f to m communities like in a few more in like Yahoo Groups and like trans bucket was a website that talked about surgeries and showed pictures.

Adorian: When you were on these sites, were you in any way in real life connecting with Trans community outside of that?

Schwartz: A little bit here and there. I mean honestly, I came out to my friends and myself when I was about 17 and started binding around then, 16, 17, 16. I started finding, I mean it was binding on and off ever since puberty just because I hated the whole experience of it, but I finally told my friends when I was 17, I was guys, I'm a transsexual. I identify as male. And they were all like, yeah, Duh, you know, they were all, of course we do that. It's like "you were never a lady Nogga, we've all known for a million years".

Adorian: Were these friends, friends identify as queer themselves?

Schwartz: Not really. Um, my one friend identified as bisexual and in fact my best friend that I came out to her first and then I came out to my other friend, one of them had known since I was 10 and the other one I met when I was 14 and Yanet, I was in love with her. She's like the, not the first person, but I had a huge crush on her. We used to hook up all the time, we were kind of, you know, weird teenage lovers. She dated other trans guys that I knew, as we got older, like she was very queer.

Adorian: Where was this?

Schwartz: Paramus, New Jersey, which is where I was growing up for the most part. Essentially, um, when I was 13 I was in and out of my parent's home a lot because I came out as queer, like as bisexual, lesbian when I was 13 and that was not great. So I was sometimes living in Manhattan, they go disappear for days.

Adorian: Where would you stay when you're in Manhattan?

Schwartz: Squats. Mostly Tompkins Square Park, ABC, no Rio. If there was a spot pass out. CBGBS and sometimes we forget that I was lying on the bathroom floor, you know? Um, and so 4:00, 6:00 in the morning and they're, get the fuck out of here. Kind of a situation. Subways, everywhere. Lower east side. The lower east side was my home. Since I was 13, 14 in and out and around there.

Adorian: What, do you want to talk more about your childhood and family background? About either growing up in New Jersey, because you said you were in and out of your home at that point, after coming out. Do you feel like. Yeah. Do you, want to talk about what that looked like?
Schwartz: Sure. I mean growing up like I, you know, I'm an immigrant. I'm not from. I wasn't born here. My family is from Israel. My parents from Israel and my sister's born here. I was accidentally born here I was supposed to be born in the states. I was conceived here but because of timing, I happened to be birthed in Israel, but then he immediately came here when I was only a few months old. So I've spent my whole life in New York and New Jersey. Um, you know, especially 13 on. I was like in New York primarily my cousins grew up in Flushing, Bright Beach, the Bronx, that's all my dad's side of the family. They're all from here. I mean, you know, all my cousins, like. So New York is really deep seeded like my blood and guts and like in a lot of ways like growing up with so much access to the city, you know, you think that like things would be really progressive and people would be really good about shit. But my neighborhood wasn't, like Paramus was not by any means. It was like democratic and a lot of ways. And it was very... I had a lot of super hippy teachers that were really forward thinking and like not even in the stupid white liberal way. Really, really adamantly were like antiracist socialist hippie Weirdos. I'm pretty sure my history teacher is actually an anarchist and like used to do all kinds of like women's lib. stuff. And when I came out as trans I was like super down and you know, like, and that was like always art social studies department. They're really great teachers. The town itself, 65 percent Asian, Korean and Catholic. So like there's like this overlying Catholic population that existed in Paramus, New Jersey and that played a lot into how people viewed gay people, right? Teenagers are fucking awful and their parents are terrible and you know, the towns started out as blue collar but now it's very much upper middle class. I wouldn't say white upper middle class because like I said, it's like 65 percent east Asian, mostly Korean, couple Japanese families. But like then the rest of it is like Italian Jewish, white, and then, you know, it's like maybe three black kids, my whole school, you know, and like my best friend growing up was Cuban, you know, there's a few Latino Latinx people around, and then there was folks who were low income and that was a very small group of people and those were all the punks, Weirdos, drunk kids. Like it's very clear who the outsiders were. We did meet at the lunch tables, we all ate out in the hallway and we all hung out at the mall. We were mall rats. That's the misfits, the people, the goths, the like, you know, there's a little crossover in the theater department. We were all, a lot of us were drug addicts. It was all thing. and yeah, so those kids and even some of them were not cool with me being queer, not all of them, most of them work because we were just all, well we're all the Weirdos so we just have to band together. But even amongst them like, they would say, "oh do you mean you're gay fucking faggot, Dyke, you know, whatever". And they'd be like, "I'm am, deal with it or I'm going to break face". And then he got over it really fast. So when it came out as trans, there was amongst my immediate friends, there was overwhelming support. In fact, they're like, we've all known for years, Nogga the fuck, you know, in fact, all of us were pretty sure that you were doing this when we first met you, because I just always, even when I was located, people would argue with me if I was a girl or boy be like, no, I'm a girl. And they'd be like, no, you're not. And I'm like, I am. Some people would ask me, are you aware of girl? Be like, I'm an alien from another planet. I've come here to observe your race. You're failing miserably. And that's just identified as an alien from like first grade on when gender became like a thing that happened because I wasn't like the other girls. I have a very, typical trans narrative where I was like, always kind of like a tomboy. It was never grew out of it I guess. Um, and people kept on telling my mom that it was a phase and that, you know, all girls go through this. And also being Israeli, my dad never brought me
up in a gender, you know, he was like, you want to have a car, you need to know how to fix the car, we have a boat, you to learn how to sail it and fix it and work with wood and you need to know how to cook and clean because that’s what grownups do. You have hands that work, you will use them. That’s it. Like it's very communist, right? Like it's like if you can, you should do, you know what I mean? Like everybody has to lend a helping hand. So it was like, so being like Polish eastern European, that was status quo. But then also being Jewish, there's like a certain kind of massage is what you should do with being proud to be a woman. You should do it while wearing a skirt and high heels. Well maybe not high heels, but my dad thought they were really impractical, but my mom was like, look, I put up curtains and built this fucking thing. And I did it in heels. You know what I mean, so was like very fem empowerments or anything, we can do it. Women do it, my mom knew how to use guns, you know, because of the IDF and that kind of bullshit. Um, so you know, there’s, if you can, you do and you need to like the added thing is as a female assigned at birth and you need to do it kind of fabulous lead away which is the distinction from American culture. It's a very different thing and I have a lot of feelings about Israel and Israeli, it's, it is what it is and, and, and we'll just, we'll just, that's it's own special whatever. But as far as the feminism is concerned in the culture around like gender stuff, it's really different from American. There’s, there's very different expectations and in some ways can be even more misogynist in weird spots. But way more empowering, way more empowering. There are so many strong feminist women in my family. I'm, so like this concept of that. That's why it was so strange when my, when I came out as trans, my family rejected it so deeply and it wasn’t for religion. It wasn’t for even a cultural thing. He's Lehman do what men do. Why do you need to change your body? Like why is that a thing? why put yourself through that? why make your life harder? You know, it was, why would you make this choice that would make your life so much difficult? men, women Genitalia, who cares? It doesn't matter. that was always the which is beautiful, right? it really was, but unfortunately it mattered to me even though it shouldn't because of social construct, but it wasn't my social construct. I was never brought up, yes, there was some forced feminization. mom's we’re bored addresses growing your hair, but it wasn't you need to look princesses, you know what I mean? my dad knows how to. So he knows how to crochet, Kinda Cook, but he's not afraid of cleaning and doing housekeeping, you know, my mom builds stuff. She’s an interior designer. She put curtains up, she uses power tools. She has her own rules, which every time my father uses, as she loses her mind, she’s like, don't lose my fucking marriage, you know what I mean? Do you have yours? These are mine., Cuz he fucks him up and drops him in the water. And then she's like, no, I combined the $200 drill. So you know, my parents both do these things like the manual labor, it doesn’t matter. Um, but then there’s this weird flip side where it’s, I don't know, at one point where when I was really pushed, she's, why can't you be like Elon? So, my mom was into generous wake, she wears pantsuits because she's, she's got a nice, feminine short haircut, you know, there's this whole thing of or be more like Roseanne Barr, which, or like Rosie O'donnell and then Rosie O'donnell got the bad haircut. Or my mom was like, I hate that haircut. I'm like, I hate it too. It looks terrible. I'm not doing the weird asymmetrical mom haircut and that you get in the midwest now with the pink streets. Everybody in Minnesota as it is really cool in the nineties. So you know, there was, there was, being butch was, fine. As long as I was okay with being what I was assigned. Being a masculine woman was fine. My aunt ran track and was shocked. And she’s a tall lady that has broad shoulders. She's very strong. My grandma apparently used to lift weights, there's a lot of really strong butch or masculine quote
unquote women in my life, right? prime for lesbian separatism. It's all as long as you're okay with a uterus, you know what I mean? that was, just be okay with your uterus and have babies and find a nice woman or man, whichever. at first I was, obviously you need to marry a man who's respectable your womanhood. But then they're, oh, you're a lesbian. Okay. Find a nice lady that's respectful of your womanhood. And then they're, oh wait, you want to be a dude? And then I came out as gay and then, you know, they're just, you know what, at this point we fucking care. Now my family is amazing. But yeah, when it came out it was terrible. I was in and out of my parents' house, stuff homeless, um, I had a lot of feelings about my gender and the only examples of masculinity that I had were this kid that I referred to as my brother. He was my best friend and he literally saved my life more than one. There was an emt and he multiple times at take a de-fib to my heart because of OD overdoses and mixing of Drugs and alcohol and all of those things that happened when I was younger and my teams, um, so I owed him my life. You know what I mean? I wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for him finding me in a dumpster or doing melted mouth or rescue heath. And God knows what situation I was in at whatever club we're picking you up in Patterson and after a drug deal went wrong, you know, um, you know, he did a lot for me. Unfortunately. He was also the worst example of masculinity that you could ever get. he was managed manually module drugs, WWE level, Blah really homophobic. for his own reasons. He experienced a lot of abuse, sexual abuse from male nannies, you know what I mean? And it was real. So I was when I came out as male and started living as male, I got I had lots of gay male friends and it was fine that they were gay, but I couldn't be gay. My masculinity wasn't allowed to be. I was very homophobic towards myself, you know what I mean? And very, oh, "trans men can't love men/". Like what's the point of transitioning? If you're going to sleep with men, you might as well stay a girl. You know what I mean? because that whole binary of top bottom, you know, whatever, really, really terrible patriarchy and misogyny and femphobia and I always dated fem actually I was very attracted to other gender non binary "dyke-y' but I was still the butcher what, you know what I mean. And it was very much establishing this very specific, I was a stone butch, I didn't get fucked, I didn't and if it did it was usually when I was inebriated or under really strange circumstances sometimes I would consent to but I felt weird about it because I thought if I didn't consent to it, my girlfriend loves me anymore kind of a thing and I got dumped multiple times because I'd be like I'm trans and I want to identify as male and I'm going to, you have so much to say kick up until the door opens again.

Adorian: You were saying, you were talking about coming, coming out as gay also is a trans guy and then the people you were attracted to.

Schwartz: So yeah, early in transition I had a very toxic masculinity because I was posturing because I want it to pass and it was really dangerous in the early two thousands, late nineties, I got jumped multiple times. I had two of my ribs broken and my collarbone broken in a bar in Nyack, in Nyack New York after this guy thought I was hitting on his girlfriend, you know what I mean? And I had gotten shoved into lockers. I've had rocks thrown at me, I have had my life threatened, I've been stabbed. it's, I, I've experienced a lot of physical violence for a, being a dyke and then later on not being a real dude, you know, and being a trap or faking it, especially after, you know, Brandon Teena, you know, that was,
Adorian: What was that? What Brandon Teena. Schwartz: Teena was Boys don't Cry. The movie, you know?

Adorian: Oh yea.

Schwartz: that was, that was the stuff. That was the narrative. That's who that was. Who the representation was. You know, that film that happened around the time I came out. Yeah. was it Brandon was killed, it was 98, 97 and the movie came out in 2001, 2002 or 2003 right around there. I was 17, 18 when that movie came out. And so that, that was Hollywood's big representation. that was, that's who we had as far as trans masculine is first trans-fem them representation was a great, do you have Maury and the fucking daytime shows, but there was still some more positive people out there, you know, we had um, Auntie Kate, she was out there and there was, there was more representation of trans, of more famous Trans Feminine folks. Then there were a trans masculine as far, even trans women were like, what do you mean you're a trans man? I've had older trans femmes when I first came out as trans, I would go to a transcript, interview all these trans women and it was me and they'd be, "wait, you're not sure? What do you mean? I don't understand." they didn't know what was going on. You know what I mean, because there's a little access even being in New Jersey and the Internet being around, but there wasn't much on the Internet we had, I said, blended out when we started having that stuff in 2000 and 2003 is to have actually the said it was really funny, something happened in the year 2000 specifically for Trans Masculine folks especially that you would call f to m, two k. And it was this explosion of I was about to say tumbler. Uh, there was no tumbler live journal groups planted out.com. suddenly Buck Angel, there were suddenly trans men getting there was always transmen but like getting some sort of like Della Grace Volcano was making photographs and actually being recognized it in as an artist. You know, there was starting to be actual visibility. There was always in Brooklyn, in New York there was always people around. I have friends that transitioned in the seventies and eighties and early nineties that are amazing people that have been in New York and there was a transplant but it, it was, it was past that, not just drag kings, not just Murray Hill, you know, this, this sort of in the two thousands, early 2000. There was this sudden recognition and people were talking I found out what a Phalloplasty was, you know, and there was Trans Buck and you can see surgery results. And so there was this amazing shift that happened after the Millennium change, you know, the turn of the century essentially., yeah, amazing explosion. And folks, you know, there was gender studies, there was stone butch blues, there was all of these things that just Pat Califia, all of these folks that they were around but they weren't getting the attention they were. And now they were on the map. People were on CNN, you know, and Hollywood was paying attention and that just didn't exist before that. And, so it was funny because you have people who are younger than me, I came out really young and I transitioned a lot yet I started hormones at 23, but I started socially transitioning when I was 18. I was living full time male and that's an old transsexual term. Are you full time, you know, at you're living this way. I started living full time as male when I was 19 years old, at school as much as I could at home at my jobs. I was telling people I'm male identified and there was no protections. They had no idea what the fuck I was talking about. I remember I took a job and I went back in the closet because I was afraid and I took a job at a photo studio and I was, well, I'm not on hormones yet. I don't have any official documentation. I'm in therapy to get these things. Because you had Benjamin standards of
care, you needed to live full time as male; out. You needed to prove to a therapist for a year that your male; out and then you have to go see an endocrinologist that believed that this was a reputable therapists that, you know, actually had a degree in gender identity disorder can be diagnosed this was, you know, you had to meet these things and then you have to be on hormones for a year before you could even talk about surgeries. there was so much gatekeeping, so, but that's the thing to live out was you needed to go to a job not on hormones, not passing supposedly or looking like an 11 year old and they're, why do you look so young? And it's like, I don't know, genetics? I mean, or being why does your paperwork say female? Hopefully they don't check, you know what I mean? There's this thing. So sometimes you just didn't get a job, you know what I'm saying?

**Adorian:** You're in a double bind.

**Schwartz:** Yeah, it was, it was like the system was so designed to keep you under the thumb, you know what I mean? There was no winning and, I'm not saying it's perfect now, but man, is it so different. I remember when I heard about Callen Lorde years later when I was 23 when I was 22, I heard about it. I started going to the gender identity project. My friend Charlie reached out to me. We were Kinda, we were friends we met when we were 16. We're both baby grow dykes who tried to maybe hook up, but it wasn't gonna work. Met On planet. I'll dot com and that's, that's how I met all my girlfriends, you know what I mean? Or all my friends, all my queer friends I met and they were all people that were in high school around me, you know, and I came out to them as trans and what's funny is now seven of my really good friends from when I was 16, seven or eight of us have all transitions, most of us medically. And we all grew up together since I was 16. So it was this really strange thing. At the time they weren't out when I was, I was the first. Actually that's not true. Um, I think I was the first one that was out, but Jessica transition medically before I did, I came out a little bit. I was starting to live as male and she was still identifying as male, but then shortly after, when she was maybe half a year or six months, eight months older than me, but she transitioned before I did. Um, but yeah, she dated my old band mate who I went to Hebrew school with and my other friend Hannah, we were. And, everybody's, ruins it for you to Nogga I was, I was the first one that was out, I was the L, the G, the B and the T growing up. it was just me all the time. And then when I was 23 and I started hormones, obviously testosterone make me gay because I met my first trans guy and I was, I had a huge identity crisis as fuck am I attracted to this person because I'm not validating their gender, do I not see them as male? And that's really fucked up because clearly they are, who it might have second guessed somebody gender, gender identity, that's so wrong. And then I was really fucked up about it. And I was . And I, I didn't say anything to him. I was, I'm not gonna, but you know, we. And I was, oh maybe he's, but he's really good. He hooks up with Cis men and I don't want to look up cis men, but I'm really attracted to him and he's clearly male. So that makes me gay. But I'm also only date women and female identified folks. I don't date men male identified. So it was this whole, ah. And then we hooked up and it was perfect. And then I became a flaming homosexual.

**Adorian:** I'm glad you. I'm glad you able to eventually, validate your own desires. But yeah, that, that tie of just all the intersecting identities. Um, I was going to ask, uh, what was, what
what people have been most important in your life or what scenes are communities have been most important or validating for you?

Schwartz: I mean, Brooklyn is number one for me, which is why I’ve stuck around. I wouldn't be alive. And this is a little embarrassing. The Renaissance Festival. I mean, you know, I started working at Ren Fair when I was 17 years old. I started going there when I was nine and the sterling forest, upstate New York, the official NYRF New York Renaissance Festival. It was the first place that I was full-time male, 100 percent and nobody second guessed me. I only told one person that I was trans at first and were, "I don't give a fuck". It was just whatever, you know. And that was my adopted mom and uh, you know, she was also a sex worker. And so it was her wife and they were the second leather family I ever joined because I was in a leather family when I was 14. Um, that was really not okay. And very, very statutory rape, nonconsensual fucked up. Terrible, awful. But whatever I did, I know that it was problematic. It didn't feel problematic to me at the time. But as an older person I'm, Oh yeah, that was maybe not a great idea. You know, I think I was taken advantage of even though I completely consented to it, but I was also in a lot of drugs, but, you know, whatever, we all do things. Um, so, I don't know, you know, they, they taught me how to the, a better reenter leather community in a way that was really empowering and beautiful and consensual. This was straight, I mean, yes, my mom had a wife, but that she was by no means bisexual or identified they weren't queer, but that was her best friend and her wife. They loved each other and they would beat men up together. that was the extent and to also, you know, excite her, her actual, paper husband, you know, it'd be, Eh, sure, why not a woman's a woman, why not? She's pretty, you know, kind of a, you know, when straight people go queer for five minutes kind of a situation. So it was very much a straight, mostly heterosexual but not by any means heteronormative situation. Um, yeah, I mean, you know, I was with them for many, many, many years and you know, they treated me really well and you know, she always referred to me as their son and made me adorable Ren. Fair outfits that were all, you know, kilts and doublets and you know, we even tried to she would try to make stuff, shirts that would allow me to not essentially go topless but hide my chest so that way I wouldn't have to find per se or would help me find ways to bind without hurting myself because it'd be really hot when I was working. And one time actually my binder and this was how a bunch of people found out that I was trans that didn't know, I was surprised they didn't know, but they didn't know because my mom said that this was their son and they just assumed that I was 12 and that for some reason I was allowed to drink, you know, so it was this, I was binding, you know, this was before there was binders weren't exactly prolific underwear existed, but I didn't know about them. And so most binders were inaccessible and there was a few companies. So it was binding with whatever, ace bandages. Um, I used to use a back brace and I took the boning out of the back brace and he used to use that to bind. And when you're, you know, it's 98, 100 degrees outside and you're wearing leather and cotton, you know, period clothing with all my,, you know, I was dressed as a pirate and I had fucking leather on and, and, and patches and things. And I'm working I was working with selling clothes and I was of course a tier, my job was to make corsets and lace people up is great job. I loved it. I made great money. People would tip me. I got to be as the meaner I was, the more money they gave me. It was fantastic. And um, yeah, I was dehydrated one day because I was the manager and I'm running around who's was really busy. It was super hot that day and I I fucking sat down and killed over. I just fell and somebody ran over starting
to do compressions. Felt something weird, ripped open my shirt, just ripped all the gods, right open. Saw the back brace was are his ribs broken? I don't understand. And then my, my girlfriend said, he's trans. Rip off the binder. They're like, this needs to come off. He's, his ribs are in compression. He's not breathing for me because it was so tight. So there I was in front of multiple people. if I was male, nobody would see my boobs. Right. So they're like, okay, uh, so my grandma was like, no, you can't just rip off his binders. So my binder had to come off and there was a really scary moment. I knew that everybody would be fine because there were other trans people in the Ren. Fair I wasn't the only one but it was weird because nobody, people knew but they didn't know. So I was outing in this very intense way, sort of non-consensually. But what were you going to do? I was going to die, you know, they needed to make sure that I could do that. So the empty my, my brother came over and you know, he'd see me in all kinds of ways and ripped off my binder and got me up and threw a towel around me and got me, got walked up fluids in me and they got me okay. And I was fine. It was very dehydrated. I couldn't wear a binder because it was so hot. And that's the thing, you know, trans people do crazy things to their fucking bodies that emotionally it helps a lot. And when you're doing a harm reduction approach is binding is bad for you. It's not good for you. It hurts your body in the long run. There are things that you can do that are better than other things, but it limits your, it contracts the muscles, it breaks down the tissue in the chest, it constricts your airways it causes a lot of long-term issues bound for 10 plus years. I have permanent damage in my shoulder and my neck from it. I have x-rays from before I bound and after I found and what happened to the tissue in my chest. It's really interesting how it broke down year. We had tissue that was really healthy and then he got completely matched. the nerves look we yesterday is really interesting. And there's not a lot of research done on that, you know, because especially like I said, before 2005, 2007, even the last five years there was fuck it talked about. Um, and there's not a lot of information. Everything is by hearsay or like I said, live journal groups, the gender identity project. that Trans Masculine drop in group when I started going when I was 22 years old was lifesaving. I never met other than Topher and two other people that I knew that I met through just kind of the moving around word of mouth sort of thing. We find each other, you know what I mean? Through planet out.com, through friendster, through weird pathways. I knew a few other trans men, I thought there were no Jewish trans men. I thought I was the only one. I was, oh, just don't transition. And then I met I came to New York and I was like, they're all Jewish. All are Jewish. All guys that were not Jewish and trans identified before transition, and then convert to Judaism. I did not. I was not aware of this phenomenon. It was everybody; I know so many Trans Masculine people convert to Judaism. I was like, what is wrong with you? I don't understand. It's really weird. I, I thought it was thinking. I actually remember one time I was talking to my dad about it. He was no that makes total sense. Jews would want to transition because of patriarchy and you know, fucking look at Judaism, it favors men. They're allowed to hold the Torah and do all this stuff. Of course, you would want to be male. You get all the, you get all the perks, Jewish women have to be hidden away in the house. And I'm all right, this is such a strange read, but I'll take it. Because you're also an atheist. my dad hates religion. So he's like, yeah, fucking patriarchal binary, Blah Blah Blah bullshit. But not. But it wasn't coming from a place of he didn't like anything that, that put women above men or men above women even atheist place. It was an atheist place. And then you know, was catering to me being like, yeah, why would you. Because I, uh, you know, when I was six, 15, I joined the club and I became religious and I actually transitioned and was part of the combined to about
20 years old. Um, I was bald. I was going through the process of becoming baltshuva and I was thinking of going to rabbinical school.

Adorian: And I don't know what baltshuva is.

Schwartz: Baltshuva means I'm somebody who would often somebody who was Jewish or was brought up orthodox but stopped being Orthodox and then decides to return. It's the return of the, it's the return of the, of the free. It's to do Tshuva to make forgiveness, to ask for is to make repentance. And Baal is the child. So the child would register. The return of the prodigal child, you know, is the return of the son. So you are to be baltshuva means that you are coming back to the religion, so you, you know, you have a whole process. You're not a convert because you were already Jewish and in fact if you're about to have it, you were already probably Orthodox and does this thing called q oo, which means to bring closer, to bring closer to God. That's why you have those guys on eastern parkway that are Jewish and then they want to put, if you're a male, they want to put the to fill in oh, do you want to come with, for Shabbat? Do you want to blow this show they want it. They get Brownie points because they want to make you more Jewish. The more the more Jews they bring closer to God and send over to Israel, the sooner the Messiah will come. It was a whole weird fucked up video game that they play IRL. So yeah, I did that a little bit as a kind of fuck you to my family because I, it was, other than Ren. Fair was the other place that they were okay, with me being nailed, they made space for me. There was a lot of arguing between me and my rabbi. It was like, are you sure this is what you need to do? And that was in the hospital after an attempt on my life. And uh, he's like, no, this is really what will keep you alive. And I was like, yeah, I feel like I'm gonna die. And he was like, well then this is what you have to do. That's it. and not just physically alive your, if this is what you and God need to do to make peace, then that's what, if this will bring you to God, if this will make you a more full person. And this is what you have to do, you life trumps all the. I mean, life takes the most important. If you're allowed to break every law of the Bible to preserve life and it's not just the heartbeat, but they, it also some interpretation and say also the emotional and the religious and the and the soul has to want to live, has to want to continue and if that means that you have to, if somebody gets hurt, somebody crossing the street and gets hit by a car on the Sabbath, you break the Sabbath and you get them the fuck to the hospital because to save a life is the most important thing. It's that same. Anybody who argues otherwise is out of the business, doesn't know what Torah is, doesn't know what the Bible says, number one his life. Um, so that, that was what my rabbi in the community that I was part of. Life was did they judge me? Did they talk about me quietly behind my back was I oithered here? And there abso-fucking-lutely it was, it could be alienating and I was never humiliated. I was never made to feel bad about it. in fact, there was some times that sort of weird enthusiasm for me, almost like a backhanded compliment, you know? I don't know how to describe it. they were more excited that I was wanting to be Jewish and the fact that I was trans, that was more important. I was, I was like, oh, I went for Shabbat! That's great! You know what I mean? Or any opportunity where I could study more or have something. He was like, yes, you're wearing a suit. You look so nice for Shabbat, you're wearing a Yakama; anything that was bringing me closer to religious life was what was more important than the fact that I wanted to change my body, you know? And there were some people who were important but they didn't say anything to me. I didn't hear about it, you know, they would have preferred if I didn't, if I didn't have sex with women, they
felt that basically I would be some kind of none. I guess type like a vow of, or I'd only hook up with other trans people because you know, we wouldn't be able to produce children anyway, so I should be with somebody who's like me, but obviously in the other rate because you know, male and female, so I should be with a trans woman. It was the only, for the most part, the only acceptable things. Other trans men maybe, but at least there was kind of something because we'd never produced a child. So if I had to deal with the main goal, it sounds like ideally I wouldn't have sex period. I'd be just somebody who lived as male that had all the benefits and I wasn't allowed all of the male rights, there's different rabbis said different things. Um, but according to the Kabbalah, there are six recognized genders and you know, I was to follow the laws of the six recognize genders and there are specific rules on how to handle somebody who falls within those genders.

Adorian: If you don't mind. What? What genders are they?

Schwartz: There's tuntmum. I don't remember off the top of my head in Hebrew and Yiddish so that is one of them, but there's a lot of them have to do more with some of them are about effeminate men and masculine women are to kind of a very loose. And then there's ones intersex conditions, specifically actual medical situations where somebody has I guess ambiguous genitalia because babies will be born and they're like, do we give them a Bris or not? Right. You know what I mean? So there are six recognize genders, four of them I think have to do with very specific instances of intersex conditions and I think two of them are essentially an effeminate man and masculine women kind of something. It's, there is a lot. there's a lot of interpretations and there's no. But it's interesting.

Adorian: That is interesting.

Schwartz: Which means a Kabbalah thing. It's very much more in the mystic part, not in the Torah itself. Even though I think there's even things about what to do with a child that has a medical issue because you know, there's that whole part of the biggest that talks about when you get a posting boil that is this, it means that you have been make a sacrifice of three goats and hide in a cave eight hail Marys or whatever, whatever it is until plus goes away. Yeah. There's parts of the Bible that deal with medical weird medical issues. But anyway, so yeah, it was religious and in some ways that was really important to me. And then I realized I wasn't into the whole men being second for women because they're as much as they made space for me, they didn't make space for me. It was still I wasn't. It was a special case. I was an oddity. I was a token. I was, I was still very much another and I wasn't allowed to participate in every single way that I wanted to and so it wasn't fulfilling for me. And as I got older, I got and more terrible things kept happening in my life, outside of my being trans, but my friends dying and getting shot and all this violence I was experiencing and I'm like, where is God? You know, I'm x at this age and I've lost this many friends. And why? Why is the universe punishing me? You know what I mean? And it's I couldn't, it just got harder and harder to believe in an entity that would allow terrible things happen. Where was this all forgiving, loving being that we're supposed to protect me and doing all things and it's no, try harder, try harder. And I'm like, you know, and in Judaism you don't really have an afterlife. You're supposed to make this life count.
You’re supposed to read the words of this life, you know? So it’s I’m not reading any more rewards and just in pain all the fucking time.

**Adorian:** Do you feel like you had a formal exit from that community or do you feel like it just kind of fizzled out? Like you just kept spacing from it?

**Schwartz:** A little bit of both. I used to work at a Hebrew school and finally at some point, mostly because my schedule is changing and I decided also primarily to move to New York. Um, and I started really hanging out, I found I found the New York queer community is really what happened and I still had to a lot of Jews in New York and there's still evolved, but I found CBST.

**Adorian:** I don’t know what CBST is.

**Schwartz:** Congregation Beit Simchat Torah, that’s the largest gay synagogue in the world here in New York. It’s been around since the seventies. And so I was still wanting to be Jewish but I didn’t want to be religious and I want it to be Jewish and queer and I wanted to be in a space that allowed me to do that. So I started going every Friday night pretty much for Shava. Granted it was reform. It wasn’t religious, but he was still Jewish life and I got really involved for several years. For awhile, that’s how I met a bunch of folks, other trans men, a lot of conference trans-masculine converts and other people and between that and the gender identity group adds the GIP. I made a lot of lifelong friends that I’m still friends with today, some of whom I knew since I was 16, two or three people and then, and that’s how I met a couple of my boyfriends and my partners and I met my girlfriend and we decided we both agreed that me living in New Jersey was more expensive and stupid because I was commuting and spending $400 a month on rent in New Jersey and then spending three or $400 a month on commuting into the city, you know, three, four times a week, $800 a month. I literally could have had my own one bedroom here in Brooklyn at that time. Not now, but you know, so it was let’s fucking move in together then. And so we did. We had a one bedroom; we paid a thousand dollars a month. I actually, she didn’t even ask me to pay rent, she let me live there rent free in exchange for my job was to pay for the food and keep the cleaning and it’s an exchange, you know, make it fair, I’m fine you’re paying for my housing. I can get the food, I’ll pay the electrical bill is I would do the other things. Um, and so I worked at Sears and we lived together and I bought the food and I helped the house clean and you know, I cook for her because I was way better at cooking than she was.

**Adorian:** This was in Brooklyn?

**Schwartz:** Yea, in Lefferts gardens back about. Oh, 12 years ago, 11 years ago. I moved to Brooklyn in 2007, so 11 years ago. Because I, yeah, it was 2007 going into 2008. I moved to Brooklyn. And that summer, just before the week before I moved here, that’s when I started to, was 23 years old. I’m 33 now, so I’ve been on testosterone for 10 years.

**Adorian:** What has, has there been ways that you’re accessing healthcare, related either to hormones or to just anything else in your life have I’m, I’m wondering about how that’s changed in those 10 years
Schwartz: I mean, Cal. Lorde was the first place that didn’t require me to see somebody for a year. I mean I had to go, see, see their psychiatrist to be, yes, I’m a human and I’m aware of what this will do to me and I desperately want it and they’re like, cool, great, go fill this prescription and we’ll see you in a couple of hours. You know what I mean? Cal. Lorde was amazing. As I never experienced also never having had insurance since I lived with my parents when I was 16 years old. Oh, okay. I had insurance when I was 18 because I went for one year to college but I hadn’t had insurance in years. So if I never saw doctors ever for anything. I literally broke my fucking foot and I splinted it myself with, you know, it was I’m not going to the hospital. My friend, I split my head open, my friend gave me stitches and super glue after a puncture. I bashed my head into a wall. It was way split open, just fucking so that shit shut, you know? So I mean, yeah, it was really DIY but my mental care. And I was talking to some people about getting hormones on the black market, you know what I mean? I was straight up like I want to start now but that information was available online but wasn’t so I knew people in the GIP. They’re like, oh, if you want to get hormones I’m thinking of gave me a double dose or do you want to try a shot? And I’m like, I don’t know, I feel weird about this. Um, so I mean Cal. Lorde Has gone through sometimes being unbelievably awesome and something’s being really terrible and it has to do with their funding and who’s staffing them at the time. You know, it’s gone through a lot of changes. I’ve stuck with them. It is still better than anything out there. They’ve been around forever. They were the only ones doing what they were doing. They’ve been doing it for a long time and yes, there are a lot of problems and people’s experience of Cal. Lorde Really real and there’s lots of critiques that I have but I’m not going to stop going to them because there was nothing in New Jersey. I had to go to Manhattan. I had to move to the city. There was no way I was going to survive in Jersey, you know, there were the only trans folks that I knew were, there were, there were few and far between and the guys I was hanging out with, the only reason we were friends because we were trans and then I realized that a lot of them were really toxic and not okay and did not share my values at all. They were not feminists. They were also posture toxic masculinity and were weirdly right wing and racist. And I was like, Hey, I’m not into this is not who I am, but I was doing it because it was for comradery for something. And then I finally found this whole community here and I was like, I don’t have to be this person that I actually don’t like if you were to meet me 13 years ago, I was a piece of shit, it was a terrible person, but that wasn’t really me. But that’s who I thought I had to be to access community, any kind of, any kind of recognition because otherwise I was hanging out with my dude friends and they’d be like, oh Noggas the dyke, because the friend that was a token and it was like, oh, you know, you’ll pretend he’s got a Dick, you know, my brother used to call me a "shim". She, him actually, he used to call me a shit. She, it. Um, and then his sister was like, that is rude, don’t do that. At least try something. And it was kind of a joke. It was like maybe Shim, “she-it” because Noggas not 100 percent passing and that was like, it was a really sad attempted aliyship, but it was more than I’d ever gotten. Um, so it was amazing and it really meant a lot to me. But yeah, that’s, that’s what I, that, that, those were my best friends, you know, these are the people that I trust my life with it. They’re not painful. It’s just, it’s not what I needed at that time, you know. I’m sorry. Yeah.
Adorian: I wanted to ask actually about gender identity project and where, I mean on Saturday, where is it, what does it still exist? And it sounds like that was other than Ren. Fair and Shabbat, it sounds like that was a space that really connected you to community.

Schwartz: Yeah. The gender identity project is at the center still exists. Um, and they have the Trans Masculine and the Trans Feminine Group, those are the first two groups that were over there. They were trans-specific and then they later, much later down the line after me going there for five, six, seven years. I think maybe four or five years ago, they finally had a gender nonconforming group that was actually started by two friends of mine because it was needed. You know what I mean? Because the two groups, right? If you were male assigned at birth or coerce male assigned at birth, you went to the Trans Feminine Group which was a spectrum and the trans masculine a spectrum. But in the beginning it was definitely dominated by people who were not necessarily very binary but definitely medically focused and there was a lot of people who were like, I don't want top surgery, I don't want bottom surgery, I don't want hormones or I want hormones, but no surgery or surgery but nor hormones or I still liked using multiple pronouns, but whatever because it's a spectrum. Right. So it was a trans masculine spectrum dot dropping group, but it was still primarily even though that was what was said every time. And you know, we try to make space for that. It's a group always lead to a discussion about medical transition, it definitely dominated the space, and that wasn't everybody's experienced. I remember when we first started going to the group, my boyfriend came with me and he hated it because he was the only gay one that he was the only one who literally identified as gay. Not I'm a trans guy that hooks up with other trans guys and women, you know what I mean? He's like "I am a gay male". And he was one of he was one of the only ones that was openly admitting to that. the others, people sometimes you know, totally thumbs, but there wasn't like a, I am a Faggot, I am a homosexual, not a homosexual because I sleep with other trans men. I sleep with male men, man identified folks. I identify as gay. And I remember people were like, would kind of turn their head sideways and be like, you can't be trans and gay. You know what I mean? Because people were still thinking of the Benjamin standards of care, like if you were going to transition, you need it to, one of the requirements were to prove your attraction to women and that you wanted to grow up, get married and have children and be the breadwinner. You know what I mean? Just very like household, I want my little housewife doing all the things. Right, exactly. So this, and it's funny because it was 2006, 2007. This was talking 12 years ago. It's not that long ago, but it's also a million years ago as far as our, the way we talk about queerness now, and using terms like the T word was okay for trans masculine people to do and you, it was just, it was different. The conversation was different, the access to information was different and now it's a lot easier. It's a lot better. Do I think that the politics are better? No. Do I think that the access is perfect? Absolutely fucking not. It's still is shop full of problems and still very patriarchal and binary and all of the above capitalism, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. It's still better and has made massive strides and I don't want to negate those massive strides that we've made. but yeah, it's, you know, it was also very white, you know what I mean? And you know, that's another conversation, you know what I mean? Like there's all these is very many layers to the whole situation. So I got to experience a lot of really amazing growth were I don't know, some of my friends didn't because of being disabled because of mental health stuff especially, you know, a lot of people who diagnosed with any kind of mental health issue like schizophrenia or bipolar, were not taken seriously and their
transition because they were, they were nuts. They were crazy. They were or folks on the autism spectrum, you know, they're like, oh, you have no idea what a binary is, you know, you're autistic. You know what I mean? That wasn't really fucking abelist incredibly abelist. So guys wouldn't admit that they had diagnoses just to get to prove to the psychiatrist that they were like, well, enough people wouldn't talk about their suicidal ideation. I know I didn't, I didn't tell my therapist that I ever even thought of wanting to kill myself, you know, because they wouldn't, I wouldn't get the hormones. It's a lie through your teeth about so much stuff. there's so much weird gatekeeping and now you know, when a provider asks me about my mental health, I'll be like, oh yeah, I have depression and I tried to attempt suicide 18 times, three this time to do this. I might have been off by this many times and I'm not afraid. I'm not afraid because also there are certain privileges that I have. Um, and I am older and know how to navigate that system really well through trial and error. But I now I'm honest, I'm this should have no bearing on my access to the meds that I need. You know, I'm crazy. I'm not crazy. It doesn't matter. My legs don't work. They do work. Doesn't matter. We're talking about something that has nothing to do with that. Um, and I think that that conversation has gotten better. I think that Callan Lorde and they were the first to do it. There's still not great about it. Um, but I don't know, it's, it's interesting too, at only 33. It's funny to me because in this way, I'm, I'm starting to enter the realm of trans elder, but there are trans folks that are way older than me that have transitioned before me, but younger trans folks don't have patience for them because there's a cultural clash and it's really, really sad to me because I'm kind of right on the cusp of the two. I know what the young academics are saying. It's funny to me because people are doing gender studies and they're reading about stuff that they might even be mentioning me and my friends in that book. I probably even did the interview for that. You know what I'm saying? You know, that weird guy that did that thing, that was me or that was my boyfriend or that's my friend. These are people that I know or when I say that I know somebody, people are like, wait, what do you mean? You know them? I'm like, we used to go to therapy together. I don't want to tell you I've been here forever but I haven't been here that long. It's 12 years. It's not that long. I'm, I'm very early, very young. I'm a baby and I, there's people that are older than me and they look at me. They're like, oh the nineties. But now I'm saying oh in the late nineties, early on people were immediately these 22 year olds and new pack. You don't keep on. See You told Silas Howard. They're hyperventilating, losing the coop over it. And I'm, I tell you, yes, of course I do. We were all here in New York together. I'm a baby to them or like I'm like, they're like, oh, I know that. I remember when you showed up at 23 years old, you were all weird. You're taking my picture. Would no idea who I was, which is strange because they were somebody but they weren't, you know?

Adorian: You're caught between generations.

Schwartz: I am. If you're like, oh, you're just dumb millennial. I'm like, no, I've been hanging out in the season. I was 13. Most of my friends are 10, 15, 20 years older than me. And I relate much better to them because, I don't, I don't go to college. There was no gender studies when I was doing, when the one year that I did go to university, I went to school of visual arts and I, you know, Catherine Opie was huge to me. And I saw her project on the, on the drag kings and I was cool. And Cindy Sherman's, you know, whatever. And Claude Cahun who was this amazing photographer from the thirties, Jewish gender nonconforming, probably a lesbian, but actually
might’ve been a trans person, was doing weird gender photography. That was. Then the Nazis came in and stole all of their stuff and burned most of it and they escaped France, you know, in Jersey, Jersey, England, Not Jersey, New York, Jersey, but escape to Jersey and was married and partners with a prominent poet, philosopher who wrote amazing books and, you know, they were in the Dadaist movement. Claude Cahun was right there at the beginning of the Dadaist movement and doing and doing all these weird photography stuff before was kind of doing or right around the same time. unbelievable. When I discovered their art as blow mine everything. You just, no, no, no, give me the queer stuff because it was nothing. So I was doing weird gender photographs and taking inanimate objects and making them gender to non-gender and doing all this weird makeup stuff, you know, influenced by these artists. And, you know, this was around the time where were delegates. Well, Keto and my friend Tobarring was maybe making. They've been making art and they were putting out stuff. And, I was doing something and I was, right on this cusp had I continued, I dunno, maybe I’d actually be a real photographer right now, at school, my professor was, Oh, this is really interesting, or blah, blah blah. And I started trying to do these photo projects but I never followed through because it was high and drunk all the time, you know what I mean? I just, it didn't pan out for me, but I was right there at the beginning of this, very, very as, I said, the F to m, 2K art movement. I was, I was the baby of it. I was really young to it and I wasn't familiar with the artists at the time. I just, I didn’t know to our new Dell at the time, I met Savara and much later in life. Um, I mean not that much later, but several years later after he'd been doing art for some time and was studying something that we're very good friends. Um, but yeah, I could have been in this I dunno, I was doing weird, I was taking pictures of Trans folks in their homes for this project back in 2004. I started this project and I just kind of, I never had equipment that was good enough to get the images that I wanted second done, side tabling it, coming back to it when I had access to better equipment and the tabling it and then Amos Mac and Amos Beckerman and all these younger photographers where I had been already a photographer for 14 years, came in and started photographing beautiful photographs. I'm not, you know, and, and now they're doing great. They're blowing up and it's, it was kind of weird because I just remember when I started seeing a resurgence and Zachary Drucker and all these people who are making who leisure really important contributing artists. And it's I was kind of doing it before them slash a little bit at the same time. But I started earlier than them. But I didn't, I wasn't out there and I dunno, the, the, the timing access thing didn't happen. So it's funny because I'm the same age as several of them were the same numerical age, but in some ways I'm a little older and they had certain access that I didn't because I was a drug addict, homeless Trans Kid punk and, you know, only had shitty old film cameras that I couldn't afford to get the film processed. And then I finally had a digital camera that I got and I was photographing with events and doing weddings and try and make money in. But doing my project on the side and have a whole archive of images. I'm an a terrible, it's a terrible photograph. So really grainy and not well lit and they're interesting that they're not beautiful by any means, but they're interesting. Um, and I never put them out there because at one point I felt suddenly there was, I don't know, in 2009, 2010. I just felt like the world was inundated with images of white trans masculine people, that transition. And I was, I'm, I don't, it's, there's a shit ton of it and I'm not saying it's bad, it needed to happen. But I was, and it was all by Cis people, which was what was hilarious. And then it was being done by trans guys. But then it was, you know, and then we had, you know, uh, FTM fuckers and original plumbing magazine, which my band got to be in and I thought it was an XX boys.
Adorian: What were these? Were these . . .

Schwartz: There were online magazines and then printed magazines that existed later on after I'd been doing photographs, like XX boys was a wild around for awhile, but then the organizer was accused of sexual harassment and it got real fucking messy. So that Kinda like went to the wayside. And I know people that participated in it. Not in the sexual harassment part. Right. And be photographed part and it was this beautiful kind of porn kind of art, Art porn hot trans men being photographed and being appreciated and being gay and not gay sometimes. You know what I mean? And then original plumbing was, you know, Amos Mac and Rocco started this magazine for Trans Folks, mostly Trans Masculine folks, occasional trans femmes and it was great, but it was still kind of white, you know, there were people of color more than other places and I think that they tried really hard to make sure, but it was definitely majority of people that were in some way medically transition, you know what I mean? And it's, it's who did you have access to who was willing to work for free, you know, because the magazine had no money. It could pay people. It was free promo. They had featured artists that they did articles with. It was really important. I love original plumbing magazine. it was great. I have several issues on my, on my shelf somewhere up there.

Adorian: But there were groups that were definitely not being made as capable as other folks and that that was a typical narrative of being predominantly white and then maybe medically transition.

Schwartz: Right. And, I wouldn't even say hyper masculine, but in some ways, yeah, you know, but there was a lot of, I dunno, white riot was on the cover and why it's a pretty gender nonconforming. Like he, they definitely fem, you know, beautiful, adorable, huge boy, they're amazing, right? They're just this very sweet. Um, they had a moment kinky, queer, adorable, Chubby, faggot, bottom I don't know, unicorn, whatever, tender, whatever, whatever, the new age or as we used to describe non binary, binary, Trans Masculine, unicorn, fluffy weirdos, something. I don't know.

Adorian: No, I've heard all those terms. So something like that could be depending on what they did.

Schwartz: Yeah. And anything and everything, right. Like I, you know, I can't, it's not my place to describe somebody else. My read of them is, is.

Adorian: Yeah, of course. Right. With that, those bring to mind like, I know I've asked you before or you've talked to me before about the leather community and I feel like, what I guess where do you see, where do you see the leather community and where do you see queer radical, BDSM right now, and what would you ideally see?

Schwartz: Well, when it comes to queer radical BDSM, right? There is kind of. So there is gay leather, old guard leather and I'm talking about culture and not material. Leather has always been this amazing place, even in gay culture where it was the fringe of the fringe. So there was
always a place for gender nonconformity, you know, there was, it was always a place for fem dom daddies at sissy faggot bottoms, you know what I mean? It's fringe, right? Even in gay culture it's kind of fringe and there's always been trans folks, there's always been, leather daddies, you know, and some of them have turned into trans men and there's a lot of feelings about that. You know, there's olds, I lost a lot of my older leather dyke friends when I decide transition because they're like, oh, we got email, you're assimilating, you know, dyke separate is kind of weird TERF-y shit but at the same time there was also, when it was good, it was also could be very accepting. You know what I mean? I knew butch dikes that would fuck cis men. it was always a space that could be queer but it didn't have the radical dialect or the, the way we talk about it now and I think, you know, so there's gay leather community, but leather community was always definitely dominated by a masculine centric, idealism verbatim., yeah, ideal is, culture. Um, you know, it was when people think leather, they think big muscly, hairy dudes wearing, you know, biker caps in chaps, you know what I mean? Wearing leather uniforms, cop worship bike or worship, right? We, there's these images, very Tom of Finland, muscles, maybe some, some large body fat folks. But lots of hair, lots of grid, macho, chains bite and stuff, you know, just beating somebody and they're just, gagged, like yea "give it to me again, Daddy", you know, this and in some ways some or really hyper femininity that was the, dom, the fem domina, that's a lipstick eye liner up to here and just, you know, no more wire hangers, just corset, thigh-high latex boots, Blah this and that's even I would say more straight than gay. That's, like when people say kinky straight people, they're thinking the fem-dom, that's not even really gay even though it existed. But it wasn't that sort of high thin leather I think just wasn't, wasn't. But yeah, I would say that gay leather culture was definitely dominated, so there's this whole, you know, old guard was, you know, nonverbal consent. I'm very hierarchical, reacting to the, almost militant. You know what I mean? you didn't just get to come in, there was mentorship, you had to learn how to be a top, you had to learn how to be a boot black, you had to work your way, you were in service first and it was very formal, sir, you earned your titles, you moved through the ranks, you know what I mean? Leather was, there is protocol and I think that queer anarchist, feminists centric, coming from lesbian, less feminist, lesbian, lesbian separatist's space. Especially Vegan, anti-patriarchal, no killing animals crunchy vegetarian, Barnard, Smith University this kind of very nurturing, very consent based, very process-y, very it's a very feminist, feminist, academic and a of queer radical culture is really based on that because they were really entered patriarchal which gay male leather in gay culture, you know, Anti- Chelsea boy and to white male, anti-masculinity, all of masculinity but kind of turned on its head butch dyke, but country, Vegan earth mother. You know what I mean? Not could be hard but hard from the land, you know, like I work with wood I wear my Birkenstocks? Oh you know, different, really different. And you know, they're yes there was crossovers but these were also, these were, there were some very defined lights. And my experience of radical Queer BDSM community is, it is turned on by this, gay Tom of Finland. It's hot, but they're also very critical and they're, this is awful because it's patriarchy so we need to be more here with the matriarchy. But this is also not great and doesn't leave a lot of space. So it's they're trying to come together. But when I go to queer radical parties, they do come from a very feminist focused space. Which feminist culture, wanting to not be like gay male culture means that we're gonna enthusiastic, loudly talk about my hair follicle grazing urea or kind of the, you know what I mean? Which is good because trauma and whatever. It's not a critique, it's just, it's very different. They're really different. And I think especially amongst folks
who didn't experience that, you know, because of whatever access female assigned at birth, people, Trans Masculine folks being very embedded in dyke-y feminist space or you know, Trans femme folks that were really ostracized for being too effeminate or to sissy or do whatever in male space or wanted, you know, strong feminism because they're femmes and feminists and women identify folds and they walked that, you know what I mean? They should absolutely have access to that. But because of tariffs, you know, being shitty but also gay men being shitty because they're like, oh, I'll go with the women, you know. So there's that, that whole awful shit show middle, really, really rejecting queer radical culture. Really trying to reject this also like anarchy. Right? Who wants to fucking hierarchy? Who wants protocol? if you're a top you get to be a top, you know what I mean? Very self-informed. And that's also fine, you know what I mean? This is not, this is kind of my read and there are things in, in, in that protocol, in that leather culture that are really fucking amazing and if we want to change it and improve it and make it better, nonverbal consent is a legitimate consent basis, you know what I mean? It's not assault it, it's, it can be, but it's not always sometimes you make eye contact across the room and somebody very gently touches my knee because they've read my body language and I'm like, no, please keep going up my thigh. Let's do this. And I really like it, is it alright if I raise my hand upon your cheek in this loving way? The some ways I've found I have, I haven't experienced as much nonconsensual behavior in hyper consent spaces as I have in consensual, in nonverbal spaces. I don't think that I've been assaulted less than one and more than the other. It's just different. I've had people who have used the language of consent to um,

**Adorian:** We were just talking about the distinction between in generations of trans folk and the language people use to identify themselves. And do you mind repeating what you just said? Nogga?

**Schwartz:** Yeah. So, right you have access where now things are so available through Google and Tumblr and all these things which were not available to myself at an early age. And then there's people older than me that are earlier you want to call them trans and queer elders and it's not that they're not open to this conversation, but they, we didn't have those words, you know, in this really beautiful academic influence generation shaming older people for not being there is, it sucks. It just sucks. It's just as a really, really difficult, you know, there's several members. There's almost as, almost this, fetishization of days of your, oh, stonewall was a riot, not a parade. And, and, and, you know, you know, Ms. Major is so great and Sylvia Rivera did this and this. I'm telling you, there are people who were their friends and peers, that are alive now that I know people have cut them out and will not give them the time of day because they're not using the right language or it's not that they're not understanding a concept, but it wasn't called that people are living in theory now and not in practice.

**Adorian:** Which was also something we were talking about in regards to making space for folks who process mentally, um, in various variety of ways and folks who identify as a, not neurotypical, just there's a lot of theory about it. Right, right.

**Schwartz:** There's a lot of language and it's all really beautiful sounding and, and, you know, you can use all right fucking words, you know what I mean? If you have access to that and you're the kind of person that can read all the articles and the books and have those words to use non
binaries, spectrum, don't even know what people like. I couldn't even tell you because I'm not an academic, but, you know, I hear things. I'm, I'm a talker, I'm a listener. I hear this stuff I can't read really well. I tried to read, you know, Judith Butler and, and I don't know, name any theorists the queer theory that people are learning today in the gender studies of what people are studying now in school or reading online that wasn't there or was it was it was in weird underground culture or it, we talked about it, it was stuff they were like, oh, I wish that people would recognize that actually, you know, I might identify as a glitter Unicorn, whatever. Something like why can't that be a thing? Because, the, the predominant was bent in the standards of care or whatever was out there and now you know, you google a Fab, a Mab, you know, Unicorn, crusty blah blah blah. And you will have vice magazine, MTV. There's so much. It's great. I love it. I love, there's all this access made at your fingertips, but at the same time it's some people don't have smartphones, some people don't know to use a computer, some people are complete Luddite, some people just can't fucking read because were dyslexic or whatever, or English is not our first language. Sometimes we have, we're translating from other languages that have a binary language that don't have an nongendered other, you know what I mean? In Spanish, people are literally trying to change the language and Hebrew were trying to find ways to change the language and French to try and change language. verbs have gender actions, have gender, all these things when they get translated in English, there's knowing the equipment or do you want to take you're non binary or gender nonconforming academic language and bring it into Arabic and there's no equivalent where it's you're searching through so many things and it's, how do you describe this? Or it's there is a word for it, but it's not really a word. You know, there's all this communication that doesn't get to happen at the rate and that the way that everybody can and it's, it's, it's complicated, it's difficult and it's beautiful and wonderful, but it's not a reason that somebody is not an asshole because they don't understand, you know, ignorance is still a real thing and making space for that and no, it is not the job of an oppressed somebody to have to explain, you know, and yes, oppressions nonhierarchical, but it is hierarchical because let's be real, where are access issues united, you mean it's nuanced and it's so much more complicated and you don't just get to make you get to make blanket statements You know what I mean? And I'm not going to say that we could, can we all just get along and can we all just make understand because you don't know what somebody's story is and, no, not everybody has the capacity to sit there and yes, you're allowed to be angry, but can we be angry without killing people off? Without cutting them off? Can we find ways either within ourselves or the people around us, bring them in closer now, victims should never have to encounter the person who is oppressed them and bring them in closer and do that work, but what about the people adjacent to that? You know what I mean? within three degrees, within two degrees, find it, find the compassion, find the compassion in your heart, find the space and it's a lot of work in it and to practice we can talk about it all day at nauseam, but to physically do it, to physically go out and say, I love you, I care about you. I recognize you as a human being to somebody that has, whether they mildly offended, you flat out trying to kill you is, it's hard. But that's, that's the real work. We can study theory all day, but if you don't put it into practice is completely fucking useless. What's the point of a doctor studying how to do, you know, microsurgery on small appendages or whatever. If they never, if all they did was study and they've never gone in and practiced on a cadaver or done it when they are they going to, are you going to let that surgeon come into the room and perform that surgery when they. All they did was read the manual, you have to practice piano before you play a concerto. You know what
I mean? We have to practice. You have to have this as practice. We can't just have queer theory. We have to have queer practice and I know only in the last year do I think that, that convert. It's the thing for a conversation, nobody's actually physically doing it. I mean people aren't doing it, I see it being done but it's, it's already so hard. And how do we measure it? How do we quantify it, how we make, how do we make it a theme, you know? And there's some who practice it more than others. You know what I mean? I definitely see it in practice more in my neighbors here who happened to be people of color, they have way more compassion for a lot of stuff and I see folks have more space for it in some ways. I see older people have sometimes more compassion for younger people than I do for young people, for older people. As somebody who experienced both. I've been frustrated with some older members who have said stuff and I'm like, you know, goddammit, like Ooh. But I've approached them and I said, I mean there was a person who used to come to the group and he was an older generation person who transitioned later in life but was part of the old guard leather community and neuro-typical had a lot going on and repeatedly as somebody, because I could relate to him on a sort of peer level just because of my personal time. We had a shared experience of being from the same community from the same era. He respected me. So I was able to do that work and be like, you, I understand. He, you know, he would say something in that colon, Bro, this is not cool. That's my job, right. I'm at sort of this weird place where I can kind of chameleon places I pass as male cis, straight white, mostly able bodied is I know the language of academics but I'm not an academic so I seem smarter than I am. Fake it 'till you make it, you know what I mean? That's been a survival tactic that I'd have to use. I can do that and because of that, no I don't always come out as trans and no, I don't always tell people that I am neuro-typical and that I have seizures or that I have I can't use my right leg half the time or that I don't feel parts of my, you know what I mean? I just do the things and hope for the best and hopefully it will collapse on the floor and have a seizure or stop doing something or I won't say the wrong thing or I could use the words from some article that I was able to read, you know what I mean? I, I try to put these into practice. I find ways. Do I always do it successfully? Absolutely fucking not. But as somebody who has x privileges, I can navigate spaces. So yeah, that's my job, right? That's the work I want to do. That's what I want to do with what I have access to and you know, when I think I'm at capacity when I think it's the end of my rope and I'm like I can't fucking do this anymore. I don't know, smoke a cigarette, have a beer, take a deep breath, scream at my mom, go for a bike ride, cuddle my dogs. I find whatever. When I feel I'm at the last of my reservoir, I did deeper into what, you know what I mean? And that to me is what putting into practices when you think you're at the absolute end of your rope, when it's just the end and you don't want to do it anymore, move a rock, shifted some sand, find it, you'll find it. It's, it's there. We all have the drive to survive within us. It's animal brain deep below the medulla reptilian brain, whenever we won't call it, whatever, that thing that keeps you breathing keeps your heart moving. Keeps us wanting to connect to each other. I hate using it but go deeper. You know what I mean? But dig deeper, you know, find the darkest part of your heart and blow it open and it will blow up in your face again and again and again and again. Rin dying destroyed me. I wanted to. I didn't think I could survive anymore. I was gone. I was finished. I hated everybody. Everybody hated the whole fucking world. I hated Brin. I hated patriarchy. I hated HIV. I hated everything. Everything that was done, you know, and I was lucky. I had people that loved me. I, my family rallied around me, my community rallied around me and people financially, emotionally, they dug in, they pushed me, they did things, my partner, you know, we'd broken
up, you know, and Jack's fucking help me and I stayed with him and we held each other and we worked and we worked and we worked we did it and then, you know, I had a roommate and he didn't pay his rent and I was working three jobs 18 hours a day, seven days a week. My dog had allergies and was shitting in the house and he was complaining about it and threatening to call the landlord on me and I’m like, you can't do shit. And I didn't want to take him to court because of, there's a lot of dynamics around that. So I absolutely refused. So I continued to pay the bills because I don't want to turn the electricity off I need it. I need the AC to run. I don't want the, it's hot in our apartment. I dug deeper I worked more, I found money, people gave me money, I pay people back, I didn't pay people that I still owe people money from that, you know. And finally it was the only choice I had was to leave my home and I felt that was the only to leave the place where I've been living for five years where my roommate had passed away where we built all this love. It was a community center where I had, you know, people stay with us that needed housing in we wanted to create a hub, we wanted to share resources, that's all we ever. And I wanted to continue that. I wanted to have a place where people come and feel safe, you know, and, and, it was, it was gone. It was gone. I didn't just give up my home. I gave up an idealism, something that Brennan, I deeply wanted to share as to people who have experienced such disparate times, such awful situations. And there were people who took care of us and now we had something that we could bring to other people when we were at capacity and when would tell me, I can't believe this person is still here. I don't want people to stay here anymore. I'm done. Enough's enough. We'd be fighting with each other, passive, aggressively decorating, whatever it was constant, why do you do this? But at the same time, there was nobody. I live more in the world, you know, and, and, and, and her, me and her, everybody, even for his cunt-y and bitchy as she was, she loved so deeply. And if there was literally something that she could give it would literally cost her, her, her, her mental health. She would sit back down and say, but what if it was, you know, I've done this and somebody did for me, I'm going to do it for somebody else. And we did it and we dug and we dug and we did it. And, and it got paid back to us. I'm saying I wouldn't be here without Brooklyn. I was homeless for a year and a half and people found space for me, you know what I mean? It was all these things, you know, for as much terrible there was so much joy when there was many midnight beach trips naked and the moon, and pictures, and, and weird tours where our car broke down and just the pendulum swings and it's always terrible and wonderful at the same time. Especially being in a minority situation where the stresses and the joy is because the stress is so deep that when you experienced the joy so much more relation, you know, you, I don't know how else to describe it as except as a, a bipolar existence, you know, it’s um, I don't, want to use a mental health terminology, but it’s they're polar opposites and it's where do we like it? It's funny now that I've lived on my own, and I've struggled so hard to have this sort of mundanity and my life. I get up in the morning, take a shower, dogs go out, I feed the dogs, I feed the fish, I eat breakfast, I go to work. I have coffee customers come in and engage with people. Customers go out and close the doors. I come home, I walk the dogs, I eat a food and then I sit by myself in my apartment and watch Netflix. If I'm feeling exciting, I go to Queer-e-oke. Maybe I go to a queer play party, you know what I mean? But I'm in bed 1130. Here we go. Rinse, repeat, Rinse, repeat it for me. There's this amazing beauty and this is all I've ever wanted is stability. I just want this beautiful, constant rate. Don't have to think about the extremities of the world around me and it's so boring sometimes I'm sitting here, I'm like, what? I'm not gonna run and throw some shit at the cops. it sometimes gets over excited. When stuff like my neighbors will be yelling outside, I'll
look out my window. I'm screaming help. What can I do? Oh you know what, I'll make a bunch of food and I'll go find Jermaine and I'll go hand out some food you know, what can I do to, I don't know, be exciting and active and participate in make the world better, you know what I mean? Because I'm, but that's having that stability gives me the energy for that when. But when I was like listen, struggling and try and find food. Somebody who is like, do you have a dollar? A dollar, you know? Um, and I don't have dollars to give, put a dumpster food and have lots of it so I can give it right? I have cigarettes because I buy them for cheap and I'm like, Yo, this is what's gonna keep you alive right now. that's what I want to do. Actually I got paid today. So yes, I do have $. So you know, it's, you know, and sometimes I'll shift money from one account to another account. I'll be like okay, well we paid this and this and this. I'm behind on this, but this guy needs a burger. All right, we can do the burger, but we're going to not do the coffee tomorrow. And dog food, they go dumpster some raw meat and eat well for a week. You know what I mean? There's all this shifting and remember, I don't know, you just find, you find the spaces where you can give. It's this amazing Tetris while still trying to maintain this kind of constant state, this mundane level stability headedness where you can anticipate all the other little blocks coming in and you know, where you're going to move them to create the next level. You know? Um, I don't know. I guess that's where that queer practice and theory goes. I could say I don't know about patriarchy and racism and I could read Baldwin and I don't, I don't know the names of theorists, but people that were important that I, when I hear them and oh yeah, they're really smart and I read it thing that they sent and I liked it and I was good, and then I'm going to do that. But when it comes down to it, theory's great, but I have to live and I have to now do a thing. What, what am I physically doing? Is it perfect? Great. Absolutely fucking not; I'm a human goddamn being. The being, I'm going to fuck up constantly all the time without a doubt. In fact, I self-identify as an asshole, you know, that's just who I am and I'm absolutely going to unfortunately hurt people along the way and I'm going to get hurt. And I, the last thing I want to do when somebody tells me that I've heard them, my whole world was crushed. I don't want to hurt anybody. I don't, I don't want to lie to them, I don't want to give them false information or mixed messages or I don't want people to do what I want them to do because in humans, if I wanted somebody to do everything that I wanted them to do, I would go get Siri or an Amazon robot something or a Roomba and, or I build something I know a little bit of programming I would make a boyfriend bot. Well, you know what I mean? that's what I would do, where I would have a child, which even then not happening as somebody who's worked in childcare for 15 years, kids are gonna do whatever the fuck they want. So I don't know, it's, it is what it is. It's life. There's no right, wrong, good answer. And you know, whether you're trans or not, you know, the things that inform our life outside of this experience, um, we're going to carry with us and we're going to bring into our experience of gender and sex and religion and atheism and practice and whatever. it's all going to inform everything we operate in capitalism. How you decide to spend your money within it, how you decide to make your money, how you decide to participate is going to dictate everything else you know. You don't want to participate in capitalism. You're going to probably live on a land project in the woods. Maybe you'll have chickens, maybe you'll steal shit instead. Maybe you'll dumpster more. You'll only wear secondhand clothes that are donated, you'll find ways around capitalism. What in the end, we're all under it, right? we can divert patriarchy and change it as much as we want and we'll do things by creating feminist spaces queer and trans only bike classes, queer and trans only space, but separate space only goes so far because you have to leave it because it still exists in the larger
body of the world. And those are places where you can find respite, but they're not places that our ideal to live your whole life you can and I know people who do, but it's also not great. You know, if you, if we're living nothing insular societies, which if that's what somebody wants to do and needs to do, I applaud them, go for it. But, unfortunately if you're going to live in New York, you're going to engage with a lot of other cultures. You know what I mean? If you really want your own islands, go to your own island, it's terrible. But for me, the reason I live in New York is because I have access to all these other bubbles because there's all these different experience because I will meet some of the most amazing and some of the worst people that I will ever possibly need in the whole fucking world. You know what you mean? And, and I think that, that, you know, I, I've traveled all over the fucking world. I lived in a van, I sailed, I flown, I traveled by camel I have been to five out of seven continents. And my friends and my family even are from all over the world. You know, my cousins are from Ethiopia, Japan and wherever. And I have a very large fear that informs the way that I feel about human beings is the one thing that I know is that we have more in common than we have different. At the end of the day, everybody wants the same goddamn thing and that's to thrive and live and be happy. But that's a utopia. And I already did the people want perfection. I think people just want to be able to exist in a way that is sustainable. And, you know, and when you're operating in a microcosm, the stressors of the outside world become amplified and they seem bigger than they are and smaller than they aren't. I don't know. It's strange. It's a really weird read on things.

**Adorian:** I think we're coming to the end. Do you have any last things that you would want to say?

**Schwartz:** I mean I always to talk.

**Adorian:** Anything that you would want any, if you wanted to people to hear one thing from you, but would that be?

**Schwartz:** Sort of a hundred things. I think what it boils down to is you can only be the best person that you can be. This way that you can be in the know. That's it. that's what I want here. I don't give a shit about some of these gender or their race or their religion or what, we all bleed the same blood for the most part. We all have most of the same and we're humans and we're here and we do things and oral history, racial history, religious history. for me, grow from it, put theory into actual practice. practice it, practice it until you get it right. You know, live your truth. I don't know, I don't know what it is. Practice, practice, practice, practice, practice, learn more, practice it, learn more practices. Just don't die.

**Adorian:** Cool. Thank you so much for doing this interview.

**Schwartz:** Yeah, sure. My pleasure.