INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

FRANCOIS

Interviewer: Paige Kümm

Date of Interview: June 28, 2018

Location of Interview: Paige's Apartment, Ditmas Park, Brooklyn

Interview Recording URL:
http://oralhistory.nppl.org/interviews/francois-yzbfbb

Transcript URL: https://s3.amazonaws.com/oral-history/transcripts/NYC+TOHP+Transcript+100+Francois.pdf

Transcribed by George Richardson (volunteer)

NYC TOHP Interview Transcript #100

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Paige Kümm: Okay we’re starting, we’re live. Hello, my name is Paige Kumm, and I will be having a conversation with Francois for the New York City Trans Oral History Project in Collaboration with the New York Public Libraries Community oral history project. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans identifying people, it is June 28th 2018. Coincidentally the uhhh...

Francois: The Stonewall Riots!

Kümm: The anniversary of the Stonewall Riots. Answer this is being recorded at my apartment, in Ditmas Park, in Brooklyn, in New York City. Okay so, Francois ... umm, tell me ... yea you wanna just introduce yourself? I just said your name; but name, pronouns, how old you are if you want.

Francois: Okay ... [Laughing] Yea this is so ... I told you! The first 20 minutes, two minutes.

Kümm: Just ignore the mic, Your just ya know, just talkin' to me.

Francois: So my birthday is coming up, so I can tell you all the gifts I want. [Laughing]

Kümm: You can tell me all the birthday gifts you want.

Francois: Okay .... Ummm. Francois, 28. No seriously birthday’s coming up in september, so feel free to get all the gifts. I'll be turning Twentynine, Holy shit!

Kümm: Wow, Twentynine...

Francois: That's one more year of twenties.

Kümm: Yea, its your last year of the twenties.

Francois: Them I'mma hit the glorious dirty, nerdy thirties.

Kümm: Dirty, nerdy thirties! I like that better.

Francois: What?!

Kümm: I feel like that's totally what happened to me. As soon as I turned thirty.

Francois: Just all at once.

Kümm: I became a huge nerd. I already was.

Francois: Will you come more into yourself in that year. Your just like “I accept it, I love it.”

Kümm: So obviously looking forward to your birthday?
Francois: Umm Yea! This time yea!

Kümm: Okay, so what are your pronouns?

Francois: They/Them/His and Sir. Or like his version.

Kümm: Okay

Francois: [Laughing]

Kümm: Right on! I guess just to start off, how would you describe your gender?

Francois: Uhh, my gender would be ... is really accepting of like my feminine qualities. Like I think everything from my fa-, I'm gonna look at you!

Kümm: Yea look at me.

Francois: It's like, falling in love all these other like, feminine ... I see feminine, I feel feminine so like my face, the curvature of it. More getting in love with my thighs.

Kümm: Your thighs?

Francois: Yea! It's coming and I'm like “OH! You should be sporting the thighs more. Like you should be living that life. But then also a lot of my masculine, I feel lucky that way that, it's just always like .... You don't see, cause like, I'm a husky person. My hips don't show as much. Umm, but then there are times it does ... (unintelligible)

Kümm: That's the time that what?

Francois: All the time like, dancing. I can dance! So I know what's ... I know what's available. Private school lessons, so I can always drop my hips and I can always do a little ... tick-tock. Whenever I want, when I'm walking regularly I mean ... it's this great like...

Kümm: It allows you to go in between feminine and masculine, in that way? Your body itself.

Francois: My body itself, yea. It's glorious.

Kümm: Yea, nice, okay. Why don't we go to the beginning, tell me about your childhood and your family background. I know you grew up here, and Flatbush. I know you're Haitian, and that's like .. what else? What else don't I know?

Francois: You know I have four brothers. [Laughing] And when I'm ... [Laughing] Things you don't know ... when I ... I took, well maybe you do, I took the razor ... So my brother always got
a haircut from my dad. Downstairs, like in the bathroom, downstairs. One or the other. And I took the razor one day and I started like giving myself a hairline and a haircut …

Kümm: Really? You were trying to give yourself a fade?

Francois: [Laughing, Clapping] You already know! I was ready! I was ready. I was like “Oh don't worry, I've got this.” Maybe strikethrough that. But! It was just the start, my childhood was spent, in all experiences, trying to be who I saw in the mirror. I have this hu- ONE, My mirror, my mirror? My house has seven mirrors.

Kümm: Okay, like big mirrors?

Francois: Yea

Kümm: You mean like eighties style, like floor to ceiling mirrors .. or? Paint a picture for me.

Francois: Umm. Okay! So … (Unintelligible) Name the artist!

Kümm: This artist? Oh that's Paul Lousin's work

Francois: The frame that you put around Paul's work, like that style, like that type of mirror. Take like half the wall, but with that kinda frame around it!

Kümm: Okay so it's like a, very ornate, golden, embellished, like Baroque Style …

Francois: Yea.

Kümm: Okay, okay. Gotcha … its lavish.

Francois: Its super la-

Kümm: [Laughing] Of course! Of course! Oh my gosh, this is great.

Francois: They just realised all the reasons why i'm extra! I have seven of those mirrors in my house, okay well four, because three are in my bathroom.

Kümm: Okay so there's a lot of mirrors in your house.

Francois: That's a lot of mirrors in my house.

Kümm: And that’s how you grew up?

Francois: Mmmhmm … So we were always looking at ourselves, my dad is very pretty. So he takes a long time … I mean he doesn't .... I think he was the first metrosexual that I'd ever met but didn't really … that wasn't really it, he just … that for him, that was wellness. And he
groomed himself as well. Cause he wanted to be more presentable as like an immigrant guy. But my brother, the oldest one, he's queer and he's ... he's bi. He likes the ... and he says .... And he I told him he's definitely a metrosexual, and he loves it! Like he go, ... he's worse than I am. He's like an hour and a half, like blemishes. But thing is, I've told him “Put Neosporin if you ever get a pimple. Like, done!” He's like “Oh my god” He goes out to his mixology, his ... the only thing he works on is his nails. It’s lovely!

Kümm: Okay, so you grew up with male figures in your house putting a heavy emphasis on appearance. Okay, you said something about your dad, wanting to present himself because he was an immigrant. Are you also an immigrant or were you born here?

Francois: First generation, I was born here.

Kümm: And how long have your parents been in the states by that time?

Francois: They were there like 16 ... so it had to be like

Kümm: Oh both your parents immigrated?

Francois: Both my parents, yea. They only met a year apart. Like year, age difference. Two years age difference. No. Blahblahblah. A year after coming here, like each one of them.

Kümm: So they met here?

Francois: They met here in the states, my mom was like “Duces” to the country. Like umm, also more opportunity, there was no way she could live in Haiti. And my dad, he ended up staying with his brothers, his brother and his wife, his brother’s wife. And then three of their brothers in a small little studio. And I was like, “how much did that shit cost?” Back in the day, in Brooklyn. A hundred dollars.

Kümm: A hundred dollars? For how many bedrooms?

Francois: A hundred dollars. A studio bedroom. I was like .... Whaat?!

Kümm: Can you imagine, Done.

Francois: I think about ... that's so, oh my god.

Kümm: About how many people lived there?

Francois: Four, cause there was him, his brother's wife ... no five, cause his three brothers. That's so deep.

Kümm: How old were your parents when they came here?
Francois: Sixteen ... Seventeen.

Kümm: And they left on their own?

Francois: Yea, they were the first in every like, for my mom's side. My mom's side, the only family member to leave. I just learned some of the history of my mom's brother, so it's so trippy. But she has one sister and three brothers, so we all came from big families. My dad has ... all brothers.

Kümm: All brothers?

Francois: All brothers.

Kümm: And he's the oldest or?

Francois: Uhh, middle!

Kümm: In the middle...

Francois: Somewhere in the middle, yea

Kümm: And your parents came from different parts of Hatti?

Francois: mmhmm, Mom: Chacknug. And my dad, a little town called Labudi. And, my aunt, later on moved into ... actually my grandfather. They still lived in my mom's countryside but later on they moved into the Porta Princa, the city's capital. And my grandad bagged my grandma in the best way.

Kümm: [Laughing] On your dad's side?

Francois: Dude, like. I know! On my mom's side. I think ... suaveness. He was a mail, mailman driver, on like a motor pad. And my grandma ran, like the countryside she's from, she ran away she was like “I can't deal with this right now, I need to go into the city, live my life." She met up with him, and he was a younger dude, and he swaved her in the best way cause, it was not like your typical like ... he wasn't Casanova like. Wasn't like (unintelligible). Yea he wasn't none of that, he's super like. He's much more smaller than my grandma, se he's like.

Kümm: He's smaller than your grandma? [Laughing]

Francois: Yea ... so Like, how did this man like finesse this woman? He was like “You can sleep at my place, you can have the bed.” And he slept on the floor. [Laughing] Like, every night! And she was like “Alright I like you.” And I was like Wind!

Kümm: Wait how were they staying together?
Francois: umm, he had a home.

Kümm: Oh and she came to stay?

Francois: Mmmhmm, They met each other like somewhere on the street, and she was like “I don't have a place to stay.” And he was like “You can stay with me!” And it's a shock situation. So this (unintelligible) was like you can have.

Kümm: oooooohhh. What's your grandmother's name?

Francois: Ummm ... oh my god....

Kümm: What do you call her?

Francois: Gomeh!

Kümm: Gomeh? And you, have you met her? Is she still alive?

Francois: Nah, she's not, nah. Thats first, I have my first, well my second tattoo. The rosemary beads, that's for my grandparents. But it's Gomeh and Grandpa, that's why i was like “Uhh their names are ....”

Kümm: [Laughing] Their names are my Grandma and Grandpa ... like, what are you talking about?

Francois: Ummm, I think it's Vita- Nicoli! I know Nicoli is her last name.

Kümm: Okay, interesting. So Okay so, That's how your grandparents met on your Mom's side.

Francois: Yea.

Kümm: And they had your mom, with four other kids you say?

Francois: Yea.

Kümm: Four other kids. Is your mom the only one to come to the states?

Francois: Yea.

Kümm: Really, everyone else is still in Haiti? On her side.

Francois: Yea. On her side yea.

Kümm: And then for your dad?
Francois: My dad, Most of them are here in Brooklyn. I don't know if you know them very well, but most of them are in Brooklyn. Their parents, their parents were able to immigrate much later. I mean, you know, the seventies and everything. They're no longer here with us, they passed away as well. Umm, but most of the family was able to immigrate over. Oh shit, I never even know.

Kümm: Wow, on your dad's side. So you have a lot of cousins?

Francois: I have a lot of cousins, but I don't, we don't really fuck with them.

Kümm: How come?

Francois: Ummm....

Kümm: I mean you don't have to get into that.

Francois: Yea, that's more like ...

Kümm: Like family drama?

Francois: Family Drama! Each one had a kid on both sides and that shit just didn't work out with each other.

Kümm: Wait you said your mom came here when she was 16? All by herself, and the rest of her family is still in Haiti.

Francois: Yeah, when she could she, like The first time I met my aunt I was like seven. So after she was thirty she was able to bring, she was able to bring. My grandma moved when she was ... twelve years later? So like in her late 20's she moved. Stayed over

Kümm: And you were, you were there for that time?

Francois: No that's an additional four years.

Kümm: Wow, so what made your mom decide to leave so young? I feel like, when I was seventeen there was no way I was going to immigrate to a whole new country by myself.

Francois: She had to.

Kümm: It was for survival ... cause there was nothing for her.

Francois: Yea, there was nothing for her in Haiti at the time, I mean it was the best move for her family.

Kümm: So what did she do when she came here?
Francois: She was a domestic worker she cleaned homes. And that's how she got her taste, she was like ... she was a teenager.

Kümm: Oh you mean from like, rich people? That's what all the baroque stuff, cause she was cleaning their houses and she was like “Oh thats cute.”

Francois: Yeah, she was like “Thats what they have, that's what the rich white ... so that's what I must have in order to show that I've made it. And then you have to think like ... there's plastic on all the chairs.

Kümm: Right, right, no no I've been in those houses. My Grandma literally used to keep plastic on her sofa, and on her carpet.

Francois: This is why we don't believe in plastic. We're raised strong by the plastic.

Kümm: So, she came here and started working as a domestic worker. And, how did she meet your dad?

Francois: On the street, she's walking to her apartment. She had a kid with her, thats my oldest brother. And she has a gated window, and she sees my dad. I think they passed a other few times, but she's like “You're cute.” and he's like “Cool.” Yea, that side of my family is just crazy I think. But she has this gated window, and from what she told me, she told him that he needs to fix it for her. And he came in, fixed it for her, and then she was like “My furnace is broken.” ... so she made him fix like two things. And then she was like “Do you wanna sit here” She cuffed my dad, my dad got got.

Kümm: She new, right away. She was like Oh. And what was your dad doing, he was young too.

Francois: He was a tailor.

Kümm: A tailor? Really? Oh, style!

Francois: I mean he told me ... Told me about, I'm literally the offspring of him. I don't think they would see that exactly that way. But as I say to him like it's all makes sense.

Kümm: What's your relationship with your parents marriage.

Francois: Compassionate. Because I I've thought about all of life like that, well we may have different ways of navigating this world and different ways a strategy that was we think we're going to invest for our survival and build relationships. I have a different goal than my parents did and I think oh we have that because their first goal was to survive and to assimilate. And I'm lucky enough to be like “Assimilation is no longer my goal.” Like it's just to be honest for myself is my goal in life.
Kümm: What do you mean you're lucky enough.

Francois: Because I think if they ... We. We were dirt broke. And that didn't stop, brokenness never stopped being proud of .... So I just peeked. This is go dumb ... I'm just peeked Kendrick Lamar's lyric when he says “Syrup sandwiches.” And the niggas were like oh that's when you was mad important, you know I also just learned what lean is so some...

Kümm: You just learned what?

Francois: What lean is. Shit that ... square.

Kümm: Stay away from the lean.

Francois: Yeah. I was like Oh this is, I learned this from like a for one of those like they have like senior sit ins is never never done these things do that. But syrup sandwiches, that used to be I don't know it was, I had my friend I was like “What is it” like “When you take a bread and you put syrup on and that's French toast or that's a sandwich” I was like that's what I eat all the time, what are you talking about? We call that a French toast. They're like. Bitch, your ridiculous. ... Didn't know.

Kümm: Wow. So you grew up broke.

Francois: We grew up broke. And we grew up really really good ways of reframing things from negatives to like positives or find the silver lining because it wasn't a syrup sandwiches it was a French toast.

Kümm: Where did that come from. That impulse to see the bright side?

Francois: Because then you have ... You got make the best of what you got.

Kümm: Well I suppose like your parents ...

Francois: Like yeah they're like mentality. They're like You gotta ... you got to figure it out. We're the best at like figure it out. Well my dad I think he's more about “Just do your best and what you find a way to make yourself happy and you'll ...”

Kümm: So what do you mean about the compassion now?

Francois: I learned so much about myself and this is real hard to go ...

Kümm: In the bay?

Francois: In the bay and because immigrant parents hold you closer. Maybe not Asian but like in my experience they've held me my friends a lot closer to the chest because they're so afraid. They also grew up and I grew up ... But so much technological advancements happen so quickly
in front of them like the ... I think a lot of it changed more drastically when they were they knew what they had survived struggle through. I think shaped them a lot because they're teens and then they had to set it all in like over a five year course like everything from the Internet popped off to then YouTube. Like it was just I think a little too fast and. They're trying to hold their bearings so ...

Kümm: What year did they come here?

Francois: I would say like 1972 to like something about ... Yeah. Was it. Yeah I mean I know my mom says she she went to some. Like. They both got their bachelor's. When I was a kid what five went back to get a masters. And my mom said somewhere in college she was in a class with Coretta Smith. And I was like well then I don't like shit like what.

Kümm: What she didn't what? She didn't like Coretta Scott? Coretta King?

Francois: Coretta King, Yeah. She was like I with it. My mom is an interesting character though she's ... I think the compassion is, I think she we want the same things we just go different ways about.

Kümm: But you hold the same values or like you actually have similar goals?

Francois: We have .... We have similar goals. We have similar goals but because our ... And I think my values have evolved the time and with the learnings I've had in the day. And for her it was at the root like “I get it you want everyone, you want the best for us.” So she for her best mean things very like linear things get a good credit card, get a get a mortgage, get we have a strict boring life period right? Like that's the opinion of success. Whiteness and, but know you're black! P.S.. So you're like

Kümm: In a good way or?

Francois: In a way that she feels like she's made it so there's no excuse for anyone else to not have and I'm just like ... That's not a ... I don't think it's what I was like historically and systemaly that's not okay. Really I understand why you think that way because you made it out but not everyone had the same resources or same like sometimes the relations you have the bridge I grew up like my mom was man charismatic she's had so many best friends like quote unquote because everyone calls her their best friend. But she dont pay nobody, so it's like whatever, these bitches, but they lay dead ass love her they love her. That's my relationship. When I was a kid she was like “A friends and come and go.” but I value so deeply my friendship. So it's like she's the root of where I started from. And because of like learning queerness, The Bay, I've got to build on that shit. That's why I feel like it can be compassion because I get it. I'm not fucking with you though.

Kümm: Right. Right. And you mentioned the Bay a lot and what you learned about yourself. Can you talk a little bit about that and just tell me that story and ... then how you ended up here
again and what it was like to be back? And you're back with your parents right and you're living with them.

**Francois:** I just went from the living room couch ... living room mattress floor to an actual bed!

**Kümm:** Congratulations.

**Francois:** Thank you. Thank you, just wanna say seriously, thank you. You were there for some hard ass times, son.

**Kümm:** I know you ...

**Francois:** It was pain.

**Kümm:** So it's been hard going back from the bay?

**Francois:** Hard coming back from like, But it spoils. When you might be spoiled me.

**Kümm:** The Bay spoiled you? In what ways?

**Francois:** In every way. You talking about ... ummm ... This! So we're in Paige's apartment.

**Kümm:** Yes, we're in my apartment.

**Francois:** And Paige loves themself. So I wasn't ... when I ... growing up there was no way I knew someone could like, love themselves and like other people. My parents are working on this shit, but in a healthy way that they can have. You know. I guess art for my parents is like, my mom is an apple. But this is ... Your mom is an apple would do you mean by that?

**Francois:** You know my mom's idea of art is like the painted apples and stuff like ...

**Kümm:** Oh like still life?

**Francois:** Yeah. So I thought that was it. I was worried because I'm here in your apartment seeing like. You reflect yourself on to like the space.

**Kümm:** So you're saying that like your mom, your mom's space doesn't feel like her?

**Francois:** It felt like everybody what it didn't feel like. And you want ... it felt like her. But like. Not. I hope I can make my own space in there. So I'm really sad about like so she let me.

**Kümm:** She let you what?
Francois: I got my room painted for the first time. It's ridiculous. This sounds like school but these are small gratifications of my life.

Kümm: But this has happened recently. That she let you paint your room.

Francois: Yeah. It's like a very happy teal ocean situation. The, you feel like your swimming in water, feel like a tortoise. Don't know why that sounded ...

Kümm: So wait let me backup just a second because you're saying like the bay ... And they start talking about art.

Francois: Oh yeah yeah sorry.

Kümm: So it sounds like. It sounds to me that in the bay you were exposed to like things that you hadn't been exposed to through your parents and that changed a lot. So can you talk a little bit about what those changes were like, what the things that you experienced were?

Francois: You should do this more often. I see my podcasts come become they develop.


Francois: No you gotta say it again I'm so sorry.

Kümm: Oh just like what about the bay. Like what, what experiences did you have there that. That changed you and made it, made it so that you were relating differently to your parents now?

Francois: What is it ... the lessons of vulnerability. That's some shit.

Kümm: What are some of those lessons?

Francois: That it is OK. It's really great. Shout out to all the homies who, was like. “Oh it that's. Totally acceptable to feel.” I was like. What do you ... speak more of the situation. What I feel and what I've heard of happiness and I've heard of anger and I have literally until then I maybe this year. I mean so a point you like so many feelings that you're like “What is going on.” And then they’re making it passive aggressive say you're not sure. But it's a whole nother situation. But unless the like, just identifying and recognizing your feelings and then being open to exploring them and I think that's. Really the best lesson because then like trans It's like a domino effect of better behave better behaviors that happen.

Kümm: So you feel like. You're introduced to the concept of vulnerability not as a negative but as a positive. And that, why did that make it awkward or why did that make it different with your parents? Because that's not how you grew up? So how did you grow up around feelings?

Francois: What we're feelings?
Kümm: What we're feelings. So they weren't ... you didn't discuss them.

Francois: No no no. I literally didn't know what feelings were and it wasn't a range of ... There was two feelings. There was anger there was happiness.

Kümm: I see.

Francois: So there was, I learned different words of feelings. I got it.

Kümm: Yeah.

Francois: So it is not that I wasn't exposed, like vulnerability wasn't a bad thing. There was no such thing.

Kümm: So you're coming back now. First of all what is it like to be back in New York and how has New York changed since you were growing up?

Francois: In New York, me and my friend used to have this game, I think I told you on the train like. Less than 2011. And we had these games. You live here ... we live in the deep deep Brooklyn side. Deep Brooklyn where up until seven years ago Caucasian folks, that's my name We'll give them their full, Wikipedia name. We are colonizers that came through here.

Kümm: Say that again.

Francois: Before colonizers came through up in ... particularly, you could, you knew if there was a train and it was packed and everything you and you saw a caucasian person, a colonizer. You can stand right in front of them. But while there were sitting down and wait for their seat because ... after, before Franklin, they would not, they would get off like you can expect "This is, I'm going to have a seat this Mo-fo is too scurred not scared scurred to come out here like oh this is gonna be cute!" Now they just posted up looking at you like "Bitch, what?" And they have it figured like, lit. Like lit, its fucking lit, like. Right no you get that seat. This is. Like if Rosa Parks and the civil bus, civil rights act, civil rights movement particularly the voice of pride Didn't work it's like that because they look at you now and they're just like "I don't care. I don't care."

Kümm: So there's white people now.

Francois: Yeah. The scariest thing. I mean, luckily. Yeah. Here because we're so far. Yeah. Can't get to see any more but. My neighborhood, now this huge complex which I. I think I get it has brought more jobs, more a lot more minimum wage jobs, people didn't even discuss or when you say what "Oh my God this new development is going to bring so much jobs into the area. Bitch you know it's not like meaningful jobs like shut the fuck up...

Kümm: What development
Francois: Before ... target used to not be there.

Kümm: Oh you talking about at the junction.

Francois: I don't know that space used to be, that shit was not there though. Yeah. So it's funny but they framed it as like economic employment for the entire community. You have, you have young people from Midwood Brooklyn College working like 15$ an hour ... not like we need talk about quality employment. Or let's work down to change our retail systems that offers health insurance to like all it's workers then ... here for it! No we want to keep doing this shit? Sure sure sure sure.

Kümm: Yea, so it's changed a lot, and you changed since going to the bay in 2011 and coming back just last year in 2017? So your neighborhood has changed, and you have changed.

Francois: And I've changed ... and so we but heads, all the time.

Kümm: You and your parents?

Francois: Yeah. But thats ... all the time. And by the time with my brothers ... But the thing is. I have come back a few times a year, so they I also come back strategically like, I used to go back seven- like a full week. And I was like “This is not healthy.”

Kümm: Right.

Francois: So four days

Kümm: Four days

Francois: It's enough for me to like, remember to love them.

Kümm: Wow.

Francois: Yes. You know and then they’d be like cool cool cool.

Kümm: So you think they were, when you were come home to visit that they were seeing your progression?

Francois: Thats, I thought they were.

Kümm: What do you butt heads about now?

Francois: What is wha- Everything

Kümm: Is it your gender presentation with them?
Francois: Yes and no. No because I refuse I refuse my mother's comments about it. It's just straight up like I've got to live my life. I went to my brother's graduation and he took seven years. I'm happy for him like and happy for him like he's happy for himself that he got to BA. And like yeah get it. Umm, I came late, it was like back in the day of the graduation had a vest on, a shirt. It was like a red life vest. It wasn't that... the idea was there. I think my color coordination was a little off. Vest, T-shirt and pants. I didn't like the pants I was wearing so I told my mom. This was 2014 right. So this was three years since moving in here.

Kümm: Right.

Francois: So I'm where it is, I'm like call my brother I was like "Ask mommy to bring me a new pair of pants because I don't really like this one." Ask me what she brought me instead.

Kümm: What did she bring you? A dress?

Francois: [Clapping] On the money! On the money! Bitch, I was like “I'm good I'm wearing these pants. I'm wearing these pants.”

Kümm: Oh man..

Francois: Ummm ... Yay to everyone.

Kümm: So that type of thing continues now?

Francois: Definitely continues umm, though she did say I look good because I had an interview with someone. She was like “You look nice and presentable.” She wants me to like Ellen. We have ... This, Yall, you hear this? Straight up laughs in my face.

Kümm: Ellen?

Francois: Yeah. No seriously that's her. She's like...

Kümm: Because she thinks Ellen is like a ... successful, non-threatening lesbian?

Francois: Thank you! That's how I broke it down to myself! I was like she's nonthreatening, and I get not her entire presentation is ... I Get it! Like yes. Exactly that.

Kümm: So what do you think your mom thinks about your gender presentation? Like, what was the issue for her.

Francois: Like, compassion part. Right? That will limit my economic opportunities in life. As her ... There's love ... I think. I think. This is what. It would feel like to be friends with Kanye. Like if you thought ... I used to think there was brilliance in it. Used to, used to. And then I was like “Oh this is sickness is it has worked.” So what was is it? Fuck, umm.
You’re saying what your mom ... like what's the issue that your mom has with your gender presentation. She thinks that it will limit your economic opportunities.

**Kümm:** Yes, she. Oh ya, So. Because as an emigrant black woman, who who was a teenager and how to navigate U.S, and she moved from Texas to New York City. Like in the like ... She was in. She worked as a n- So she was a domestic worker, but she worked as a nurse during the AIDS crisis, Right?

**Francois:** So holding that like and everything moving forward like, she looks to me and she's like a ... and she didn't know queer folks and trans folks. And when she did she only knew them from getting gritted when before it was called AIDS. And they were just stigmatizing folks. So she having, I remind her of all the death and all this like nonpossibility. And then she sees Ellen and was compares, she's like, “Whiteness saves the day once again.” if you just move away from anything that looks black, looks poor, looks queer, then you'll have a chance to live. Because look I did it like. If you just take ... learn your place. And thing is I think often credit the bay for, My vulnerability my like evolution and values because. I realize. My recovery from that mentality didn't serve ... doesn't serve myself or the people I actually care about. If I think that. It’s my own responsibility to change myself, versus my own responsibility to change the system that we’re in. Like I shouldn't have to like hold myself and cover myself so deep. I should not have to assimilate to be seen. It works for her. It's not going to work for me, and it's not going to work for other people. And it's ... the compassion part like I see and I know where you get it. Like that sucks like you see death. And you see ... You see potential because you're like I'm your kid. But you see me squandering away that's when you perceive that because. I don't ... because I want to be as bold as you are. Bitch, you worked as a nurse through the AIDS crisis and fucking managed. She ended up going until, she moved from that, like she had an entire lineage that was crazy. She moved from the nurse then to an assistant on Wall Street where this creepy w-. Okay well maybe it was creepy. I think it's creepy. You would scre- we used to send them photos. This dude, white dude is a guest who coming home for dinner a situation where this white dude was like “Your so gorgeous let me take pictures of you.” And he was a rich white dude. And yeah. Yeah.

**Kümm:** To your mom?

**Francois:** Yes. She knows I carry that... Yeah. It's ... thank you. He would bring up, he brought her home one day and not as a date as a friend. And like I'm right in front of him they were like “You're not dating this black woman right?” And he was like “No. But look how gorgeous she is.” You know and she was like, “Yea, thanks.” Like, that was ... her ... like she was like, “So you need to survive that way. Like, Don't you wanna .... I've made it. So if you do exactly what I do you'll make it here.” I don't want those values.There's some shit, compassion is a bitch. Existential crisis five times a day, every time I think about this shit.

**Kümm:** So tell me about. Tell me about the communities that you’re part of. Now.

**Francois:** In New York ... I wanna say, yea, I'm not yet part of any community. I just have really good friends. Like I have folks from my ... who knew me since thirteen. And who's known me in
the babies moved out here and folks who know me since I came out in New York City. That's
crazy. Ten years, over ten years where you start work, with youth organizing here.

Kümm: Right. You're youth organized with Fierce right?.

Francois: Yeah. Youth organized with Fierce to save the piers, to create ... a homeless ... to one:
get correct police brutality particular the NYPD, which like, fuck us up all the time. For a shelter.
We used to work with the only queer homeless shelter in New York City. And create the pier to
save space. I mean the biggest thing we were able to do is get a Kiki ball which was lit. It was
my first time voguing into the space.

Kümm: How did you find fierce.

Francois: Good ... I went to Sojourner Truth.

Kümm: Sojourner Truth?

Francois: Yeah.

Kümm: Say more.

Francois: I read or when I was like 8 years though and I was like I want to be her. I was like. Did
she get. She literally was doing her gardening walk ... No. She saw someone doing their
gardening while she was walking it was like “You know what? People need to be like, supportive
like this some fucked up shit happened and change your name.” Well that's my short version

Kümm: Sojourner Truth inspired you to ....

Francois: To care to give a fuck. And also was like, the only come out. Wel no, that and Yes
Center! They butted heads.

Kümm: Yes center?

Francois: Oh. Oh. The center. There was a group called yes. It was for queer ... it was like ten
years.

Kümm: So how did you find them though. Practically. Aside from Sojourner Truth.

Francois: Google. No it was AOL. AOL.

Kümm: AOL, so you took it upon yourself to research, because you knew you were queer. Or
on the like, LGBTQ spectrum and needed to find people?

Francois: Where my people went.
Kümm: So what was it like becoming part of that community.

Francois: It was so cute ... we walked the pier. It was nice. You know I was like “What. I'm not the only one?” Oh my God.

Kümm: Yeah. How did that feel.

Francois: Is liberated too strong word?

Kümm: Your word your experience.

Francois: Yeah. I mean yeah. Yeah Yeah.

Kümm: It felt Liberating.

Francois: And most, shout out to all the shout out to David. They're no longer here. They passed away. But like in all the queer folks who like were. Who were like slightly older we were so much more themselves. I didn't know ... Sometimes I didnt know if I was gonna make it to twenty five. Like you know?

Kümm: Why?

Francois: I clearly. I thought about them. I think my why reconciliation is that I didnt think that ... I didn't think I had the means to. Or the ... There was no possibility. Like I thought life was then it was like. I didn't see anyone out there that looked like me after twenty five. It was more like cool, You party to you dead. And you're probably dead at twenty five. Oh yeah. It's actually what I saw ... 

Kümm: You saw that.

Francois: Yeah. Yeah. Something was up.

Kümm: Wow. So what made you realize that it could be different?

Francois: I'm still figuring out. And I see some ends up there ...

Kümm: Because you made it past twenty five.

Francois: I made it past twenty five. And every day I'm like “What the Fuck?” We'll see if I make it to thirty, for this year.

Kümm: It's coming up soon!

Francois: Some dirty nerdy thirty!
Kümm: What kinds of relationships do you have with other. Trans or non binary gender nonconforming people?

Francois: My brother asked me ... two years ago if I had any straight friends. I was ... I was like Yeah I can count them. On my hand.

Kümm: One on hand.

Francois: On one hand. They're all my high school friends. I was like well there was a very observant. Like. Thing he made.

Kümm: Yeah. So you don't have any straight friends and all your friends are queer. Do you have a lot of trans friends?

Francois: I have a lot of trans friends and gender non conforming friends. That's like overwhelming what my friends are.

Kümm: Really?

Francois: Yeah. The other one, it's not all. It's not always like lotta my found friends I don't have that many like I mostly just. I mean it is we'd like. It's a small groups subset.

Kümm: A smaller group of masculine centered folks. That you hang out with? Why do you think that is.

Francois: Don't know ...

Kümm: You don't know?

Francois: I mean the one the people I like, they're just they're good [Laughter] Where sometimes and we'll see some are real shy.

Kümm: So you're saying fems are bolder, then than masculine presenting people? In your experience.

Francois: My friends are gonna be like “What are you talking about.” They may be like, no actualy they are straight up, they'd be like “Yea, technically you're right Francois.”

Kümm: So I want to come back to what you were saying about the bay and like vunerability. Like. Is there something about vulnerability and your journey with your gender identity and expression that ... I don't know is there a connection there?

Francois: What I learned is that so vulnerability means ... I equate it to being a rock on the beach and the waves crashing on it drowning it but crash and I hitting it until it becomes
supersmooth. And like every phase of my life growing pains like when I ... growing pains is basically like me being vulnerable with myself. That's what's actually happened. Like I become smoother and people think it's like the charm and I can like no. More. Yes I get I'm kind of like my morning camera because I've been crashed by water and like opened up to my own self so deeply, so honestly so like, crushingly that there's nothing left except like honesty right? Like it's this thing.

Kümm: So all of the, like, false notions that you had about yourself falling away. So you feel like you know yourself.

Francois: Did you just quote a Drake line?.

Kümm: Did I just quote a Drake line?. No. Maybe! he's in my head. Drake, you're everywhere.

Francois: I think just overheard us when they say oh no I think he just like, someone said it about themselves and he's like “Work and just push it.”

Kümm: Yeah. So, what. Did that make possible for your journey around gender.

Francois: It's ... It made me be more and more okay. Cause I definitely couldn't ... It was incremental progress. It made me more and more okay to leave all the like ... negative whether it was subtle or super overt criticisms about my gender away. I used to hide the fact that I was like masculine in the center. And I used to hide the fact that I'm not masculine centered, I'm more than non-conforming trans, then hid the fact that I'm not a gender, that I'm that I'm trans like it was just. It was all this like it's gonna be OK it's gonna be OK It's going to be OK all the time. But the only for me to do that was to be like really vulnerable and that was like all. Vulnerability has been like ... me as really connected to like ... Well. It's super opposite. So background My mom is like super like, The cr- . My dad is super sweet and soft and my mom is really like bold and like takes up a lot of space and the U.S. is super, it's the opposite. The guys take up like really ... so it's opposite right? In the bay though we got switched around on me so I never knew. And then I like what the fuck and then someone was like. “Exactly. That's what being queer is about!” And I was like “What the fuck!?!?” And I was like “OH” literally. Yeah. Yeah. And then. Every time I would make those realizations like. Then he honestly just poured out. It was a spike. “Oh this is what makes me feel good. Like this is like scene in the mirror. Is what I like being reflected back to me.” And then it is always showed up in my style. It showed up in the places I started going to, the parties I would affiliate myself. The like happenings, I called them. Or like the 70s model of happenings like the artistic events I would go to. Right? And then it started happening with the people I was friends with people who are acquaintances with like. I started tracking those people who I want to reflect and then those people reflect me back. And I was like. “You're so gorgeous!” Every time. I'm vain now. Like. I'm absolutely vain, because I'm like “Peep.” So I am. Vain and cautious. Vain because all my friends are beautiful physically and like cmon. Like when I describe them they sound ... they are badassery and all it's definition. you want me to focus on ... you know how celebrities are like grand, bitch. Meet someone I know. And you're like Oh my God how do you do this like. Yeah yeah yeah yeah that's my friend, but I won't tell that to their face because who needs all that. Every once
and a while I'll drop a little like it's like I'm like a psycho and at times. I feel remembering or I am friendly segments but I think sometimes like it I'll retain all the water and ... and and I'm really flirty with my comments but this, when I poke you it actually has aloe in it so I'm making you ... lotion and I'm working on myself I'm working on it.

Kümm: You’re a semi-helpful.

Francois: I'm a cactus that worked right? Yeah. Yeah. It's helped me.

Kümm: So it sounds like you found a lot of people in the bay. Who like reflected your value back to you, and your work back to you and it made it. Possible for you to be in touch with yourself but being in touch with yourself also attracted you to those people.

Francois: And they also have similar or different ... They had insecurities on their own but they're at least navigating it right. That's also it. Yeah. Yeah. Because I watched like anxieties and all they were actually moving, showing me how to move through it because they were in their own life. So they made their appeal stronger because he wasn't just based on my air base like “Oh you're hurting right now too but you're trying you're hurting because you want to be better.” I was like like. All. Right. Woo woo woo. Woo woo

Kümm: So what brought you out of the bay? Why did you leave New York?

Francois: Why do all queers leave new york?

Kümm: Why do all queers leave new york? I thought New York was like a queer destination

Francois: For a summer.

Kümm: For a summer.

Francois: The partener. Why do all the people like ...

Kümm: Ooohh, you fell in love.

Francois: Yeah I was like a queer baby, this whole baby situation, moved out.to the bay together. To play. It was supposed to play house. You play house.

Kümm: I see and that, didn't work out. But you stayed in the bay. Why?

Francois: Because I literally got the child like the day I landed. The universe is like is where you got to be.

Kümm: So what kind of work did you do. Or did you do over there?
Francois: In the bay? I got to meet Paige my first job ever. But they also didn't know what it was. But I worked in housing immigrants, shout out to (Untinteligable). Then I worked for GIF. (Untinteligable) Then I did a whole lot of other jobs when particularly I sergeant like more special events in every thing. The Dapper Clothing Exchange, did it and and woke and so I then moved into like tech and media, Which I like at the end of the day, I think I just kept putting myself an intersection of people, culture and resources all the time. Yeah, cause Dapper Clothing Exchange, like it's about thrift shop in New shopping getting access to like clothes and not many queer folk were fine to have a heart. Have an easy time in finding styles and clothes that fit them in safe places. And so when bitches want to go to H&M before they want to put green t shirts that say “Monkey” on black kids. They will have to be like “Cool I'm gonna go to the store and hope that this button down will fit over my breasts.” Because they don't know what a binder is. Or even if they do, the only one we can get a binder is going online and you don't know how to measure yourself they give you all the right things but it's really anxiety producing to measure yourself because you're so close to your body now where you have to be like “Oh shit it's what I'm about to do.” That's why I think bitches end up just bandaging themselves which causes groups of ribs and causes a lot of health problems.

Kümm: Wow. How did you find out about binders.

Francois: Thank you. Kaiser because you were the most fucked up health provider. I went to see my primary care and I wanted to get a breast augmentation, because I love myself. So a lot of folks and I think a lot of media not our people, cause were like secrets and we're amazing. My queer and trans people, we're zebras and I know everyone thinks we are unicorns. But here's what ... and I want my people to believe they're unicorns but what's on me, bitches, yes you're magical but you're such an abundance to me in my life. You're a fucking zebra or you have your own stripes and pattern distinct where you're a fucking zebra. But be a unicorn do you.

Kümm: OK gotcha.

Francois: Family health provider when I went in for my breast augmentation. Was like your you're overweight you can't get the surgery, and there's actually no ... I'm the same weight as I was then. But there's no correlation to like, I was I wasn't to the point of obese, obesity to my health was in danger. I had perfect blood pressure. So that's like one indicator right.

Kümm: Right.

Francois: So basically like they give me flawed information which then put me to the pressure. I didn't take a shower for three weeks. Why am I. And when I finally Yeah I was so bad but then I saw the refrain. I was like well maybe it wasn't meant to get chest ... It just it's really different. I kept going when I was start Googling between top surgery and breast augmentation. What's the best thing. Because I was like some when you type in chest augmentation and top surgery also comes up.

Kümm: I don't understand the difference.
Francois: That, I didn't understand the difference either. So breast augmentation is they take a little bit of your tissue out and so you still actually have what looks like your breasts and top surgery you actually remove your entire breast and relocate your nipple. Yeah. And so I was like “No I don't need to do all that.” but little bit of me was like “Oh my God.” You know what I do in the mirror I just hold up my boobs. I used to hold my boobs. I thought that's. Fucked for me to get fucked up or it's like my boobs will be this high up. And then I'd be like “I wish my boobs would be this high up so it doesn't look like I have boobs.” and then I was like “I just don't want to have these I love you I just don't want you.” And yea, It was uncomfortable to hold them all time and then when I ... so the primary care provider gave me wrong information I was, I went to the depression and I was like I can't live with these anymore. Like I love them to a point I need them off me. And then so I started typing in Ace Bandages and like what are the ways and they were like "Don't do it!" There were so many articles that said ...

Kümm: So the Internet really helped you out.

Francois: They were like “Don't do it.”

Kümm: And it sounds like you've turned to the Internet a couple of times where you felt like you needed to find resources or support for yourself.

Francois: Yeah I didn't need the ... I never lost friends in it for like conversations. Cause that I could just call up my homie. But like very practical and logistical information. I would be like Google what do I do.

Kümm: Yeah like what are some queer organizations, like what can I do about my body. Right. That makes sense. That makes sense. What ....How do you. So this is a moment where like there is more trans visibility and also sounds like you went through your own journey of like becoming visible to yourself and because you know there are people who are visible to you. What is it been like ... Like how do you see yourself in this moment of increased trans visibility.

Francois: Is it that we see ... sometimes I question like what's the trend of visibility. Well. I just want them to always do more. Yeah I just wanted always more. But, lucky enough to be in a lineage like trans folks now. So but its like, Trans Day was the actual day in his like. Oh all the give out days were like based on like grassroots trans organizations actually, which we don't want to give credit to because bitches remaid the Stonewall riot movie and they were like “Its the white dude who saved us!” But in all like, if we look for folks then we'll find them. All right. So I shout out to people that have more of an interest. And, I can't ... not really going to analyze where the interest is coming from, right. It can be full of fucked up places. But when they ... Trans folks, trans women, black women and women of color still like Lord is hunter or Jeremiah. Are doing are, anytime they get into like a conversation that change the narrative where it's like from a place of dignity and respect for themselves first and whatever trash talking bitches wanna come at them whether they want to want to reduce them down to their genitalia, or be like How do you pass or how do you ... they never say blend but like how do you like make ... how do you become non-threatening enough so that we can see you. They always change a conversation like let's think about all of the black trans women, trans women of color
who are not here and, we're never actually passing we have never actually been threatening. You or ... like anger in the culture that's the transphobia culture is the thing that makes it unsafe for us. So actually bitches are the ones who came to attack us we're not threatening you. You're threatening us. And so it's really cool that when I see them I get to see those narratives. But when people seek them out for in regards to women's, they're so smart that they can change that narrative to like. It was reframed. Because they just made a movie. Marsha P. Johnson and it was ... I got ... I got feels like

Kümm: You talking about the Netflix one?

Francois: Yeah. But they can ... they always make it ... when they do autobiographies of like straight women are just like very mainstream like likable personalities. They give them a bigger budget, but two they make it so that it's entertaining and like this like feel good montage to like everywhere else. But when I do like on trans women or just like, on a minority they make it in .... Yeah. Sorry I have been reading. And the women artists come up a lot.

Kümm: You've been reading what?

Francois: I reading, period. And minorities come up and though I just said it, I don't like that word.

Kümm: What word?

Francois: Minority even like ... no. It just doesn't feel good, it's like disgusting. When we talk about under-resourced community it's always like in this like what's out with a woman that tries to save dogs is like that sweeping ...

Kümm: Sarah McLachlan?

Francois: That! It's like that! It's like watching that and I'm like ...

Kümm: The dog commercials. All weepy sad story.

Francois: That's why I never want to watch I'm just always like. In real life you know and you know like in real life these women are nothing but like sob stories. They're so colorful they're so impactful. And yes it happens. I don't mean that under undermine that like at all. Like right. Like a sex work the like being harassed on the street like that shit is not cute on any basis or any day. But the way they hold themselves and these bitches are peacocks out there and. That's why I like. I feel like this movement of transmissibility. They want to look at them like they're dogs like they're out there to entertain them or provide or ... more and more to create a sob story about them and they're like “Hey I know we've dehumanized you for so long, but maybe we can repay you by make people feel sorry for you.” And these amazing women who are out there are just saying like “I don't. I never needed you to feel sorry for me. Just what you respect me. And actually at this point in my life I don't need your respect. I got the respect of my people's. And I love myself so much.” Like they've given themselves for being leader because
they had to like. Overcome all the hate. Like the, the culture of hate that they were surrounded by. To be like. I dig myself more than I think any dig your affirmation right. And that's. And then seeing that visibility reminds me. “Oh if I'm so worked up over myself that I become .... And variability to me leads to honesty and the honesty leads to me loving myself. That's the that's the visibility that I get to take away from this women.

Kümm: Right. I like it. Oh do you want to, I mean we can end whenever you want. Oh I just had a couple of things I wanted to ask you.

Francois: I like that dress by the way.

Kümm: Thank you.

Francois: What .. Oh you were talking a little bit about the work that you did in the bay. So it sounds like you've done a lot of like kind of social justice nonprofit type of work. What are you doing out here in New York? Has it been sort of the same. And then I know you're working on your two projects.

Kümm: Woke and you were talking about Dapper Clothing Exchange. So if you want to talk a little bit more about those and where those are at?

Francois: Oh here in New York I'm happy to be back. So I started up a media company with a sensei. Just realized that it's not exactly where I wanted to be. So I love the storytelling it came the stories are supposed to be like tons of stories of people you don't normally see out in the world. And I love the storytelling that was taking place but I wanted it. I didn't need to see on TV anymore like I know we're all right now but really big scene I shouldn't TV but I'm a tactile person. I need to feel it. And that's why they're proposing to do that in the bay and bring it back out now Into New York City and it has always been the plan. I needed some time to like, Dapper Clothing Exchange is about relationships like for first and foremost. And I had my straight amazing friends .. one, two, three or would you want us to try ... three. Told you, I can count them on my hands!

Kümm: Three straight friends.

Francois: Yeah they show a real special sign. I've got these bitches on lock. But it's about relationships and so that couldn't pop off until I had relationships in place.

Kümm: And it's been harder to build those here. Why do you think that is.

Francois: I had to acclimate to being back, so that was an adjustment. And I didn't ... My Resources started draining, I came off like a savings account and it took ... And then I worked on walks I was feeding, using that money to ... you know I was litteraly mooching off my own company and that's what a lot. You basically real similar to the non-profit industrial complex and is where they shift to foundations. People of color still still don't get resources from capitalists and women led or majority PRC women lead. And it was weird we filling out these
these things i guess, like because venture capitalists don't put trans or queer in the census or the applications.

Kümm: So you were applying like, as a woman led company? Interesting.

Francois: Yeah. I'd be like “Well, I'm half of it so to speak!”. And Sensei you're really like a fem-like let's sit together. It's the one lets just, we're half. It's one of two the two of us cool sure. And our advisors are mostly black and they identify cis-fem and I was like cool worst ... we win. So I'm gonna miss out.

Kümm: That's so interesting. I mean I wouldn't have thought about that.

Francois: You're so fun! You know what's annoying? (uninteligable) And you know, there are foundations that just support queer folks. There's venture capital then just for queer people, because the rest of the people with money don't think that way. Yeah. They're like “You're too niche of a market you probably need your own people to invest in.” Because our own people have sizable funds like that. Yeah. Cool. Yall should have seen the read on Paige's face!.

Kümm: I'm just like, I have a lot to say about that but ... This is not my interview. So ok so that's interesting. So it does sort of feel like. So would you say that your Identity, you know. Well first what, what aspects of your identity are most important to you?

Francois: My my caribbeanness, and my queerness.

Kümm: And would you say that your identities have played a role in your opportunities for economic advancement? And what role?

Francois: What I applied to is really based on like those two. Will it be an environment which I can bring those two selves. Like other parts of myeself I can find other outlets for. I can find other outlet too. So I would, so right now I'm applying to- I work in retail and I'm applying to experiential that's what. That's a different level of this of special events. So then they're posting but like, I need bitches to give me money not just putting my own money behind things. And so I need to find environments that are are cool with me being queer. Dude, I just came out to so one I got a volunteer opportunity which is where's your volunteer opportunity. Whatever, but its still like premier to be part of the men's wear but it's not menswear trade, that house. It's just Men's Wear two words trade show called Liberty Fairs. So they're like the biggest expo of like modern contemporary menswear. OK I just want to fuck that shit system up. In the best way I love them. I want to I want to queer it up. I should say something I want to queer it up. Because some places I want to fuck up.

Kümm: We do fuck shit up too. We do.

Francois: We do!

Kümm: In both creative and destructive ways.
Francois: Just to rebuild anew that's more inclusive, it's like.

Kümm: Okay so you got a volunteer opportunity there.

Francois: Yeah. So I mean but I only decided that was a place I want to be at because I felt like I could be I could bring those selves of mine. So I just came out professionally I was like oh yes use these on my resume and everything I put. I have. I put Lauren Francois and then I put preferred name: Francois. So already there they'd be like What's up? And then I put like pronouns.

Kümm: You pronounce on your resume?

Francois: No, in the email. Like thank you so much for like looking at my resume. Da da da, pronouns. And with the name Francois why when you just see the email your like “Of course!” Which has always been a fun thing when someone sees me in person they like but you have boobs. Now I wear by binder like He? She? Fuck beautiful ... I don't know what to do here. I'm like Sir you're flirting with me, you just called me beautiful. That's very kind, but I'm at work. But I applied to that because I felt I could be ... those two big parts of me could be safe in this environment. But I know people like to say they apply for 20 jobs and everything. I can't I don't have the luxury of doing that. Like I have to do man research on a company not because it's the way to get in. It's not the way to be most. to just write a super cover. Its for my own protection and safety because I have no time. I will. I cant work at a place that I can't be out. That I. Yeah.

Kümm: Have you ever had to do that before?

Francois: Thank God no. I refuse. From an early age I refused. I started with Fierce and I was like and then I was like why? For why? That was, I'm really glad I was like for why?

Kümm: That's interesting so, so because you found Fierce do you think ... well, do you think your life would've been different if you had found Fierce? And like what ways?

Francois: If I hadn't found Fierce ....

Kümm: Because it sound ... is just sound I like they like gave you a perspective that helped you recognize your worth right. Because. A lot of people I think without that kind of support wouldn't necessarily have the same approach as you do to like employment and like identity in your place of work.

Francois: That's interesting.

Kümm: Sorry, that wasn't a question. I guess I'm just wondering do you think like being exposed to queer people ...

Francois: Queer social justice ...
Kümm: Queer social justice people gave you like a different perspective than the majority of other trans people or other queer people? And how so?

Francois: Because it made me ... My dad for all his sweetness. I was broke. I went to school, I ended up getting a degree in communications. I went to a really predominant a PWI at Fordham, that shit was trash. Thankfully I found two good people, up there. And some others but I was like, that close to ... You don't know what I'm doing I say “that close” I'm pointing very close ... really close to becoming an entertainment lawyer. Because I know that this is a straight up joke from how ... fuck my life. London comedian woman, she wears a Missy Elliott Sun which makes all the sense. I don't remember a name, I think it starts with a Y. Like spiky red hair. London woman with man's tattoo's ... Shout out to her. You're going to know who she is. She has great joke. Her mom is Nigerian. And I think it applies to any West Indian, African. “If you're not a doctor, lawyer or engineer You're a disgrace.” And I was like, so I was going to be an entertainment lawyer to make my dad happy. And I was like “You know what, you kind of see me like I feel the most like. Like I see you trying and like we get to have conversations let me be let me let me be nice, let me do what you want.” And then all the bitches at Fierce were like “Fuck doing what anyone else wants. Go live your life.” I was like ... “We can go live our lives?” Every few weeks I'd ask.“What do you mean, I don't understand?”

Kümm: You're saying that I could just go and do what I want? I now tell me that again like, What do you mean by. “Do me” I don't get it. Yeah yeah

Francois: Yeah. So that could have been a thing. But instead I went to like “Oh well since you've shown me what it felt like to be cared about let me go care about other bitches.” And now I care.

Kümm: And Now you care. So it sounds like not only did you get like a political understanding of of your identities but through through Fierce and then through your subsequent like social justice work but also sounds like those were the spaces where you could be yourself and and you're saying that that's a safety concern for you right?. When you're looking for a job so. Do you have other safety concerns like on a regular?

Francois: Yeah, I don't like to walk. I shouldn't. I don't ... I like walking because I grew up in Brooklyn that's all we did, and. Fond memories of walking miles and miles. But I was ... Trigger Warning I don't know I'm sorry just FYI ... I was raped like three blocks away from my house when I was 15, 16. So and it's funny they had cyclically like it was by like some random dude and everything but ... What is it? You going into car crashes like real close to your home and I thought it was funny I was like oh shit by your home is worth more shit happens because you let your guard down because you're like you feel like “I mean I'm in my home like I'm in my area.” So just walking down I still have all the insecurities of like knowing as much as I that's why I dress masculine to disguise this ... well for safety concern like that's why most, I hold myself differently I dont sway my hips because I don't want the ... I want to limit the amount of not only missgendering but also the sexual harassment that I get. Cause before I binding t... I'm a double D, bitches.42 Double D's out here! 38 waist! And a big wide ass. So basically my
boobs were at 21 when I was 15 and so that attracted man attention, and I went to Catholic school so niggas are really about "Oh large woman in catholic school uniform let me try." So I still walk with all that mentality later on. Once you get it it's more likely you you end up ... umm I think Nick is no and he said and he come asked me more afterwards I think is also reached for and it is unfortunate. From shaming, being in a lot of abusive situations. My move to Oakland, some dude followed me so it was like stalked for like a full bus ride so I don't ... I like, I am constantly aware of like if I ... Don't present. Both like walking physically, then misgendering is like the least of my concerns at times it's more of like sexual harassment is not cute. At all, Yeah. And then when I'm treated like when people don't think I'm a woman quote unquote. And they see me as dude they see me as a black dude, and I followed every once and a while in a store. That's less common. But if it works out that I do hormones and I pass then that's gonna be a little more of a thing. But right now it's just more the sexual harassment. Yeah you know I can do without.

**Kümm:** Yeah. I mean Brooklyn streets in the summer.

**Francois:** Sun I never seen nothing in their life. They're like. These bees not enough for you, bitches. Shout out ... just go do your thing Jeezy, imma share businesses. No they can't control themselves. They have no home training. I don't mean that in like. I mean the global like news on how to act right.

**Kümm:** Right. Wow. Thanks for sharing that. I didn't know that about you. Yeah I guess now makes sense all the work that you did with S.F. Women Against Rape.

**Francois:** S.F. war is the fucking best.

**Kümm:** Nada, Janelle, Pretty

**Francois:** Good. It was they taught me so much. I'm Nadia asked me to be on the ready and Nadia didn't even know about that.. And she was like. There's something about you. You may be here. And no one ever talked to me about sexual violence or like that before. So we never had a it like we. We had a relation. So was this really. It helped me. It healed me to be able to talk about it actually because up until then I was out in those streets being real sure I was basically trying to heal myself through sex. So it was a very healing thing. Yeah.

**Kümm:** You didn't have anybody to talk to about it when it happened. No. Did your family know?

**Francois:** No I did not tell them I told my brother years later and then he went through stuff like about it. But Yeah that was so common. It's just that. But and. Now I, I used to. Yeah. No. No. And I also never tell my folks. They still don't know. And I used so I think I used to think one of the reasons I came out here was for me to tell them. And I was like that's not safe. Things that are not safe to do.

**Kümm:** Do you think you'll get to a point with your parents where it would be safe.
Francois: No. Because then it'd be the reason why I'm queer and trans.

Kümm: I see. So here is your is your family religious. But you said you went to Catholic school. Is that where they're like. Is that where they're feelings about your gender and sexuality come from.

Francois: Yeah. Catholicism. Cause my grandma on my mom's side did voodoo every motherfucking day!

Kümm: Really?!

Francois: Yeah! My mom just told me this shit. I was like my oh I we always knew she was a witch like my brother in the crew and he's like grown men deal with his spells like yeah. But I was like just blew that off. Like that's just Grandma being Grandma. And my mom's like nah like she like real casual like "Every day this woman did this."

Kümm: She was working the Juju? So what is that related to like why your mom ... to catholicism?

Francois: No that's the thing because they were. Nope. In fact there is like a cool queer voodoo community up in Haiti. Yeah. Because voodoo is expressive like it believes in all the genders. More than I even know and speak of. Catholicism does not, Catholicism is like binary. And my parents believe that, my parents believe in a very strict modality of like if you do certain things, it will result in certain things. So in the best possible outcome you do things traditional ways you will get traditional answers and those answers will lead to some promised land. I'm about simplifying it.

Kümm: Yeah. No but it's it's really Intense. How they would basically use a traumatic, you think that they would use their traumatic experience to explain like these aspects of your identity that they think are wrong sinful or bad.

Francois: And I would have to give them compassion for that Isn't that crazy?. Like I say have to be-

Kümm: Would you have to?

Francois: Yes you. Compassion may just, I don't have to think they're right. But I've got to get back I'm going to like that's what you were. It takes a lot of being queer and trans and I'm gonna say fem in like the, not straight but not fem I'm not femme like and all that but there's like a suit there's like a thing that people are saying now. That they are.

Kümm: No. No. I don't think well anyway, go ahead.

Francois: Great because they're not!
Kümm: I wouldn't equate women with femme. There's lots of different kinds of women. Lots of different kinds of men.

Francois: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. So I think those revelations are just aware and informed. I think when I those three committees are wearing uniforms and appointed like they know that those have no relation with each other. And like you can be full of stuff like that. They're not they decolonise their mind. Decolonise being like. First I was like you just mean like historical. Yes. And like present they like how they move is very much consistently in context with like Time Present, Time condition. And so they walk with that feeling and that history I know every action and do well whether I'm putting lipstick on or put in like where they shot the section they shop at a mall like they know how their presentation and how they're moving roles like causes shift causes everything. All right. My parents would be like oh no like you can change on that but it's suppressing because that's the best we do. And I'm like what? No. that doesn't have to be the way you find the peace or the recognition of your dignity. They that's you. We've learned like this. You don't need to be seen as human or having their respect. And that's done by doing traditional ways emotion. You can be all this.

Kümm: So how do you. Maintain your own dignity and respect as a queer trans person.

Francois: I kick it with you.

Kümm: You hang out with a friends, your community.

Francois: Yeah. I watch certain things that make me look like me. Sometimes I do watch other things that don't just because it's hilarious.

Kümm: You mean media wise. Yeah yeah

Francois: Yeah yeah. gosh. Yeah. I think all the artists that are out there that. Lexi Valdes. You're hilarious, Yeah. Lexi, you're a really good artist. Yeah. They have this like, super ... It feels like pale season nomads through space. They feel like migration to space. And I fish it. I can't run that. So I just the people, I put,. I put myself in front of people who I think look amazing and act amazingly and I find the media that looks amazingly like me. I just called myself amazing. And then yeah I literally to make sure I have everything around me that's going to be like You look good. You look there's not gonna be a day. I mean that's of course our days but I'm constantly surrounding around myself and like the seven mirrors! What are the different ways that can reflect greatness upon myself, bitch. I got, even on my phone it says “Good Looking”

Kümm: So like beauty and self reflection, reflections of your image.

Francois: Harvey Lord knows it. Harvey Lord was vain. Mitch knew what it was about she and I mean im joking here, what she knew was about she was like about. They're like all the most radical ... Frida?! She was like. Was she we all knew she she vocalized as she was about herself
and she was about her orgasm she was like “Things that I don't fuck around with no fucking orgasm you know fuck all of my friends.” Done. Oh that's pretty solid.

Kümm: Yeah. Pretty simple. So I guess to wrap, If you wanted to be remembered for one thing. What would it be? If you wanted to you do want to be remembered.

Francois: I don't want to be remembered.

Kümm: You don't want to be remembered?

Francois: I want a really lit party, where people take shots. I wanted ... this is me being nice of what I've come down to because I first was yall grinding on my casket, but then I realized possibly a little bit older that might not be okay with everyone's hips but ...

Kümm: So you do plan to live a long life. If your friends are old at your funeral.

Francois: I guess if my friends get old, I'll get old I'll be like. “Well I want to see what you gonna do next. This should be fun. Because I know entertainment.”

Kümm: Ok so you want to party.

Francois: I want to party at my funeral I want you to ...

Kümm: And what kind of things do you want people to say about you?

Francois: Hopefully that I put in that they danced really well. I think you will see that now.

Kümm: I don't think anyone would argue in that.

Francois: Yes it's great. I work so hard you know shout out to ... you know why I do that?

Kümm: What?

Francois: Why I dance.

Kümm: Why?

Francois: Pretty woman.

Kümm: Pretty woman.? I love that movie.

Francois: Oh my God. This is why we’re friends. Holy shit. No explanation needed. You already know. That was the first ... so cheesy was so it was so far like...

Kümm: I don't understand how it made you dance.
Francois: Oh. Because she was so freed of her body. I wanted to be that free from my body. Also I think at some point she was that she was a she was a dancer or maybe just maybe I mean yeah well I mean I just looped that in somewhere. Yeah. One of the new friends. Shouts to Rent to the Rent as an adult again is sad fuck up. That movie was great at 17. When I didn't know what rent was. I don't know what affordable housing was or like Medicare or health care. I want. Hopefully ... that they end up liking themselves more because I help them like there's more like me you're like “Oh my friends once showed me this mirror right by Park Avenue and I get to see your flashing lights I've run your flower shop.” That's written you know. That Francois took me out and we got dressed. Though. Like. What are some way like you like yourself more That's good.

Kümm: So the mark that you kind of want to leave on the world is like. People being ...

Francois: More in love with themselves. Entirely and outwardly so I want to give them like tools for them love themselves, like on hard days and then tangible resources for the love themselves outwardly so that's why fashion is so important to me like it's one way to get more gender aligned. So I can make that easier for you then I want that for you. So yeah. And inwardly and outwardly I want people to love themselves and. Give me a little bit proud of that then. Sprinkle juice.

Kümm: Of awesome ... Anything else you want to share?

Francois: Paige is awesome! No I forget it forget it forget the people I'm close to at times and it is like you asked me this reminded me I'm like right. We've known we've known each other a long time. Yet but like, I've shared a lot of my stuff with you. And you've shared a lot of yourself ... but sometimes I just don't and it makes me forget, because it's easy to go back to what you did as a child. Or what's like ... So sometimes I forget like “Oh Paige does know!” Okay, Cool.

Kümm: Thank you, Thanks for sharing yourself with me, and New York City, and New York City.

Francois: Well, That's why they call me a hoe elder.

Kümm: A hoe elder? What is that?

Francois: Umm ... someone who now teaches people how to hoe. Not only produces more orgasams, but also like ... holds their own self respect. It's great. And they can do it especially as an introvert, like over the internet. But they did it as an introvert. And figured out ways that worked for them. And they increased their orgasams and they were feeling great about slutting around. It was great, I was like “Oh my god I'm a hoe elder.”

Kümm: A new title of respect, and with that ... I think we'll end. Thanks, Francois.