NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

https://www.nyctransoralhistory.org/
http://oralhistory.nypl.org/neighborhoods/trans-history

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

SOPHIE CADLE

Interviewer: Sebastián Castro Niculescu

Date of Interview: August 6, 2019

Location of Interview: NYPL Offices, Midtown Manhattan

Interview Recording URL:
http://oralhistory.nypl.org/interviews/sophie-cadle-b8tu7i

Transcript URL:

Transcribed by Sophia Nguyen (volunteer)

NYC TOHP Interview Transcript #110

RIGHTS STATEMENT
The New York Public Library has dedicated this work to the public domain under the terms of a Creative Commons CCo Dedication by waiving all of its rights to the work worldwide under copyright law, including all related and neighboring rights, to the extent allowed by law. Though not required, if you want to credit us as the source, please use the following statement, "From The New York Public Library and the New York City Trans Oral History Project." Doing so helps us track how the work is used and helps justify freely releasing even more content in the future.
**Sebastián Castro Niculescu:** Hello, my name is Sebastián Castro Niculescu and I will be having a conversation with Sophie Cadle for the New York City Trans Oral History Project in collaboration with the New York Public Library's Community Oral History project. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans identifying people. It is August 6, 2018, and this is being recorded at the New York Public Library offices, in midtown Manhattan. Hi, Sophie.

**Sophie Cadle:** Hi, Sebastián. [laughter] How are you doing today?

**Niculescu:** I'm doing great. Thank you for inviting me to have a conversation with you today—

**Cadle:** Yeah, of course.

**Niculescu:** Um, so, to get started, um, let's just begin with where you are from and what was it like growing up?

**Cadle:** Yeah, definitely, um, so, I was born in the Dominican Republic, and I was raised in Washington Heights, New York, I was—I came to the United States about six months old, six or seven months old, and I was raised by parental grandmother. From a young age, I didn't have much connection with my biological mother, so for that reason I was raised with my father's side of the family here in the U.S. And my remainder siblings and my mother stayed in the Dominican Republic to live, and currently still live there. Growing up, I remember having a lot of, um, mind blowing moments I would say, for the lack of another word. Just growing up and being able to be a child and somehow grow up in a fast pace environment where you're still a child, but you are doing grown folks stuff. Like taking care of grandma, doing some chores around the house, taking more initiative about, you know, what I wanted to do with school and, just that aspect. You know, just being growing in that aspect of my life. I don't know. I had a lot of child moments that I could share that were great, and that were not so great. So, I don't know where you want to take the conversation—

**Niculescu:** Yeah

**Cadle:** From there [laughter]

**Niculescu:** I guess, just to like go from the really beginning, like, do you know what prompted the move from the DR to here?

**Cadle:** A lot of the things that happened—sorry—that happened during my childhood, are still kind of a blur to me, so, our, you know, some family secrets sort of say, I did grow up with a Dominican and Catholic background, so my family's were instilled, in like, 'what happens to the family, stays in the family' and certain things about before you were here, are things that you shouldn't know. Basically that's how I was raised, so, I was still left with, you know no answers to why I came to live with my paternal grandmother and my father's side of the family and why I didn't have so much connection to my biological mother and stuff like that. To this day, on this day, as we speak, I have a connection, have a both connection with my biological
grandmother who now lives in Spain. And I re-established that connection with her in 2010 when I went back to the Dominican Republic for a brief trip. So, there still hasn't been a conversation that has been brought up, to have, but I'm pretty sure that had to do with, you know, citizenship, immigration issues, and just like what will be more beneficial for my life in the long run. Just sort of to speak, cause a lot of people's dream who lives in the Dominican Republic is to come to the United States, and come to New York, and have the American quote-unquote dream.

Niculescu: So maybe to start gathering some memories and moments, um, do you have a kind of very first impactful memory?

Cadle: Um, [laughter] I guess the most impactful memory that I would have, is just the bond that I had, that I built with my grandmother, and that I still have to this day regardless of where it stands now, I still have that bond towards her, that love, that person who was my mother figure, my father figure, you know, and my grandparent symbol. She was both my grandmother and grandfather because I didn't have a grandfather in neither both side of the family, neither on my grandmother's side, on my mothers side, or my father's side. And she was my main guardian, my main caretaker because my father while I was growing up, from what I remember, he was traveling a lot overseas, and state to state doing work, construction work like that from what I remember from when I was told. So my grandmother, she used to come to all of my parent teacher conference, my graduation, she made sure I had everything I need to start school, to make sure that I achieve and succeeded in school, that I was enrolled in after school programs, that I was in extracurricular activities and that I was, you know, supported as a child, that you know, that had love, that felt loved and cared for. So I think my grandmother always showed me that. Unfortunately in 2011, things weren't going so well in the household both for my gender identity and because of just you know, my youthful mistakes, or youthful paths that I wanted to take and my grandmother didn't agree with and it was just becoming torn in her life too busy taking care of my father's four—well three children at that time—and still providing for my father and his kids and not being able to manage her life and her retirement and what she wanted to do too, you know, to live the rest of her life. So I miss her from that perspective and I just worry her, when she made me leave home, and you know, from there just the trust and love and bond I have for my family wasn't the same. Because of all the experiences I went through, because of the things I know I went through while growing up that a child shouldn't have gone through. Although they made me a stronger person today. So I cherish the experiences, but I cherish the bond and love that was broken. If that makes any sense. [laughter]

Niculescu: I can totally understand that. So what was it like, kind of early on growing up in Washington Heights? What was the neighborhood you were in like?

Cadle: Washington Heights. Washington Heights is a very Dominican culture instilled in it. It's like a transition from Spanish Harlem to East Harlem then upper west side and then Washington Heights was all Dominican Spanish and it transitions to Inwood and Riverdale, one is a little more suburbs and one is a little more conservative. So it's a very sticky neighborhood to navigate. If you're not from the neighborhood and you are not descended, you will feel very
out of place. But growing up that was my home, that was where I felt comfortable, it was where I grew up, it was where I nurtured, and I did everything in the same 5 to 10 block radius every single day growing up. My school was on 182nd and St. Nicholas, my after school was on 183rd and Audubon, and home was on 188th and Broadway. So, growing up that was my transition to... until I started high school and I started working at American Eagle which I had the opportunity to get out of the neighborhood and come work out on 34th street [inaudible] and I was going to school on 84th street at Lewis D. Brandeis high school. So that was until 2010, 2011, and which I didn't have the experience to get out Washington Heights and get out of the instilled culture, and stigmas, and neighborhoods like that. It wasn't bad, it was just very fast pace growing up for a child my age who didn't have a lot of supervision, who didn't have places to go during this age that were expected to go, or that was in trouble. But not having the parent who was, knowledgeable or experienced in navigating the neighborhood to give the child full experience of what the neighborhood in and community is instead of what just the family knows, if that makes any sense. It wasn't really much exposure except for school and afterschool and home, for a while.

Niculescu: And so how did you learn to navigate yourself, like, through the neighborhood not having a person lead you through it?

Cadle: When I turn 14, 15, not sure what year that was in—pretty much 2009 or 2010. I got introduced to the LGBT underground community quote-unquote. Which is the ballroom community that host house parties, they used throw either in Washington Heights, Harlem area, or the Bronx, always. And they were called 'homo bashes' which is this underground queer party that would go on Saturdays and Sundays and holidays for queer youth who are either homeless or not of age to go clubbing and who just wants a sense of community with people they want to party with. It was a lot of drugs, alcohol, and ungodly things just to say the least. But it was the experience that counted and the connections in the Bronx and the friendships that we built. It was like making our own family. So, that's how I got introduced to the outside New York City never sleeps world, around 15, 16, by my brother, my biological brother who is also in the LGBT life and is engaged at the moment—

Niculescu: Oh wow. [Laughter] Congrats! [Glasses ding]

Cadle: This is to him. My brother introduced me to a couple of friends who were a part of this underground world and we used to sneak out at night from our grandmother's home. And we used to go party. Parties used to start around 10 and end around 4 or 5 in the morning. My grandmother used to work late nights and we would go out and party and be home before she gets home. You know, it worked for a while and she caught up with us and it was more like, "are we going to get in trouble and just go because we can't miss a party." Because it's that—it meant that much to us. It meant more of like, "oh my god, we're in an environment with people who understand us and where I can just be free, I can be myself and no one is here controlling me and judging me, or just putting down." It was something we looked forward to every weekend if there was a party. When there wasn't, it was just like, "what are we gonna do, like oh my god, there's no party, are we gonna throw a party?" [Laughter] So it became that, and
out of that I built a lot of friendships that lasted a while until I became homeless, and the ending, I mean the summer of 2011.

Niculescu: And so how did you first find out about these parties in these communities?

Cadle: Um, you know what's crazy? At this point I don't even remember. But, the connections were made through my brother and my brother was inside—I wouldn't say inside—but it was a part of the underground community for awhile. He was more advanced than I was. To give a little bit of background, my brother use to live with my grandmother but who also has a biological mother who lives New York City, in Brooklyn. So whenever things weren't going well in the household where I used to live with my grandmother, that was essentially my father's household. They would go back—my brother and my sister who have the same mother, would go back to their mother's and just, you know, cool off a little bit, and will have to deal with all of the shenanigans that was going on in my grandmother's house. But since that's not my biological mother, I didn't have much of a relationship to do certain things that they had to, that they had advantage to. Like you know, just, “I'll leave, bye, I'll leave, see you later.” I didn't have that opportunity because there was only one household that I knew of—which is my grandmothers home. So there was no cooling off, it was just dealing with it and being the essential secondary caretaker of the home of my grandmother because she is... of background—she has bipolar disorder, depression, she has a lot of, a lot of mental health issues that weren't taken care of when they should've and now they're taking a toll of her life. She really needed someone there to help manage her and take her medication and just being supportive to helping her through, like, the daily needs of the household because she's taking care of all of us and she needed a secondary person to help her and I felt like I provided that for her while I was there. My brother introduced me to these parties and then Grindr expanded those doors. You meet other people who were coming and going to the party or coming with other people and you will get—it really became like a domino effect and you will get introduced to more people, to more outings, and more gatherings, and more places. And then I became homeless to those networks I was introduced to the organization that I was a part of now.

Niculescu: I see. So, when did you have to take care of your grandmother in that way? I imagine that it was pretty young when you had to start doing that—

Cadle: Yeah, from what I remember my grandmother always showed some signs of mental health issues, but you know at a young age when you're 6 or 7, first or second or third grade you're not really paying attention to those things. And if you are, you don't have the words to describe or to understand what those issues are, but you see the ways that a person treats you from one another and you grasp on to those things. Especially, as a child, you're like a sponge, you absorb everything. And then I started having issues with my father, and just like—just me personally I was acting out, but it was acting out in a sense of like, seeking out some type attention that I don't know what it is, but it's just a reflection of what you are giving me. Through my whole childhood, I was placed in counseling in school and I had a psychotherapist growing up. So I just like, I've always been placed in these places to talk about things that I don't know why I'm placed there as a child and then when I come home it's like “you don't have a problem, is something wrong with you?” But then there is. And it was kind of like a confusion
of like thinking because of their problems that I have problems. That was my family's understanding of mental health. Because they come from this culture of like, we don't talk about our problems and we don't sit down and conversate what you are feeling and why you're feeling this way. So, it was like well this person is here to help you because I feel like you have an issue, but I don't feel like you have an issue. There is no issue of you. You're just acting out. So it's like, but why are you sending me here? So it's like growing up, that was my understanding of why I was seeing these people. Once I started growing older, more family secrets, I started to understand more, I started to just kind of like be—I was put in these environments where I would just absorb and I'm like, “okay, now I know what this is, I know what this is, and I know what this is, and now there is going back,” and my family, they don't understand the perspective of me and not being able to unsee things. And it's just like I'm going to react the way that I react just as a human person reacts when they see something that doesn't make sense to them. So I started voicing those things, I started to see my grandmother more for my family who I seen just take advantage of her because of her mental health situation. Or sometimes they wouldn't take advantage of her. They would just pity her because of the way that she managed her life. And it was just like, you guys all understand her situations and all making it more difficult for her to function in her disease. So, I was essentially her protector, then her go-to person, and then the secondary caretaker of the apartment. I just had to do, be on top of things that she would essentially be on top of, but because of her disease she wouldn't. She would find other people take initiative and do things because they live in the household. It was just the way that her disease work with her life, there were certain things that I didn't need her to tell me that I know needed to get done, and if not, she was gonna flip and show the other side of her that she wouldn't initially show other people who just showed her a little bit of support. And I provided that for her. Because I understood her disease as I grew older and older. And I still do and I still feel, I guess, I wouldn't say sympathize, but I empathize for her in the situation that she is in now. But I told her that once I left, that was the situation she was going to be in, and in fact she is now. So I was her secondary caretaker in that sense and I would accompany her to her mental health appointments, I would get her medications at the pharmacy, bring it back to the home, make sure it was in a place she would remember where it's at, her medication was organized and she didn't have excessive bottles and stuff like that. She would also show the same support support that I show her back, the same way. But as soon as something would go wrong, I would be the initial person to blame, even though I had nothing to do with it. So a lot of that took a toll on myself and my mental health and what I was absorbing from the environment with my family and stuff like that. So when I started to rebel, you know, going out to parties, and meeting more people, and kind of just being more like myself, I'm developing and growing as a person. And they didn't quite understand that and I kind of put it in a perspective like I'm still me, I'm just changing internally and I'm expressing—my outer appearance is a expression of what I feel inside. But it still doesn't change the love that I have for you, still doesn't change my goals, doesn't change the life that I'm going to live. They kind of didn't understand that, they wanted some type of instant gratification of what my actions were, what my intentions were with my gender expression and stuff like that... So around the beginning of 2011—no, 2010, around my birthday, around November something—I started dating this other young person. At the time I was 16, the person was 19, and I met that person through a connection of the underground world. A lot of people in the underground world knew the person but didn't tell me all the things that we're going to get to in a second [laughter] that
kind of made my life go downhill. So that was kind of like, he was one of the major impacts in my life in that moment. So in 2011 I started dating this person, I was very instilled in the underground world, just wanted to go to these parties. I wanted to feel accepted, I wanted to be free, just wanted to do me. I was working at American Eagle, I had a very good job. I was still in high school. I wasn't going as consistently as I should have been. But I had transitioned from an ordinary high school to an alternative high school, which gives you more credits per year, you get to graduate earlier if you complete all your credits. Initially, all of that was going great, because that's the plan that I put in my head and that I was following that I'm committed to this new relationship, I'm committed to exploring myself more. I'm in school, an alternative high school, something that's working for me, that works for my schedule and I'm making money. So eventually, I can make a plan to bring my parents home, which was my goal when I turn 18. So I had this ideal plan that as soon as I'm 18 that I'm just working this out, and this is what it would be. I'm still doing my chores at home, still being supportive to my family, I'm still being a young person, but to my family it felt like I'm rebelling, because I was working, because I was going to school, I was never home and I was doing these things. And it's like, well if you're doing these things then you need to pay these bills. I'm like well I don't ask you for anything. You guys don't provide for me, the things that I need to be to be a young person. And it was like, well you're growing up a little bit too fast. I'm like well, how fast am I supposed to grow. You know you guys are exposing me to so much that there's no being a child, being a teenager, regardless of my age. Like I was already exposed. I'm already doing these things. I just need to follow this plan as long as I'm being a young person that's abiding by the rules of the household. Anything beyond then, is you asking for too much, or asking for something that's unreasonable. But my family, coming from a Dominican culture, where you don't have like—you're a child, and these things we don't do, and other people, they were like what would other people say. It was mostly about my gender expression of me being way too feminine at that time and it's like you could be homosexual, you could be gay, you could be whatever you want. You just don't have to express it. You could be you. And I'm like well I am being me. It was just like a back and fourth of like I know what I'm saying, I know that I'm not crazy. And then I just started doing whatever was feasible to me because I just knew that eventually things were going to end up the way that I had envisioned. They are going to kick me out, I'm just going to go either—or life is just going to happen the way it's going to happen. And that's the way it did. Because I wasn't ready to leave home, because I didn't know anything else. I didn't have any other family in the city so all I was instilled and all I knew was Washington Heights, work, school, but work and school was not going to help me find a place and they could care less where I sleep at night, so I just had to make a plan that worked for me. So in 2011—July 3rd of 2011, things weren't going well, just at home, the relationship. Let me rewind a little bit [laughter]. So while I was dating Jesus, let's give him a name, from November to July 3rd, all that time I found out so many things about Jesus. He was married, he was dating other people, he was very instilled in Grindr like he was known by everybody and everybody was just his ex, but not their friends. It was just kind of like, for me at just 16, I'm just brand new into this underground world, into this Grindr life, into just the fast dating, meeting up apps and all that stuff, and just what people's intentions were, with other people who just weren't as savvy or as up to date with the intentions of these apps at that time. I started losing some of the friendships that I made—during meeting up all those people in the underground world—I ended up losing because of Jesus, because they began telling me things at the beginning of our relationship that weren't necessarily true, but
that were said to them. It was just kind of like, I was in a place like, are you trying to just have
not me date this person, what are your intentions? I was kind of like, everybody is just coming
for my relationship because that was what was instilled in my mind. And it wasn't the case. So
my brother who is also part of the world, who introduced me to—who told me about this
person, and told me that the person was supposedly going around and infesting people with
HIV, and just a very nasty person—a very sick person like someone did something mean,
something unreasonable to them and they're going out there replicating it to other people in
a very malicious way. So I stuck through all that relationship and the person who he was married
to used to meet us at parties, and used to assault him, and there was ordered protections... It
got to the point where every time we seen this person, there was always police and ambulance,
and he was always unconscious. It got to a point where I'm sitting with him in the hospital room
where they're taking glass out of him. He's crying on the stretcher and I'm like, what do we do?
Like, I love you so much, I'm so blinded by what I'm being told, but now things are coming and
they seem to be true. On July third, long story short, he... I was staying at his home for about
three months prior to July 3rd, I hadn't been home for that time because things weren't going
good at home so I'm just like I have somewhere to go right now because I'm dating this person,
so I was staying with that person for the remainder of the three months. On the 3rd, Jesus tells
me, “we're going to go out, I have to go to Jersey but we're going to 125th.” We end up going to
125th street, we took a cab there. Once we got the cab, he's like well, “I'm breaking up with you,”
or whatever the case might be. I don't remember the exact words, but it was just like, this
is over. I was just shocked to begin with. I was just shocked. Like, this is so confusing. What the
hell is going on, like I'm 16. The first thing that hit me was that I haven't been home for three
months. I'm just not going to pop up over there because I told them I'm not coming back
because they had kicked me out. Long story short, I started walking from 125th street all the
way to 180th to Washington Heights, so that's like 50, 60 blocks. [laughter] It was a pretty hot
summer day and I was just crying from 125th to 180th and I'm like, what am I going to do with
my life. That moment was just kind of like... I fucked up a lot of things and I just didn't know
how I got there to that point where it was like, how did my life just get here? Nine months ago
I was just brand new, working at American Eagle, going to school, at home. How am I not
homeless? That was my first thought. And then, all of the thoughts of like the relationship, and
everything that I just went through, what it was telling me, the first thought was like, he just
gave you HIV and you really let him give you HIV. And he just broke up with you. Everything
people were telling you, you just seen it, it was true. And then I'm like well I'm going home like
this is the only place that I know to go to, regardless of [inaudible] is just home. So that was my
destination. I started walking from 125th all the way home. When I get to the door—my
grandma's apartment door, the first thing she says is, “oh you're home, you're back”, or
something of that nature and, “I need to get your father because we need to figure this out
because we're not going to be going through this,” or something of that nature. Because of my
fathers history, the first thing that I knew was going to happen was we were going to get into
a physical altercation and he was going to put his hands on me, and I didn't want to deal with
this right now. So she lets me in and I sit on the kitchen counter and I'm crying. She asks me
why I'm crying and she's coming up with all these assumptions. I'm just like... everything's
going, but I'm not hearing anything. I'm kind of just in the zone. And she, with her problems,
she can't even tell. I sat on the kitchen counter and she had left the kitchen for a while. I just
started taking all her pills. All her pills. They weren't doing anything and I started taking more
pills. Didn't do anything so I just left. I walked through the door, lit a cigarette, I started walking, and that was the last thing I remember before I woke up in the hospital. So I woke up three days later in the ICU. I had a tube down my throat, all that stuff. They were just like, “you were seconds away from dying. If somebody wouldn't have picked you up from the streets and brought you in here, you would have been dead. There was no waiting for an ambulance or anything. The person who picked you up and brought you.” I was like, picked me up? What are you talking about? And then things started playing back, I'm like ohh, ohh, oh my goodness. So I was in the in the hospital for about 15 days. They sent me to a psych ward for 30 days. I was still underage so my grandmother, my family came to the hospital. I was like a regular in the hospital for a while, for like intoxication, mental health, suicide ideation, stuff like that. Cause going through all those things at that age, she was just kind of like I don't know if I have the same issues as her, but I know that I feel certain things inside that I'm just kind of like confused. I'm just like I don't know what I'm feeling, I don't know how to express it. My family doesn't talk, and I'm the person the blame. Growing up I had a lot of issues with my father. He was a very good person, but he would deal with his frustration with putting his hands on his kids and showing his discipline that way. As I grew older, I grew a hatred towards him. Not towards my father, but just towards the person that he was. I just had to grow distance from him. Growing up, my grandmother was seeing that I was putting him against my father. I'm not going to put you against your own son, but you have to realize that your son is not a child anymore. That I'm his child and that the way that he is treating you and treating me and then coming in here and trying to discipline is kind of like well you have no place cause you’re never in our lives and you have your mother, which is our grandmother, taking care of all your three kids and you're living your life. And that was the life growing up. There’s so many things that play a part into how my family is. But it’s just Dominican culture. A lot of Dominican families will tell you the same thing. It was very secretive, so to explain it, we would be here for hours and days. Just to paint you the picture of how my family functions... it was just very toxic and I felt like that was the best thing to do at that time, was just like I'm lost, like I just want everything to just go black. It wasn't that I didn't want to live, I didn't want to die. I didn't know why I took the pills. They asked me, I'm just like, “I don't know. I just, I don't know. Like I can't give you a specific answer.” It was just like pills... it was the moment. All of that had to play a part. Something that led me to those actions. Even though I didn't know how to explain those actions, or what led me to it, I felt it. It wasn't that I wanted to die. I guess I wanted people to listen, to take some type of like... you're killing me. Not being able to have that conversation with my parents about the scariest thing that I was going through because I know that they weren't going to understand, not one bit of it, was even scarier. When I was in the psych ward, my parents—well my grandmother, not my parents because my father was no show—my grandmother, who was the only person there was being very unsupportive, was like, “you’re the problem. Just stay here, they're going to deal with you,” and the hospital explained to her, “this is a minor and you're the guardian. We have an obligation where we have to keep the person until we feel like the person’s safe to go back to your custody. After we're ready to release the person, you need to be here to take ownership because it's a minor.” She didn't understand that so I was in the psych ward for a little longer. The ACS [Administration for Children's Services] got involved all that stuff. It was essentially, we're not going to be part of the treatment, family counseling, that's what he wants at the time. We don't want that because we don't have an issue. The issue's him. It was just like wow, this is like, I'm supposed to go back
to that. ACS was unsupportive because that we had an ACS case prior to that so the same case manager came and it was just kind of like you don't got it either. I was 17 at that point so the options were very, very limited. It was very like 1 or 2, pick one. I’m like well, they’re all the same. They’re both the same, they’re still going to give me the same outcome. So initially I went back home for a while and I just felt like I was suffocating as soon as I got there. Everybody was scared that I was going to try to kill myself. And then there was kind of like... blame. Like “you’re so stupid.” It was a blame, the feeling that I was going to kill myself and just this other fear that I had inside my gut, telling me to run. One day I just picked up and I left. It was that August and I never came back. Since that day in 2011 I haven’t been in the same apartment with my family since then.

Niculescu: Wow. And so where did you go?

Cadle: I went everywhere [laughter]. Umm, as I was telling you at the beginning, the only thing that I knew growing up was Washington Heights. So when I became homeless it was very instilled, like I didn’t know where to go, I just know that I can’t go back there. So at the beginning it was a navigation of me going to the ER, going back to the places that I been before when I was in trouble. And it was helpful for the beginning because it was just... nowhere to go. I started trying Covenant House, I started trying the ER, I tried to find something that balance with the person I was and what my comfort zones were. I reached out to the friends that I knew, for a while they were okay with it. I was still trying to find stable employment. It was just like trying to find somewhere to stay, trying to find something that's going to keep me money and trying to stay in school at the same time because I’m still a minor. And I was still going to school during the day because I knew that if I go to school during the day that I would have at least a room to go to during the day. Then I was like, I’m not going to school unless I freshen up. I'm not going to school dirty and I'm not going to school without being the person that I am. So I can’t wear the same thing every day. I initially didn't think about all those things and everything started playing a role in where I was. First I lost my job at American Eagle, and then I stopped going to school. School wasn’t listening to my situation, even though I disclosed to them that I wasn’t staying home because of this and it was kind of like these are your options. You got to go to the shelter, this or that. So I went to Covenant House. Covenant House was okay for a while but they had so many restrictions, so many barriers to stay in there and it was unlimited so I was just like, well I’ll stay here for the days that I can and when they kick me out, they kick me out. And then I'll try again when I can. Because I was a minor at that time, there was only certain shelters that I could go. I couldn’t go to an adult shelter, I could only go to a youth shelter, and there was only so many youth shelter beds in the city. I didn’t come to find out about Ali Forney Center until I had navigated all of the other services. The first year, the first homelessness year, I could tell you that it was just strictly sleeping on my building where I used to live at, sometimes I used to sleep in the—on top of the doormat in front of my grandmother’s apartment. She had a schedule, when she would come in and out of that apartment, so I already knew—before she would come out and I would just disappear. Until the super started taking counseling and he caught onto it so then it was an issue. And then it was just causing me to get arrested so I stopped going there. I started sleeping in the train. The train was an issue, I started getting locked up when they used to be out here targeting people who were sleeping on the train, taking up more than one seat. Then I started sleeping in other buildings, or wherever the
night landed me. It was usually right in right in the train, or in the turnstyle or somewhere. In the summertimes I used to hang out around Christopher Street and hanging out with the other kids there. I didn’t start doing survival sex work until 2015, 2016, out there, personally. Yeah so, it was just navigating the streets and like making it work day after day. Going to the drop in centers, I found about Hetrick-Martin Institute around 2012, so I started going there faithfully—they were like one of the major people to help me get my life back in track. Yeah, so it was really a roller coaster, I would say a little bit everywhere. I’ve been in unimaginary places. I’ve woken up in unthinkable places. Sometimes I would get high and I’m like, “how did I end up here?” Like all the way in Rockaway Queens, like, never been out here before. I used to get high, ride the train and... wherever the line took me.

Niculescu: So it was really just like improvising every day?

Cadle: Mhm, at the beginning of—from 2011 to 2015, to when I got some type of balance in my life and some type of stability, it was just kind of like making it work. Improvising, I got this and now I’m able to get this and go here. Or I have a little money in my pockets so I could stay out for two, three days you know, on the drugs. It was workable then, until I hit complete rock bottom in 2015. January 2015.

Niculescu: And so, where was your friends from the community, or from the underground scene? Were they around during that time, what kind of connections were you able to sustain?

Cadle: Well, once I lost my job at American Eagle and certain things weren’t going as they were when they met me—you know, my appearance started changing, my circumstances started changing. I wasn’t accessible, I didn’t have fun, so people change. I wouldn’t say they changed, they showed their true colors. Now that I’m, you know, much wiser, you know you understand what a friendship is and I just felt like a lot of people just turned their backs on me when I was going through my hardest hardship. And I didn’t understand it back then, cause I was brand new into the scene. Everybody that I was hanging out with was older than me. I was the youngest one—16, 17, and all my other friends were 18, 19, 20, so I was the youngest one of the bunch. And I always hung out around older people, much older, wiser and maturer people. That’s always been, since I was a child, that’s why I say that I think that I matured a little bit quicker than others. But once things weren’t the same when they met me, a lot of people turned their backs on me. Even my brother. It was not until... since I got my life back on track that I have built some type of relationship with my brother, just because I don’t have any other family that I stayed in contact with. And I’m like, well my brother’s been the only other much reasonable person in my family who’s gone through similar experiences and understands me and what I’m going through now, and who, some way or another, has always tried to be supportive, regardless of their situation. But I also realize that my siblings had to save themselves also. They were also put into similar circumstances, just not the same, you know, as me. So my brother and I have a connection, a relationship now. We don’t see each other as often cause he lives in Brooklyn and works in Brooklyn, and I live in the Bronx, all the way in the other side, so he doesn’t like traveling, but we see each other. Last time, the most previous time, I would say was June, no May. It was May 30th, when I received an award and he went to the award ceremony. We talk with each other here and there. Yeah. [Laughter]
Niculescu: So maybe we can talk about, you were in this really deep, dark situation, right? [coughs] And so, at what point did you feel like you're able, or what happened that you're able to get some stability, and what were the ways in which you're able to achieve that. Or maybe it was just luck, or what happened?

Cadle: Yeah, so um, I wouldn’t say that I believe in luck, but it had to do a little with luck and was just like your higher power and your higher spiritual beliefs and stuff like that. In 2015—January, 25th, of 2015, I ended up getting arrested on a burglary charge, so class C felony, um, while I was homeless and addicted to K2, which is synthetic marijuana. And I was just... I had an extensive long record with NYPD of just like, hopping the turnstile, petty larceny, grand larceny, trespassing. They were just kind of fed up with me. So that charge, I was going through my homeless experiences. You know, doing drugs, I wouldn’t excuse it, or say that it’s the reason why I did these things—I did it for survival, I did it because I knew it would get me somewhere or something that I needed. So obviously I wasn't crazy, I was making decisions for myself. You know, decisions for my circumstances. And not everybody will understand. But I was just stealing. I would go into Duane Reade and catch a couple of accessories, or deodorant, and like toiletries that I could sell or make a profit. I was doing it to make a profit for my addiction and whatever else I needed to survive or to make it through the day, when other things weren’t working as they should of. The colder nights were the nights you needed the more funds to make sure you made it to the next night. Either you needed a lot of drugs, or you needed just a place to stay warm or you needed food that day, depending on the schedule that you work, that kept you alive. And every homeless person knows that experience of like, this is what works for me so I can make sure that I make it to the next day. So around that time I was stealing UPS packages, off of like building steps and stuff like that. I used to go up to Washington Heights into like an Arab store and one of the corner stores and would buy it, whatever, profit, or they would exchange it for K2, or funds, or cigarettes or whatever was feasible to refund you for. I was doing that for a while. I got caught up with NYPD cause obviously I wasn’t good at it. And on January 25 I ended up getting arrested with like—like red handed basically. And they, when I went to arraignment, they were just saying 7 years. I was just like 7 what? Is that just like 7 hours? [laughter] And no they were really serious with me. Luckily they didn’t give me mail tampering charge, stuff like that, which would have been a federal. When I got to Rikers Island here in the city, it wasn’t my first time there. But the number of time that I was facing, and the circumstances, just like me coming off the high, and being sober, and like now being put in this unpredictable environment, and an environment where it’s not guaranteed for me to make it, alive. I was traumatized. It was like a rude awakening. It was kind of like this is going to be your life. And I just, this like suicide ideation clicked into my brain. It was just like every second and every moment that I got to try and harm myself or try to kill myself, I was doing it. And it was for a whole two months that I was in the Department of Corrections—and an intensive in and out of the hospital, or being restrained, or being put in suicide observation. It was very tough for me. It wasn't the idea of me being incarcerated, because that wasn't the issue. I had somewhere to sleep now. I’m homeless, I’m getting three meals, I’m sleeping, I’m getting a shower like... a free haircut every fifteen days. Like what more could I ask for? You know, I don’t have anything to really care for other than my freedom and not being institutionalized. Like I said, it wasn’t my first time there. I've done 12 days. I've done
25—the most that I've done prior to that time was like 22, 23 days, for petty stuff, and now I'm facing time. And it was kind of like I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired. I'm sick and tired of being afraid. I'm sick and tired of being hungry. I'm sick and tired of going through this. I'm sick and tired of the system and these experiences. I'm tired of my family, I'm tired of living, I'm tired of breathing. I'm just tired of being tired. And that was my mentality—if dying is going to prevent me from keep going through this and keep tumbling and keep failing in life, then just let me go. Please. I don't know, I tried a lot of things and I guess God didn't let me go. That's my understanding of it now. But then it was kind of like, “what the fuck, will you just let me die? Like, I know it's you stopping me every time I'm close to death” and the officers were like, that's their job. Some of the officers were like, didn't care. Some officers were abusive of you after you tried to harm yourself. Some officers will see that you're really in a state of crisis and... I think everything just worked out in it's best way because I was really in a state of crisis. I was gone. I couldn't speak for myself cause I didn't know what I wanted. So after 20 days of me going in and out of the [inaudible] suicide observation unit, and them placing me in suicide smocks and everything. Everything they could do while I was incarcerated to prevent me from harming myself wasn't working. So they sent me to Bellevue Hospital to their prison ward where it was like hospital unit, but it was monitored by department of corrections. So I went there and they kept me for 22 days. They admitted me immediately and that fear of being incarcerated and going through what I was going through and kind of like, finding a balance to deal with it. Because I knew that I didn't want to die, technically. I just wanted the experiences that I was going through to stop. Or for me to find some type of balance so I could deal with it and be where I'm at now. So I got to that stage where I was just a little bit more conscious of what I was going through or what I was understanding. I found some type of coping mechanism... I would say that it was just a higher power. It was just something that I said, “I'm going to put my faith into this because that's all I got.” And I did. While I was in the hospital prison ward, my lawyer came to see me because I had missed all my arraignment and my previous court dates because of mental health and medical supersedes all of it. And your lawyer only finds out when he comes to see you. And they tell him your client is in so and so place, so he found that I was in the hospital and he came to see me on a Sunday, I remember he came in his jeans and he's like 6'5”, real skinny dude. Ryan Shanovich, I still remember. And he was just very traumatized by seeing me in the state of crisis that I was in. I just let him have it from what I remember from when I was born to the moment to where he saw me. I'm just like I'm tired. I'm ready to just let go. I don't want to see another court date, I don't want to see another judge, I just—if no one is willing to listen what I'm going through and help me get out of this so I can be in a better place and not have to keep going in front of a judge, then just let me die. Because you're not going to lock me up and throw away the key, because that's a no go because that's not the life for me. I know that I don't deserve to be here. I know that I don't deserve to be going through this and be dealing with this because that's not the person that I am. Try to meet the person that I am. And I guess the realness in the conversation that we had then just instilled him in wanting to help me, like very very—to the fullest. And he was an 18b lawyer, not a legal aid, and he was just very great at doing his job and wanted to help me. He was just like, “I met a lot of people—I met a lot of people in your situation and I just know that you're not a person that deserved to be here.” Just knowing how—he basically said, “just know how advantaged I've been or all the positions I've had, if I would have been in your situations no one would understand it. But just hearing your story and listening to everything you've been through,
there's no way that I can judge you for everything you've done and for you being where you're at now.” So he would say, “this is the best way for me to help you,” and he did exactly what he said he would do and in 9 months I was out of Rikers Island. He got me into Manhattan Mental Health Core, which is like a different type of criminal justice—not a different type, just more designed to help folks who have mental health issues, or like substance abuse issues, who have a lot of interactions with the criminal justice system, work out their needs while working out their legal issues or situations if it inflicts each other. So my addiction led me to do those things—my circumstances led me to do those things. So the best thing was they got me to a treatment program for 18 months, which was conditional discharge through [inaudible], and then complete 18 months in a residential treatment program. The program was designed for... it was 9 to 18 months. I had to be there from 10 to 18 months, or do a city year. I already had my time in, 9 years, [inaudible] to a year in city sentence in the city. So technically I had to do go the treatment program and complete it so I could get a misdemeanor charge on my record instead of a felony. So I went to the treatment program. The treatment program was amazing in the way that it showed me a lot about myself, a lot of things that I'm strong in, and a lot of things that I'm weak in. And it's made them better because I'm more awake in my choices, my people, places, and things is really what we have instilled in you, people places and things thats goes with addiction, that goes with employment, that goes with success, with everything. Just say people, places, and things that's all they say in there. Like make it better, make it worse. So I was incarcerated from January 25th 2015 to August 21st of 2015. So that was 9 months and a little bit of change. The same day that I got released, I walked into rehab right there in the lower east side. I had a UD [unknown], I was there from August 21st to the ending of December. Only completing about five and a half months. So when I left there—I left there without notifying the courts and stuff like that so not there was a warrant for my arrest because I didn't complete my conditional discharge. I left there because I already got what I needed and I knew that I was not going to stay in a place that I knew was going to side track what I already knew, that I was willing to do. So now it's just going to prolong if I stay here. And knowing that I don't need this, weather I have to turn myself back in and just go back so the judge could put this as a felony on the docket because I already did my time regardless. So I wouldn't have to go back to Rickers, I would just have to go back in front of the judge and when I go in front of the judge I'm released into [inaudible]. So I did that, I turned myself in like a week later and they calculated all the numbers and all that stuff and now I have a felony on my record. If I would have stayed for 18 months, then I would have got the misdemeanor charge. But it was just the way that the OASAS programs, essentially, the residential programs we have that are run in the city. They're good for people who really are there for the drug addiction, just like I need to get off a drug, and the way that they do it like breaking you down and building you back up. I got the breaking down, the building back up and it's just like okay now I'm done. I don't need to go through your whole 18 months of you basically torturing me. Or me being in a place that I know I don't need to be because someone else is telling me that this is where I need to be so my life could be saved. And I've proven it. Proven that if I didn't then I'll prove it very soon. But I've done the work to not go back into the system and to keep myself out of the system. So since 2015 I haven't interacted with the law or been incarcerated again. And everything that I said I was going to do once I got out of jail, I've done. And now I have my own apartment. I'm working as a self employed consultant, I have two active contracts and just being grateful and keeping the work going of my own personal and professional development, and the things that I want to achieve
from my experiences. I think that my experiences and my circumstances have made me not only a better human being but a better person in general—a better person in understanding life, and understanding my own life, and trying to help people and give back and just showing some type of humanity and being knowledgeable that everybody is going through their own individual crisis and just finding a way that the community and the world can be supportive of each other's needs, and struggles, and crisis. I believe in whatever you put out in the world, you get that back 10 times back. Or 10 times more. It's like the law of attraction. It's like negative attracts negative and positive attracts positive. Just like whatever you put out there is going to come back and... while I was incarcerated, I ran out of books. Books introduced The Secret while I was incarcerated by one of the officers who I grew connection to... that I had in contact with, unfortunately. I think that would be illegal for them. But I met a lot of officers, or a lot of mental health professionals in corrections who really were there for the right reasons, or who were really there just to do their job and nothing more. And I made it through because of them and other people that I met, other friendships that I made inside of corrections who, I made friends with two inmates who I've now hold since 2015, now it's 2018, three years, it's like, wow, like you never know when you're gonna need the people who are going to be there for you or just someone who's going to help you make it to the next day. And I met a lot of people that had helped me make it to the next day in corrections. And that just gave me a lot of knowledge and a lot of power to make it out of there and then make it when I'm out of there, like in the streets.

Niculescu: So when did you start connecting with the organizations, and places that you're now doing advocacy work in?

Cadle: I started my advocacy in Hetrick-Martin [Institute]. I started going to HMI since 2012 as a youth in crisis. I started utilizing their pantry services, and their hot meals, and their homeless youth services—just like the drop in center. I used to go there every day from three to seven. That would be like my safe haven from those days Monday through Friday. Saturdays it was open from 11 to 5 or 6, so I used to be there all day. While I was going through all my homeless experiences, like in and out of jail, in and out of rehab, and just really going through it, they were always there. If I called them and said I'm incarcerated, can you speak to my lawyer, verify that I've been going through situations, or this letter for the judge, or this letter for me to go to HRA [Human Resources Administration] or whatever the case may be, or whatever the case may be. They help with all of that. While I was going through homelessness, I was applying for housing and stuff like that through them, through their homeless youth department. I got my housing voucher through Hetrick-Martin, so when I came out of rehab around that time, my voucher got approved. So now I just needed to find a landlord to take my case to move in. So they helped me do all of that. I didn't get to move in until 2017. In 2016 I went into the shelter system, the department of homeless services for the adult services cause I already had a voucher approved. So I knew that it was not going to take long. So I did 9 months in department of homeless services and I got my apartment. I got connected to someone who interviewed me, one of the landlords. That first landlord who interviewed me gave me a second interview and I was ready to move in. I moved in August 3rd of 2017. I just made a year on the 3rd of this month.

Niculescu: Congrats.
Cadle: Thank you. I'll be moving this year too, before my birthday to a more stable apartment. Now I live in a support housing unit so I'm going to move out into a one bedroom apartment that's not in supportive housing complex. So that was like my end goal for getting out of the system. HMI has been my main go to place. When I started getting more stable, and then I had a stable shelter to go to, like a go to shelter and stuff like that, I started getting connected to the programs that they were offering, got connected to their high school equivalency classes and I started taking some classes there. I started joining their internships, just to keep myself busy and build some job employment skills for my resumé because I always kept my self employed, or kept myself engaged in something that will be applied to my resumé that will keep my engaged in the community. So with the internships that were offered, I was able to build an advocacy platform and I think people just started grasping how I told my story, how open I was of my experience, just talking about my challenges and how I overcame those challenges and what my goals are for myself and the community and for—just like how difficult navigating this system is. So I got connected to one organization to another organization, to this opportunity to another opportunity to write an article. And then I saw that I had an opportunity to create some type of positive, meaningful and purposeful change, or just have some type of platform that meant something to somebody. That I was able to connect to somebody because of my story. Or that somebody was able to connect to me or my experiences and my community because of my story. So I saw that my story had a power in it. The more that I told it, the more that people wanted to get to know me. The more opportunities that opened, the more doors that was just opening and I was walking through each one of them because I said this is my law of attraction. This is what my path and my higher power and my positivity is telling me that it's going to be a meaningful and purposeful engagement for myself. And I just took it one day at a time. The same way that my life went down in a domino effect, I feel like it's going back up. Everything that I said that I said I'm going to accomplish and things that I found out that I wanted to accomplish, now I'm working towards and I'm accomplishing every day—just because I keep a positive outlook in life. I look at how much I overcame and that gives me power. Whenever I feel down, whenever I feel like this might not be the right choice to make, I look back at those experiences that I overcame and say this just happened because of something else. Or something else is about to just burst into that right path that I'm supposed to follow and it usually does. I don't mean to sound selfish or like gassing your head, but it really, I really do believe it. I feel like the more you believe in it, the more power you put into it, the more that it becomes reality for the person whose putting the positivity out there, and expecting that positivity back, because that's the way that my life has revolved for the past few years.

Niculescu: And so through that work have you been able to kind of re-find a larger community of trans people, of LGBTQ people—or what are the ways in which you have this underground community before and you kind of lost it through your experience with homelessness and so what is maybe different, or how did you start finding your community in this new stage of your life?

Cadle: Yes, prior to my incarceration in 2015, I did not identify as a transgender woman, or a transgender individual, I was just a queer, gay young man going through a self discovery. I was always very very feminine. Always growing up very feminine and always had long hair and long
lashes and it was always in me. A lot of people, while my transition—once I started meeting people in the underground world, they would tell me, “Oh you want to be trans?” I just didn’t know what trans was. “Like you want to be a girl right?” I’m like no, I just want to be me, like I don’t know. I’m like being a girl, that was never, it never seemed possible for me. I never met a boy that could be a girl. So enlighten me if you can, [laughter] that was my mentality at 15, 16. So when I got incarcerated in 2015 for that time, that’s when I met a whole bunch of transgender community who are incarcerated. I’m just like, [whispers] oh my god, like, you’re really a girl, boy, what—like this is so confusing. And I was very enlightened about... enlightened of the transition, like really seeing it with my own eyes. You really can just become who you want to become and be who you want to be. But one thing that I, um... let me try to rewind a little bit. The way that it happened for me is a very different way that it happened for a lot of other transgender individuals. I wouldn’t say that I always known that I wanted to be a girl, but I always known that I always been feminine, that I always been myself. I’ve always known that. So when I went to Rikers in 2015, after I left the suicide observation and came back from Bellevue, they were finding the best place to put me in. I was told about a transgender housing unit that was just newly open in the Rikers Island, and they had trans—and there was only transgender individuals housed there. But I wasn’t a transgender individual, when I was at Rikers. I was booked as a male, as just gay and etcetera, etcetera. And my appearance, on the outside, didn't reflect a transgender individual, or with a quote unquote norm of a transgender individual. So DOC [Department of Corrections] was very hesitant, like, “should we place this person there, you’re very feminine, you just don’t look feminine.” So I kind of explained to them, this is who I am, this is how I feel and this is the best place for me. I pleaded my case and eventually I got placed there. I was placed there for 4 months and in those 4 months I met a lot of transgender individuals. Older, younger, in the beginning stages of the transition, in the middle, and in the stuck phase, in the phases that was explained to me. And everybody there was just rooting for me. They were like “I see it, I see it,” and I just started being more of myself while I was there. And it was both healthy for me mentally, because of everything I had just went through in the mental health ward and at Bellevue, and now just being, going into a place where it’s other people that I can relate to and conversate with and actually laugh, talk, cry, and just certain things while being incarcerated, it was just mind blowing for me. I just felt safe there. Ultimately, things didn’t end up the way that I wanted to end up. I didn’t end up staying in the transgender housing unit for the remainder of my incarceration because other transgender women came in and not every transgender woman is friendly. Friendly or not as accepting of other transgenders, or they’re just, you know. The excuse that I made for them was that they were institutionalized. They were institutionalized and they were stigmatized by what their reality was and I was like this is my reality and I’m going to stick to that like I may not be trans, but I’m trans enough to be here. You know, and the group of the trans girls who weren't friendly made it their mission to get everyone out of there who didn't reflect transgender cause it was only limited beds. It was 31 beds, and the girls that were in there wanted to create the house to either be all trans, like the girls who were in the clique that were known to them, and their boyfriends. So jail just works a different way that if you stick together, you could make things happen. And you could make people get out of the house and have other people come in and stuff like that. So long story short, I didn’t end up staying in there. So when I signed out of there and signed into Pacific Custody, because now once you sign out of there, you either go to general population, or you go to PC where you have to sign in voluntarily. So I
signed into the custody and I went to another building and I was in a housing unit where there was other transgender, there was other gay folks and there was other heterosexual guys and there was a little program, quote unquote, it's just like the way things go. And it was very open house, people had relationships, the transgender girls were left alone, the gay people were left alone, like nobody really messed with them. I was instilled in that. Long story short, a guy grabs into being in a relationship with me and I was named Sophie in corrections like prior to me being in the housing unit. Like everybody who knows me in corrections knows me by Sophie. Everybody knows me by Sophie, I was given that name once and then from there it was just like everything's been Sophie. And I don't have any explanation for it, it's just how I feel, who I am, and when I came out of DOC, finished rehab and stuff like that, I said this is who I'm going to live as, this is the person I created, person who I always envisioned. I felt like that person now. And I went on and I changed my name, legally. I did the gender marker. I said that I wanted to change everything on paper before I started doing the medical transition and I started the medical transition when I went into the shelter, October of 2016 and I continued that consistently. And I changed my name. My name was changed officially in February of 2017.

Niculescu: Wow. Yeah, so that's like a big undertaking to take while incarcerated—but seems like a really interesting space to be in. I mean like the trans ward and the kind of mixed protective custody, like that's not something that maybe is a part of some people's experiences in incarceration pre a certain date. So what was the kind of like pre, um, the other girls getting in and trying to make it like their house? What was the kind of feeling and the environment and the setup of that section?

Cadle: From what I understood from the time I was there was that a lot of the girls who weren't as friendly was the girls that had been in and out of corrections for a while and who have been sentenced to state time prior to this incarceration. So these are girls who know each other from the town, who have been girls for you know, 4 or 5 years plus, and who have been in and out of corrections for doing things that I was introduced to—which was like the escorting and the white collar crimes and just the date world. The date rape and all that stuff—I was introduced to while in conversations there. Once I started doing survival sex work, I used some of those techniques for my benefit when I started doing sex work as a transgender individual. Something that I transitioned out, because it's not aligned with my goals and it's not aligned with the person that I envisioned, and the person I created. But it's something that is our survival. So if we know that it makes ends meet, we're going to make ends meet regardless of what—because the vision that we created for ourselves is bigger and it's more important than me feeling belittled or feeling unworthy because I'm going through this experience, or because I need to do this to survive. So sometimes it's important to explain it to people, cause sometimes it's different for other folks. But for my life it's been like that. So going back to corrections, most of the girls had been there before, who already know how the system works, and I was just the new girl. I was both the new girl in corrections, because it's the first time that I'm facing time, the first time that I'm actually doing more than 30 days, and I'm also a new girl. Like a new girl in the sense like you're new to what we're telling you. You're new to what we're exposing you to. Prior to this, how many other trans women did you know? So they used all of that. Once you meet a person, the first 2 days was good—the 4th day was a little better, and then after that it just started going downhill because you're living with these people 24 hours
a day in a dorm setting. And when you put a whole bunch of transgender women who lived this lifestyle, who are incarcerated, who are institutionalized, there's nothing other than to pick at each other. But my mind was in working myself out of being incarcerated, so I was very always, like, sitting in the dayroom, working on my legal work, that my lawyer had me do. Going to my therapy sessions during program hours and stuff like that. I barely made a phone call while I was there. I was either in my bed or I was in the day room doing the things when the day room was open, or I was sleeping. I wouldn't really converse with anybody unless people conversed with me because I was always the outsider and I didn't have the things that they all had. They had 125 in the commissary a week to go shopping, I didn't. I probably had 12 dollars out of the job that I used to do in the housing unit that I used to get paid from DOC to go to commissary, so I wasn't able to share time with them, or I wasn't put on the same pedestal as them, to sort of speak. So all of that... Once other girls started coming in that they were familiar with, the shade would come out. It was like, oh peoples true colors are really coming out. But I was always a strong minded person and a very boisterous person. I was just like that's that and it doesn't really matter. I'm not living life with y'all for the rest of my life. I'm always realistic with how I speak and what I say before I say it. They were like, “you're always trying to be politically correct.” It's like, well I'm not, I'm just saying facts. And a lot of them didn't like that I was very boisterous in a place where I wasn’t expected to be boisterous, where I was expected to have a backbone. And I didn't expect myself to have a backbone or to be boisterous or stand up for myself in that type of environment. But I was put in an environment where I felt safe, that I felt like none of you were going to attack me more, or more than I can defend myself, right? So it's not like I was in danger, it wasn't the same danger that I felt in general population, cause it was a different type of danger. So it was just like I'm adjusting what I have to adjust and whatever you don't like you don't like and [inaudible] but it isn't like we're angels. I'll bicker you until you to get the reaction that I want and I'll do what I want to do and eventually you get fed up with it. I ended up getting removed from the housing unit because someone put cleaning detergent in my drink and I had reported it to the officer, so once you make a report like that it's like liability on DOC, so DOC removes you from the housing unit and puts you somewhere and gives you an option on where you want to go. So that's what happened with my case. But I always knew that it was going to happen eventually, I just didn't want to be the person that initiated leaving because where am I going to go? Like, if I have to go then I'm have to go because it's like I don't have a choice. But if I was going to suck it up, because if I can suck up then go suck up something that I don't know that's going to be a more unpredictable situation than this. So I've always been a critical thinker, I will say that. [laughter] At least when I wanted to, and that's saved me from certain situations. But yeah, those girls, a lot of them are known, like Kitty Rotolo, Venus, like these girls who have been in a lot of documentaries, like the Marsha P. Johnson documentary, Kitty was just on it in her prison uniform, and I was just with Kitty in 2015 when I was in Rikers island. She had just went home, and when I was there she had just came in from going home. And she got sentenced again, so now she's back up there. And she's like, “I don’t, when I'm home, when I'm out free, I don't know how to like, I always end up back over here. I don't know that I'm instilled in the prison environment or whatever the case it might be. But this the norm for me. And she's out there. And it sucks that a lot of girls realities is in and out of jail because of you know, their survival and, it's not all about survival because a lot of girls do make it, do get the sex change and are not in a predicament where they need to keep doing what they are doing. But that's all they know. That's
all the reality. So, it's like, while they are working so hard to be passable, to be accepted as a woman in this society and I did all of the things I did and I worked so hard for the last three or five years, or six years, or the last decade, doing this—I didn't work on anything else. I didn't work on my career, my employment, I didn't work on my family, I didn't work on love, I didn't work on this—anything but being passable. So, when you get the sex change, it's like, now you can go enjoy life—what life? You're enjoying the life that you keep on going. Because you' already developed and instilled yourself in this being your reality. So, I think I was exposed to a lot of things before my transition that once I started my transition, this is where I feel comfortable, this is where I now say the transition is transitioning. Because the transition is always there, you're always like transitioning from day to day but when you turn on the transition switch, which is where you see some fast pace things you know, you might not be ready, but it's going to start accelerating right now. And things starts accelerating, you know, you start changing your name, you know, people got to start respecting your pronouns then, you starting using this specific bathroom, and you behave a certain way and it's just like okay, now I'm getting into my real self and it starts molding in. A lot of girls didn't have that exposure prior to the transition and it's just like, I'm gonna go straight in and whatever happens happens. I think I had an opportunity to see, you know, two sides of trans lives, which is the unpredictable and the predictable. Which is now, I could—some type of—I've lived this type of lifestyle and it's unpredictable, but I can predict certain things that I can, I know for sure everybody put in the work because it was going to happen. But this life is totally unpredictable, it's just like, I don't know if I'm going to have money at the end of the day, I don't know if I will be alive at the end of the day. But I know that by continuing, and I do it good, I get the program right that I'm going to make something. That's the only thing I promise you that it's going to make something happen. So, that difference of two trans lives is really something I keep in the front of my advocacy. I try to really emphasize on it. I try to explain to people in the way that makes sense because it is difficult to, well, it's like the same thing as saying women are women. But you know there are different types of women. You know I'm saying, there's predictable lives of women, and there's predictables lives of women that are seen on that every woman holds a Master's and is in school and has to live this lifestyle that women still prostitutes, still escorts, still you know, lives this ungodly lifestyle. And then you have these other traditional cisgender women who have successful lives and all of this stuff and the same things goes for transgender women and it's just like, when we do this advocacy, we do it for entire community and our goal is that trans people have sustainable and stable lives. Stable and sustainable lives. And that eventually we cycle out of that survival sex work, survival of anything, that we just have the same opportunity as other people, but there are still going to be a percentage of transgender women who are not going to be safe and don't want to. Who just have their—this is what I know, this is what I'm going to continue because this is their culture. It's different for our people. I feel like our generation, our new generation—the generation generation that I'm part of, has been so privileged to have so many events, laws, and events, stigmas, and we're just in a better place when it comes to transgender issues and transgender lives. That it's very beneficial to, to now say okay, I can be actually be a transgender person and have a stable productive life. And be a productive member of society. And I just feel like, oh, am I going to be able to make it, like what is my life going to be? So we don't see a lot of... like I've seen a lot of transgender women in wonderful positions, in higher positions, and now we have a transgender person in the House, a transgender person in legislation, like, we have a trans
person running for assembly of New York. You know, we're seeing improvements—we're seeing that we're being integrated into society little by little. [laughter] We have always been here and now we're being integrated. We're being a part of a picture, we're being a part of a conversation we're holding positions—important positions and improvements and development of the world to sort of speak. Just in humanity, we're teaching the world humanity on so many levels. But it's not going to be perfect.

Niculescu: So, what does your advocacy work consist of now?

Cadle: Um, so, my advocacy work right now consists of, I hold the title of transgender gender non-conforming and non-binary Policy Advisor. So I'm self employed, I have made myself self employed, I'm only doing consulting work until I find the right full time position, and even after I do, I would still hold my consulting title as Transgender Policy Advisor. Right now I have contract with Point Source Youth whose mission is to prevent youth homelessness with a mission of ending youth homelessness in 10 to 20 years. We are a nationwide organization, we have pilots right now in the South, in the East Coast, in the North, and the north east. Sorry, not the East Coast, the West Coast and Northeast Coast. The west is like LA, Texas, and stuff like that. You know what I mean. So we have 4 different coasts right now, we're developing rapid housing, family kinship and host homes pilot program in different jurisdictions that have high rates of youth homelessness. Ideally our goal is to end homelessness, period, but with a big emphasis on youth homelessness and a higher emphasis on LGBT youth homelessness. So what I provide for Point Source Youth, well Point Source Youth is, we only provide like the expertise and like models and key interventions that work to end homelessness. We only provide the key expertise, we provide like the models and the support, we don't direct services. So we partner with other non profit organizations, local agencies, in those jurisdictions to further our key key interventions so they could try it, or implement it to end homelessness in their jurisdictions. So it's the, in English terms, is basically dismantling the old school system and putting this system with these three key interventions so it could work. In addition to that, I'm a sitting board member for the New York City Continuum of Care Youth Advisory Board. Which is now been renamed to Youth Action Board. And what we do is we provide advice and basically our own expertise and knowledge and systemic change and homelessness from our own experience and the things that we have learned in the workforce, to the New York City mayor's office homelessness task force—youth homelessness task force. Yeah, and aside to that, I do other side projects, I stick to really just representing the transgender, gender non-conforming, and non-binary youth spectrum, but I speak from an adult perspective, I speak from a youth perspective, I speak from a sex workers perspective—I just speak from a person who has been through these challenges, these systemic barriers, and who's trying to achieve these goals and studying for this purpose. So, I just keep them at the front and just being me, myself has opened up so many doors. So, sometimes I don't even know what exactly the topic of the conversation might be, or who or what is it specific that I'm advocating for but just me going in there and having a conversation about my experience, and you know about, how this system was so more of a disservice than a service for me in this distinct way and point and make it—and put it in a way where people can feel what you're saying and eventually you create some type of change out of that. I often just say that my work is just to change minds and souls. Or if I can't change it, I can at least make you sympathize and empathize with it and come to an
end sentence where like, well, you're just a human just like me. And that's my ultimate goal to give the community the opportunities that we deserve.

Niculescu: That's incredible. I mean, I have one question that isn't super related to everything we've been talking about—

Cadle: Definitely.

Niculescu: That I'm interested in. And that is spirituality. And how that works for you. Because I noticed right throughout your conversation that there's moments where you're like “well the only thing is some higher power” and so, I'm wondering how spirituality has been a part of your life and how it's evolved from a Dominican Catholicism to now?

Cadle: [Laughter] You know what's crazy? I've never been a religious person. Not even in my family's background, we've never been a religious family with—my family was raised Catholic where we, my grandmother would preach to the Catholic bible I would say. For like other words, or understandings of it. She would preach to the Catholic bible and she would only practice Catholic rituals. But we never went to church, we were never a part of a church community. You would never saw more than one bible in my house. You know like, saints and sanctuaries, we were never a part of those things. We were just like there's a god, and you know, there's a bible and this is what the bible says. We just try to be holy people and try to follow the commandments. After growing older, I had a despise of the church and you know just preaching and saying in general, god, like what is god? And because just saying I was in this situation god? If god was here, would god allow this? In 2015 when I had no other choice but to put, I wouldn't say that I have no other choice because I had other choices—but it was just something in the way everything playing its course in and I was just like, there is higher power. There is something. I'm holding onto something. This faith is not just on a leave or on top of the table. This faith is on something because it's strong. Because it's kept me alive this long and gotten me through this barrier and this barrier and this barrier and this wrong doing. So I would say that my spirituality right now is based on the law of attraction, like, what I put in the world is exactly what I'm getting back. The kindness that I do, the kindness that I give, the humanity that I speak., the kindness that I show people—it's the same kindness that I get back. And it's sometimes not the same because sometimes you're challenged. The law of attraction is challenged and that's what you choose. Do I put my faith in it or do I put my emotions into it? So I no longer speak from emotions, I no longer do from emotions, or feelings. I just do what from I expect, from what I would want other people to do if I was in that situation. So same thing that I've put in the world is what I've gotten back in the last 3 years. I don't know if that's spirituality, if that's religion, if that's some type of Voodoo, or like Hinduism, or whatever you want to call it but it's worked for me. And I felt like the law of attraction and that positivity, and that magnet of like, the world, it's really true. Or at least it's true for me. But spirituality can be anything. It can be just like having a journal entry every day, or just like having a routine of like you know, not cursing or speaking positive, or not letting anything negative change your mood. It could be what you practice, but I think that spirituality is different and it's just faith. You know, what are you putting your faith onto? What's going to get you through that hard place, through that hard milestone, through that dark place that you just know that you're going to
need that faith to hold on to make it through because its nothing else that's going to give you
that instant gratification, or that's going to get you out of that situation, just because. So yeah,
spirituality has been something that I've developed, and something that I put into every single
day as of 3 years ago.

Niculescu: That's great. Yeah, really just like the practice that keeps you moving forward.

Cadle: Mhm, and even with like um, I just had, um... a couple of like hard weeks from like July
4 to like... just like the ending of July was just very hard for me like I felt like everything was just
going downhill, like one of my friends that I met from Rikers... like things just crashed that
month and I was just kind of stuck and like, am I being a fool to myself? Or with like the law of
attraction and doing good for people like putting the kindness out there but what am I going
to get in return? You see how shattered I am, I was just crying for days and it wasn't just that
relationship or that friendship, it was like employment, and not being able to enjoy my 23 years.
You know what I'm saying? Like ever since I got out of jail, it's been like work, work, work, work,
work, like get your life together, get your life together, get your life together, and that was
what I instilled in myself. So now that I was in a state where I was like, wow, I have my own
apartment, my bills are paid, I have this much money in my account, like why can't I have fun?
Why can't I enjoy just time, why can't I enjoy, why don't I want to leave my apartment when I'm
home from work, or why don't I enjoy my weekends, why don't I leave my apartment on the
weekends, you know, why am I always in this like overshadow out of like... you can't test new
things, or you can't get out of this daily routine because you're going to get sidetracked. And I
just, you know, decided to have fun, and decided to like just be... just give to people that I knew
just needed things. And my friend was staying with me, she's homeless, or doesn't have any
place to go, because she's on the run from parole and all these things and... just certain things
play a part with your friendships, but all the people that were a part of my life who I want to
give back to because I know that I— I wanted people to be there for me in the situation that I
was. So I'm trying to be that for those people, and I see that those people weren't giving
anything back to me, and weren't trying to help me maintain what I already had, and would
judge me for not understanding them, or not doing for them more than I was already doing. So
I was stuck for a while, was like, am I wrong, am I not doing enough? But I'm doing enough, I
was just kind of like, I know that I'm not wrong, I know that my law of attraction is not going to
fail me, and I know that all I have been doing is giving my last, and my last, and making sure
that I maintain what I have so that I can keep giving and that I can keep growing myself. But I
felt like all of that was just one sided, so I had to realize that that environment was toxic to me
and that I couldn't help people more than they were helping themselves and that I wasn't
responsible for them. So I had to come back down from the things—to the things that I knew
going through my experiences. Ain't nobody responsible for you, so you're not responsible for
nobody. And whatever you're doing is enough, knowing that you're good inside, your
intentions were good, and you were giving everything that you can and that you know... it was
just not beneficial to you, or the other person for you to stick together. So I had to make a
decision and that friendship, and those terms, and it's just—it hurt me a lot, because it's like
damn, that's a friendship that I really worked for, but I know if the law of attraction was the
right thing, it meant for that to end, and I moved on, and this week and couple of days has just
been flourishing for me. I just seen everything that I already knew was going to happen, that I
just needed to close that chapter, because it was done with. So there's certain things that I already know, you know, how to do about it, but because I want to be strong, or I want to prove a point to myself, not to anybody else, that I can do this for somebody else, I can be there for somebody else, I can do it all, that kind of mentality, um, just kind of like shows you that you can't do it all, or you're not responsible for all. And that self care is main priority, regardless if you're doing this, this, and that like you're sanity, your piece of mind and your self care is the main priority thing because you're only responsible for yourself, and then once you taken care of yourself, then you can take care of your responsibilities. And that's how I just go about life. You know, sometimes you get sidetracked, sometimes like the spirituality says the double life's coming into your home or like is disturbing you know, or things are going, but when the devil's trying to disturb whatever it's trying to disturb, that means that it's only showing you that you have something going, that things are about to flourish, because you had this hard barrier, hard this, hard breakthrough. So I don't call it the devil myself, because I don't speak—I don't... my spirituality is not a god, and it's not an angel, it's just my energy, just how I live, just how I let things, how I reflect things, or how I let things internalize into my body, that's my stride.

Niculescu: That's wonderful.

Cadle: Yeah, so a little all over the place, [laughter] but that's how it is in my brain though, but it works. And I often tell people, find what works for you, find your balance, cause your balance is not going to be my balance, and it's not going to be a balance that you've seen, or somebody's going to show you. People can give you examples of coping mechanisms, or balances, and how to balance life, but those are only examples—you're gonna have to find your own model, and even if you're using somebody else's example, it still has to be molded into your own way of balancing it, because it's totally different. And this is how I found my piece of mind, this is how I found, you know that I'm going to keep growing as a person, and as a professional, and this is how I know that I'm going to make it to the next day, and I'm going to keep growing while I make it to the next day, which is my goal.

Niculescu: Yeah, absolutely. Well is there anything else you would like to say, or anything we might have missed?

Cadle: [Laughter] I mean other than um, everything I said, I just want people to know that I am, I don't know, I felt like my bio says I'm a natural born leader, and—natural born leader driven to make a change in the world—and I do believe that. I do believe that somehow, some way, that I'm going to create a change for the world, not only for my community, not only for my generation, but just for the world in itself. And I feel like everybody in the world should feel like that, that they are driven to make a change in the world and to add something to the world, and even if you can add nothing to the world, at least don't take anything away from it, but just contribute to what other folks are working towards, which is, you know, showing that the world, that our country, that our communities, do have some type of humanity, and that we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, that we take care of one another, that humans won't be able to survive without other humans, and that, yeah we need to be there for each other. You know, times are hard, and like I said, everybody's going through their own individual crisis, that the fight for our community, it's a crisis, and that our community can not do it alone, and this is
why I fight so hard to try to show people a different way of, you know, changing minds and souls, just tell your stories, speak from the heart, speak from experience, and you don't necessarily have to share every single detail, but be as open as possible and try to paint a picture that people would never, never, see—because they don't live it.

Niculescu: Yeah, yeah, well thank you so much.

Cadle: Thank you for inviting me and having, um, and giving me this opportunity and this platform.

Niculescu: Yeah, absolutely.