

NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

SLIM

Interviewer: Yana Calou

Date of Interview: May 5, 2017

Location of Interview: CUNY Graduate Center

Transcribed by Amy Crandall

NYC TOHP Interview Transcript #050

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Yana Calou: Hello, my name is Yana Calou, and I will be having a conversation with Slim 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 May 5th, 2017, and this is being recorded at The Center for LGBTQ Studies at the CUNY Graduate Center.

Calou: So hi, Slim, thank you so much for—for talking with me today.

Slim: Thank you for having me.

Calou: So, um, tell me your name and your age, if you'd like.

Slim: Um, I go by Slim, and I am 22 years old.

Calou: And what are your pronouns?

Slim: I go by he and him.

Calou: Um, how would you describe your gender? How do you identify?

Slim: I identify as male, um, when I need to, I—I identify as a trans male.

Calou: And, uh, when and where were you born?

Slim: I was born in 1994, and uh, I was born in Woodhaven, Queens.

Calou: Okay, um, so you've lived in New York City your whole life, or did you move at all?

Slim: No, I've lived in Woodhaven my whole life...

Calou: Um, what was it like when you were growing up there?

Slim: In terms of my sexuality...?

Calou: No, what was it like in—in Newhaven?

Slim: In—In Woodhaven? It was, um...

Calou: Or Woodhaven, yes.

Slim: I like it. I like my neighborhood, um, I had to see it change, and I think now more than ever, it's a place where everyone has—everyone is different there, and, um, it's okay to be different there. Not as much as, like, Manhattan, or like, certain parts of the city, but um, it's definitely less of a place where you couldn't be who you were...

Calou: Mhmm...

Slim: ...like, 20 years ago.

Calou: Mhmm... What were your favorite things to do as a kid there?

Slim: Um, go to Forest Park which is not too far from my house. Um, there was a lot of, like, candy stores in the area so, uh, I would go there, um, get ICEEs, um, yep.

Calou: And what, um, what do you miss, the way you said it's kind of changed a lot, do you miss anything about the way that it used to be—do you like the way it's changed now?

Slim: It was definitely safer in the past, um... I just miss being a kid [laughter] but, no.

Calou: And do you, uh, live in the same house that you grew up in, or did you have multiple different places—

Slim: No, I—I live in the same place—in the same house, yeah.

Calou: Um, so could you describe a little bit about your childhood and your family background?

Slim: Um, well I come from a—an Egyptian household, and um, my parents are muslim, so, um, I was raised with those ideologies. Um, and I have three siblings—I mean, three sisters and one brother. So, I come from a big family.

Calou: And where are you in the birth order?

Slim: I am fourth, and then my brother is the youngest... [inaudible]

Calou: Um, and was your family really—did you grow up, um, with religion as a big part of your home life?

Slim: Yeah, um, I would say, like, both—a hybrid of kosher and religion was, like, heavily emphasized growing up. Um, less now, 'cause when you get older, you do what you want, but... you make your own choices, but, I've had that instilled at an early age, yeah.

Calou: And that's still a big part of your parent's lives, and less for you, or...?

Slim: It's—well, I live with my mom now, but, um, it's—it's a big part of her life, but because I had it instilled in me, like, early on, it's still a part of my life. Not as much as she would like, but enough for me.

Calou: Um, what, um, what were your parents like, and who did you grow up with?

Slim: Um, I grew up with both of my parents until I was 10, um, and I grew up with my mom after that. And um, in terms of their personalities, my father was more, like, militant, and my mom was more laid back... more than—more than he was, at least. Um, but overall was a nurturing environment, I guess.

Calou: Um, and what were your siblings like growing up?

Slim: Well it's a lot of us, so we all got along pretty much, but we also had a lot of, like, arguments, like kids and stuff when we fought, but um, that was something else that my parents instilled in—in all of us, like, no matter what happens, like, this is your family you—you guys all have to get along and stuff. We have a very close bond, all of us.

Calou: And did you share rooms—share bedrooms, anything like that?

Slim: Yeah, and I feel like that made us closer because of that.

Calou: Mhmm.

Slim: Yeah.

Calou: And do all of your siblings still live in New York?

Slim: Um, one of my siblings lives in New Jersey [inaudible], I see her from time to time, so...

Calou: I mean, are you in touch with some of them now, or all of them?

Slim: Yeah, yeah we're all in t— yeah. One of my siblings moves in and out and, but, to—my sisters, we all live together... we're still in touch, so...

Calou: Uh, what were you interested in as a kid?

Slim: As a kid, I was interested in sports, basketball specifically, and writing and music. Yeah, I wanted to be a basketball player...

Calou: Where did you play?

Slim: I played in the Beacon Center. It's like a part of the YMCA, and my middle school, and... I guess I stopped because I think I wanted support from like, my family, or like, my mom specifically, and like, at the time I was appearing as female when I didn't really know I was trans, so um, yeah, my mom really wasn't cool with me being—doing boy things, so... yeah she didn't support that. I—I had, like, my friends, that I played with all had their parents there, or their siblings there, and I had no one, so I think, because I lacked that, I kind of, like, said no, I can't really do this.

Calou: So when you would have games, your parents or your siblings didn't show up?

Slim: Yeah, they didn't show up. It was on the weekends, so it was like, they intentionally did not want to support that. I still, like, played in like, my gym classes and stuff like that, and I used to play on like, my block—we had like, um, basketball hoops out so... when my father would see me playing with boys, he—he would like, say something when I got home. And then one day he was just like 'the next time I see you playing outside with boys, like, it's not going to be nice.' so—there was no way for me to even do something that I loved, like, as a kid, so...

Calou: And how old were you when you stopped playing?

Slim: Um, maybe before I was 12? Oh yeah, before I was 10... [inaudible] yeah. And then, I would just play, like, in my gym classes, and that was it.

Calou: And you mentioned really also being into writing. What—did you keep a journal or did you write stories? What...

Slim: I would write stories and then when I got to, like, sixth grade, I would write, like poems, and songs... like, spoken word that I didn't even know was spoken word, um... yeah, that kind of stuff.

Calou: Do you remember, um, any of your stories that you wrote when you were younger—what any of them were about, or...?

Slim: No, but I remember one was like, it was like, about a boy, like, going through stuff. And it was weird because when I remember that story, I'm like, why did I write about that? Was I, like, foreshadowing something, you know, like, as a kid? 'Cause that was before I knew I was trans, so... yeah, I remember that story 'cause I drew a picture—like, I made a cover to it, so, yeah.

Calou: Um, and then they kind of turned into poems and lyrics as you got a little older?

Slim: Yeah.

Calou: What kinds of things did you—what were some of the topics that you wrote about—that you wrote poems about?

Slim: Um, my father leaving, and girls, like, love. Or what I thought was love at that time. Yeah.

Calou: Um, you mentioned that you lived with—with both of your parents until you, uh—I'm wondering if your parents split-up?

Slim: Yeah.

Calou: And where does your dad live now?

Slim: I don't know.

Calou: So... you aren't in touch anymore?

Slim: No.

Calou: Is he in touch with your other siblings, or...

Slim: Uh, he is, but not all of them.

Calou: And what is that like for you to not be in touch with him and have him be in touch with other people? Is that your choice, or his choice, or a mixture?

Slim: In this moment in time, it's my choice. Um... what's it like? It's like, I think in this point in my life, I think it's like, good, because I don't have to deal with like, someone that I don't see eye to eye with, but then I also feel like it can be bad, because I grew up with my mom mostly, and being a guy, it's like... you do need guidance from a man or—you prefer it. I prefer, you know, if I—if I could choose ideally what I would want 'cause there are certain things that my mom can't teach me that I've overheard my father teaching my little brother that I know he, you know, would have, like, helped me with, in terms of like, my gender identity, so, yeah... It's good and bad.

Calou: Mmm, and when it—at the time, when it happened, what was that like for you?

Slim: It was... intense, because I had a strong attachment to my father. So... when you have a strong attachment to someone—you never imagine that—that they would leave, or that you would lose them. Um, it's a shock, so... yeah. It was an intense part of my life. And I feel like because of that, I suffer from, like, attachment issues with, just, relationships in general, like friends, and like romantic relationships.

Calou: Is there anything else that you want to share about your family, or what it was like growing up, or what—what your dad leaving was like...?

Slim: Well in terms of, like... since this is about my gender, I feel like because I was struggling or wasn't like, fully aware of like who I was, I was kind of outcasted by my siblings, and then like, when I grew up and got to an age where I knew who I was, like, slowly but surely, they like, started to accept me more and it's crazy how noticing my difference, and like, expressing my difference to them actually made us closer, or made us, like, communicate more... [inaudible], yeah, strengthened our bond...

Calou: Um, what—where did you find support when you were going through that really intense time? What were your friends like, or your... the ways that you got a little bit of, like, peace when all of that was in upheaval?

Slim: I didn't really talk about it. I think writing, and I was starting middle school so it was like a new environment for me, and I just made friends. I had like, a whole bunch of cliques, and I just, like, floated around, but I think I tried to make new connections and like, friends to deal with that... deal with my thoughts. Yeah.

Calou: And what was your gender presentation at the time? Like, what were you wearing, how you did your hair...

Slim: In sixth, I—I was a tom boy, yeah, I was a tom boy. I dressed like a boy, I wore my hair back in a pony tail, and I was just very hyper. Like a little tom boy, yeah. That was my presentation then—Uh, female.

Calou: Um, so, um... in terms of like, encouragement for music and writing, did you get some of that from your family or your friends? Did you ever share—Did you ever do open mics or something like that?

Slim: Um, for my family, I didn't really share with them. But, my sixth grade teacher actually did, like, talent shows in the class, and me and my best friend at the time, we were in the same class, we actually like had a... we picked a song that was like a Chris Brown song at that time, and we just, like, picked parts in it, and we performed, and then I remember I was at the back of the classroom cause he did his part and I just couldn't, so he was just like, just save all your parts and just do it at the end and go somewhere in the back and I didn't face the class, like, I was too scared. I did it, like, looking at the wall in the back of the class, and I still felt good that I did it, but yeah, it was my first time ever performing.

Calou: And is that something you've continued?

Slim: Well, the year after that, in seventh grade and eighth grade I was in chorus in the same school, so... but that was like something done as a group, but individually, no. Yeah.

Calou: Um, do you, um, you mentioned music as well. Did you play anything, or do you play anything now?

Slim: I played the recorder in third grade, and... no. I have a guitar but I'm slowly, like, learning, like on YouTube and stuff, how to play it. It's an electric guitar.

Calou: So it's like, listening to music was a big part?

Slim: Yeah, and writing songs.

Calou: Do you still have some of those songs... in a box somewhere?

Slim: Yeah, like, folded up actually, yeah. I was writing them with a—with a pencil on loose leaf paper, and I would just fold them up and put them in a box, literally, and...

Calou: Do you... have you looked back at them now since you've...

Slim: Yeah, every, like, once in a while, maybe like, twice a year, and then I just laugh at the stuff I was writing, 'cause it was just like, so dramatic. Yeah. Like, I didn't know [inaudible], I didn't know why I was so heartbroken. Yeah. [Laughter]

Calou: [Laughter] So you had, like, crushes in like, junior high or high school?

Slim: Yeah.

Calou: Tell me about that.

Slim: Um, my first girlfriend was in—was in middle school, and... I don't know—I don't even think she knew what being gay was—I don't know. But I told her and, like, we dated but she had a boyfriend, but he didn't go to the school, so when I found out, like, I was heartbroken or whatever that meant at the...

Calou: But she didn't tell you that she was—had a boyfriend?

Slim: No, the crazy thing is that a dean told me. The—the dean in my school was like, really close with me, and I don't know how she knew, but she told me, like, at lunch time one day, and I was just like, oh. And I trusted her, and it was true. So, I just, like, talked to her about it at lunch and we broke up.

Calou: Oh.

Slim: Yeah.

Calou: That sounds hard for... any—at any age.

Slim: Yeah, it was. That's like stuff that [laughter] happens in—later in life, but yeah. And then had—I had another in that school, and then she got kicked out 'cause she was bad. [Laughter] And then, um, and then another girlfriend broke up with me the same day for a guy. So that's a pattern that happened while I was like, identifying as, like, a lesbian.

Calou: So you knew from a young age, at least that you were a lesbian?

Slim: Yeah, but I only said those—said I am a lesbian to my mom and I think one other—maybe like two other adults. But people just assumed, and if I was asked, I would just say like, "yeah," but I never really said the words and I think it's 'cause I was always unsure, and maybe because of the stigma and the culture that I come from. But I never really said the words—it's just

something that I think about from time to time. Like, why didn't I ever—I think I identified as it just because of how I appeared and if I was asked, I'd just be like, yeah I am. You know? But, yeah.

Calou: And what was that—you mentioned that your mom was one of the couple of adults you told, what was it like for you to tell your mom? And do you remember, like, where you were? Can you tell me a little bit about how that happened?

Slim: I told her through text. I was on my lunch period at the school that I went to, it was outside lunch. So, I told her through text, and she called me and asked me if I was serious. And, um, I told her "yeah," and I didn't go home until really late that day. I ended up staying at, um, my friends house for a little bit, and then I went to my best friend's house right after, um, and her sister identifies with the community, so I know she was pretty understanding, and um, I called my mom while I was there, and she was just like, "come home, it's okay" like "God made you this way," and um, I remember going home, and just like, getting a hug, [sirens] and I guess after that it like, set in with her, and it wasn't as okay as I thought it was going to be.

Calou: How old were you when you had that phone call on your lunch break?

Slim: I think I was 15.

Calou: And who were the other couple of adults that you told, or that you got support from?

Slim: Um, the dean at my middle school. We're still, um, close to this day, and um, I feel like I've told someone else. Oh, um, my counselor, but yeah. Other than—'cause it's different for you to tell an adult something, or for them to perceive you a certain way, and sometimes adults or older people don't know. Especially when it comes to more of a sexual orientation thing, or that you could—someone could just think that you're just dressing a certain way. So, I had to give myself a label.

Calou: And that didn't always feel totally comfortable?

Slim: No. Yeah, um, in high school I made—I made, um, friends at the second high school I went to, and there were two people that looked like me, um, they appeared female just dressing in, um, guy clothes, and one of them I got really close to and we were on the softball team together, and I just remember her being, like, very comfortable like, changing in the locker room, and like, changing in front of like, the other girls on the team, and um, and just like, being okay with people asking her questions about her bra size and stuff like that, and I—I respected it one hundred and ten percent, but it was just like, I didn't understand how we could talk about girls and relate so much as individuals but I just didn't embrace my body the same way that she did, and I didn't have the same, like, comfort doing things that she did. So, that was a time where I just, like, started, like, being confused, and it wasn't just her. I—it was like, more... It gave me more of a chance to think about it because I was around her a lot, but there was definitely, like, other lesbians or like, butch people that, you know, made me think, too. So, yeah, I just never knew. It

was like, if I'm not this, then what is it, you know? I was just very confused because of the lack of information that I knew about the community.

Calou: And were you going to high school in Woodhaven as well, or was your high school out of your neighborhood or in your neighborhood?

Slim: I was going to, um, at that time I—I was in the city. I was going to high school in the city.

Calou: Um, so when did that—I'm talking about your identity and realizing that maybe you were gay, and being like "wait but I'm not like these other butch cis-women that I'm around"... when did you start, sort of, thinking about gender in your life.

Slim: I think it was like, way before, like when I was really young. I always had like, a dream, a reoccurring dream—it's crazy because I've never told anyone this—that I had a reoccurring dream that I was in a red car, like a convertible, and I was around palm trees and stuff, and there was a girl in the passenger seat and I was a guy, and I had my shirt off, and I was just driving, like, around the beach and palm trees... But, that, and then I remember around the time that the dreams kept happening, that I was just like, young, and that I would take like, the blue hand balls, and joke around and put them in my shirt, and imitate, like, a woman's breasts, like, or just try to joke around with my mom and my sisters in the house and they would just laugh. But, I think being that young, I didn't know that I was a girl. I really think that I didn't know that I was a girl. And then, um...

Calou: Like that was funny because you were kind of like, doing drag almost. You're like "oh, look, I'm dressing up as a girl and it's funny!"

Slim: Yeah, and I did it for the sole purpose of making them laugh. It wasn't because I was like, let me just—no. I did it intentionally for that. Then I remember getting in trouble by my father, he was like, very aggressive, very, like, militant style, and he didn't like the way that I walked, like as a kid. He was just like, "stop walking like that." And I didn't know what I was doing. I was just like, walking, like, what? But you couldn't really ask him that. But apparently I was walking like a boy, and I got in trouble for sitting like a boy. So, then I was in pre-school, and I think I mentioned this before, like, that I had like, shorts, that, like, that I ended up getting them like, ripped up, like, right in front of me by him because my mom bought them for me and they were like, guy shorts, or boy shorts at the time. I was questioning my gender very early, and I didn't know what it was. But I just knew what I leaned towards, or what I liked for myself and stuff.

Calou: Can you tell me a little about the process, of like, starting to like, learn about—like what's the first trans person you ever met, or heard about?

Slim: How'd I find out that I was trans? Um, it's actually funny because I just saw the person that, um, that lead me to find out about my identity, like, two days ago. It was a professor. Um, it was the English professor that... I was having trouble in her class...

Calou: And where was this?

Slim: At Queens College. Um, Chastity Whitaker is her name. [horns] She's an English professor, and I had already had her a semester prior, so the second semester I had her, I was having trouble reading the books, so she, um, told me to watch a movie and write a paper, and she gave me, like, things that she wanted in the paper. And I was just, like, okay, and it was Boys Don't Cry. I had never watched the movie, I didn't know, but she kind of like, was explaining it to me before she told me to watch it. And I was just like—she was like, "it's about a boy that's trying to pass" and I was just like, what, I thought he was like, dying. [Laughter] But, I watched it, and right after I watched it, I started doing, like, research, about like, what transgender means, what does it mean to be transgender. While I was reading it, I was like, "holy shit, that's me." Like...

Calou: And where were you doing research?

Slim: In my house.

Calou: On your computer?

Slim: Yeah, I watched it on my computer, and then, literally just started opening up tabs. And, that's how I learned about what transgender means.

Calou: And were you—the professor that had you watch "Boys Don't Cry," that wasn't an assignment she gave to your whole class? She just gave that to you specifically?

Slim: Specifically. And I asked her when I saw her two days ago, for the first time in years, I saw her two—two days ago, and that was one of the questions that I asked her, I said "Why did you give me that specific movie?" and she said, from the essays that I was writing, it seemed like I needed to wa— and I was like "how did you know?" and she was just like, "I felt it so I gave it to you to watch." So, I don't know how long it would have taken if she didn't recommend it or tell me to watch it for me to realize, like, that's who I was.

Calou: And so once you started googling after watching this, and watching videos, what was kind of the next step, once you were like, "wow, this is—that's me!"?

Slim: Well, my mom, like, after I came out to her as a lesbian, like, because of the religion, like, Islam being like, a religion where it's kind of vague whether that's—it's okay to be a lesbian or not or it's really looked down upon, she was telling me that I should see a therapist to fix myself. And, um, when I read, like, that that was a requirement to transition, was to see a therapist, [sirens] I just took advantage of her offer, and was like, okay. And, she chose an Arabic speaking therapist that was actually Egyptian as well, and I was just like, "damn." And I was just like, no, but there's ethics, like, you have to follow certain things. Like, you can't judge me or not write a letter for me or whatever, and she ended up being a great therapist that helped me with my transition a lot. A lot.

Calou: Did you see her—were you speaking in Arabic when you would see her, or did you speak in English?

Slim: No, she was—like, she grew up here, she had an understanding of the community, and like, the LGBT community and like, she was very open minded and willing, like she genuinely wanted to help me, and, yeah. It was a good therapeutic experience.

Calou: Mhmm.

Slim: Yeah.

Calou: So then, your mom wanted you to go to therapy for a different reason, you end up getting what you need out of it, and then, how did that play out from there?

Slim: With my mom?

Calou: Mhmm.

Slim: Um, she wasn't too happy about it, because my mom actually came with me for the intake, so she got to meet my therapist, and my therapist just told her straight up, like, "I'm not fixing—we're not in the business of like, changing people." So like, my mom actually took me to another therapist, another Egyptian therapist, and he was awful. Like, he was—he was willing to change me. Like, he told me straight up. Like, we—I think he said "the first step is to start dressing differently." And I was just like, no. Like I'll go to the... And she was just like, "No, I think he's better"... no, so. I stuck with the other therapist.

Calou: Um, and so, when—how did, um, how did the process of like, start—like, coming out to your mom as trans instead of lesbian go, and how did your process, like, going on T, uh, I'm guessing, I don't know if that was before or after you talked to your mom about being trans...

Slim: I think that me coming out to her five years—five years prior as a lesbian, um, were in my favor, because it kind of prepared her mental... and kind of got her to thinking like, my child is not quote-unquote normal, or like my other children. You know? So, when I came out to her as trans, um, I—I feel like, I don't know. I feel like she was more understanding, but I feel like there's a difference between understanding and accepting. So, I gave her her space after I told her. I actually, took my shot the next day. I just felt like, I needed to tell her at—at least before, and, but, um, I kept pushing back the date for my first shot of T, because I couldn't tell her because I didn't want to hurt her. And then I was like, you know what? I'm going to tell her the day before. And, um, it—it's been a journey for her, and I'm just, like, respecting her beliefs and like, her culture so... she would say hurtful things. Of course, not intentionally, but because she was still, like, understanding and coming around to accepting part, so... It's very different when you don't have parents who grew up here. Or, when you have parents that are, like, very into a culture, and like, the culture doesn't align with, you know, the LGBT community? [sirens]

Calou: What were like, some of the messages that you are getting from your mom that come from that part of her background?

Slim: That it's unacceptable to change how God made you, um, [inaudible], a big one is like, my mom is very careful about like, how she's perceived by other people. So like, family friends, or even people in the neighborhood, like neighbors, so like, that's made me so paranoid. And I already feel like I'm an avoidant person to begin with, so like, I feel like, because I was transitioning, I had to avoid people for my mom's sake, just so that I don't make her look away, because she's very, like, "what are people going to say about how I raised you?" and that "everything that you do reflects who I am," and I'm just like, but, I'm not doing anything wrong. But, I feel like my transition has really put my mom, like, in perspective, sometimes more than putting myself first, so like, that's been a struggle. But, um, going back to your question, just like, sometimes, she would just say certain lines from the Quran about like, how someone should not dress a certain way or change the way that God made them, and—and like, sometimes she would just be, like... she would just say like, things that are like, hurtful, but, she doesn't—she doesn't mean it. Like, she doesn't mean to hurt me, but it's just like, you have these expectations for your child before they're even here, so, to change your whole mind within a fraction of the time that they've lived is hard. So, that's where it stems from.

Calou: What do you believe in regards to your beliefs about God, or about the world and where it comes from, and your place in it in regards—specifically to trans people or yourself?

Slim: I still believe in Islam, and being—being a Muslim means that you're also a Jew and a Christian, you take all those beliefs collectively, and something that's in all of those religions is that the only judge is God. And, I tell that to my mom. I say, like, you're judging me but you have no right to judge me, so you're actually sitting right now, and like—another staple in the religion is like, your intentions are more important than what you do. Some people do great things with bad intentions, so like, I feel like, as long as my intentions are good, God knows that, because God knows your intentions. So, I don't feel like my transition was to hurt anyone or to hurt myself. Like, I feel like, if anything, God would probably be happy with me, like, transitioning and making myself happier than I once was. But, yeah, overall, like, I feel like, if my identity is not hurting someone else, or [horns] pretty much hurting someone else or, bothering someone then I don't think it should be judged at all, and, in terms of like, the LGBT community, like, someone's sexual orientation shouldn't be judged or even be a topic of conversation for anyone that's not them. Yeah, that's my belief.

Calou: Yeah. Um, tell me about when you told your siblings, in respect—was it like before or after you told your mom?

Slim: I told all my siblings except one before my mom, and the sibling that I didn't tell—I still never came out to them. Um... but um, yeah, it's definitely easier, um, it's definitely easier for me to come out to my siblings first, because they're definitely more open minded. They were accepting of me liking girls, and like, having girlfriends and stuff, but um, it was definitely a learning experience for them, and still to this day, because sometimes they'll mess up on

pronouns and they lack, like, certain understanding of like, certain things with me being trans, so... but I—but I get it. I think that's something that's very important for all trans people to understand, that just because you're going through the transition, like, you just have to step back sometimes and give people what you want for them to give you. So if you want people to understand your transition, you have to understand where their head is at, that they've known you for x amount of years, like... it's—it's hard, so um, yeah. Whether it was like, my siblings or my mom, like, I just, um, came—came out and like, just had that understanding that it's not going to be easy.

Calou: Mhmm. Who are some of the most important people in your life to you now?

Slim: My girlfriend. She definitely validates my gender around people, and like, even my mom. My mom will, like, be around us, and—and she'll be like, "she" and my girlfriend will just keep talking she'll be like "he," and then my mom, like, will pick it up. So, she's pretty important and, um, obviously my mom and my family, and I think the—the program, the CUNY LGBTQ Leadership Program is important. Even though we see each other every so often, just having that support from people that don't know you but just, you know, like, just support you and you feel that every single time we meet. And, my friends that are still around and accept me. Yeah.

Calou: You have some friends from like, middle school, high school days that you still hang out with?

Slim: Yeah, I do. And then I have friends that—just a few—that didn't accept me and I lost a few friends. But, that's okay. I'm happy for the friends that, like, I do have, because every so often when we speak, they'll tell me like, there's a trans person in my class, and like, it's not that they're outing them. They say it to my because they're excited that they know that someone else is trans and they have that, like, knowledge because of me, because—because I'm sharing my experience with them. So, I'm very happy to like, be able to do that, because it's just, like, a domino effect. One person, like, can teach someone else, and then it's just, like, you never know, and then it's like there's some friends that I know their parents, and their families, and it's like—it's like, how many people can you reach and educate just by being you and sharing your life?

Calou: Mhmm. [sirens] Um, I would love to hear a little bit about what your—what's really important to you now, whether that's, like, what you're studying or what you're into, or what you see yourself doing? Whether that's work, or your partner, or projects, or like, what you're really excited about?

Slim: Well, I finally figured out that I want to do something in the field, of like, law. So, ultimately, I want to be a judge, and um, I'm going to law school after I finish college by the end of next semester, so I'll be taking my LSAT's, and...In terms of what I'll be practicing, I would love to help out and like, do something along the lines of like, helping the LGBT community, um, and I want to start a non-profit. I already have the idea, but I can't say it, because someone will steal my idea, but it has to do with catering to trans youth, specifically ones that are interested in

athletics. So, that's like, my life goal, like, I can't die before I do that. But, yeah. Those are my goals.

Calou: Awesome, and how long have you and your girlfriend been together?

Slim: Uh, like 6 months. Yeah, we've been together for 6 months and...

Calou: Is there anything that you feel like you want to talk about regarding your identity? Um, I'd love to talk a little bit about the program that I met you through, which is the—this is the first year, you know, the first time that CUNY [City University of New York] has ever done this—has put together this LGBTQ specific leadership development program together, so I would love to hear about, you know, what that's been like for you, but I want to give you the opportunity to talk about anything, whether that's like—if you want to talk about like, medical stuff, if you want to talk about like, family stuff, or partners, or interests, or, you know, anything that you want to go over, um, anything that feels important to tell me? Where you work, where you want to work—you talked a little about that. Is there anything you want to share? Experiences getting medical care, if you want?

Slim: [whispering] Or, can I just ask you...

Calou: Yeah.

Slim: Like, it should just be like, from my— like, oh, like—but not really more of like, advice things...

Calou: You can share whatever you want. It will be from your perspective no matter what.

Slim: Okay. Yeah, I think that overall, um, even though it's hard to... nevermind. Nevermind.

Calou: [laughter] Anything about, like, safety? Anything, you don't have to share about anything if nothing is calling you. I just want to give you an opportunity to, you know...

Slim: I think self love is important. That's what I wanted to say. For not just trans people, but just anyone. But, I think that's helped me a lot, and just, I fall in and out of it. It's hard to be, all like, jolly all the time and you—you get down sometimes, but I think that's what attracted like, a better environment for me to, like, transition and, it's attracted a good partner, a good girlfriend for me and like... just like, a more peaceful transition. Just like, loving yourself and being easier on yourself—on myself [beeping], and um... so I wanted to say that about myself and also project that to anyone that's going through it.

Calou: Mhmm.

Slim: Yeah.

Calou: Yeah. Are there any particular challenges that you want to talk about, or any particular strategies for figuring out how to do the self love that you're talking about?

Slim: I think realizing that this transition is—or anyone's transition, whether it's like female to male, male to female, or even being like, lesbian or gay or anywhere on the spectrum, really, like, it's not easy, and like, you have to keep it real with yourself, and realize that and know that it's easier to love yourself than to hate yourself or to—or to take in the hate that people, like, pass on to you because it happens, and if you have that then it's pretty much like, a shield for anything that comes your way. Whether it's like, unsupportive parents or unsupportive friends or like, a comment that someone can make on the train, a stranger, um, but... There's books. There's like, affirmations you can do. There's youtube videos. Um, but, something that me and you have spoke about before was like, monitoring your self talk, and just like... When you—personally when I—when I have like, negative thoughts or like, when I was going through, like dysphoria and stuff, like—when I would have those thoughts, I would just be like, literally, tell myself in my head, x—x out that thought. And, it works. Just like, and then after you x out the thought, like, I just like, give myself a good thought. Like, validate myself, because nobody else will. Not like you will, and you believe it more when it's you. So, I think that's very important. That played a very important part in my transition and it still does.

Calou: Mhmm. Yeah. Um, well, I would love to hear about what—what being in the program has been like for you? Um, you know, I guess also being one of the few out trans people in the program, or, you know, anything that's been hard, anything that's been awesome. I know that's four questions.

Slim: [laughter] I love the experience, honestly, and the—the benefits have been too many, like, just from getting that support that I spoke about from, like, people that don't like, fully know you. Like, they've—you just met these people, and every time we meet, I—I personally feel it's just like, genuine support, and like, care from people that don't even identify, like, specifically the same way that I do. But, you just feel it, and, personally I've, um, I've heard and I've also, like, experienced, like, differences between, like, trans people and the rest of the community, and this is the first place where there's not a—I don't feel that, I don't feel like we're any different or there's any shade or anything like that. So, that was very good for me, being like, the only trans person that's like, out, in the program. But also, like, having you there was definitely, like, I don't want to say helpful, but like, I embrace your point of view because even though we don't identify exactly the same, it's just like, having that other perspective there, and that other side. But um, it's been a lot of like, opportunities to like, network [beeping] to meet people that that are—that identify with the community, and that's very inspiring to see professional people, like, you only see that, like, on TV once in a while, and it's like, people, that are in our field of study that, you know, we can look up to. Um, yeah. It was a great experience. I would do it all over again.

Calou: What was the best—if you can like, think of one of the best parts for you, or the best part for you?

Slim: I think it's when we did the skits... When we acted out the skits, about like, if you saw, like, a trans person in the bathroom, like, how would you react. Even though I didn't participate, it was very interesting like, watching and, I think it was a good way to really, like, put our reactions into perspective and our values, and what we—like, really questioned what we would do in a situation like that, because we might not talk about it in the group, or tell anyone in general, but like, I'm sure that's very possible to happen to anyone in the group, and some people have said it has happened to them, so... And then the fact that you and David also like, included like, the muslim person on the train with the hijab, and that kind of, like, related to me, and my religion, and—I like that you guys like, thought about like, not just the community, but just like, just people in general, like what—what can you do in a situation like that um, and it made me think like, even more outside the box after that, like, because I already have, like, that instilled in me. I'm all for the underdog, so like, I like that that was there, especially because that, like, new thing with like, the bathrooms and stuff, so, yeah. That was my favorite part.

Calou: Cool, thanks for sharing that. Um, you mentioned that this group, as like a mixed, like, like LGBT and Q space is like one of the ones that has felt like there's a lot of understanding and not as much shade between like, people who identify differently. Um, can you talk about, like, how you see yourself in relation to like, other queer—queer community in New York, and what kinds of queer things do you do, or do you not do queer things, and what does your—are you friends with other queer trans people? Things like that.

Slim: I actually mentor to trans people that are much younger than I am. But, those are my trans friends in New York.

Calou: Do you do that, like, through a program, or just people that you met...

Slim: No. They just both are like, friends of mine that they, like—they will call me, like, their mentor. I don't know how that happened, but, I'm glad that I'm there for them. But they're also my friends, so, those are my trans friends in New York.

Calou: And how did you meet them?

Slim: One of them is actually, um, my friend's brother... wait—my brother's friends. Sorry, my brother's friend. They were friends since, like, elementary school. And then, the other one I met at a previous employer that I had.

Calou: And are they trans masculine?

Slim: Yeah.

Calou: Both?

Slim: Both. Yeah. And... I don't really do queer things, but I actually went to an event with Mitch Drasen(?) and um, I don't know. I guess I was feeling kind of, in a gay mood, I don't know. Like,

not in a gay mood, but I just wanted to be around more like, gay people, because obviously there was like, gay people at the event, and I just walked to the Stonewall end, and I got a drink there, and um, I was just like, this is cool, like, I didn't really... before that I never really went to, like, gay bars or anything. I was just like, it's not...

Calou: [inaudible]

Slim: Like, being around gay people 'cause before that, I didn't really feel like I fit in, and that's something that the group did do for me, like, just being around, like, 20 other people, that like, all identify differently but are all in the same community like, I feel like I fit in so, yeah. Who knows, maybe if I didn't—if I wasn't part of the group, I hadn't had went to Stonewall after the event. Maybe not.

Calou: Were you with us the day—you were with us the day that we also went in front of Stonewall with Jay?

Slim: Yeah. I had went before that. Yeah, I was there that day for the tour, yeah. That was—I would have picked that as my favorite part but that was another good experience.

Calou: What was like, your big takeaway from hearing about Jay's life and walking around where she had lived?

Slim: I think it was her strength, and just like, her being an older person that identifies, and just hearing about like, her experience... [inaudible]

Calou: Jay uses all kinds of pronouns.

Slim: Oh okay, so, um, just hearing about her experience and how different it was then and now. It made me really appreciate the time that we're in right now even more, because of the sacrifices that her and her colleagues at the time, like, had to go through and take, so yeah. I walked away from that tour feeling like really really appreciative of everything that the people before us did.

Calou: Have you been inspired by any recent or historical political movements? I know you mentioned being grateful for the time that we're in now and what people went through before... Now we're in another—another time, and what that's like as a trans person, as an islamic person, um, any kinds of political or social beliefs and values that are important to you? I guess, have you been inspired by any historical or political social movements?

Slim: Could you give me an example, because, I guess, the presidency would be one, but I'm not moved by that.

Calou: Mhmm. Maybe another way to ask is what kinds of political—what kinds of change do you want to see happen in New York City for any communities that you're a part of?

Slim: More policies catered to LGBTQ people would definitely be one, and like, the agenda being passed. That's New York state, but still. Um, I don't think I have a good answer for that one.

Calou: Yeah, no, that's okay. I would love to ask about CUNY [City University of New York], like what—what do you think CUNY needs to do to be more welcoming of trans people, or more welcoming of islamic people?

Slim: I personally think that CUNY does a good job with like, islamic people, but that could be maybe, just like, my school. But I've been to a few other campuses and I think they do a good job at that. In terms of LGBT people—LGBTQ people, I feel like, there needs to be education for professors and like, staff. I feel they lack that, because it is, like, professors that are teaching there for decades, and they don't know how to talk to a trans person, or what a trans person is. So, um, I think they should definitely incorporate that somewhere, like an educational piece for professors. I think they did a good job with the, like, posting the signs for the bathrooms, so that was good, and they're working on like the blackboard and CUNYfirst name stuff. [inaudible] I don't think that trans people should have to pay ten dollars for a new I.D. once they trans—I feel if you can show proof, maybe, that you transitioned and you need a new I.D.... I know it's ten dollars but still, like, think of all the trans people, like, they're definitely capitalizing... but like, there should be a free I.D. for that. And education to the CUNY officers, too.

Calou: You mean security—like security officers?

Slim: Yeah, the CUNY security officers because someone did tell me about a situation with them not understanding different gender identities, so, just to be on the safe side so there's no like, embarrassing moment or, like, anyone's put on the spot. So...

Calou: Is there anything that's happened at CUNY that you'd like to share? Anything in a classroom, or in a building, or—that was uncomfortable for you? I'm guessing you started, like, your medical transition and then identifying as male while you were at Queens College?

Slim: Yeah, but just a few days ago, I'm in a group—a group chat, and um, and one of my partners for this group project sends a document and he has all of our names on it, and then I see, like, my birth name. And I'm like, first, how'd you get that? And it turns out that he got it from my CUNY email. So the CUNY email still has my birth name on it, and that was—I had to like, private message him and be like, can you change the name, and that can be outing me in a way. Because if he googles the meaning of my name, it's like, a female name. So, yeah, that was something else that they could definitely fix, or just give—give us another, um, email address.

Calou: When you do your name change with CUNY...

Slim: Oh, you do get one?

Calou: No, I'm asking you, so you changed your with CUNY and then didn't get a new email address, or you weren't able to change your name with CUNY yet?

Slim: I didn't change my name with CUNY, but I still think that if you have a preferred name, they should take that into consideration, or if you write to someone, there should be like a page, or something, that you can request a different email, with—or maybe like, a first initial?

Calou: So what's it like when you go to a new class in the beginning of the semester, and they have a roll, and they have your old name...

Slim: No, they have my new name. Well, they have my preferred name. I filled out a document for that. They always—that's why I was surprised when he had my—because I was like, you're a student. How did you—I would understand if it was a professor, but, yeah. That can be unsafe, like, if someone is appearing female, and their email is like, john, like that's—that can be unsafe.

Calou: Mhmm.

Slim: So, definitely that, but overall, good experience using the bathroom. Nobody has ever said anything or done anything... Professors—some professors knew I was trans and were very nonchalant about it. Nobody treated me different because of it. If anything, they like, respected it more. So yeah, good experience at CUNY.

Calou: And you're graduating...

Slim: Fall 2017.

Calou: Almost done.

Slim: Yeah. I can't wait. Seriously. It's been a long time.

Calou: Yeah.

Slim: Yeah.

Calou: Um, is there anything—you know, is there anything else that you want to share? Anything about accessing healthcare, anything about partners?

Slim: Um, for the healthcare question, I was surprised to know how many resources are out there, because you're not told when you figure out who you are. You're not—there's no like, magical message that like, tells you where you can go or what you can do. But...

Calou: Where you can get a script for T, or you can get surgery, or...

Slim: Exactly. So, the resources are there, and I was very surprised to see how many resources are there, and who actually really caters to um, trans people. But, um...

Calou: What was the process for you, um, starting T? Like, with—interfacing with the healthcare community?

Slim: It was actually pretty easy. I had, um, Cecilia Gentili which is pretty known in the trans world. She was my, um, case manager at the clinic I was going to, so she guided me through anything I needed. She got it done for me but, I'm still learning how many chem shops and like, pharmacies in New York fill those scripts and like, where I can do for like, other medical trans needs and like, it's there. It's been very great to know like, if something doesn't go right for me in like one place, I can go somewhere else, [horns and sirens] and like, maybe that's the beauty of like, being in New York and, like, New York being so diverse and having these resources. But, I—I'm more at ease. I think living in New York City has made me more at ease with being trans, because if it's not one place, it's another place, or if it's not one that can get something done for you, it's someone else. You just never know. Not too long ago, you actually helped me with finding that doctor when I was stuck with a bad doctor. So, just like, me and you both living in New York, it's like, we both collectively have our own, like, resources, and like, networks, so, yeah.

Calou: Yeah, I've felt lucky living here to for that, absolutely. Um, well, if there's anything you want to close with—you don't have to... Anything you want people to take away, anything you would want to share with anyone who would hear this interview?

Slim: As cliché as it sounds, be yourself, and don't—be yourself and don't let other people alter your ideal self, or like, how you view yourself or who you want to be. Whether it's like identity, sexual orientation, or just any goals. And self love. Self love for whoever you are. That's important.

Calou: Awesome. Thank you so much, Slim, it was a pleasure learning more about your life, and thank you for sharing it with us.

Slim: No problem, thank you.