

NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

SIMON CHARTRAND

Interviewer: Elliott Maya

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Transcribed by Colette Arrand

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Elliott Maya: My name is Elliott Maya, and I am here with Simon Chartrand for the New York City Trans Oral History Project in collaboration with the New York Public Library Community Oral History Project. This is a community oral history project centered around the experiences of trans-identifying people. Today is July 27, 2017, and we are in Simon's home. Simon, would you like to introduce yourself?

Simon Chartrand: Uh, sure. Um, I'm Simon, I'm 25, and my pronouns are they/them.

Maya: Awesome. So where were you born?

Chartrand: Um, I was born in Kingston, New York, which is just like a two hour bus ride north of here.

Maya: Which borough is that in? It's not in a borough, it's upstate.

Chartrand: It's upstate.

Maya: It's upstate.

Chartrand: Yeah.

Maya: Can you tell me what it was like growing up there?

Chartrand: Uh, middle of nowhere. [Laughter].

Maya: Middle of nowhere, is it like rural?

Chartrand: I live, like, I was born in Kingston Hospital, but I grew up in Boysville, which is a town that nobody's ever heard of, so I just tell people that I'm from Woodstock because it's close by. [Laughter] um but it was very insular. Yeah, um, and Boysville was interesting I guess because it was, I guess there was a blend of um, we have a blend of like, rednecks and hippies basically. [Laughter].

Maya: Can you tell me more about that?

Chartrand: Um, you really get a little bit of everyone. [Laughter].

Maya: So when you say rednecks and hippies, can you give me like a portrait? Like describe to me like what do you mean?

Chartrand: Like people who are in a—people who grew up in a rural area or in a rural area, and like, some of my family is like rednecks, so I'm like okay, like, I can say this. [Laughter].

Maya: Okay, okay.

Chartrand: Um, but uh, and then there are the people who are attached to Woodstock and its historical significance [Laughter] and its, I guess I mean you have like more liberal and more conservative both there.

Maya: So would you say there are, is there like a split between like really liberal people and really conservative people, or how was that dynamic?

Chartrand: I, yeah, it's kind of like the extremes are both there [Laughter].

Maya: Um, and what was that like uh growing up in the middle of those extremes, as you say?

Chartrand: Um, it wasn't fun. [Laughter].

Maya: [Laughter].

Chartrand: Um I guess for me like I had to be good because like my dad was the high school teacher. Um, he was also in charge of detention, so I couldn't get in trouble.

Maya: [Laughter].

Chartrand: He was like, he's fair, I mean, he's tough but he's fair. Um, and uh, it was mostly just uh me not knowing anything. I feel like growing up was just a lot of confusion.

Maya: Um, and what do you mean by that?

Chartrand: Um, I feel like there were a lot of moments, um, and like one of them I guess being, it was, I was in third grade, um, and I was in the—I was at the YMCA and I was in the women's locker room. Um, and I felt uncomfortable, but I didn't know why, and I didn't have the words for it. And I tried telling my mom that I was uncomfortable. Um, and she just kind of like laughed at me, and she told me that like, oh, but you were so comfortable lifting your shirt up in front of that boy. And uh, and I didn't really know what to say after that. It was just—that's what I mean by confusion. And I didn't know why I felt the way that I did. I just did, and I kind of like let the moment pass. And I um I just pretended, I tried to pretend that it didn't happen.

Maya: So when you were in the third grade, you had a conversation with your mother, right?

Chartrand: About that. when I was in kindergarten, there was like a, [Laughter]—

Maya: [Laughter].

Chartrand: I just remembered this, there was like a um, there was a boy, and we would um, we'd sneak out, during like recess we'd like sneak out of like the classroom and go in the hallway, and like, where nobody was like looking, and we'd like, switch our toys, [Laughter].

Maya: Interesting.

Chartrand: Yeah.

Other Person: Hello, hi. I'm his roommate, sorry. Is anyone in the bathroom?

Chartrand: Um, um, and um, I feel like it wasn't really a problem until I moved. So I moved like, it's the same school district, just different elementary schools. Um, so those, so I feel like once I was the new kid at another elementary school it gave me another reason to be more of a target.

Maya: Hmm.

Chartrand: Um, yeah. I feel like I knew for sure that something was really off when I was at like, sleepovers as gendered as they are. [Laughter]. Yeah. Um, they were just, in general I never felt comfortable at sleepovers because it just felt like they were going through certain rituals that I didn't understand. I always fell outside of it. Like I was, as a spectator, but I was never quite involved. Um, and I've had some traumatic things um happen as well, um, to the point where one of these things that happened, um, I remember very succinctly just like, uh, I was nine years old and I was crying, and I thought that I didn't belong in this world and I didn't deserve to live. Um, because whoever I was was not fitting in, and therefore it was bad and I had to go. But I couldn't like get rid of that part, so I would have to get rid of the whole in order to get rid of the part. Um, yeah. [Laughter]. That's, it's intense. Um but I feel like that's growing up trans, [Laughter].

Maya: [Laughter] a little bit, yeah. The intense experience. Um, you mentioned this idea of going to sleepovers or other gendered events, I assume.

Chartrand: Yeah.

Maya: And observing gendered rituals and feeling outside of them. Do you remember any specific rituals that made you, or moments that made you feel really kind of aware of a budding otherness, I suppose?

Chartrand: [Laughter]. Um, let's see. Um, other than that moment, I feel like any time I ever had to wear a dress, [Laughter]. Um, for any event, whether it's like going to someone's wedding or something, or graduation because I, and I distinctly—I never quite wonder why, where, whenever I put on a dress I would have to um flex my muscles to make sure I was still there.

Maya: [Laughter].

Chartrand: I'd have to go do something like [Laughter] do something like, go do pushups or something, or like, run around, or just something to remind myself that I still existed, because it,

[sighs], I don't know how to explain that feeling. It's not like an invisibility cloak, it's like a negation cloak.

Maya: Mm, wow, no. That's really, really actually amazing.

Chartrand: [Laughter].

Maya: Um. This idea, you said "negation." You're using really interesting words, and I'm loving it.

Chartrand: Yeah, [Laughter].

Maya: And it sounds like there was like a physical, like, the act of putting on a dress required a physical response, and you said to negate the dress being put on you.

Chartrand: Yeah, it was negating me, and so I had to negate it back, [Laughter].

Maya: Interesting. Wow. And, were there ever moments where like your family noticed kind of your negation politics?

Chartrand: They knew I didn't fit in, and um I'm going to fast forward it a little bit because um I never came out to my family. I was outed.

Maya: Oh, okay.

Chartrand: Yeah. So, um, it was like um, I had made a separate Facebook, and I um, and when I did that, I thought like, if I just blocked all my family members that it would be fine, [Laughter]. But somebody found me, somebody who went to high school with my little brother. Um and so that person told my little brother, and then my little brother told my parents. And he was like, 14, 15 at the time. So it's not something I blame him for. I feel like he was just young, you know, he didn't really know what to do. Um, but when my parents found out, um, and this is why I'm— and this is where I'm like trying to tie back to the question, my mom told me that she knew that I as different growing up. Um, but she didn't think it was because I was trans. Um, because she just thinks that it's a belief. Um, yeah.

Maya: Like a choice?

Chartrand: Like a choice.

Maya: Oh, interesting.

Chartrand: Yeah. Um, so she's like, no, you're not trans. And at first she tried to say it was because of trauma, but then she said that growing up, she thought that um, and this is like, hard to say, um, but she thought that I had—she said that I was at a birthday party one day, and she didn't even tell me like, what I was doing, but she told me that there was an off-duty nurse who told

her that I could have Asperger's. And she believed it from then on. She never took me to any professional. And when I asked her why, she said it's because she didn't want to label me. So she just, she knew I was different but she didn't know why, and that was her explanation for it. Um, she also didn't tell me until I was outed, and then she argued, you know, I'm not trans, I have Asperger's.

Maya: Interesting.

Chartrand: Um, so like the whole, I mean, when I had to be out it was kind of like finding my history growing up, too. I feel like, I mean, things that happened like 10 years ago, um, like when I was in high school, um, I guess there was somebody else from my high school who told me that yeah, like, that my older sister had mentioned to them that I had Asperger's, and he didn't know why she said that because it didn't make sense. And I had to keep like, asking people, [Laughter], because I'm like, I was so confused. I was like, what does this mean? And what does it mean to have Asperger's, what does it mean to be trans? Um, and I've been to therapists as well and they've told me that I don't have Asperger's, um, that my mom was just wrong. So that was, that was just her way of negotiating difference in her head without having to accept the existence of trans people.

Maya: Is that still kind of a stance your mother takes today?

Chartrand: I'm not exactly sure where she's at, um, but I do know that she just uh thinks that it's a belief. Um, when I had, I saw her like a week ago and she asked me to go off hormones, so uh it would probably still be her view.

Maya: I'm sorry.

Chartrand: No, it's okay. I'm open to talking about it because like I feel like for me that's airing it out instead of bottling it up.

Maya: Yeah, um, can I ask when you were outed?

Chartrand: Yeah, um, of all the times for it to happen, um I fell like when it rains it pours. So this was the summer before I entered grad school, so the summer before I was starting a PhD program, um, I was outed as trans. I was already socially out in undergrad um but um I could keep that like separate from my home life. Um, even that was tricky because my little sister went to the same undergrad, but I was able to still um manage that. And so I've gone from this like, and in undergrad everyone was really accepting. They were great. [Laughter]. Um, but yeah, that's when I was outed. And during that time, I was getting my wisdom teeth removed. Um, and I mention that because that's why I have nerve damage in my tongue. Um, when the surgeon um operated on my mouth, he severed my left lingual nerve, and um as a result, I—the nerve is completely gone, so I don't have any feeling on the left side of my tongue. I also suffer from chronic pain because it's nerve damage. Um, so it was kind of like I like because of my tongue I physically lost my voice and I had to teach myself how to speak again, and that's what it feels like

with being outed as trans, too. Like I lost my voice, and I was trying to have to find it again. Um, and start a PhD program, all in that just, you know, do it all, do it quickly. It's kind of like I have no choice sort of thing.

Maya: Damn.

Chartrand: Yeah, it was a lot. [Laughter].

Maya: That is a lot. Wow. Um, can you tell me more about um your undergrad experience?

Chartrand: Yeah!

Maya: You mentioned the fact that you went to undergrad with your younger sister.

Chartrand: Yeah.

Maya: But you also kept—

Chartrand: Separate enough?

Maya: Separate. I feel like what, that, I'm trying to imagine that. Like, can you tell me more about that? That period of [inaudible].

Chartrand: Yeah. Uh, well different communities. We had different friends. I went to a SUNY school, uh, Oneonta, and I mention that because everybody was great. I was actually just shocked at how accepting everyone was. Um, I mean, starting with the women and gender studies department and then shifting toward other departments, but also I was a student athlete um for the track and field team, and my coaches were accepting right off the be able to. And I was worried, because I went in there, my coach was like, you probably thought you were coming in here like about to quit, and I was like, yeah, I kind of did. And he was like no, like that's not how this is going to play out. He's like, if anybody has a problem they have to come to me.

Maya: Wow.

Chartrand: And it was the most validating experience, and even like, there was even like an abandoned like locker room like across the gym and he was like go, you can go use that one. And so he talked to like the athletic director, and it was like, it was all um done really smoothly, and there were people who worked at the Gender and Sexuality Resource Center as well who really helped me out, um, across campus as well. Even like my um my graduation, which was tricky because I wasn't out at that point to my family, but I was out to everyone on campus, and so I had to kind of like ask them to like use the name that I don't want to use, use the pronouns I don't want to use, and um and people were able to do that. but also the registrar's office was really cool because they had um, they gave me my diploma with the wrong name on it, um, and then they mailed me one with the right name on it. So it was like, yes.

Maya: Yeah, that's amazing. That's very surprising to me, um, I feel like a lot of people don't get to experience having like an institutional community be really supportive.

Chartrand: I had never experienced that, and it was um, I mean Oneonta was just a surprisingly trans friendly place. It's also where this really well known trans doctor is. Uh, there's just a really good community.

Maya: What's the name of the doctor?

Chartrand: Oh yeah, Carolyn Wolf-Gould.

Maya: Carolyn Wolf-Gould.

Chartrand: Yeah, people drive like 200 miles just to socio-economic her because she's that good.

Maya: Wow, damn. Wow that's really amazing. Um, is it a real large school, like a large physical campus?

Chartrand: No. I mean, it's a SUNY school, but it was like, 5,000, 7,000.

Maya: Was there a central campus structure to it, or like—

Chartrand: Yeah, it was all on like, it's all on like a hill.

Maya: Wow,. So I'm assuming, were you still sharing spaces with your youngest sister then at this point, or were you kind of like moving around each other?

Chartrand: We could move around each other, uh, because we were in different communities. Studied completely different things. I was literature, she was physics.

Maya: Wow, alright. Yeah, you're right. [Laughter].

Chartrand: Pretty different, yeah. [Laughter].

Maya: Wow, that's amazing. Um, some of the really awesome moment of getting to control your own narrative.

Chartrand: Yeah, and there was a point where I did come out to her because I was like okay, I don't want to like have this kind of anxiety anymore. And so she was actually accepting of it right away, which was cool.

Maya: How—was that for the entirety of undergrad, or did you tell her while you were in undergrad together?

Chartrand: Uh, while we were in undergrad, like near the end.

Maya: Okay.

Chartrand: Yeah.

Maya: That's really amazing. Um, can you tell me more about the sports team to me? And why you were there and just kind of your experience in that as a trans person?

Chartrand: Yeah, I was scared.

Maya: [Laughter].

Chartrand: Uh, because I was, I mean, I'd like to think I was a decent athlete. When I like, my first year, like broke some school records and stuff.

Maya: Oh.

Chartrand: And uh, I was like a, I was a jumper um on the track team, which was a lot of fun. But um I didn't really um—I felt like I talked to like a couple of people on the team, but I felt like my community, like, and that community is kind of more, there were sprinters, there were distance runners, and then there were like a couple of jumpers.

Maya: Like hurdlers? Or like [inaudible]?

Chartrand: Hurdles were kind of, sometimes they went off on their own, sometimes they were with the sprinters. Um, but jumpers were kind of like, there was just like a couple of us, and we were just off on our own. Um, and there were like—I met quite a few cool people through there.

Maya: That's fun.

Chartrand: Um, yeah, and then I just talked to the coaches a lot, because they were cool. [Laughter].

Maya: Oh, that's really awesome. Um, what was I going to ask you? So I wanted to ask you a little bit about um navigating health care, and how was that for you?

Chartrand: Oh yeah, [Laughter].

Maya: When did you start that process?

Chartrand: Because navigating health care is—

Maya: [Laughter].

Chartrand: It's a big issue, um, being a trans person and being someone who suffers from um a disability and chronic pain.

Maya: Right.

Chartrand: Um I feel like it gets amplified, um, and so I've had to deal with the healthcare system a lot of times. Um, I've been to um—there are things like, for my nerve damage, for example, I was hospitalized last year. Um, for a few weeks, because the pain was that intense. Um, but um they put me, when they hospitalized me, they put me in the women's ward, they um, they couldn't change—my name was legally changed, and they didn't change it in the system because it would have required me physically to go downstairs and bring forms with me. Except I was also hospitalized and I couldn't physically do that. Which also made it a problem just to get my prescriptions. They didn't give me testosterone, and when I asked them why, they couldn't tell me. I've also had employees um ask me invasive questions. It was a mess. Um, I went to one pain management doctor who was at a different place, and he asked me, he's like oh, like, so when are you growing breasts? Because he assumed that since I was trans that I was a trans woman. And he asked me um, and he asked me this specifically which was really disturbing, that um, he asked me if I knew any Asian trans women, and if I did, to give them his contact information. And this was him as a doctor. And this is while he was injecting me with botox for my pain. And so it all kind of happened really quickly. And I never went back to him, because um how can you? And so I feel like because of being trans, because of having chronic pain, I have to jump from doctor to doctor to doctor because they just, they can't get over the trans thing. Like, it doesn't make any sense to me, because it feel like would you ask like an endocrinologist to do open heart surgery? No. So if you're like a pain management specialist, why would you like, try to ask questions about trans people? [Laughter].

Maya: Yeah, just um, that's a big yikes. [Laughter].

Chartrand: Yup. I feel like I've experienced it all [Laughter] with doctors.

Maya: Yeah, are you still jumping doctors? Do you find you still have to do things like that, or have you found—

Chartrand: I found a good one now.

Maya: Okay.

Chartrand: Who I go to. Um, but then there are some things like um like I had laryngitis um uh was it a month ago now? Um, and I went to uh I went to a doctor and he like looked at my chart and he's just like, are you female to male? And I was just like, what does this have to do with my sore throat? [Laughter].

Maya: [Laughter]. Did he have a response?

Chartrand: Like, I can't even talk right now, like what do you want me to say? And it's like one of those things that would be in the chart, so do you really have to ask? It's just, and so I feel like whenever I'm like relieved, like oh, like finally I have my health stuff under control and I don't have to like deal with like doctors again and their ignorance, um—I do. [Laughter]. It always comes back up. And it's not just a matter of knowing—and that's another thing with like trans people and healthcare, it's not just a matter of um accessing our hormones, it's a matter of just going to the doctor in general. Um, when we have health issues, we don't just have health issues, we have health issues and trans issues that the doctors are trying to figure out, so it's like, when we're in trouble it's not just physically but it's emotionally. Both fronts.

Maya: Yeah. Sorry, I'm just like, being mortified.

Chartrand: No, you're fine.

Maya: No, the emotional exhaustion. I saw those as, it goes along with the physical and like the financial and like resource exhaustion of—

Chartrand: Yes.

Maya: You don't get to just go to one place, you know what I mean? You have to—you bounce around and then, but each time you're having to reintroduce yourself in a way that no one else is being asked to. You know?

Chartrand: Yes.

Maya: And, yeah.

Chartrand: And it's like I don't really have a choice because with my chronic pain, it's, I mean, on a scale of 1 to 10 it's a constant four to five, um, and that's um throughout the left half of my tongue. So yes, I did teach myself how to speak again, um, with just half my tongue, but also you know, I can't teach myself to unfeel pain, and so that's what keeps me going to try to find something that will relieve it. But at the expense of a lot of other types of pain.

Maya: Right. Do you find that the attention is like malevolent? Or is it like just crude curiosity?

Chartrand: I think it depends. I think for most doctors it's crude curiosity. The one doctor I mentioned who was basically sexually harassing me, that's malevolent. I think that goes beyond ignorant.

Maya: Yeah. Has that been a common situation where doctors have been like sexually invasive or like harassed you, or people you know of?

Chartrand: Usually it's just like questions about my past.

Maya: Yeah.

Chartrand: And stuff.

Maya: Have you had any positive moments involved with healthcare at all?

Chartrand: [Laughter].

Maya: No, I'm just curious, because—

Chartrand: Sorry!

Maya: No, no, no.

Chartrand: I'm like, laughing, I'm like all cynical. [Laughter].

Maya: No, no, it's perfectly fine. I'm just curious because I don't really, and like, I haven't gone through anything that most people would consider like medical transition. I already have like a hard time going to doctors.

Chartrand: Well, my first doctor, Carolyn, who I mentioned before, Wolf-Gould, um she was the first doctor I went to when I started coming out, and even though like, she has a lot of patients. She's always overbooked. But it's like, even though she's like that, you could e-mail her and um when I went in for my first appointment, she like gave me all these information pamphlets, but then she also gave me like, poems and stuff, and so she asked me about my family and like not just their health history and how they're treating me. And so she was very like, she was acting as like, doctor, as therapist, she was doing a whole lot of things. And you really felt like you were the only person there. And that's what I feel like the ideal healthcare for trans people is, like exactly what she's doing. Um, and I haven't seen her in like over a year, but I'm like, I miss her. [Laughter].

Maya: Wow, no, that's—I'm very happy. I'm happy you had that.

Chartrand: Yeah, that's how I know like what's right for me, [Laughter].

Maya: I wanted to back up a little bit. Um, oh actually I wanted to talk about, if you're comfortable talking about your experience with, I know, not [inaudible] transition, but I was wondering um specifically in regards to your healthcare experience, what was that like for you in regards to transitioning? Or any way that you would define that I guess, like getting hormones.

Chartrand: Uh so I mean, hormones were pretty easy to get. I think a lot of the issues were about timing and safety for me. Um, so I started hormones before I was out, before I was outed to my

family, uh, any while I still had a job. Um, and I thought to myself well, my voice won't deepen for another few months, [Laughter], so I have that going for me, [Laughter]. Um, I kind of just wanted to get the ball rolling because I knew that it wasn't going to happen overnight, um, and a lot of that is about with hormones is about patience. I wish, like, I wish it could just happen quickly, but then I also don't wish that because change, it would be too much. Change is gradual, and it should be that way. Um, with hormones, I felt like I had to, I mean, it's going through puberty again, um, and all of the things that that entails, which is a lot of confusion because you feel like, I felt like a teenage boy, [Laughter]. Um, and then um I also got um top surgery, and I got that uh a year and a half ago. I'd gotten it in January. And that I wanted to be really careful of. Um, I gave myself enough time um before classes started up again because I wanted to make sure that it didn't interfere with anything. Um, so pacing, timing, um, those tend to be big factors, um, in what I wanted to do. Um, I don't, I'm not interested in anything else at the moment. Um, I kind of, I mean other than wishing I could grow more facial hair—

Maya: [Laughter].

Chartrand: Uh, I like where I'm at.

Maya: Nice, nice. Um, awesome, thank you. Um I was wondering if you could talk more about your employment history? Um, you don't have to talk about specific places if you don't want to, just what has it been like for you?

Chartrand: Um, I mean, a lot of the—in most of the jobs I had were um, were before I uh began transition. Although I did um back when I worked, there's, um, one summer I worked, it was during undergrad when I was just figuring out the trans thing. Um, I was working in a nursing home, um, and um and what was interesting about that was um I had long hair, I, for all intents and purposes I looked like a girl, [Laughter]. Um but there was one um resident, and um she, and she happened to have Alzheimer's, and um and every morning she would always say like, excuse me sir, or mister, [Laughter], and it always um, it always made my day. [Laughter]. I mean, like when you work in a job like that, the residents always tend to make your day because they're just such wonderful people. But um that was something that was like wow, she actually knows more than everyone else does, [Laughter]. Um, and so that was really cool. Um, and um my other jobs haven't been as cool as that. um, I wish I had something more exciting to say.

Maya: Um, did you find that you experienced um more difficulties like locating or holding employment after a point?

Chartrand: Um, well right now I feel um, right now I feel lucky because I'm in a, I mean, I'm in a graduate program and part of it, employment is a part of it. Um, so I don't have to like look for other jobs. If I did I wouldn't know how to even go about it because everything else was under another name, and what feels like another person. So I wouldn't even know how to bring it up.

Maya: Wow, yeah. Right. Do you, I wouldn't even know how you would get to like build like a resume in the same way, right?

Chartrand: Right, it completely changes the structure of it, and it's like what do you do? Do you like, do you write like a lengthy explanation of like what happened?

Maya: Right. Um, do you have any mentors, or um other trans people or trans spaces that you are involved in, or groups or anything like that?

Chartrand: In undergrad I had a couple mentors, um, uh, Elliott and Bambi, and they were really great, and it felt like my um my little family for coming out. Um, and I've had, um, I've had other professors who are mentors too who were just really, um, who were open to who I was, and some who even made me feel like I was a part of their family, and I'll always be grateful for them. Um, that's what got me through when I first came out was experiencing everything, was just the amount of overwhelming support I'd gotten from my mentors.

Maya: Was there any advice um some of your mentors gave you that really resonates with you still or really helped you out?

Chartrand: Anything specific—um—

Maya: Or even just moments that stick out to you that you remember that, you know, you had with them, conversations or anything?

Chartrand: [Laughter]. Yeah, yeah, one of my professors, um, and uh, I'm like laughing because now if I say it he'll know who he is, um, [Laughter].

Maya: [Laughter].

Chartrand: I think when I first went to him to talk about it, he was just like, you know what, this would be like if you were walking into my office and you were telling me that you were wearing like off-white socks. Would they be any different? Like would you be a different person? Like no. And I guess that always resonated with me because it's yeah, like you're looking at something like clothing that's like a construction, which is also, gender is a construction. And just that like, no, like this doesn't change how I see you was really vital to me at that point in my transition. Um, yeah. [Laughter].

Maya: [Sneezes]. Sorry.

Chartrand: You're fine.

Maya: Um, what were you like growing up?

Chartrand: [Laughter].

Maya: Sorry, I love asking questions like that.

Chartrand: That's fine. Um, what was I like? Um, I feel like I was a pain in the ass.

Maya: [Laughter]. Sorry.

Chartrand: That's the professional term for it. I was very adventurous. Um, I feel like I would eat like rocks and sand and things that I should not have eaten. Um, but everybody loved me anyway for some reason. [Laughter]. Um, and then uh but then like after moving schools and like recognizing my difference, like that's when I got really depressed and withdrawn, and I stopped speaking. And my parents noted that, but they never did anything about it. Yeah. Um, it was kind of—and like ever since then I think it was just depression, because I didn't have any answers to anything. It's like, I mean, all those years kind of felt like, and I did have a lot of bullying as well. Um, those years felt like—it feels like being a little kid, it's the middle of the night, everything is dark, you're scared, there are like monsters under the bed or something. Something imaginary, something you can't see but you have a feeling that it's there and that it's real. And there's nobody to turn on the light. There's no like, parent, no guardian, nobody is telling you anything. Um, so that's what it felt like for years. Like, I mean, it's bad enough to have to go through that for one night, but [sighs] but yeah. Nobody can turn the light on for you but yourself, I guess.

Maya: Yeah.

Chartrand: And when you're a kid you can't do it, because you're defenseless. So I had to get older to do that, and with some help.

Maya: And at what point did you feel like you had solidly turned that light on?

Chartrand: The beginning of, well I think the overwhelming support I mentioned earlier was definitely a part of that. I felt like I lost that, um, moving here actually, because I um, because I moved schools. Um, so I lost all of the community that I'd built up, um, and I had to start over from scratch. Um, and a lot of it was feeling very, very alone. And I also, in the beginning I had horrible um therapy. Uh, just therapists who just weren't even there, um, who not only didn't get what being trans meant, but just would say last minute that they were like sick or something. But do that like for a few weeks straight. Um, and so I feel like when you have bad therapy, it's worse than no therapy. Um, over time though, what's been helping me is I do have a really good therapist who I'm working with right now, and she's made a lot of difference. And it's funny because like she didn't know anything about trans issues before but now she's like, [Laughter], she did a lot of work on her own. She actually went to like conferences to figure stuff out, and stuff that she did on her own time, and I guess that's kind of like, she's put a lot of effort on her part.

Maya: You mentioned that when you moved here, you kind of had to start over community wise.

Chartrand: Yup.

Maya: How did you begin the process of rebuilding support networks?

Chartrand: LGBT Center. [Laughter].

Maya: Like, which one? Like the [inaudible].

Chartrand: The Transmasculine Voices.

Maya: Okay.

Chartrand: Uh, I go to the open group and the closed group, and the open group meets once a month, but the closed group meets once a week, and that's how I found a lot of my friends, um, and that's who I hang out with mostly because it's just people who have similar experiences. And really nice people, too. And I feel like that's—and for me that feels like home.

Maya: This is at the Callen-Lorde center, right? Or no, no.

Chartrand: No, this is the uh LGBT Center on 13th Street.

Maya: Okay, okay. Yeah, how did you get connected? Did you just Google the group or Google the Center? How did you?

Chartrand: Um, I think I went to—I wanted something completely different at first. I'm like, trying to remember the name of it, but I can't. Um, and they suggested it.

Maya: And so what has that group been like to you? You meet once a week and then once a month, right?

Chartrand: Yeah, like, there's open group and closed group. Closed group is just like, you do an intake, which doesn't cost anything, and then you go.

Maya: Nice.

Chartrand: Yeah. Um, but yeah, we do that once, so the open group is once a month, closed is once a week, and then afterwards we'll go out to eat and then you can have like just really casual conversation that just feels like a family dinner, [Laughter], weekly family dinner.

Maya: That's awesome. Have there been any other, like, New York specific uh trans or trans friendly spaces that have been really important to you since you've arrived here?

Chartrand: All the trans events. [Laughter].

Maya: What does all the trans events mean?

Chartrand: Trans Day of Visibility, Trans Day of Action, Trans Day of Remembrance.

Maya: How do you get plugged into those? Like, how do you find these events?

Chartrand: Uh, well Facebook is a really good place. [Laughter].

Maya: Yeah, [Laughter].

Chartrand: Uh, Trans on the Stands—

Maya: Trans on the Stands.

Chartrand: Which is coming up, uh, August 12. Yeah, Coney Island.

Maya: I'm making a note.

Chartrand: [Laughter]. I mean, going to the queer beach of course.

Maya: Of course.

Chartrand: Riis. Any time.

Maya: Yeah.

Chartrand: Um and I guess like what also helps me is like there's another student in my department who is also trans, um, which makes me feel not alone.

Maya: When was the first time you went to Riis Beach?

Chartrand: The first time?

Maya: Yeah, like the queer side or trans side.

Chartrand: Oh, a year ago.

Maya: A year ago.

Chartrand: Yeah.

Maya: What was that like for you?

Chartrand: Uh, [Laughter]. I was like, wow, people can be shirtless. This is awesome.

Maya: [Laughter].

Chartrand: Like, um, it was freeing. Um, I feel like I'm so used to the beach being really like, heteronormative and everybody just has like, really like, I don't understand how like, um, I don't understand how cisgender and heterosexual people work. [Laughter]. And there's like this whole like, I don't know, like I think like the cis women are supposed to have a certain type of body and the cis men are supposed to have a certain type of body, and there's only like one type and they have to keep like, striving towards that. And I like see that and I'm like, where else is that most exhibited? Like, the beach. Um, where everything is shown. And so it seems like, it just seems like really um restrained, and really stressful. It's like I almost feel bad for like, people who aren't, like, queer, because [Laughter] like don't have certain type of freedom that we have. [Laughter].

Maya: Yeah, you're not wrong. [Laughter].

Chartrand: [Laughter].

Maya: Um, yeah, can you tell me more about—oh yeah, how do you like, see or like, cisgender people and like, heterosexual people. Like how—I feel like, as like trans and like queer people, it is a fundamentally different experience in a lot of ways.

Chartrand: Yeah.

Maya: And that like I agree, like a lot of times I will go to the beach or just go to events that are very much coded as like straight and cis and I'm like, I fundamentally don't understand what's happening. Like, the social dances. I'm outside of this. I feel like I'm watching Animal Planet a little bit, you know?

Chartrand: Yup. [Laughter].

Maya: I'm wondering your take on that.

Chartrand: How do they work?

Maya: Yeah, [Laughter].

Chartrand: I, well right now I've just like I feel like the nice thing about New York City is you can like, pick your communities because there are so many people. So I kind of, I mostly restrict myself to queer communities. Um, I'm just like, right now I'm just like trying to survive, [Laughter]. And then once I'm like more established maybe I can start talking to [Laughter] open-minded um—it's just, and I think it's also I'm just like realizing like, I don't have any problems with them. It's just that they have problems with me. Um, it's like, if you're cool with me, like, I'm cool with you. I don't care, like, who you are or how you dress, just like, don't be mean. Like Kate Borenstein said, just don't be mean.

Maya: I hear that. [Audio cuts out]. Alright, so we're back from that brief bathroom break.

Chartrand: Um and I guess I just wanted to clarify one thing because I feel like if I don't say it than people don't know. Um, it's totally possible to have Asperger's and be trans at the same time. They're not mutually exclusive. Um, when I was talking about it because it was just um, it was about my mother's way of trying to figure out my difference and where she failed. But there are quite a lot of people who have Asperger's and are trans, and they're completely valid. And that's like another thing that people try to use to like gatekeep, so to prevent like some trans people from getting access to hormones and from transitioning, or from just saying that they're trans, um, just because they have Asperger's. Um so yeah, you can be both. That was it.

Maya: Thank you for that clarification. Um, I wanted to you about your experience in New York with dating and sex and relationships. Um, and to start that off, how do you meet people? How have you met people in the past while you've been in the city, um, both romantically and just like casual sex partners?

Chartrand: First of all, hi everyone I know. [Laughter].

Maya: [Laughter].

Chartrand: Um, secondly, so it's interesting because growing up I um, I always had online relationships. Um I feel like I wasn't—I feel like that's because I wasn't comfortable enough with bodies, whether it's someone else's or my own. Um so I wasn't able to engage on that level and it was kind of like the internet was perfect for that. and actually one of the, like the first person I fell in love with um has actually come out as trans. Which is really cool, [Laughter], um because it makes me feel like alright, like, we kind of found each other. Like trans people can kind of find each other. And we both weren't out yet, um, but then in let's see, and that continued uh, that continued in undergrad as well. Um, but then I just stopped dating and then uh because it seemed like the dating scenes where I was was that thing where it's the middle, it's a small, I mean, Oneonta is also a small town where I went to undergrad, so everybody knew each other, so dating it's kind of like nothing is um kept secret, [Laughter]. So I just didn't date anyone. And then I moved here and then I was like wow, there are a lot of people, um, and also I was like, wow, I'm on hormones now, so I have the libido of a teenage boy, and I have the means of an adult. And that is an interesting combination, [Laughter]. Um, I started using hook-up apps, um, and the main one that I used was Grindr. Um, because uh, and my sexuality is a difficult thing to explain, um, I just like to tell people that I've played uh LGBT bingo, so I've been a lesbian, I've been bi, I've been gay, [Laughter], and [Laughter], and I'm trans. Um because I feel, and it's like this constant feeling of like, needing to fit into certain spaces, um, and identifying in certain ways. Um, so beforehand, I thought that I was just into women, and then there's a point where I was like, I was on hormones, and then it was like, I want to find people who are in the same hormonal level as me, and that happened to be men. Um I started using Grindr because it was easy. It's like how to have sex in five minutes. Um, and uh the only thing about it is like yes, there's the easiness and yes there is a certain safety in being online, so I can disclose that I'm trans right away um and I can just get that part over with. Um, of course the negative is that Grindr is—Grindr has the worst of the worst, um, it tends—if you are a cis, white, able-bodied gay man, it's great for you.

Um, if you're any other marginalized identity, it's not nearly as welcoming. Um, so my experience uh with it has been a lot of transphobia and I think I've actually gained a lot of wit. Because I've used it for a couple of years now, and I've just gotten so many like, attacks on me, um, people who, and I let people message me. I don't go after people because I'm like, I'm not trying to confuse anyone. If people want to hook up with me, then fine. I like it when people just hook up with me like they would anyone else. It's just like, it can be a very simple thing. It's just like, hey, you're hot, like let's get together. Um, but when people start being like, hey, you're trans, tell me your entire life history, tell me about your traumas, tell me about someone who you weren't really, then it gets to a point where it's like people are entitled to emotional labor that I cannot perform. Especially over and over again, oh my goodness. Um, and they expect it, and when you refuse it they get really angry. And they try to tell you that by not disclosing that information you're not doing any good for yourself or for trans people, and it's just like, oh, goodness, um, it's frustrating. So I think like the block button is my best friend. Um, and then there will be the other people who are just malicious. Um, I've just—I've had people who have threatened violence uh with me, I've had people who had told me like, um, I can't wait until Trump becomes president so like Mike Pence will make you use the women's bathroom. And it's more—it's more of a hurtful thing coming from the gay community, um, because that's a marginalized group. And yet, and yet, it's like people who are marginalized in certain ways will use those certain privileges that they have in order to retain a sense of power. And so that's what I discovered the hard way. Um, granted, there are a lot of cool people too. I'm not saying that there aren't. But the majority of my experience on Grindr has been just ignoring people, blocking people, saying no, that's like fetishizing, please don't say that. There's the occasional like straight person who wanders on there, even though they're not really straight because why are you on Grindr if you're straight, [Laughter], um, and so that's my experience on that. Um, I've also um dated uh I've had some dates on Tinder as well. Um, that's where I tend to look for just queer people in general. And um I've had a couple of relationships. Um one lasted for like six months, and that was with a cis man. And um and I thought that um sometimes the difficulty for me in dating cis men is that um I'll compare my body to theirs. And I can never win that fight. It's almost like a fight that I always lose because I'm not cis. Um, and it's really difficult to navigate queer spaces when there's still cis normativity. Um, so I'll say things like I'm not, you know, tall enough, not—I'm like too small, my hands are too small, um, and I'll kind of be too hard on myself, but not consciously. This is all done like, just through comparison. Unconscious comparison. It's just like you get a bad feeling, like I got like a bad feeling and I couldn't quite say what it was. It took me a lot of time to discover like oh, that's it, that's why I feel bad, because it's an insecurity that stems from society and expectations that I can't meet. And I'm trying to learn how to be better about that and how to um improve. Um but there were like other things about that relationship that weren't working. Um, one example being um the person who I was with tended to only date trans men, or trans masculine people, and I have questioned him about it before, and he said that um that since he had multiple marginalizations that he would like to be with somebody else who had multiple marginalizations. That made sense to me. Um, it's just like a form of bonding, I think. But the fact that he was only with trans men also I think was a little bit of a warning sign. Um, because I think that it just kind of casts us as other. Um, like you're only into one specific type of body. Um, and it's kind of strange. Um, and we had um, we had an open relationship because that um, that's how I prefer my relationships to be, because the way I see relationships and like hook-up culture,

uh, for me, it's like hooking up is like traveling, and having a relationship is like being at home. So sometimes I like to travel to other places. But when I'm with someone I love, then I feel like I'm at home. Um, and I don't feel like they're mutually exclusive. Um, and so I like, and he could do whatever he wanted too. Um, but whenever I started um hooking up with people I could never um, I could never like talk to him about it because he would say that um that he would get jealous, um, which was very strange because I kept asking him do you want an open relationship, is this what you want? And he just kept saying yes, yes, yes. But it's kind of like he was saying two different things and it got really confusing, and in the meantime he just kept hooking up with other people and that's like, not fair to me. And I guess what kind of struck me as strange is um uh last year, not this year's Trans Day of Visibility, but last year, Trans Day of Visibility is just um, it's an event that um increases awareness about uh trans people and trans rights. Um and so there tend to be a lot of trans people there. And so he went with me last year, um, but he wouldn't let me like, hold his—we had just started, we had started dating like a month ago, or maybe it was like half a month into it, um but he was like, I'm not going to hold hands with you, we're not going to have any like—it was kind of like it was looking like we weren't even together, because he said that that was his comfort level, and at the time I took it to be that and I was like, okay. Um, but I learned uh this year that he um, that he was saying that because he was telling everybody, everybody meaning my friends who are trans masculine, that he was single and so he was using that event to cruise um for other trans masculine people. And he never told me about that. Um, I had to find out from other people. And it's kind of like, that's dehumanizing. Um, you can like, you can be with whoever you want to be with, but when it gets to a point where you're not being honest with me, even though we have an open relationship and when you're only targeting a specific group of people just because, and what feels like just because it's a group of people, uh, I feel like I don't even know what to say because I'm not even given a voice anymore. I'm given an identity with certain scripts, and I'm not an individual, I'm just part of a, I'm part of a group. And I love being trans, but I don't want to be loved just for that. Um, on the upside, [Laughter], uh I'm in another relationship now, and the other uh other person is also trans, uh, trans feminine, and uh, they use the same pronouns as me, so we both use they pronouns, and um being with another trans person feels, kind of feels revolutionary. It's like we get to validate each other and each other's bodies, and I don't have the same insecurities that I would with—in my previous relationship. And they're not like, and I don't feel um, I don't feel targeted, I don't feel um I don't feel less than. It's actually really nice. Um, and I can just, I can make myself more—I can make myself vulnerable and I can be understood. Um, yeah. It kind of feels like when two trans people are in a relationship it's just, it's revolutionary.

Maya: How did you learn how to be a good partner?

Chartrand: Ohh, [Laughter], what a question. Um, because a relationship is a lot of it is about power, uh, it's a power dynamic. Um, and I know from growing up what it's like to be controlled. And I knew that I could never do what was done to me. Um, so I feel like that's a big part of it. Um another big part of it um is being in therapy, um, because I've been seeing my therapist for over a year now, and she's been really good and we kind of go over everything um and so I'm made aware of things that maybe I wouldn't have realized. Um, I like having that um third-person perspective. It's actually really nice. Um, knowing that—it's a balance. Usually in relationships I

was always the person I guess who would um who would sacrifice. Um, so I'm starting to learn how to keep it more of in an even ground, which is really uh, which I think is really good. Um, and uh realizing that like it's okay to be vulnerable. It's really hard to do that. I feel like as time goes on it's harder and harder to get in relationships. But yeah, things like—I think when I see vulnerability in people I love, that's how like I can um I guess I can trust, because it's like when I see people—I'm used to be with people who thought they were perfect, and like, now that I'm like, with people who like acknowledge that they're not, it's just like a relief. Um, yeah. Because we're taught the patterns, like we tend to, I'm just speaking on very general terms, but people tend to form relationships based on the relationships they had with their parents growing up. And since mine was always one of control, where I never had a voice, I had to unlearn that. And I'm still trying to unlearn that. Um, it makes something like hooking up really easy, [Laughter], but something like having an actual relationship really hard. But sometimes you just swipe right on Tinder, meet someone, and you have a lot in common with them, uh, and it works out really well, [Laughter]. Like for me, and people, I guess like, gosh, what would make anyone good in a relationship? I think it depends what you're looking for. Like if you're looking—like for me, I'm not, I mean, I'm looking for someone I can connect to, someone who I have like things in common with. Someone who makes me feel like my inner child is safe. Like people are so busy on like the physical characteristics, and I'm just like but who are you really? [Laughter]. Yeah. Sorry. And it's like, things like physical characteristics are really weird to me too because like apparently I'm hot, like [Laughter] I didn't know this. No, I like, and that sounds stupid, but like I grew up, because I grew up socialized female, um, and my um my older sister was conventionally beautiful. She was tan, blue eyes, um she had uh a larger chest, which guys in um middle school and high school would tell me about all the time, like I even had—okay, the one relationship I had in middle school [Laughter] uh I was told like oh, like your older sister is so hot, like I want to bang her. And I'm like, while he was in a relationship with me, and it's like oh great, like. Um, so I grew up hating my, because like, where does that leave me? I hated everything about me that I had. And I thought you know, I thought maybe I was like horribly ugly or something. I definitely wasn't the convention. Not at all. I am now, and it's really, in some ways, um, being short doesn't help, [Laughter]. And this goes back to gender, right? Because guys have to be tall, they have to take up space, and it's like I can't do that, that's not me. I'm tiny, like I'm cute, like [Laughter]. Um but even uh back before I transitioned I wasn't um conventionally, I didn't have like the conventional body. I even had, one of my exes tried to um tried to point out um that my breasts hadn't fully developed. They still looked like they were pre-puberty, and he gave me like a chart and everything. And he didn't understand what was wrong with it. And, [sighs] cis men, um, [Laughter]. Um, yeah, so I mean, having like dysphoria in that area and then being told I also couldn't perform, it was just all sorts of confusing. I don't think I can even say how that feels because it's, in some ways I took pride in it. I was like, this is good because I'm an athlete and I can perform better because of this, not realizing that like it was also affirming my gender, but then I was also like, I was being pointed out to how I was different. Um, because um growing up too I also had um, my body just naturally produced more testosterone, which also doctors didn't like. So I've had a really rocky relationship with doctors because they tried to give me um they tried to give me birth control which has estrogen in it, um and when they did that I started getting migraines and they started getting bad. Like I couldn't move my eyeballs, and I—well, the neurologist said I was going to get a stroke, so I had to go off them immediately. And even though

my endocrinologist knew that, she still wanted me to keep trying it. Uh, and so I was like nope, and I just stopped seeing her, and she kept threatening like cancer and stuff, and I was just like, I'm just going to be who I am, like I can't like, I can't live the like—I can't live like that. like I couldn't even move my eyeballs. Um, it hurt too much. I didn't realize how many muscles were in there and how many nerves were in there until it happened. But um, so that made things difficult. Um, and yeah, I feel like my body was kind of like hey, we kind of want to be more masculine, like can you just like take it a little further? Like we tried, we tried, like we gave you a little bit of a head start. Because I feel like I have um transitioning, I think there's some things I have a little bit of privilege over which would be a more, a little bit of a more muscular body, which was also me doing athletics, but I was always masculine, I mean, I was always muscular, masculine, muscular [Laughter] growing up, uh, and I used to—gosh—it would freak people out when I flexed. Uh, and I loved that. I was just like, this is my body. I'm showing off. [Laughter]. Uh, oh gosh, I think I completely lost myself [Laughter]. Um, growing up dating, um—

Maya: Body?

Chartrand: Bodies, um, and—

Maya: Oh, that you're hot.

Chartrand: Yes! Oh my God yeah, okay. See? I feel like that's how weird it is for me to acknowledge that I can't even remember what we're talking about because my mind is just like, going. But no, I want to address it because it's—apparently I'm really hot. Like people are just like, because I get a lot of like, compliments on Grindr too, um, from a lot of people. And I get compliments from people when I'm out, but in a different way. Because before I transitioned, there was catcalling, uh, and people would grab me too. And when I transitioned, people stopped going that, so it's like you get a certain safety in that. So it's like people find me attractive, but they won't violate me because they see a man and they respect that. Um, and that freaked me out when I first began transitioning because I felt like I had a safety cloak on that I didn't deserve. Um, now people are just, people will compliment me but it's always in the appropriate settings. It's never like while I'm walking out at night. I think I had one woman say something to me once, but it was one of those things where you can just laugh it off because you know you're not in danger, whereas before transitioning I always felt like I was in danger. Um, and being like, more uh conventionally attractive in a masculine way is definitely more free than being conventionally attractive in a feminine way. Um, I mean, masculinity is afforded a lot of space in sexuality. Um, it's a lot of it, a lot of it's about pleasure, and it's, I think it always just blows me away. Like I don't know, like I want to celebrate my sexuality, but I don't want it to be—I want to celebrate who I am as a trans person, but I don't want to celebrate um—I don't want to celebrate the privilege of masculinity, uh, if that makes sense. Uh I wish it more equal footing. I wish, [Laughter], yeah. Um, and people like treat me differently, I think people get more nervous around me sometimes when they like see somebody who is more conventionally attractive. I fell like people are more quiet, because I'm just saying things that—I think I'm just like word vomiting at this point [Laughter] but like, um people, I just feel like I get different looks than I used to before. Part of it, male privilege, totally. I feel like people respect me more. But then I get the like, quiet like I'm

checking you out sort of thing, and if people say how beautiful I am with the apps, or I can see them like, repressing certain things that they want to say, um, they try to like control themselves. Um, and it's, and I never really know how to respond when people try to compliment me because I like don't believe them. [Laughter]. Um, so it's still something that I'm trying to find my way around. Um, I've, I mean, I only got this beard like, six months ago? Like, it's pretty recent. I think the goatee helps, uh, if I shave it I look like I'm 14. Um, it's pretty bad. Um, when I first, God, I used to be compared to Justin Bieber all the time. Um I actually had somebody trap me in a store because they thought I was Justin Bieber's brother, and I had to like, go out, I couldn't escape. I had to like, actually go outside with them and like meet their friend and like shake their hand. And like, pretend [Laughter] because they were so convinced that everybody was just like, oh my God you're Justin Bieber, and I'm like, I would rather not be associated with this person [Laughter]. Like, that's not me. That's not me. Um, like I kind of want to be Simon [Laughter]. uh but I think that was also people's way of uh figuring out why maybe I like looked more feminine, um, and also I get called, I mean, on the streets I get called faggot like a lot because I have a more feminine look, and especially if I'm like, I like wearing lipstick, it's like so much fun, but then like on the streets it's just like people will tell you like oh, men don't wear lipstick. Like they'll tell me that on the street, or I'll get harassed and it's like, I don't feel safe right now, like I can't like, I want to look a certain way and I want to have a certain confidence, and I guess my ideal like, aesthetic would be like, facial hair and lipstick. Because it's, I don't know, it's bold, it's exciting, it's like, in your face. Um, and it feels like both masculinity and femininity and it feels like they're in harmony for me. Um, because and another thing about my transition was I never like before I transitioned could not do makeup, could not do lipstick, could not do any of that. Um, I had to find my masculinity before I could find my femininity. I had to establish one before I could establish the other. And so I guess that's what helps me feel beautiful is when I can feel a little bit of each. One or the other doesn't do it for me. Hence my they pronouns, [Laughter]. And yeah, I feel like back to like the hot thing, like being conventionally attractive, uh, it's way too easy to hook up with people. It's like I don't even have to try. But then there are other things that I recognize that's like, uh, like yeah, it's with people who are open to trans people, but there are whole other layers to it too, and I feel like I found this out through Grindr, like I think a big part of being conventionally attractive is um other than having like certain like features, I guess like more feminine facial features helps or whatever, but I think a big part of it is um having other privileges, um, so being able-bodied, um in a sense of how I look, um, because I don't look, God, like a—I hate wording it this way, but I'm like, I don't look disabled. Um, I don't, whatever that means. Um, I don't—

Maya: People don't perceive you as?

Chartrand: Yeah, like it's not something that you can tell um when you look at me as something that, it's something, well I guess it's an internal thing. I'm sorry, I'm rambling. Um, and another thing is like being white because like, in the Grindr community like there's a lot of racism. Uh, people will want, like they'll ask like specifically for like white people, or they'll be like no and then put a certain race, like I'm sure you've heard like no fats, no femmes, no Asians?

Maya: Mm-hmm.

Chartrand: Um and I just like don't understand, I like don't understand people. I'm like why are you like, why? Um, it's just, and this goes back to like the gay community having certain marginalizations so they use whatever privileges that they do have to hold power over other people. I think that's what it comes down to, just power. Um, so a lot of, I mean, this is from white gay men. Um, it is where a lot of these racial comments get made. And sometimes they'll even have it on their profiles, and then they'll message me, and then I'll be like nope. Because they're problematic, and I like, and like I can't deal with that. Like, it's like a, I don't know, it's, I'm like, I guess this reminds me um of one of my philosophy classes. So uh, I had a great philosophy professor in undergrad. Uh, he had like an 8:00am class so everybody was sleeping, but he was a very animated person. Um, and um he did like, he just did something I think that was trying to wake us up, but we were talking about, um, I forgot exactly what we were talking about. I'm not sure if it was John Stewart Mill, um, but we were talking, he was like, alright. Everybody who has um a hat on gets an A, and everybody who doesn't just like fails or doesn't get an A, just based on that. And he like looked at me, and I was like oh God, because this was back um in the beginning of my transition, um, in order to stay safe, I had, I wasn't able to cut my hair. But what I could do is I could pin it up, and I wore a beanie over it. Um, and so for me like hats were like crucial because I like needed that in order to um hide the fact that I had a lot of hair. So when he said that, like I immediately took my beanie off. I was just like, I can't. If you're saying that you're going to give an A to people who have hats on, I don't want to be part of that. Like, I'm done. Like and it was kind of like the um whatever else I may have been feeling like didn't really matter because it didn't put me on equal grounding as other people. Um, because it's such an arbitrary thing. It's completely unrelated, like, getting a good grade and wearing a hat. That's what I kind of feel what it's like—that's why it doesn't make sense to me why people have like certain, they call it "preferences," I call it racism. Because where are preferences rooted? If people aren't questioning things, it's like saying the hat and then the grade and being like well it's just a preference, I just prefer to give like people wearing hats As. Like it doesn't make any sense to me. Um, yeah. Um, and so Grindr has introduced me to a lot of things. It's introduced me to cis privilege, to white privilege, um, which I do have. So I had to realize like alright, where are my marginalizations, where are my privileges? And what does this mean, what does that mean? Um and I feel like Grindr kind of is like the ultimate test because it's like, because it is so hook-up based, like people just—it really brings out like, people are just honest, [Laughter]. They don't hold anything back. Um, for better or worse, I don't know which one to be honest, um, but I've had like a lot of conversations and I feel like I've put in a lot of emotional effort, I think I'm trying to use Grindr less because it's getting too like, it's getting too much of like, I'm educating people. It's like a job now. Um, so I think like yeah, because I mean there are like a lot of other apps, there are a lot of other like Facebook groups that are more open and accepting, um, sorry if I like, ramble on. [Laughter]. It's just so, people are messed up. I'm like, why? And I'm constantly like questioning myself too, like how am I problematic, how can I change things? Um, sometimes I'm like, sometimes I'm like, activism is simply like existing as a trans person. Um because when I went to D.C. for the Trans March with one of my friends, and we had our trans flags on, and there were a lot of cis queers there, and they were like, nice flag, what's that? And I was just like, this is the Trans flag, and you're in the LGBT community. I didn't chastise them, I was just like oh yeah, you know, you learn something new every day. But then there was like one

like it was like a, I think it was like a white cis gay man, and he like went up to my friend who was just like, nice flag, what country is that from? And I was just, I think we were just like, oh my God. Like I was thinking Transylvania, but you know? [Laughter]. And then there were like older cis white gay men who looked at some of the signs that were talking about like Marsha P. Johnson, and they were like, who's that? And I'm like, you're older and like you don't know like about this history? And I didn't like, I don't understand. Because for me, I see Stonewall as something that was started by women of color, trans women of color. You have Sylvia Rivera, you have Marsha P. Johnson, um, and then it turned into something that white cis gay men just kind of took over. And so when I see the erasure of trans women of color, it just, like, even today. Like I guess I thought people were more knowledgeable, but—or at least people who lived during that time would be more knowledgeable, but then they weren't. It's, and it's just like always a shock to me. I'm just like, my heart, like, [Laughter], um, because you need to, I mean, you can't just, [Laughter]. Sorry I'm like, where are the words? If someone starts a movement you kind of need to give them the credit for it, [Laughter]. Like it's just a really basic thing. Um, [Laughter]. And, I mean like whitewashing is everywhere and it's like, and seeing it go into the queer community as well is just absolutely heartbreaking. Absolutely. Um, so I think I just get mad and I just like yell at people. [Laughter]. Um, I'm a little more cynical. No, I don't yell all the time. I think I have to keep a certain like, like I have to stay a certain like, emotional—I have to be emotionally detached, because then if I'm too angry people won't take me seriously. Which is also different um like um because if like I'm just like arguing about race as a white person to somebody who is racist, they'll just be like oh you're wrong. But if I'm arguing about something like uh transness, as a trans person, to someone who is cis, they'll be like, oh, and then they'll think like I'm that angry trans person or like, then they don't have to take me seriously. So I feel like when you're arguing about something that directly affects you as a marginalized person, you tend to not be taken as seriously as opposed to when you're in the more privileged group. Um, which also doesn't make sense to me because I'm like, if somebody tells you that you hurt them, you don't get to say that you didn't. [Laughter]. Um, yeah. I just, and that's um, and I guess that kind of also came from my upbringing too where I like, where I felt like I was being controlled and I felt like I was being hurt, but then like my parents would be like no, you're not. No you're not. And then it's like as a kid you're just like, these are my parents. If they say I'm not hurt, then I'm not hurt. But then you still are, and it's really confusing and it's like what do you do? And it's so, [sighs], so yeah. My understanding of the world comes from how I was brought up, and I feel like my parents did the best that they could. Like I don't want to be like, it's not all hate, it's about all like, I wish I never knew that, like it's just there is a lot they didn't know and instead of choosing to ask me they chose to erase me. And I know what that feels like, and I can't do that to other people. Um, [Laughter], great, now I'm like going to tear up. [Laughter]. That's not masculine, [Laughter]. Um, that's actually one of the things on testosterone that hasn't, uh, like testosterone hasn't impacted my ability to cry, and um and that's also interesting because um in like ancient Greece for example, like crying was seen as like, you have so much emotion that you're just outpouring and it seems like very masculine whereas like now it's like, men can't cry. So whenever I cry like, to myself I can do it, I do all the time, but in public there's that added layer of like, of like I can't do this because I'm going to like people are going to like look down on me, nobody is going to be like oh, are you okay? They're going to be like toughen up. And it's like I can't do that, that's not me. There are so many things about toxic masculinity where I'm just like I can't do that, that's

not me. I can't do that, that's not me. [Laughter]. Um, like the way I like kept my masculinity growing up was through sports. Um, I think there were like, toxic ways I managed it too which was by being immature, but I can't be too hard on myself, it was high school. [Laughter]. I learned. Um, but yeah, I see like—and one thing that I wish like, one thing that confuses me is when um other trans masculine people are toxic, when they're like misogynist, when they're trans misogynist, because I'm just like, you actually had the socialization of somebody who was less privileged, and yet you're going to do exactly that to people who have that similar, less privileged, who are seen that way. And I don't—I mean, maybe it's a way of giving, I mean, I feel like this all comes back to power, um, and this is just how they're going to give themselves power. Even at the expense of denying what they had previous, might have, I can't say for sure, but what they might have previously experienced. Even at the sense of deleting themselves and a piece of their lives, they'll harm people. Harming themselves is a way for them to gain power, which makes no sense. It makes no sense. I feel like I'm like the worst grad student because it's like the more I know the more I don't know. And everything is just confusing, and I'm like I'm sorry, like. Uh, I'm sorry, like people confuse me. Like I can study psychoanalysis, but people confuse me. [Laughter]. I can study literature but people confuse me. [Laughter]. [Sighs], yeah. I mean, I can try to, I can have the sort of like theoretical distance, but uh but emotionally it's all just very confusing. And yeah, um, more time goes on, the more I just, I feel like the more my anxiety goes up because I just realize how much I don't know about. Because when you transition, you're figuring out like, at first I was like oh, like, I get it now, like I know how like, women and men work. Like, I've been on both sides. And then it's like, as more time goes on, it's like, I don't know anything. [Laughter]. Gender is a lie, [Laughter]. Um, and gender like was a lie so that people could uh delegate certain forms of labor um but I don't want to get theoretically distant [Laughter] like um I don't want to use too much theory. I already do that enough. I want to do, uh, this is a lived experience. And that's just it. I can keep talking about theory and keep trying to come up with and keep citing other people, but uh but they don't speak for me. Um, gosh, there's just so much to it, and there's just [sighs] there's—I think like the younger generations of trans people might have like a little bit of an easier time depending on how things go. Um, yeah. [Laughter]. Uh, but it seems like there's more awareness. Um, which helps. But I don't know. All I know is that like, as a whole, uh, trans people are just like family. There are family members I love, there are family members I'd rather avoid, [Laughter], but they're family. I guess it was really hard for me um coming out as trans because it's like you lose so much. I lost, and when I talk about loss there's certain loss, which is like I don't have any nerve endings on the left side of my tongue and I feel chronic pain there, that's a loss. Uh, and then there's ambiguous loss, which is none of my family members are dead, but they all feel like they're dead because I've been—I feel like I've been betrayed by them in one way or another, and I feel like I'm not able to have deep conversations with them, and then I get blamed for it. So I feel like I had to have all these forms of loss and somehow I had to, somehow I had to go into a PhD program which is already challenging enough in itself, um, it's extremely demanding, um, which like, which I like because like in undergrad I was that student who took seven courses [Laughter] and I was on the track team and I had a job and I was applying for grad school. I could do all that. Um, but then once I started transitioning and I started feeling loss and grief, it's kind of like my ability to perform started, it went away, and I wasn't able to do as many of the things as I used to, and I started blaming myself for it and I started like, I thought it was just because I was just like dumb or lazy. I kept telling myself I was lazy, which doesn't help,

um, but I think a lot of it is really just grieving. There's a lot of, which is difficult because academia is a very competitive field, um, and it's like people can talk about a lot of theory, but a lot of people haven't experienced a lot of the things that I've experienced um, and so it's difficult to connect. I feel like a lot of what I need in my life is connection. And people try to connect with theory. But then when they do that, it turns into an intellectual defense. It's really just a defense mechanism, intellectual defense. Not all theory. That's not what I'm saying. But I feel like when we talk about something like trans theory for example there are ways to educate um which are good, but then there are ways that it gets used so people feel like they know everything and they don't have to try to see the person for who they are or for what their struggles are. Um, and I'm trying to be lighter on myself. I'm trying to be like, I made it this far, it's just hard to see sometimes because I'm so hard on myself for not doing as much as I used to. And I suffer from a lot of anxiety because I mean everything that I've experienced with transition has happened just over the past few years and it's very overwhelming. It's a lot. And I don't think cis people realize how much it is. And I wish they knew. And I wish trans people were accelerated more. Um, yeah. I wish people were nicer. [Laughter]. It's like such a simple thing. I wish people just didn't assume. Um, I wish people asked themselves questions in their head and how they would take it before asking trans people questions. Um, I get it. We're different, but we all, we function with similar uh emotions. Um, I feel like I'm going to like go into that like Shylock speech, like if you prick us do we not bleed? [Laughter]. But um, it just, it always [sighs] I just wish people uh—I guess yeah, no, I just wish people didn't assume things. Um, and I also feel like I'm too hard on myself, too. Um, and maybe I should be a little lighter. But that's why I'm in therapy to try to do that. Um, my therapist is awesome, because like psychoanalysis in itself when we talk about it, I mean, a lot of it is like, cis white men. [Laughter]. That's the majority of theory. Um, and so um so some of the things that are difficult in therapy is navigating it as a trans person, and um for my therapist, um, because she's a person of color, and so navigating that as well. [Laughter]. Um, and like, and I feel like there are a lot of questions that we just don't have answers to because they just haven't been given yet. Will there be answers? I have no idea. I'm not a psychoanalyst. It's not my field. I study a little bit, but it's not like, my expertise. Um, but I'm glad that at least like a lot of uh questions of identity and privilege um are being brought to the forefront so at least we can have conversations like these. Um, not to, I mean not to say but like that's the entire basis of therapy, but just that it's a part and it's there and you can't have the whole without the part. It's not that the part defines the whole. It's just that um one of my uh, I guess when I was coming out, one of my friends kind of put it uh this way, that he's like your identity is an ecosystem, and if one part of it uh, if one part of it dies off, then so does the rest. I feel like I could talk forever. [Laughter].

Maya: I think that's a good quality.

Chartrand: Because I just like I get started and I roll and I roll and I roll. [Laughter].

Maya: You can keep rolling, it's good. It's good.

Chartrand: Yeah. Um, but I guess the nice part about, at least about studying literature is that even with the sort of distance, um, I am starting to see how um people try and connect uh and how people deal with certain um deal with certain marginalizations in their life, um, I feel like

that's, you know, literature is about the human experience and what does it mean to be human? Uh, humanities. Uh, [Laughter]. And at least like the nice part about theory is that now that, and what I get to do as a trans person and what's fun for me is um is the gender theory, is the queer theory, because it's um I'm trying to, well I'm just trying to understand people throughout time. And because people have different frameworks of knowledge based on when they lived, um, it's incredibly difficult. So all we can do is theorize but at the same time there's not nothing. There are a lot of things. There's always something new to find. Um, and that's just what I'm trying to do, and I like what I study because it's also like if anybody is like oh trans is this new thing I'm just like, I mean the term itself was invented in like the 50s by John Money, but um but if you look at gender non-conformity, which is a term that I like to use because it's not an identity, but it's um it's actions. Um, you can find that just about anywhere. Um, including uh, including the 13th century, [Laughter]. Um, and yeah, so that's why um that's why when you see like you see this um old French um this old French, I'm trying to figure out how to word it, um, I'm just going to say uh text um which is uh, it's called Silence. Uh, the French title would just be Le'homme du silence. Um, that's when you have uh a lot of conversation um around um around somebody who was assigned female at birth, was raised as male in order to inherit, and you have nature and nurture in there acting as an allegorical dialectic, and so they're constantly uh against each other. And when you see that kind of tension going on um and is um trying to figure out how to word it, um, when you see that kind of tension going on and in a 13th century text, and when you see somebody who is trying to navigate life like that, um, you feel a connection to that person, [Laughter], because I know what that's like. Um the ending is much different than uh than something that I could ever relate to, but that also, that's also because it's a product of its time. And what do we mean when something is a product of its time/ I feel like that's also a very uh general statement. Um, but what I'm trying to get at is that um there's a lot of uh gender non-conformity, um, and some people talk about like the gender binary and everything and they just like assume um there's a lot that people aren't um there's a lot that people aren't open to. Um, I'm trying to remember this quote by Leslie Feinberg, um, gender is the poetry that each of us is taught uh, gender is the poetry that—I'm sorry, I'm going to try to—I'm trying to like, memorize. Gender is the poetry that we write based on the words that we were taught. Yeah. And so it's—gender is poetic. It's not, I mean, I'm like, oh, people think gender is science? Really? I think it's poetry. Um, or people equate gender to genitals and I'm like, actually gender is more like fingerprints. You want to attribute it to a body part? We're going to go with fingerprints, because nobody has the same fingerprints. Nobody has the exact same gender. I'm sorry if that confuses you, but it's not simple and it's not meant to be simple. [Sighs] [Laughter]. Yeah. [Laughter]. I'm like, I don't know what to say now.

Maya: [Inaudible].

Chartrand: Um, yeah. I guess I just always laugh when I see people who like try to argue against trans people because it's like the same arguments every time and I'm like, I'm like been here done that. [Laughter]. Like, I love like the image of like, uh, trans people trying to explain gender to cis people, and you see like Plato and they're like—and uh and then you see, on the other side it's like, or trans people explaining trans people to trans people, talking about trans people and then you see like the philosophers, and then you see trans people trying to explain gender to cis

people and you see the parent with the child and the child has like this toy truck or something. It's just like, it kind of feels like that and I don't mean to infantilize cis people but I just mean to say that it's just a level of understanding that maybe cis people haven't grown into yet. Maybe it will be easier to understand with time, maybe as there's more exposure. I don't know. I mean, at the same time you look at like something like misogyny, which there are plenty of women around and that's still a thing, so [Laughter], so what can you do? I mean, if the answer were simple we wouldn't be here, right? Um, I'm going to just try to relate to people and to know that it's okay to be imperfect, and that um because I think everybody is like, we must all like, I think people stumble when they try to learn, and I think it's okay to stumble um as long as you're learning. Um, not to assume things, if uh just to treat people the way you want to be treated. Wow. [Laughter]. I feel like it always comes back to that. Um, ugh. [Laughter]. And I always get, sometimes I get scared too because I'm like, what interview there's like, because this is where the discourse is at now but it's like what if like in the future there's like a group of people or some sort of topic that's like marginalized and we have no idea about it right now and I'm like woah. And sometimes it like scares me, but um I try to just—so that's what I'm also like alright, like, I'm just going to keep, I mean I feel like the main formula is just to keep uh letting people defend themselves in their own terms, and to [sighs] and to not assume anything. And just don't be mean. [Laughter]. It's kind of nice to watch people grow. I like watching people grow on their own terms, because it's like they just, it's just beautiful to watch. They become themselves. I mean, isn't that what life's about? Watching people grow? That's all we can do. Like, isn't that what we're supposed to do as people? Like we have a lot of differences and we have to recognize them. We have to recognize them and we have to try to understand each other, and I feel like, I mean, it's a strength in numbers thing. If we all, if we could all just get along better, uh, it just feels like a lot more could be done. I feel like people perform better when they're um when they're seen. I think I like, [Laughter], I just remembered this, it's like so random, um, when I was like first coming out as trans and stuff, I went to um, Janet Mock was giving a talk about Colgate University um and I went to go see her and of course she just looks like she's like a goddess because she's Janet Mock, [Laughter], and uh I remember her like talking and then like at the end she was signing like autographs for her book and stuff, and I was just like hey, and I was like, I read your—and she like, during her talk she was like one thing that's weird to me is when people say that they've read their book in class, and of course that's what I told her. I was just like, I read your book in class, like it was really great, and then I was like, I'm going to be studying like literature and gender like non-conformity and I think, and sometimes I'm afraid that like I scare people because I think she's like—I'm like no, like, I admire you, like please like [Laughter] um but that was also kind of cool because it was just like seeing someone um who is celebrated for being herself. Um, uh, what else? I feel like when I read her book there were like a lot of things that applied to me but in the reverse, so sometimes it's like the little details that get you. Like uh when she was uh, when she wrote about like uh wanting to play the flute, because that was always seen as feminine. Like that's like exactly why I didn't want to play that in elementary school because that was like feminine and I wanted to play saxophone because I was like yeah, that's masculine. [Laughter]. I got afraid when um when people said my name. Uh because my name wasn't uh, they usually sing a Beatles song because my name was in one of them. And I got afraid because I didn't know who they were talking to. Um, yeah. I feel like as trans people we just get so much misrecognition, even before transitioning. Um, and so when I say being seen,

like, being seen like it's—there's so many layers to being seen. I mean, there's the obvious physical, then there's something like a name, then there are things that are material like clothing, then there are things that are psychic like how you feel inside. How do you see someone is a very deep question. I think that's the end of my ramble, [Laughter].

Maya: Thank you. Um. You said a lot of really good stuff. Um—

Chartrand: So giving as much material as you uh as you want to have.

Maya: No, absolutely. No, absolutely. Um, yeah. You touched on a lot of really great stuff. Um, a lot of the things I have not even thought of. So thank you for that. um.

Chartrand: I could talk about this all day. [Laughter].

Maya: No, it's good, it's good. I think I have a question that cycles back like a bit ago. But I was wondering, you talked about like vulnerability and the idea of growth, and I was wondering if you could talk about, well, how do you encourage vulnerability in others and yourself in this really turbulent period of I feel like both American and international history that we both have been in for a bit and more recently feel like we are like rapidly spiraling down into?

Chartrand: Well, when you look at power dynamics, there are the privileged people up top and then the people with less privilege more at the bottom. And when you try to um bring up people are marginalized so that they're in equal setting, the people who have privilege tend to get scared and so they'll heighten themselves more. And so that's why I think there's so much backlash, because they're like oh no, like people who are marginalized are starting to gain more equal footing, so we need to re-gain our power and so we're going to be even worse, um, and I think like when we talk about vulnerability, a lot of it has to do with time, with place, and with audience. Um, so that's the time where at right now is we're seeing the pushback. The place matters. I mean, obviously the conversations we have in New York City are going to be much different than conversations that people have um in Texas where is that bathroom bill. Yeah. Um, conversations we have in America where there is the military ban is much different than Canada which kind of mocked us. And I was like, [Laughter]. Um, but um so you need to be—it's hard to know when you can be vulnerable. Um, is there a good time to be vulnerable? Probably not, or else it wouldn't be called vulnerability. Um, the place tends to be more um I feel more, usually more in like a one on one person setting, more intimate setting, or maybe three people or something like that. It can really be with anyone. Um, and it tends to be in a place that uh that you trust more. Um, and with people, audience, well, that goes to the people you trust more. Uh, there are ways to connect consciously to like test people to be like what do you think of this issue, what do you think of that issue? And then there are ways to connect, I think, with body language. There are ways to—and sometimes you just get a feeling and I feel like there's an unconscious like connection. Um, and uh I uh I feel like that happens in um in therapy a lot, because when you're one on one with someone, you tend to figure out things that they never told you about. Like I've had friends who've like figured out the names of like, their therapist's parents. Like not even trying to. They didn't look anything up. They just like, they just like had—there was just one

moment where they were just like, what do these names mean? Therapist was like, that's my parents. And it's like, wow, I mean, wow. [Laughter]. Um, so there are—[Laughter]. Um, speaking of connection, um, my mom does a thing where she likes to call me, um—

Maya: If you need to pick up, you can. I can pause it.

Chartrand: No. Oh, no, no, no. I don't pick up. She um, let me see if she wanted me this time. This is all back to the power play that I was talking about. Um, I wish she would just text me or be like hey, can I call? Instead of just, um, so going back to your um tattoo thing. Um, that we discussed maybe bringing up. Uh my mom recently found out that I have a tattoo, uh, and um [sighs] because I usually try to cover it. It's on my chest. And I usually try to cover it. Um, but there was one day where my sister saw it and she said nice tattoo and then my mom heard. Um, my family is very like anti-tattoos. Like growing up they told me like that tattoos were for scumbags, uh, their words. Um, and here I am. Um, and what I'm trying to navigate now is um she likes to ask me a lot of questions, and I feel like navigating this is, it's different from navigating being trans, um, but there are certain similarities, um, and I feel like where she keeps asking like, did you get this? Did you get this? And then what is it, what is it, what does it mean? And I realized that with my transness I tried explaining it to her, but she didn't listen. So with my tattoo I decided not to explain to her, what it was, what it meant to me. Um, and she asked why do you have to keep this secret from me, because I just ended up not responding. Because I didn't know what to say. And she wouldn't stop texting me, and since she kept doing it, I told her um I said you're asking a question you already know the answer to, do you have a tattoo? Um, and I prefer to talk about other things. Um, I'm not going to talk about what I don't feel comfortable to talk to you about. And that actually um, that actually worked. Um, my therapist would say um that the relationship between my mom and me is um from um just from like a psychology standpoint um is that of a narcissist and co-dependent. Um, and so the thing about um narcissists in general uh this is a very general thing, is that they don't know boundaries. And so they keep asking and asking and asking and asking, all sorts of invasive questions. And so back when I was beginning to transition, I didn't know how to defend myself and how to set up those boundaries. And now without my tattoo I know better, and that's why I'm like, I don't want to answer those questions, I want to talk about something else, because I don't feel comfortable. It's not about keeping secrets, it's just not something that I want to talk about with you. Um, I don't talk about much of my life with her and I wish I could. I really do. It's not like I want to hide. She'll tell me oh if you want to hide it means you're doing something wrong. And the way that I think about it is like no like I'm hiding from you because who I am is wrong to you, because I tried telling you. I've tried my whole life. And you didn't want to listen. I wish she did. I would do anything. But I don't have the same relationship I don't think as a lot of other people do to their mothers. Um, I think that's why I'm in therapy. Um, there's a really good book um by Alice Miller, uh, the Drama of the Gifted Child. Um, I recommend it. Um, it has like some, I think like the end of it is really strange and not great but like the first half of it is really good. Um, and like one of the metaphors used in it was one that um like an anonymous patient had to use, and it's like when you're growing up with someone who is controlling and I don't think you have to just apply this to a narcissistic parent but to anyone who is in a position of power, um, is that um, growing up, it's like I grew up in a glass house where my mother could see everything. And I had to bury my true self underground in

order to protect it. But the thing about burying it is that you can't see it yourself either. And that's what it's like. A lot of this has just been trying to figure out who I am, what does it all mean, [Laughter]. Um, and being okay with not knowing too is something that was very difficult, especially since I like to research. But that's why I keep listening to people. Because everybody has something to contribute to ways of knowing. Because I don't have all of the answers. I don't have most of the answers, I don't even think I have some of the answers, [Laughter], uh I think that I'm just trying to survive and I think I've learned a lot of important lessons that I can try to tell other people, and that's about it. I'm trying to dig up the true self so that I can see it, because the house has changed. It's no longer glass. The thing that's really nice about my grad program is that um is that I'm funded, so I'm able to be financially independent because um because I'm trying to not rely financially on my family. Um, a scary thought: when I was outed as trans, my mom wanted me to see a Christian therapist, and it had to be Christian. And so for me, that seems like conversion therapy. But I was going to grad school, so she couldn't force me to do that, and I couldn't even imagine for me what that would be like for people who do have to go. Yeah. She's called me a murderer. She's told me I was going to die, if not today than one day from testosterone. If I got angry she would say it's because of the testosterone. She's said a lot of really hurtful things I think without thinking about my autonomy. Being trans is a part of being who I really am. I think being trans highlights vulnerability because you're changing something that's very visible. I mean, your name, your pronouns, um, for people who do want to change those. Um, there are people who want to change hormones, that change appearance, a lot of it is a change. And it's hard enough for like us to like bear it ourselves. So when family can't bear it, well, all we can do is just keep moving forward. And look for what we do have. I feel like a lot of my life over the past two years has just drastically changed just in terms of gender, in terms of um, I moved like five different times, I've had like, I haven't had a week where like I didn't have a place, like I was just crashing with my friends because I was trying to get away from an abusive person. I've had people turn on me, I've had a lot of things happen. I've had violence against me. Um, I've had sexual violence, I've had—I've experienced a lot, and so a lot gets confused and it makes it really difficult to be vulnerable because it's like well that's where vulnerability got me. But I'm never going to stop because I still believe in people. And some really great things have come out of it too, some really great people have come out of it. Being trans highlighted a lot of problems I would have had with my family even without transitioning. But it really like brought it home that it wasn't okay for me to be vulnerable about who I was. And that's necessary for life to be vulnerable about who you are, because you can't live without that. And so that's why I try to find other people who I can do that to and they can do that to me. Because that's like, that's all we have. Like, and it took me uh, I tried to deny that for years. I was like no, I don't have to be like this, I can take anything, [Laughter]. Part of me is like, alright, was that like a masculinity thing or is that like [Laughter] uh a vulnerable thing? Because masculinity is fragile. Um, and it might be a little bit of both. Maybe. A little bit of both. Yeah. And I'm very open with like talking about these things because if I weren't and if I just bottled them and nothing would be, nothing would change. Like do I expect my parents to change? No, I do not. I expect me to change though. I'm still changing a lot, and it's really scary and it's overwhelming, especially with all the work that I have to do, and sometimes I don't do as much as I should and I blame myself for it. And I'm trying to tell myself like you just like, you're just going to make it. Like, I don't know how you're going to make it through this program, but there's some really cool people in it who are supportive of

you and you just, and that's how. And you just have to trust that if they see something in you, that maybe there is something. I never thought of myself as smart. I thought of myself as dumb growing up. So to be here is actually really, [Laughter], strange. But here I am. And maybe with all the lessons I've learned over the years and with everything that's been thrown at me, maybe I have something to contribute. And I figure like once I teach and I have like students, I'll be able to teach them and like when it comes to time when like a student needs like a mentor that I could actually like help them and help them believe in themselves, and help them learn that where they, that who they are is whoever they want to be. Where they come from doesn't dictate where they're going. Or maybe it does a little bit. Either way is fine. I want to give what I was given in undergrad and in grad. I just want people to value themselves, and that's why I want to teach. Because I want to teach people. I want to give them knowledge. [Laughter]. I also come from a family of teachers, but they were high school teachers. Um, I'm teaching college. Different level, but I feel like it's a similar thing. Because it's really easy for there to be professors who are just detached from all of their students, and then it's like what gets done? Like you're here for the students. So I want to be there. I want to be that cool professor. Yeah. [Laughter]. Uh, yeah. Just someone students feel comfortable that they can talk to. And that they can ask questions and that they can engage in learning. Because if you're not there as yourself, then you're not there. I kind of learned that lesson myself my uh, when my older sister got married um, there was a whole thing about me wearing a dress. And I knew I couldn't. like I just knew that if I did I would just like die. Um, and I tried telling them that if I couldn't be there as me then I can't be there at all. In the end I was able to wear what I wanted to wear, but when they have like name placeholders, they had my like old name. I wasn't respected at all. I was just stared at, I was a spectacle. I know what it's like to be a spectacle, and it sucks. All your family members just staring at you wondering who you are. If they can even hold a conversation with you. You're more of a zoo than anything. And I can't do that to other people. I was, yeah. Yeah, I knew I couldn't do that to other people. I'm trying to learn to have more like faith in myself because I grew up under these circumstances and I didn't turn out like them. It's kind of like from the start I knew better and I don't know why. At this point it's just repair and repair and repair and finding myself. It's a lot of repair. Repair and creation because this whole movement, I mean I think that's why I'm being so vulnerable, timing is a thing, I mean, this is like we're in the middle of like some sort of movement where we weren't as visible before. We existed before we just weren't as visible and now we are. And so I thought hey, why not add a perspective?

Maya: Do you want to take a second?

Chartrand: Sure. [Audio pauses]. I guess like what would be really cool for me would be to know that like, there's like some younger like person out there who is maybe questioning their gender identity or something or they're trans and like they don't know, like, if they can do it, and then like they can hear someone like me who like made it but also have no idea how. [Laughter]. Like I really don't know. I feel like it's a struggle sometimes. Um, but if they can at least hear that and know that it's possible that maybe they know that they can make it too.

Maya: Um, what is one thing you would like someone to know about you in order to have the best chance of understanding you?

Chartrand: What a question. [Laughter]. One thing. Um, [sighs]. One thing. Um, I'm just trying to do what anybody else is doing. Uh, exist. But I'm trying to exist on my own terms. And it's really difficult for me to do that but I'm trying.

Maya: What is one hope you have for the future?

Chartrand: Um, let's see, [Laughter], I hope [sighs], I don't want to say I'm hopeless.

Maya: [Laughter].

Chartrand: I just, oh my God I can't believe I'm about to say this. Um, [Laughter], sorry. I'm going to say what um what my therapist tells me sometimes, because she's like, I don't believe in hope.

Maya: [Laughter].

Chartrand: I remember like the first time she told me that, I was like, oh! She just like laughed and she's like, I know. I um [sighs] I don't think I have any hopes because I think that they would turn—I think because it's places a certain investment into the future when I really just don't know how it's going to turn out. I feel like all I can do right now is um figure myself out better and connect to people. I feel like that's all I can really do. Um, and what will happen in the future is what will happen in the future. Um, I uh I'm not um, I'm not sure how it's going to go. I mean, again, we felt like we were gaining more rights, but then the whole presidency happened. [Laughter]. Um, to put it lightly. Um, I uh I don't know. I don't hope for anything in the future. Um, if I were to have a hope it would be for our hope in the present. That people, that more people will come to realize that who they are is okay. And that as trans people that we are worthy of love, that we are worthy of respect, in that every horrible thing you feel about your body is not your fault. That was put upon you by society. And you have the right to exist exactly as you are. If there's something that you can change that you want to change, that's great. If there's something that you can't change, that's great too. Um, I used to just, I still do it just, uh, be really hard about myself and like my relation to my body and my place in life, and uh and I can't change those things. Um, I mean like place in life like yes, but um but I can't change where I was from. Um, and so it's okay to struggle. It's okay to struggle. Um, even if the celebration isn't there yet, um, it will be there, with support. Um, I hope that people realize that they're not alone. That there are others like them. That we're all different but we all have connections. Um, and that there's just—there's no wrong way to have a body. There's no wrong way. Because if there were a wrong way, it wouldn't exist. And here we are.

Maya: Checkmate. [Laughter].

Chartrand: [Laughter]. That's what I love about like, intolerant people. Because they're like, you don't exist. And I'm like, here I am. Like. Um, yeah. You can't really like deny that. Um.

Maya: Yeah.

Chartrand: That's uh and it's okay to be broken. I hope people realize that too. It's okay to not know. It's okay to be both. It's okay to celebrate and to not know and to be broken, it's okay to— there are just nuances. I mean we experience people in multitudes so why not experience ourselves in multitudes.

Maya: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Chartrand: [Sighs]. Um well for my trans family, I love you. Um, and for uh for cis people, um, you can love us too. Please do. [Laughter]. Um, but on our own terms.

Maya: Yeah. Thank you so much.

Chartrand: Thank you.