

NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

B HAWKS SNIPES

Interviewer: Michelle Esther O'Brien

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Michelle O'Brien: Hello, my name is Michelle O'Brien and I will be having a conversation with B Hawk Snipes for the New York City Trans Oral History Project in collaboration with the New York Public Library's community oral history project. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans identifying people. It is March 28th, 2019 and this is being recording at the New York Public Library's mid-town Manhattan offices. How are you doing today?

B Hawk Snipes: I'm doing good

O'Brien: Yeah

Snipes: How are you Michelle?

O'Brien: I'm doing very well

Snipes: Awesome [Laughter]

O'Brien: Lets start off and just have you introduce yourself.

Snipes: Well I am B Hawk Snipes and I am 30 years of age and fabulous, may I add. Um and I'm just out here doing the work and living my life the best way I know fit.

O'Brien: And you told me on the way up here that you are a native New Yorker?

Snipes: Yes, and I am a native New Yorker I am from the Bronx, New York born and raised. Technically born in New York city in upper Manhattan and then raised in the Bronx. So I'm like 50% Bronx 50% city. So um yeah it has been quite an amazing experience kind of seeing how New York has changed.

O'Brien: Where up in the Bronx did you grow up?

Snipes: I grew up on Kingsbridge Road so that's a little bit right off the Fordham Road for everyone who doesn't know where Kingsbridge is [laughter] I'm up there but you know we make it work.

O'Brien: We're doing a bunch of Stonewall 50 events at the Bronx Library Center not far from there...

Snipes: Yes

O'Brien: And a couple of them are really exciting...

Snipes: Yeah

O'Brien: So you should check those out.

Snipes: I'm super excited about the different projects that are coming into the Bronx. You know growing up all we had were Yankee Stadium and the zoo and you know some parks to go to so I always had to migrate to the city in order to have a little more fun so I'm excited to see the different opportunities and artistic directions that are coming into the Bronx.

O'Brien: Tell me about what your neighborhood was like when you were growing up.

Snipes: Well growing up I—I grew up on Kingsbridge Rd. area and for some time I had to—I went back and forth between the Marble Hill Projects where my grandmother had lived and home because my dad was an alcoholic and super abusive so we had to go back and forth and try and get away from that as much as we could. But it wasn't the easiest thing growing up kind of representing as a black and more feminine cis-male. Um so that was really, really tough and trying to find out who I was and what I identified with. You know all these questions that are going on in my head and I think with growing up in a predominately black family those questions weren't asked. We didn't talk about sexuality. We didn't even talk about sex at all. I never had [laughter] the sex talk with my parents. So we didn't talk about much besides homework and homework I think that was pretty much it. And then you know my mother like put me into like different art dance classes and things of that nature. Just for me to get away from hanging out in the streets and getting into trouble a lot because she knew that for some odd reason I was this crazy creative child and she knew, she was like 'I have to do something with you as far as being an artist goes' and it's funny—this is just a random thought that came into my head—I went back and saw photos of me and as a baby and she would dress me up in predominantly what some may know as female clothing, dresses and barrettes and things of that nature. I was probably had to be like one, maybe and I find it so weird that she did that. Not because it is a weird thing to do but for the household that I grew up in it was just like, 'What is happening here?' And she was like, 'Well I wanted all girls and you know I got you and I just figured, why not?' And I just think sometimes sometimes parents just know. They just know their child and even though we have never really spoken about it—I still have a hard speaking with my mom about what I identify as and things of that nature—but I just know that we have this connection that we even if we don't communicate about it we kinda just, you know, she just figures it out in her own little creative, sarcastic way. So, yeah growing up it was definitely tough especially in the Marble Hill Projects as well um you know, trying to express myself, going to a predominately catholic school. And knowing that I didn't I couldn't connect and I didn't relate to the catholic religion as well and then my sexuality...it was a lot going on so kind of just I hid it with sarcasm and jokes and being an artist and an entertainer and I think that's how I kind of just stuck with my love for art so all that was held within and I just had to express myself somehow and I think through the art world that's how I got it out.

O'Brien: Can you say the name of the Projects that your Grandmother lived?

Snipes: Oh, Marble Hill Projects.

O'Brien: Marble...

Snipes: Marble Hill, yeah Marble Hill.

O'Brien: I know the Projects in Brooklyn, but not in the Bronx.

Snipes: Yeah it right up it's uptown it's on like 231st I believe it's up there. It's like right in between the like end end of like Washington heights and the Bronx so. It was quiet interesting growing up in there. We had a baby sitter and you know, I saw a lot of crazy things. But I think growing up in the projects taught me to be humble; it taught me to be a stronger person. Um I think that when you're growing up in certain environments where you know a lot of people are just trying to survive and they don't have the resources that they need to do better for themselves or they don't know how to. My mother—you know she she you know we weren't like super duper poor but we definitely didn't have a lot of money. We kind of right in-between of that middle class state and you know—she was like, 'Listen, you know I'm gonna give you as much as I can and teach you as much as I know but just know that you have to rise up from this. Just know that you have to want to do better for yourself and do better for not just yourself for but for others as well.' And I always kept that in my head in the back of my head and that is what I still do today.

O'Brien: How did your family pay the bills? Do you know what kind of work your mom was doing when you were young?

Snipes: Well she still does...she's involved with dividends um so its a lot of stuff to do with stocks and money and things of that nature she at that time she worked for um JP Morgan Chase that have transferred over to some other company. I have no idea what the name is [Laughter] but she was working for them at the time and that was the only job that she had it was very, you know, still a very great paying job. My dad is now a retired police officer so he was working for the NYPD so that was also interesting growing up having a dad that was a cop and you know he had went trough some issues with that as well, some mental issues because you know at one point he was...I would say he was bothering a homeless person on the train which a lot of NYPD officers do at times um and the the homeless person had stabbed him and it was all over the news and in the newspapers. Luckily my dad is still alive to this day but he does suffer from alcoholism and a lot of mental issues and I don't know if it was because of that but I know that it didn't help, necessarily. So now that know that he is retired it's been quite an interesting um journey with him. Because we've been in and out of rehab with him about four times I think when I was younger and it just...he just wasn't catching on. There would be times that he would stop but he would just keep going back. So I think my mother really had to work over time. She had to get us a babysitter which luckily was...in the apartment right next door to my grandma's in the Projects. So you know, we had we had a really great um loving environment surrounding us and a lot of really great people protecting not just me but my sister as well. I have a younger sister [laughter] by three years. I don't communicate with her as much as I should but we have our own little issues as most siblings do. You know, it happens. But I think with, you know, my mother kind of being in a way a single parent my dad wasn't around a lot and if he was you didn't know what was going to happen next with him. You did know in your head you'd be like, 'Is he drunk? Has he been drinking today?' You know, 'Is he going to do something that is going to like upset my mother? Are they going to get at it?' My mother, you know, she's a Gemini, she's feisty, she's for

Harlem [laughter] and she doesn't...she likes to fire back and you know and it was it was really, really tough kinda growing up in that kind of environment but we had we definitely had more love than hate for sure in that whole situation. But yeah, my mother had to do a lot of a lot of work and a lot of hours to pay the bills but she did it with the help of my grandmother, my uncle, my grandfather at the time who was alive at that time. They really helped us out a lot and also my babysitter at that time too. She didn't she didn't charge my mother a lot and you know she took care of us most of the time and she fed us and it was it was great.

O'Brien: Do you know anything about what it was like for your mom to be a black woman working in finance?

Snipes: I don't [laughter]. Until I grew up later and she told me like, 'You know what's hard?' And I'm just like, 'What? What's hard?' I'm like, 'What's wrong? What's happening?' And she would just tell me, she was like, you know...she wouldn't necessarily talk about—my mother, she's, you know, she's a New Yorker like I said [and] she's from Harlem so she's a little dramatic—but she would just be like, 'I work with a lot of white people and they just don't get it. They don't understand; they don't get it.' And I'm like—you know I grew up of course in a different generation where I grew up you know with all colors and things of the nature—and I'm like, 'Ma, you can't talk about white people like that.' She's like, 'No they just don't understand me' and I'm like—I didn't get it until later on like what she was trying to say—and I'm just like, 'Oh, okay. I understand what she's saying.' So it was I think still to this day she works for the company and um it's been tough for her to be an older black woman and have um younger people come in and take different opportunities away from her and have the company kind of treat her as if you know, 'Well we'll just give this to her she'll, you know, she'll do it. She won't say no to it.' My mother has been within that company for almost fifty years so it's pretty it's pretty amazing to kind of see how strong she is as not just a woman but as a black women um when the odds are kind of against you in a way. But um she's about she's a smart, beautiful person and I think just hearing certain very sarcastic stories from her when she would get off work was entertaining but also now that we can have deeper conversation that I'm an adult now. It's been a journey and I've learned a lot from her and how to migrate in this world as a black femme person. And you know, how can I be successful without necessarily bringing anyone down and how can I be honest without being you know quote, unquote angry black person that lot of sometimes, in space people would see me as? So it's been it's been it's been quite a journey to kind of just listen to her and to hear her talk and do more research in other powerful black women that have that kind of fight those standard so it's been—I love her. I just look at my mother like, 'Wow.' She's still doing it, that's the crazy part. Like, she's still at it and she's, you know, 'I love what I do.' You know, she's waiting for me to really get those mega millions in there [laughter] so she can retire and get a home somewhere so we're working on it, we're working on it but until then, she's gonna have [laughter] to stick to it and we'll figure it out eventually.

O'Brien: What um, what were you like as a teenager?

Snipes: Ooh. What was I like as a teenager? Um, feisty [laughter]...I went to LaGuardia High School for performing art for dance and art so once I left catholic school that I went to from

kindergarten to eighth grade and then going into an art public school in the city I was like, ecstatic with joy. I was like cause I had applied to all boy catholic schools in the Bronx. And I did not want to go but my mother was like she didn't want me in a public school environment she was like, 'You're gonna get in trouble.' She was, I think she was trying to protect me from, you know getting in trouble and getting picked on because she knew she there was something up. She knew I was different from the rest so I think she was just like, 'No, go to an all boy catholic school in the Bronx you'll be fine.' And I'm like, 'No, that's not where I want to be. I want to be able to express myself. I don't want to wear uniforms all the time. I don't want to feel ostracized because I'm not catholic' [laughter]. Um, and at that time I didn't know what I was. All I knew was Catholic and you know, Baptist. And I had never been baptized so I don't know how that goes. It was a whole religious situation that I had to find for myself but after not after then being accepted to LaGuardia for dance, I kind of went behind her back to try out because I had a few friends of mine that were trying out. Because I had heard friends of mine in the eighth grade that were trying out. They would say, 'Oh, we're trying out for this like, fame school were you can like dance and all this other stuff.' And I tried out. I told her I went and she was like, 'Oh, so you went to this dance school, okay. How was that?' And I was like, 'It was really great and you know the people were awesome and everyone could just express themselves.' And she was just like... 'Okay, you know that school is in the city right? You know you have to go downtown?' And for my mother, downtown was just way too far for us. Like, 'My child is not going downtown I don't know what's going to happen to them.' So she made me go. We went. You know, she checked out the school, she was obsessed with it. She was like, 'Oh, this person went here. This person graduated from here. Okay, so you know this is a thing.' She was just super excited about it and I was so happy that she was because I wanted to go. So I got into LaGuardia High School for that and that kind of changed it changed my life for the better. Because I got to be finally around people that were more creative and expressive and things of that nature because in catholic school everything is so restricted. We had art teachers every once in a while and things of that nature and gym class so we could be free for like an hour, but it was hard for me who knew that I wanted to cut up my jeans and wear like, tank tops and you know just be free. And it really, really express myself visually and we didn't have those moments unless we went on like school trips but we still had to keep it in dress code. So I think once I got into high school it just blew my mind I was like, 'Oh, we get to wear regular clothes everyday. Whoa, this is like a new thing.' I'm like, 'What do I wear?' Cause all I knew was my uniform and the probably, few t-shirts and jeans and two pair of sneakers that my mom got me from like, Fordham Road that I didn't necessarily want to wear but that's all I knew. So it was a great way for me to be free, express myself, and learn more about what I wanted to do as an artist and where I wanted to go because I needed it. I need...to get away from what my family—different family members thought about me or what they wanted me to do. A lot of the men in my family went into the Army and the Navy. [loud beep] I think that I was the first one that didn't want to do that. And so I had to I had to do something different I knew something had to change so.

[Inaudible background noise]

Snipes: So that was my teen life.

O'Brien: I imagine there were a lot of trans, gay, queer kids at LaGuardia?

Snipes: Yeah, yeah.

O'Brien: What was that like?

Snipes: I mean, I think that at that time, I didn't know what trans was. I think I only knew gay and lesbian. That was it and I only learned that because I watched shows like *Queer as Folk* when my mother wasn't watching [laughter]. I watched...what else did I watch? *The L Word* and that's all I knew. I think in my little box in my world within the black community you didn't talk about the LGBTQ+ community and if you did, if you spoke about being gay or queer it was a negative energy attached to it. So I would hear, you know, words like 'fag' and things of that nature and I was like, 'Well, that's not me.' [laughter] I know I'm not that I can't be associated with a gay or fag or queer person because according to my uncles and my cousins and things of that nature then that's a really bad thing to be. So I think when then going into LaGuardia I was like—I still had no idea what any thing outside of gay and lesbian was but I think going to LaGuardia I met more people that was expressive. More people that felt free and there was this one friend that I knew, Jack. Um and they were so amazing—they were a vocal major—and they would come down hallways wearing dresses and a big afro and I was like, 'I want to do that. Like, I want to be that free. I want to be that free.' And at that time I didn't know, I didn't see any other sort of representation that looked like me except on TV. I saw Ru Paul, I saw Lenny Kravitz, but they were on TV. I didn't see anyone in person that I could relate to and when I saw Jack I was like, 'Whoa. Like, there's a possibility that I can share this same experience' and I think when I saw that I was like, 'Wow, this is amazing.' ...I didn't get into the other parts of the LGBTQ+ community until probably senior year. I may, I might have known other you known beautiful trans—people of trans experience at that time, but I just didn't know how to express it or had that conversation with anyone. And I think—especially in that environment at that time—I think a lot of people were still just trying to figure themselves out. You know, high school is tough so you know everyone is just like trying to figure it out no one knows what proper title to use. Um...the funny thing is we did have a LGBT group. I wasn't a part of it because, you know, they had like four people which is just crazy for a performing arts school like LaGuardia to only have four people part of that group but. For me at that time—cause I was just so stuck on like being the popular kid—that group wasn't the most popular thing to be a part of because it just didn't feel like something I need to be a part of at time. I really didn't know my voice all I knew was like being trying to be cool and trying to be like dramatic and be petty about like stupid things. I was just so stuck in that world and dating. Trying to like get boys' attention and stuff like that. And still trying to pass, barely [laughter] and not to be late for class. So yeah, it wasn't until later on that I found out more and did more knowledge and work on LGBTQ+ people and things of that nature and until like I think—then *Noah's Arc* came out a little bit later in high school on the LOGO network and then the LOGO network came out. And I was like, 'Oh, this is what I needs to be doing with my work because since I'm not learning it in school...' TV was the next replacement to that for me. I was stuck on anything that was entertainment so LOGO definitely helped me and broaden my knowledge on the LGBTQ+ community.

O'Brien: What was *Noah's Arc*?

Snipes: ...For people who don't know, *Noah's Arc* was pretty much, I guess the black version of *Queer as Folk*, honestly, for LOGO so that was like huge for me. Because we didn't see any sort of representation of queer POC (People of Color) identities on a major network or any sort of television except Ru Paul. That's all we knew. And to have a show like that—it was only on for like two seasons—but they were on LOGO. It was an actual network and for that to be probably one of the first to be broadcasted by Patrik-Ian Polk who was the writer and creator of it was pretty major. It literally changed um—another show that also changed my life. It was the first time that I saw that and I was like, 'Wow. They look like me, or they express themselves like me in a way and they also look like the people that I hang out with.' It was just it was magical. Yeah.

O'Brien: You've used language of people that express themselves and people that are free and you've said both of those things a lot.

Snipes: Yeah

O'Brien: Can you say more about those words and what they mean to you?

Snipes: Um when it comes to freedom—it's just I feel like when it comes to freedom it's more for me—it's more of a feeling. It's a way to break free from the shackles that society puts on you. I think as a black person we've been shackled for so long and we still are in different ways so when you find a space or you find an experience or a moment for you to branch out from those shackles that society puts on you—whether it be in the work place, whether it be at home, whether it be in school, whether it be in the government—it's just a moment that you can't even express. An emotional feeling that's just like, 'Okay I can breathe. Not only breathe, I don't...feel suffocated.' And um, a lot of people that I know go through that on a daily basis. I think that even for me like, just navigating through New York City is sometimes very um, it could be very daunting. But I think, you have to you have to learn some sort of confidence and strength, especially when you grow up here when you're here for a long period of time to know that this is your experience, this is your world. And you can get through, you can push through it, you can get through it and I think that's what freedom is to me. What was the other one?

O'Brien: Expressive

Snipes: Expressive

O'Brien: Like someone is expressing themselves.

Snipes: Right, um I use that word because for me, I'm a very visual person so you know, Madonna's "Express Yourself" was like a thing for me. And I didn't I didn't get into that until I was kind of thrown more into the fashion world after high school, and I went to FIT [Fashion Institute of Technology] and I was like, 'Okay, I could really do this.' I didn't know I was just, you know, I was just working retail and I went to FIT to do design. I was a design student for two years and I

was like, 'I can really do this.' And then I said, 'I don't want to be a designer because it's too much.' It was too much political things that were going within the fashion industry at that time. For you to for me to be a successful, you know—at that time—a black, queer designer I was like, 'This is probably not going to happen for me. I have to find out another way to express myself and for people to see me and hear me.' So then I went into styling, I went into more entertainment work and tried to do more things in front of the camera. And so for me that's where I became a little bit more expressive with the way I look, with the way I carry myself, and the way I could kind of communicate to people through my words.

O'Brien: Tell me about working in retail.

Snipes: Working retail, it was fun. It had its moments. Of course, dealing with customers isn't the funnest thing sometimes, especially when they feel like they're always right even though they say that, sometimes they're wrong. So, working in retail was a great way for me to—depending on where I was working—it was a great way for me to talk to people. [Siren blaring] And at the same time...

O'Brien: So a moment ago I asked you about telling me about working at retail.

Snipes: So working in retail was fun. Um I had worked in retail for a long time. I can't even think how long it's been. Probably right as soon as I got out of—maybe when I was like 21. No, that's a lie [laughter]. It was before then. I think I was like maybe 17 or 18 when I had my first retail job. My mother wanted me to work in security [laughter] so she put me through security training so that was a fail. But my first retail job was Kanel Jeans in North of Houston, in NoHo—it used to be in SoHo and then it moved to NoHo. And I was super ecstatic. I was like, 'Oh I could work, get paid, and be myself and be expressive.' It was kind of this vintage, but they also sold other brands type store. And they were really known for their jeans hence Kanel Jeans. And I was just super excited because I really didn't want to work security and I was like, 'This is not what I'm trying to do. Like, this is not how I'm going to be this famous entertainer. Like, I can't do it through here.' So working retail was a way for me to be in the city more, be able to meet new people, be able to be more of myself in a way. But you know at times, at times it was tough because you get certain stares and certain ignorant people that came through the door depending on what store you work in. They don't understand how you look, they don't understand how you talk or how you act. So you know, it all kind of falls on management and how you vocalize your issues with them. Sometimes they cared, sometimes they didn't depending on the company you work for. But I worked so many different places I can't even name them all honestly. Like I worked at Patricia Fields, I've worked—Patricia Fields is probably the best but also very [tongue click] very frustrating to deal with this one manager that didn't like me so it was personal. He shall remain nameless [laughter]. But Patricia Fields had an amazing store in New York for creatives that was just out there and outlandish and just didn't care at all. They didn't care at all and it was beautiful to be in that environment. A lot of the people that worked there at that time that I was there I'm still in touch with now because they inspired me to try different looks and try to express myself in different ways. I worked at Diesel. That was fun that kind of taught me that I'm this glam, edgy person. So I've taken bits and pieces from different experiences in retail and kind of transformed

them into the experience that I am today. So its been quiet a journey. I had my last retail job was last year at Beacon's Closet which is also an amazing place full of vintage clothes and other name brand stuff. And it's also a great, a pretty great company for you to just be authentically yourself. You meet lots of so many types of people especially at like I worked at Buffalo Exchange as well. And it was just a great environment for me to to meet so many, so many great people that love fashion and love style and love things that are different. And it was okay to be different in those spaces. So my message is always to other people within the fashion world or if you're a part of the LGBTQ+ community, retail is always like—fashion retail is always the way to go. Retail is kind of like the way to go when you kind of want to be a little bit more flamboyant and want to be a little bit more comfortable in the world that you're in because a lot of corporate spaces don't want to hire people that don't really fit that box or don't fit a more reserved look—a more corporate look, quote unquote. Things are slowly changing but still, you know, it's tough. I had a mohawk, I've had dreadlocks. Those weren't very corporate looks to have. So I had to figure out where can I be comfortable. Where can I work and get money to help support my family, help support myself, and be comfortable with that? So retail was the way to go.

O'Brien: So, you were at FIT studying to be a designer and there were politics...

Snipes: Yes, there were politics at FIT only because, it was the first time I got to really understand the fashion world and how it worked. Um, I knew that my chances of being successful in that environment were very slim. There weren't a lot of successful black designers and especially successful black, LGBTQ+ open designers out there. And I knew—and then also I just didn't like being scheduled and on time zones for different things. I just want to be a free designer and do things on my own time and put myself out there. So I just knew for me personally, those were just things that I was just like not ready to do at that time. So I had to figure out other ways and you know, being a stylist and dressing up other people made me happy as well. Um I loved kind of being able to take bits and pieces of clothing and put them together and put them on people and have them just be happy about it. Having to challenge themselves to do different looks and try different things out of the norm or what they were used to. So I appreciated the time I had at FIT because I learned a lot. I think that's what having a college experience is all about. I just didn't honestly want to put in the work at that time. I just knew it wasn't for me. I had to figure out a different way to um be successful and use the talents that I was born with.

O'Brien: What came after that?

Snipes: And after that I was just like, 'Okay well I want to be—I want to really push forward and be, you know, this successful stylist' and then I realized, 'Nope. I have more to bring to the world.' Um so I think on a photoshoot I was styling someone, the artist was late, and they needed someone to get in front of the camera to do some test runs and I think it was for an acting gig and the producer was just like, 'Oh, can you just read these lines really quick and have some personality with it?' And it was for like a toothpaste [ad] or something and I read the lines out and he was like, 'You know you really good at this, right?' And I was like, 'I mean, I know I kind of wanted to be a Disney kid growing up but it just didn't quite work out for me.' And he was like, 'No you have to continue doing this because you really have something there. You really have

something with in you.’ And I’ve been—I was told that before that in high school—yeah, it was in high school my senior year and we had to figure out what colleges we wanted to go to and someone compared me to Wendy Williams and I didn’t know who she was at that time until I did my research and I found that she was a DJ on the radio and I was like, ‘Oh, okay this could be a thing.’ But I didn’t really take it too seriously and I thought about it and I took some communication classes, but it wasn’t a true passion of mine until later on that I knew that I could actually be successful at it and make money from it. And I was like, ‘Okay well lets try this out’ and the artist at that—going back to the production shoot—the artist didn’t end up showing up. So I went along and got booked for my first campaign with this company. So it was very eye opening experience for me to know that I did have the confidence to be in front of the camera and get that done. I think that for a long time you know, I had acne, my teeth weren’t straight, I just didn’t want to be in front of the camera or be seen because I just didn’t feel like I looked the part. I knew that, I knew I was cute but I just didn’t feel confident enough to be in front of a camera and really vocalize and say things that I wanted to say but with you know, the people that was around at moments like that I was like, ‘Okay, maybe I should do this. Maybe I could, you know, maybe I do now have the confidence to push forward and be the entertainer I’ve always wanted to be.’

O’Brien: So at this cusp of moving from being a stylist to being an entertainer, where were you gender wise?

Snipes: Um, I was still figuring things out. I knew, one, was queer for sure. I just did and I knew I was very feminine. And I think while I was doing entertaining I was also doing some modeling gigs. And someone had told me—he was French and he was like—‘You know you have a very androgynous look’ and I was like, ‘Androgynous?’ I was like, ‘What’s that?’ And he was like, ‘Androgynous. You have a very feminine but masculine type look to you.’ And I was like, ‘Oh, okay lets try this out then. Lets go along.’ And I googled it. I got home and I googled it and I was like, ‘Oh, I think that’s what I am. I think I’m androgynous.’ And I remember I told a friend and they were like, ‘You know that’s not like a sexuality?’ and I was like, ‘Oh, I know. But, like I mean that’s something I can identify as.’ And I knew at that point I was like, ‘Well maybe that’s it. Maybe I’m just this queer androgynous person and that’s the end of that.’ It wasn’t until literally within the past couple of years—not even three, honestly, two years—that I started to hear this rumble of a title of gender non-conforming and gender non-binary and I was like, ‘I’m too old to be changing my titles now.’ I’m like, ‘I don’t know what this is’ and then like people were starting to identify themselves or they were like, ‘I would like to use they/them pronouns.’ And I was like, ‘That doesn’t make any sense, you know that right? You know that you’re only one person.’ And this was while at Beacon’s closet, mind you and I was like, ‘That doesn’t make any sense’ and I was so rude and ignorant. Um but I just didn’t, I just didn’t get it like it didn’t connect to me. It didn’t click in my head until someone really sat down with me and explained to me, ‘This is how I feel. As both a feminine energy and a masculine energy.’ And I think that when they used words like energy and um expressing themselves from within I really started to connect to that. It started to make sense to me and I was like, ‘I think that’s it. I think that’s it.’ And a lot of people for a long period of time would use she pronouns for me but I would get so offended. Even though I was an androgynous person and you know, comfortable within myself. But it was the she part. It was

that like that pronoun. I was like, 'That's not me cause at the end of the day I'm still a man.' You know? And I think that was because of the journey that I've traveled being a black person within a black community that doesn't vocalize and talk about different forms of how people can grow and change—we don't talk about sexuality a lot in a black community. We don't talk about sexual identity and things of that nature. So I just didn't know and I think sometimes what people don't know, it's like you really can't be upset at them in a way. You just kind of have to have patience and just teach them things and be knowledgeable and teach them things that they just didn't know. And I hope that they can then take that information and do better things within themselves and for other people. So I didn't really start identifying as non-binary until probably towards the end of last year, maybe. Um and this was because *Pose*—I was a featured actor on *Pose* on FX—and I had played a very gender-fluid type, you know walker or drag walker or, I wouldn't even know how to identify them because I think at that time where *Pose* was it was from the late 80's, early 90's but according to Hollywood, they were like, 'Well we need drag walkers.' So I didn't identify as a drag queen but I was like, 'I could, you know, I could possibly play one.' But I knew there was more to it than just walking in drags. I felt super duper comfortable and I felt so powerful in a more feminine representation of myself and I think not until the show aired that more people in the GNC—gender non-conforming non-binary um, and even in the trans community—they would contact me like, 'You are a beautiful woman.' And I'm like 'Huh?' I'm like, I was just like, 'Am I?' I was like—I just didn't see it until I really started to question myself—'What does it really mean to be woman? What does it mean to be a man?' And I think it all depends on the individual and what your definition of those two genders are and I start to question myself, 'Is there anything in between those two genders?' And that's when you know, GNC and people were saying GNC and non-binary and I was looking up those definitions and I was really doing the research to figure out, what do these things mean? What do they/them pronouns mean to certain people? Listening to different experiences and I think that was a great way for me to then identify comfortably as a non-binary person. And also surrounding myself with other amazing and beautiful people of trans experience and GNC people. Especially on the set of *Pose*. Like, that was the first time I had ever been around so many people of trans experiences and how comfortable they were and how they were still learning about themselves and other people. So it was just, it was just a beautiful moment to be on set and really realize that. There's more than just this male and female identification. There's things that are in between and things that are just more fluid and some people just don't like titles at all. And I don't mind that. I think you know, for me sometimes it's very, it's a little frustrating especially still now for certain forms I have to fill out it's like male or female and I'm like, I will literally scratch them both out and I'll put non-binary right underneath it and write it out. And I'm like, you know it's just a way of me saying I'm here. I'm seen, I will be seen, and I will be present, and you will change this eventually. I think as long as we do and speak on experiences like this and do the work physically, mentally, emotionally, vocally, that changes will come. Changes will be made. And I think we're there now. We're slowly progressing. I think with this administration it's been tough. But with every negative there is, I try to find some sort of positive. I think that with this administration we have now under Trump it has lit a torch under a lot of people to get more work done and that's the only probably positive thing I can probably say about Trump in office is that we're now pushing for it to write our own narratives and do the work so that we will not be erased and we will be remembered. Because a lot of people in this administration and a lot of cis

white men with power don't care about us. They don't want to understand us. They don't want to hear our experiences but there are so much more who do. And I think as long as we really continue to push that narrative and get that out there we will conquer. And we will—you know, we've been through a lot—and we will win at the end of the day so...

O'Brien: Tell me about getting into entertainment.

Snipes: Entertainment. So, that's always been a very fun thing to kind of talk about. I think with entertainment, my mother signed me up for Barbizon classes. It was pretty much an agency for models and entertainers and things of that nature. So we would do commercials and modeling and things of that nature

O'Brien: Wait, was this when you were a child?

[Crosstalk]

Snipes: This was a little bit. This was probably in between...this was in between like high school and college for me. But when I was a child I always forget about this story, so we're gonna bring it back. I did a pudding commercial with Bill Cosby but you know that was back at that time I was a child so that was my first inkling of being in front of the camera I think as a child. I always forget about this story because you know I don't remember it. And so that was my first inkling of my mother going, 'Okay they've got something going on here and they enjoy being seen and being in front of the camera' and I'm also a Taurus so we can't help it. So I think that was my first inkling and then you know, being obsessed with television growing up and then my mother putting me in these classes after a little bit after high school was over. She was like, 'You should try out for Barbizon modeling and commercials and stuff.' So I had a director that kind of helped me out with that. And you know, I was really trying to push forward and do it. It just wasn't working at that time. That's when—after that—that's when the little test shoot, the toothpaste commercial happened. And the producer was like, 'You have to go into entertainment. You have something there.' So then I just started to go on auditions and started going to different castings and got a lot of no's. I knew and it was very of tough for me and it still is in a way. I think representing and being a very feminine, tall, black um body um is always very triggering because you don't fit that mold. You don't fit that mold of, you know, you have to be at least 5'7" and under to be an actor. Um modeling is a hit or miss at times because they want the females to be you know probably the tallest 5'9" 5'10". They want the male models to look like Abercrombie models. I fit neither of those boxes. So I think, I just started to tell myself, 'You have to show up. Because if you don't you will regret it. If they don't see you, how will they know you?' And you never know in certain spaces where maybe if you show up they might change the whole dialogue around because they like what your look is, they like what you're saying. They love—they see your talent, they see your energy so that might change. So I think going on more auditions and doing different types of commercial work and television stuff kind of helped me even get into something like *Pose*. Where I wasn't, I had no idea about it until my friends where telling me about it on Instagram. Like, 'Hey, you should try out for this show. It's about the ballroom community in the last 80's. I think you'd be perfect for it and you know it's produced by Ryan Murphy.' And I was like, 'What

does Ryan Murphy know about the ballroom scene?' You know, the mostly black ballroom scene at that time. And I was like, 'Mmm. This seems a little suspect. I don't know.' So then other people—I think about four different people from different areas of the world—hit me up about this *Pose* thing and I was like, 'Okay, this is a sign that I need to get off work.' I literally left Beacon's Closet early—my job at the time—and I told my manager, 'I have to go on this casting call. I have to go in.' And I went in and it was just this automatic connection where I walked into the room and I saw the people that were casting for it and I knew at least three of them. And I was like, 'Okay I can do this. I can do this.' And they were looking for ballroom walkers and things of that nature, you know and people walking in drag and I was like, it was the first time that I felt comfortable, I felt seen, I felt heard. Especially in a space where a majority of the cast and background—even people behind-the-scenes and back behind the cameras were people of trans experiences. So that was just mind blowing, you know? It was the first show to have such a large cast be of trans experiences so it was mind blowing to me. Anything is possible, anything is possible. Yes, you may have tons of doors shut in your face. And even with the writer Steven Canals—I believe he is from New York. I believe he's from New York I'm going to go with that. If I'm wrong, sorry Steven. But I believe he's from New York and he actually wrote the beginning of *Pose* back maybe, I think 2005, 2006. He got shut down so many times. So many no's. 'No one's going to watch that, no one's going to want to see this story' and things of that nature. Until you know, thankfully Ryan Murphy kind of jumped in and was like, 'This is actually pretty brilliant.' And I feel like with the powers that he—and the privilege that he has as a white man in this world—he was like, 'I can do this. And I can do this for the community. I can do this for people who aren't heard, who aren't seen, and have the talent and have the work ethic to do it.' And just for him to be putting that out and them doing that work, it's just been...it's definitely changed my life for the better. I've gotten so many really great opportunities from it, especially walking during New York Fashion Week, and different reality shows that I've done and it's been an amazing, progressive movement that's happening. Especially, you know, me now getting into it. And I just know now—I'm working on a short film because I've been inspired by the people I've been around and you know, I just want people to know that you can do anything. You can do anything as long as you put the work in and you're diligent and you have a great community surrounded by you and a great space and a great family so...

O'Brien: And you have to put up with a lot.

Snipes: And you have to put up...you have to put up with a lot of no's. You have to put up with a lot of rejections. And you just have to push forward. You have to push forward and not let that determine your future, not let that stop you from doing the things that you necessarily want to do and want to get done. That's just another reason for you to keep pushing and to keep moving and never stop.

O'Brien: Tell me about the balance of making a living doing retail and then also trying to do entertainment gigs and camera stuff.

Snipes: Oh yes, um [laughter] that was a struggle. Especially when you want to work a 9-5 retail life as much as you can. My mother was like, 'You need to find a job that is full time so you can

help pay these bills' and things of that nature. And I was like, 'But mom, I want to be an artist. I have to get out there and get the work done.' And she was like, 'Being an artist doesn't pay as much as you want it to and you're not getting as many gigs as you're trying to get.' And I was like, 'Oh my goodness.' So I think it was very, very tough. You have to figure out scheduling and being very precise about you know, getting that work done, scheduling to where if you have to be at work from nine to five literally but there is an audition at three, how can you communicate that to your management? How can you communicate that with your other co-workers? Like, 'Hey, can you just cover me for two hours?' Or you know, if you have a hour lunch break—which is very rare at times, but I think things are changing in the retail world—if you have an hour lunch break and you know that you have to make this casting, then do it. Even if you bring a snack, figure it out you know you might miss a meal but you know that you have to kind of make sacrifices. I think that's really, really, really important when it comes to figuring out how to balance a nine to five job and also going on castings and trying to do gigs and films and things of that nature. And there are times that some gigs don't pay and you may have to say no to it. Because at the end of the day you have feed yourself. You have to pay bills and maybe the opportunity just wasn't for you. Maybe that moment just wasn't for you and just to know that there are other opportunities out there. It's okay to say no. You don't have to take every opportunity that comes your way, especially when you feel it in your gut. I think back then I said yes to a lot of things and I jeopardized my work. I jeopardized losing jobs, losing actual nine to five retail jobs because I will call out a lot—too many times—to take gigs that I wasn't paid for but I was on screen, I was being seen. And I think if I had to—I don't regret anything—but if I could go back and change some things, I would ask the casting directors, 'Hey, is there another time I could come in? Could I come around this time? Can I kind of maneuver things around where everything flows and works properly?' You don't have to say yes to everything that comes your way and I learned that for sure. Especially when there's no money attached, then it's no shame. It's like, bills have to be paid and how are you going to get from point A to point B if there's no money in your account? Like, you have to be really smart about it. If it's a huge opportunity that you can't let go, you have to figure out how you can communicate that with your management in a way where it's smart, it's responsible, and just make it work. Make it work. You know there were times that I had to call out like, 'I can't make it.' I mean, of course check with your co-workers, make sure maybe they're available to cover your shift and things of that nature but if there's no other way you can get to work or have someone cover you, then you might have to take that risk and maybe, possibly call out to go to that huge audition if it's something that you're really passionate about and you know that it might just change your life then you might have to take that risk. But I advise you to try every other way that is more a responsible way to do it. I was very care free and I was like, 'You know what? I'm gonna call out again this week from work because I need to go on this casting.' Not the way to do it. Figure out other ways to do it, please.

O'Brien: And for people that you know that aren't stars, how common is it that someone is able to pay the bills from doing entertainment work? Like, how realistic is that for people when they're starting off? Or you know, like mid...

Snipes: It's hard. It's really, really hard I think, especially when you don't have that stability or that support from your family or your friends. I'm lucky enough to have my mother pay for the

upstairs and downstairs condo building that we live in. So I am lucky enough to be in that building and not have to pay like some crazy amount for a room or have like, 18 roommates. Um but a lot of people that I've heard, a lot of friends that I have, they have that experience and they're just like, 'I don't know how to make it and I don't know when my next meal is going to happen.' So hearing from their experiences and even my own sometimes there have been times where I'm just like—cause I left my 9 to 5 job last year so I've just been working on non-stop entertainment work and things of that nature so I think what's really big is budgeting. Meal prep is very important and just being real smart about it and trying to figure out how can I just possibly make this work? I think background work is great, especially when you're just starting. And getting try to get ahold of different casting agencies cause I mean, they pay. They pay not as much if you had a principle role or whatever the case may be, but they do pay. I know a lot of people that are part of the set community and all they do is background work. And they've taken trips to the Bahamas and all these other places so they pay. You just have to be consistent with it and you have to enjoy what you do. I think that if you don't first enjoy it that's when things are going to be really, really tough for you. You have to be really passionate and you have to be really excited about the work that you're going to do. Being background is not easy. It's very tough, especially for a lot of people that are non-union. Your kind of...[noise] you're treated in a way that isn't like a lead. You're pretty much the bottom of the barrel in a way. And it's very, very tough for non-union people to kind of make it work. You feel at times that you're not seen, you're not heard. But my thing is that as long as you try to keep a positive mindset when you go through life, you should be good. You should be okay, and kind of also surround yourself with people who are probably going through the same experience as you're going through and help each other out in a way, especially on set. When I was on set for *Pose*, I was non-union and I was completely over it. I didn't know anything about like SAG [Screen Actors Guild] and you know, people who are part of SAG go first in line and they get their own busses and we got to walk and things of that nature. And I was like, what is this treatment? What is happening here? But it's part of the journey. It's a part of you know, Hollywood and the film industry. It's not the easiest thing but SAG people pay their dues. You know they have to...you can't be in SAG—it ain't free unless a big production is paying for you—but they have their dues and you kind of just have to be humble enough to go along with the journey but still be knowledgeable of your surroundings and know how can you push forward to get what you want to get cause now I'm SAG eligible. So I'm almost there—a part of the SAG community—but I don't have the SAG coins or money right now to pay these bills so I think, you know, I'm 30 and I'm still trying to figure things out and just because you see me on a hit show or things of that nature doesn't mean everything is quit together because at the end of the day once the cameras are off, you still have to deal with reality and real things and I think people need to hear more of that and start to see more of those stories of what's going on behind the camera and behind the scenes. So just don't think everything is okie dokie. Don't believe everything you see on social media. Just know that people are still going through things. People are still going through struggles so you just have to keep pushing forward.

O'Brien: I'd imagine there is a tension between people needing to keep their spirits up and keep hope up and having confidence and then social media is like, needing to present that out to the world. And then for people just on the outside or just getting into it, that's the image they get and the hardships might be a lot harder to be frank about and to talk about.

Snipes: Yeah it's a really...entertainment is a very tough industry, so you can't believe everything you see or hear. You kind of just have to go with your gut and go with your own knowledge and experience and how to maneuver through it and get through it mentally and emotionally. It's a very draining situation to be a part of. I think just living life is hard. So for being a part of the entertainment world we have to constantly be around so many personalities and so many different people and kind of also take course of a role that you're trying to play or a totally different identity. It's a very draining experience. I mean, but if you're happy doing what you're doing then you know you'll stick through it. You'll figure it out. You'll figure it out. A lot of people have and a lot of people have told me, 'I don't want to do this any more' and they've gone a different path and that's okay. There's so many other ways you can be a creative and have your voice heard you can probably start your own production company which is probably another you know dilemma to go through but you can if you don't feel comfortable in the space that you're in, create a space you do feel comfortable in. You know, we have to start creating more spaces for ourselves and for other people who probably don't want to be in more of a huger production or volume of things. You have to you know really, just do the work. It's going to be really, really tough and it's probably going to be a journey. But let's say like say for example, if Steven Canals didn't continue doing the work then we wouldn't have *Pose* on FX. We wouldn't have the biggest or hugest hit show for a cast predominately people of trans experience. You wouldn't of had that if it wasn't for him saying, 'You know what? I'm not going to stop doing what I'm doing. I'm going to push forward and I'm going to get this done.'

O'Brien: Do you have parts in your life where you are able express yourself or keep going that don't rely on getting hired?

Snipes: Yes I think just my daily life of walking around the city and being—according Instagram or social media—a public figure, in a way. It's a great way for me to be around people who necessarily, maybe don't get to be around people who look like me or experience people like me. That's why I also love—I mean I'm also...I don't have a driver and I don't drive so I don't mind taking the train. I don't mind have that interaction with people who don't necessarily—especially in the Bronx—who don't necessarily see people like me all the time. Because it's certain places in New York and certain places in the Bronx, it's not the greatest place to be expressive visually especially when you don't fit into the norms of what society wants you to fit into. So I think me leaving my house everyday and me being the person that I am, I have heard it has changed people's lives for the better. It has taught them or gave them some sort of hope, some sort of inspiration to be authentically themselves. Or even, I've had parents come up to me like, 'I have a child just like you and I don't know what to do with them.' And they will sit down with me in the middle of no where and we will talk and it's very interesting, especially in places like New York for people to come up to you randomly and have a sit-down conversation with a stranger. But I really to do it only because one, I am a people person not everyone can do it—I'm a people person—and then two, I don't mind sharing my experience or my knowledge on things if it's going to help someone else. You know, cause you don't know what that person's going through especially as a parent that has a child that is—I wouldn't...I was going to say different but we're not really different if you really think about it. We're just human's living our lives. I think a child

who identifies that is outside of the norm...and some parents just don't know what to do. They haven't had the research, they haven't had the experience to deal with that situation, so if they could lean on someone else or they could hear it from someone else it could possibly change their life or their child's life from making a huge mistake when it comes to like suicide or, you know a lot of children are still going through a lot of mental issues with trying to find their identities, so and I think it's a big burden for the parents carry to help them figure it out because they don't know how to communicate with their child. And I think that's one of the things that I'm thinking about now that I'm growing up is, how can I now change the narrative of how I grew up with my future children? I can not wait to sit down with my kids and talk about everything. How was school today? What did you learn? How did you express yourself today? How do express yourself visually? What do you want to wear today? You know, things of that nature instead of, you know...my mother did a great job she did much as she could but even being born under my father's name—my government name is Bernard. But in high school I changed my name, not on paper physically. Not yet at least. Someone gave me the name B Hawk. She was like, 'You don't look like a Bernard. You don't...you know, whatever Bernard looks like.' But—which is kind of like my dad—but she was like, 'You don't look like a Bernard. You look like this whole different express something that is just super dramatic. You have a mohawk. We've got to figure this out.' And she said, 'B Hawk.' And I was like, 'Okay, that is not a professional name but we can figure it out' and she was like, 'Well, you're an artist so I think it will work.' And when she said that I was like, 'Yeah, I can see that.' And it kind of just flows like, B Hawk Snipes. It kind of just made sense. And you know little things like that. Little experiences like that just makes such a change so I've been going by B Hawk since high school and that's how a lot of people know me as. I just, I think even though I haven't physically changed it on paper, my name B Hawk makes sense to me. Bernard is someone. It's a part of who I am. It's a part of my journey and at times I do feel like a Bernard when I'm just sitting at home minding my business in my basketball shorts but I think for the most part, B Hawk is just a name that really you don't know what's going to go through the door when you see, when you hear, when you see B Hawk on a piece of paper or in an email. It's like, 'What does B Hawk look like?' You want to know more. And I think that's really, really exciting to have a name like that—a unique name—and I would love to have that conversation with my children on how to identify and what it means to them. Are they comfortable with the name I gave them? Do they feel like the name I gave them represent them? And just have all those conversations with them. I think that the world that we are going into for the future, I'm hoping at least will be really big on communication and fluidly and expressing themselves and people just living. I think that a lot of labels will go out the door. I think people who want to represent themselves as lesbian, as gay, as queer, as trans, as GNC, or non-binary, it's going to be great but there's going to be a total shift that's going to happen. Where people probably...I know a lot of heterosexual people—cis heterosexual people—who like, I kind of represent them too in a way. I take full power in the energies that are living within me, both male and female. So it's interesting to kind of see certain people shifting on the other side as well and questioning things and really pushing against the norm of what society wants to label as just two genders so I'm excited about it.

O'Brien: Tell me about wanting to have kids.

Snipes: [Laughter] Um I don't know if there's something ticking within me but I've always wanted to have children. I think I would literally dress up like I was pregnant when I was little and my mother used to be so freaked out. She would be like, 'What are you doing?' And I'd be like, 'I'm pregnant.' And mom would just be like, 'What is going on?' Cause you know at that time when I was younger I played with dolls and express and I played with like G.I. Joes and X-Men figurines and dolls at the same time and my mother used to be like, 'Okay, let him do his thing' or 'Let them do their thing.' My uncles and the more masculine cis people in my family, they weren't really into it but my mother was a very protective woman. She was like, 'No, this is my child and they will do as they please.' So I think now that I'm grown up, it's been pretty fun, kind of. What was the question? I totally...

O'Brien: About having kids.

Snipes: Having kids, okay yes. I was like, 'Oh my goodness. I'm talk about me as a child.' Um having kids. Yeah, I've just always thought about like, 'Wow, one day I'm going to be a parent and I'm going to have my two kids. I'm going to have a dog.' I kind of want three kids but I think that might be too much for me so we're going to go with two kids and a dog and see how that goes but I think it started ticking probably a few years ago when I saw a lot of people I grew up with in high school at 25, 26 everyone's having kids and I'm still over here thinking about what gig I'm going to get next. I'm like, 'How is this going to work? When am I going to have kids myself?' And how—oh, this recent question in my head—'What will they call me?' Now that I identify, I haven't really done my research on it but now that I identify as a non-binary person do they call me mommy? Do they call me daddy? Or do I give them like a special name for them to call me? Yeah, I haven't done my research on it but I'm going to figure it out. My close—Sir Knight, one of my close friends—is like, 'They can call you B. [Laughter] They can call you B for short. I mean, a lot of people do it.' And I'm like, 'Okay.' I've just been so...I think I've been so programed growing up to mommy daddy. There's been nothing in between. You know there's been little nick names of course that you call your parents: mama, dada, papa, whatever but I was like, 'Okay, so what do gender nonconforming, non-binary parents ...what do their children call them and how do they kind of go through that journey with them?' So I haven't done my research on that just yet but once I figure it out and hear different stories and experiences from them, maybe I'll have an easier time maneuvering through that when I get to that point. But I can't wait. I can't wait to have kids. I can't wait to carry on this powerful legacy that I will leave them with and I really feel like my kids are going to be like Willow Smith and Jaden [Smith] or something like that. I really feel like they will be really similar to like Will Smith and Jaden Smith's family dynamic. It's like, very free, very black, and just open to having sit downs and communication with each about everything. Like, 'Lets talk about as much as you want to talk about.'

O'Brien: You mentioned dating men in high school towards the end. But you haven't mentioned romance at all around since then. Tell us about what your romantic life is like.

Snipes: My romantic life I think from high school leading up to probably now...I usually date mostly men that are more on the masculine side. I have very high feminine power so I feel like I need to balance that out sometimes. But it wasn't until I started being more on social media and

having conversations with men of trans experiences that I was like, my mind was kind of blown a little bit and I was like, 'Oh this should be interesting. I don't know how this could work out but I'm I'm into it.' And also just a lot of even lesbians that were a little bit more on the more masculine spectrum. I was very intrigued by them as well. I was like, 'They're hot, they're very attractive.' But I'm just like 'But is that what I'm attracted to? Am I attracted by their masculine energy or is it a physical thing?' So a lot of things started to go through my brain in the last few years. I think I started to really get into who I was love-wise when I started to then date men of trans experiences and how I think love shouldn't be. It should be more than just a physical thing. It should be a little bit more of a—I mean, you know you see someone physically [and] you're attracted to them but it should be a more deeper and emotional connection with someone and I think that once you realize that you kind of just open your whole world up to all the possibilities that the world could bring your way. I think now, recently watching the documentary on *Miss Major* blew my mind. I was like, 'Whoa they did a little bit of everything on the spectrum.' Like, she or they were just so...leading with love and I think as long as you do that then you know the world is your horizon, honey. You can do whatever you want and have connections and experiences with people that you never would have thought about. I think a lot of us are very brainwashed growing up to, 'This is the way things are supposed to happen. These are things that you're supposed to do when you grow up and become an adult. You have to marry this way, you have to live your life this way' and you really don't. You honestly really, really don't and I think now I'm in this arena where I think love is not number one—I think loving myself or loving someone is not number one—for me, I think loving myself is number one. And then you know, possibilities are endless, honestly once you love yourself. It's like then you can love anyone else that comes along in the journey. But dating is tough, especially in New York. Figuring things out—I'm 6'3". I'm not the shortest person on the spectrum so that's also very, very fun. A lot of people kind of see my height as overwhelming for them and they also just feel very nervous and they don't know what to do with themselves. Like. I'm just this walking dinosaur and I'm just like, 'I'm a human. Being six-three is actually not that tall.' But I know it's above average for America. But I'm actually doing a panel about love for gender nonconforming and non-binary people for the Flower Project coming up so I've known a lot of people that go through they same issues that I've gone through where people hit—you know, they contact you or they try and flirt with you but it's in all the wrong ways. It's like, oh you know, can you like...they'll ask for a request like, 'Can you come on the date looking more feminine?' And I'm like, 'First of all, you can't tell me how to identify as a non-binary person. Like, you can't pick and chose what side of the spectrum you want me to um show up as.' So that's also been very interesting. Like, even when it comes to sex or whatever it's like, 'Oh I have this list of requests. I want you to wear fishnets. I want you to be heels.' I don't want to be in heels when I'm having sex. I want to be as comfortable as possible. Some people are into that stuff, for me no. And that's also not something that you should bring up in a conversation. Like, you shouldn't put in a request for someone. You should kind of have them just naturally want to do that unless you're in a relationship with that person and that's something that you kind of want to have a conversation about. But when you first meet me please do not put in a request sheet because it will be terminated. Thank you. Cause I can't. I can't. But it's going to be a very interesting panel and I can't wait for it to happen because there's like five different people who identify as gender fluid, gender nonconforming, and non-binary from all different kind of walks of life and nationalities. So you get to see how they kind of migrate

through life single, dating, open relationships, love, all that fun stuff. So I'm really excited about that coming up.

O'Brien: What are your communities in New York like? Like, who do you spend a lot of time with? What sort of social networks you are, do you feel you get the most support from or do you feel connected with? You've mentioned a few different communities, but how, where do you find your people in the city?

Snipes: Mmm like I've said before, I grew up kind of I grew up mostly in a Hispanic neighborhood but my group of friends were all different nationalities in a way. I had a really close friend that was Filipino, I had a Spanish friend, I had an Asian friend, I had um all different types of friends and I think growing up and then going to La Guardia, that was all different types of people there. So I've always been open to having and surrounding myself with different nationalities, people with different backgrounds, different experiences, and that was so I could learn more about who I am and about others. So at this moment I've been doing a lot more work with identifying with my black experience. I think for a long time, being black and queer were total opposites. It was like, 'You can't be both you have to figure one out' and it was just like, 'Well that's a part of who I am. how can I do that?' So I didn't hang out [clears throat] I didn't hang out with a lot of black people because I always just felt like they wouldn't understand me, they would judge me, things of that nature. It wasn't until I went to, I think an afro-punk festival one year and I was like, 'These are my people. Like, oh my goodness, these are creative black people who are expressing themselves with no care in the world.' Like, they're really wearing feathers, we're wearing dashikis, we're wearing face paint, we're acknowledging our love for punk music and alternative music. And it was just a really great place to just be yourself as a person of color and it was just mind blowing to kind of see. So I think from that point on I was like, 'Okay I can do this.' Um and a lot of even black people now are like, 'Why did it take you so long to really own your experience?' And I think even though all we might have be under the same black experience umbrella because at the end of the day we're all black. But I think everyone has their own black experience and journey. For me this was my journey and I think it took me quite some time to figure that out and to figure out my community and how can I how can I learn from other black people that have gone through similar things. How can I learn from black networks that want to empower my blackness? And want to spread knowledge on things that I didn't know about within my own community, within my own black community, within my own queer community. So it's been it's been pretty amazing to kind of work with Sir Knight and Love More from black trans TV they've—especially Sir Knight—Sir Knight has taught me so many things. Everyday it's a new experience like, especially with us being best friends. I teach him all these things, all these different things about entertainment that he knows nothing about and then he teaches me all these different amazing things about blackness and what it means to own your experience and what it means to be a powerful black queen or black king and things of that nature. So I didn't really own it or grasp it until a little bit later and also just branching out and working with different networks that are in the Chelsea area for LGBTQ+ youth and um really just getting myself out there more as an activist and less as just someone on Instagram just talking about things. It's like, we have to inform people that. People are being murdered. Black trans lives are being murdered. No one's talking about it and why? Let's have those conversations and you know, teaming up

with even an activist such as Ericka Heart and all the work she's doing for the queer community and how she speaks so passionately about those things that really, really should matter and those things should be on the news and talked about and they aren't. We then have to do that work. We then have to carry that kind of that baggage as millennials in a way. To push forward for the next generation, to live openly and speak on the things that really matter, and do the work and know the knowledge that came before them. Because I was so embarrassed that I just learned about Miss Major. But I think Sir [Knight] was like, 'A lot of people didn't. A lot of people just didn't know and if you don't have these things written down that we've done as a community and these things recorded and these things documented then we will never know.' And I think a lot of people want to erase that but you can't. You can't when there's solidarity in the fundamental ways that America kind of has for people of color. Like you can't erase these things that have happened in our journey because they're there and they're documented. So many aren't but the majority are and they're hidden somewhere under some rug or vault that people can't get to and I think it's really, really important for projects like this, for the New York Library to do because if they didn't have research like this, especially now, then who knows what the future would be. Who would know my story if I don't record it? If I don't write it down? If I don't really get it out there for the world to see? Who will then know my story? Who will know the work that I've done for people to live freely and for people to express themselves in a way that they see fit?

O'Brien: Well said.

Snipes: Thanks.

[Laughter]

O'Brien: Is there anything that you didn't talk about that you that you wanted to make sure to include?

Snipes: Um I think I've covered pretty much everything. I think I have. It's been such a journey, like learning new things everyday and putting forth the work that needs to happen. I think being open minded being open minded to learn as much as you can. I'm a little bit of a stubborn person so I've learned to step outside of my comfort zone and try different things and listen to a lot of different experiences because it can only help you to be to become a more powerful person, especially within the LGBTQ+ community. I think if you just stay stagnant in this one circle then you're not going...you're not going to get as far and you're not going to be...you're not going to become as powerful of a person if you kind of just stay in this little box. I think someone asked on a panel that I was a part of for Pride last year—it was a white cis-heterosexual man in the audience and I was like, 'Hey'—he was like, 'How can I do the work?' And I said, 'That is a very good question, how can you do the work?' And I told them, I told him, I said, 'The way that you can do the work for me, from my knowledge, is to not necessarily go into...I mean you have to be very tricky with different um environments that you go into. But I think that as long as you branch out of your comfort zone, branch out of this norm that you have for yourself and that the world has for you and listen to different stories, read different books, talk to different types of people

that you necessarily wouldn't talk to, then you'll know how to do the work in those places and then things could go a little bit easier for you. I feel like if you really just branch out and get to know different types of people and stop just kind of constricting yourself to people that you only know in your area and your community, you have to branch out and get to learn different types of people it's really, really important.' Cause if I didn't know then I wouldn't be where I am today so. That is all. That is all I have.

O'Brien: Thank you B Hawk.

Snipes: Thank you.

O'Brien: That was lovely.

Snipes: Thank you so much.