**Interview with Odette Dynasty O’Hara**

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Sabrina: So what do you prefer to go by? Do you your name or you like your stage name?

Michael: So depending on where I am and how I’m presenting myself in the moment that is typically who I like to be preferred to as.

Sabrina: Okay.

Michael: So as of right now out of face as just regular old God given me, I’m Michael Kenneth Wooten.

Sabrina: Okay.

Michael: And when I'm performing or stage or at events. I'm Odette Dynasty O'Hara.

Sabrina: Okay so one of my first question is when did you first hear about drag and what was your initial reaction to it?

Michael: Well, considering the first time I actually saw drag performers was via the movie *Too Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything*! Gotta love it. I was about 10 and 11 and my mom said I literally watched on repeat; I didn't understand what I was watching at the time.

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: These fabulous men in gowns, but those were drag Queens and I was enthralled. But my first time meeting a performer in person was in college it was my junior year. I was graduating from a private Christian University

Sabrina: Oh my.

Michael: In South Carolina and it like drag was not even talked about at all, gay was nothing.

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: And I was just a person who didn't belong in the world that I was trying to fit and ended up went to a nightclub and saw a performance on stage and was mesmerized; I couldn't take my eyes off of her and ended up after—

Sabrina: You’re fine.

Michael: Okay. So after that I ended up meeting entertainers, hanging out with them , I was just--I saw an opportunity for there to be—for there to be newness in the midst of whatever was going on in my life. So yeah, did I answer the question?

Sabrina: Yes.

Michael: Thank you, you’re amazing.

Sabrina: That's awesome. I can't remember my first time like experiencing drag; I think it was like my mom when we watched Rocky Horror picture show.

Michael: Really?

Sabrina: Yes and that was just like the coolest movie ever like Tim Curry like dressed up like he was like oh my gosh like.

Michael: I live.

Sarbina: He rocked that!

Michael: He did, he did.

Sabrina: Alright so when did you start performing as a drag artist and why did you start performing?

Michael: Well, this is fun. So, I graduated College in 2009 or 2008, December of that year and it was during the end of that year that I ended up coming out now as authentic with who I was and church no longer needed me-- and I don't like them they have their rules. And ended up I ended up homeless for a period of time and it was a group of nine drag queens who took me into a one bedroom apartment like, smell of man musk and Victoria's Secret love spell was everywhere.

Sabrina: Yum.

Michael: It was delicious and disgusting at the same time; a double D.

Sabrina: I love it.

Michael: So it ended up they dressed me up and put me in a talent show and I won.

Sabrina: That’s awesome.

Michael: Thank you and that was December of 2008 and I have never, and you know, up until 2015, I was up on a stage every weekend and I-- that's what began it. What kept it going was the aspect I am very much a community server. I love getting my hands in the dirt, I love being a part of growing things in an area and watching a community thrive, not just individuals. And for me, I noticed that people were attracted to the entertainer more than they were just the person. So I had a stronger voice and more of a pull to get things done as an entertainer so the drive to create more, to create new, to allow my community feel better that's what that's what get me going.

Sabrina: That's awesome.

Michael: Thank you.

Sabrina: Okay. Alright. How did your family friends and other loved ones recently sorry receive you becoming a drag artist?

Michael: Um well, well let's see since I started out, basically I had like a clean slate of everything. My family there's a portion of them I just don't talk to 'cause you learn as you grow up that there's no-- that desire to make sure everyone satisfied with who you are—

Sabrina: It kind of dissipates it goes.

Michael: It does. You realize that they're not there to help you pay your bills-- their opinion really doesn't matter. And at the same time if they’re-- they can't celebrate who you are like you would celebrate for them, and that just means they're not ready for the new and I don't have to be upset by that, I don't have to be hurt by that. And so family wise, my mom my sisters were all socially independent of one another, but my mom she was kind of like the base supporter for a while. I would receive packages in the mail for Odette and never for me. I'm like I could use a pair of pants for work lady! Stop always sending me wigs.

Sabrina: Thanks mom, but uh…

Michael: Can’t wear this to work, thanks. But friends wise, true friends love who you are. They don't care about what is on the outside, they don't care about what's going on. True friends want to see the best for you.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: And those are the ones that I only listened to and by the grace of God they’re the reason I'm still here today. And so, yeah. Did that answer the question?

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: Okay good. Thank you.

Sabrina: Of course, thank you. Yeah, like my sister came out a few years ago now to me and like she was really really nervous about it. And like I had her stay the night with me at my apartment and she's just like the one time I was talking to her about how me and my mom were discussing how everybody was like I'm super straight, my brothers extremely straight, like with Sydney just like yeah we don't we don't know what she is she kind of just like is coasting, this other one? She straight, and like the baby we don't really know much either. I was telling her about this she's like “Oh well you know actually like I'm not” like oh okay cool. She was like “you don’t care?” No. I was like as long as you only bring home pretty girls, like you got brought home cute boys, I don't care. Like just don't bring home any ugly girls. Like if you're happy I like I don't care dude, you know, you do you and I'm here to follow and support.

Michael: I love that; love that.

Sabrina: Okay where does your drag name come from?

Michael: Oh! This is one of my favorite questions! So, my drag name Odette. the original name, comes from the Swan Princess

Sabrina: Okay.

Michael: Which Disney really should have really taken that by the balls and made it their own but copyright infringement you know.

Sabrina: Whatever.

Michael: 'cause the Swan Princess out of all of the Princess that girls are introduced to or society is introduced to, she's the only one that did not allow people to accept her for only her beauty. Like when Prince Derek said “I love you” she--after they grew up together, you know, she asked him why and he said, “because you're beautiful” and she goes “that's it? Well I'm out peace.” Thus the curse started all that shit go job lady for having a voice and you got a curse, but she was willing to give up what would be easy—an easy road because who she is is much more important than what she looks like.

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: And that, that's the message that I want more than anything for my character to represent is an idea that who we are means much more than what we wear or how we look. It's what you bring into this world and how are you going to make a difference with it.

Sabrina: I love that. Oh my gosh.

Michael: Of course. And it's great 'cause like we did, for dance, we did Swan Princess quite a few times.

Michael: Really?

Sabrina: When I was little yeah. So like I know that movie. That's so cool.

Michael: Thanks.

Sabrina: There are a lot of terms for types and styles of drag: drag queen, drag king, to glamour queen, male impersonator, comedy queen, bearded queen, queer artist, bio-queen, camp queen, among others. So many. Are there particular labels you would use to characterize your drag? What kind of drag do you do and what is your style?

Michael: Well, I am very perverse lady. I'm very like president’s wife, like you can take me out to dinner, and I won’t embarrass your ass, like that’s me. But I understand that our society is drenched in labels like it is one where you have to have the right label or dress someone by the right way or they'll get offended. To me I never get offended unless someone intentionally goes to say something, like people just don't know right?

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: But for me personally I competed in the Miss Gay America network and circuit, thus I am the current reigning Miss Gay Illinois.

Sabrina: Oooh, congrats.

Michael: Thanks. I get a lot of them.

Sabrina: She’s so pretty.

Michael: Little bracelets everywhere, you know. But in that system they refer to entertainers as female impersonators.

Sabrina: Okay.

Michael: Because I'm not trying to be a woman by any means.

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: So therefore any label that gives strong indication of person identity, I pull away from. Drag performer is used for me a little loosely within our community just because it-- everyone gets lumped up drag. So for me as a female impersonator, I prefer like I love who Michael Kenneth is like I love me, and I love who are Odette is and we have to have the separation.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: And so I attuned to that title.

Sabrina: Okay. I like it.

Michael: Does that help the question for you?

Sabrina Yeah. Okay. Does the type of drag that you do affect your life as a drag artist? It’s like you kind of answered that already but. ‘Cause you put how you guys had to be separate.

Michael: Oh the one part is like what style do I perform? So like in the style like I'm definitely some would say I’m a dancing Queen, I don't-- even know I teach dance, I don't I don't attune to that too much.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: What I do is I'm very much a crowd reader, and I move off the crowd, and so I'm very classy, very chandelier and all. I'm very--I'm yeah. Like first lady librarian, like you're going to get a lot of glamour, but I'll even walk out in like a Chick-fil-A outfit and like call it a day, like I’m good. You’re going to be entertained regardless**.**

Sabrina: Right like no matter what okay.

Michael: Exactly. I’m not drama let's say that

Sabrina: Thank God.

Sabrina: Who or what has influenced your drag?

Michael: My grandmother. She’s right up there, she’s so beautiful. And predominantly because she, out of everyone in my entire family, my grandmother has been there since day one and has not silently but she's definitely when she speaks it is a force and she's always encouraged me to be who I am, to love who I am, and to pursue the best of myself. And Odette definitely carries that aspect for herself and the community.

Sabrina: That's great. Yeah, I think every once in a while, like with my grandma you know it's like okay well what would she think about what I'm doing today? Would she be proud of me, you know? Like so sometimes that’s gotta get you in check.

Michael: Exactly.

Sabrina: Do you consider your drag political?

Michael: No, not at all.

Sabrina: Just from looking, I was like no she's just pretty.

Michael: Yeah she is. She gorgeous. She gorgeous. She know it.

Sabrina: Okay this has a few things to it. So, can you talk about what your life is like as a drag artist? Are you part of a drag family, house, or a collective?

Michael: I am. So, I am--my drag family is one of my favorites, naturally it's my family, but we are very independent. So, my drag mother is Eureka O'Hara from RuPaul's drag race season 10 or 11.

Sabrina: Okay side note.

Michael: Yeah?

Sabrina: We are watching that season.

Michael: Are you?

Sabrina: Watching season 11 in class.

Michael: That's my mother.

Sabrina: That's so cool.

Michael: That’s my mommy. Now there we go, used to be in Johnson City, TN. Used to drive her ass everywhere.

Sabrina: They are gonna be jealous now, so.

Michael: You're welcome. I’ll send you a picture of me with her.

Sabrina: Yes!

Michael: So like she's my drag mother but we are all, we're all independent, meaning we do our own thing, we follow our own drummer basically. It's inspired me because the O’Hara family is one that there's a certain level of expectation when it comes to us as entertainers like you said that you do or you do anything a certain way or wear something is certain way is literally about how do you make people feel when you walk in the room, that is--that's what we aspire to more than anything. It's transitioning the feel of the space. We are very much of our family that it is not shit to do with you; it has nothing to do with the entertainer. Everything to do with the person standing in front of you, and if you are-- if you're not making sure that person is feeling better about their life, then what your doing is like irrelevant and so that is what inspires me from my family.

Sabrina: That’s awesome.

Michael: Thanks.

Sabrina: I think she was actually on both right?

Michael: She was.

Sarbrina: ‘Cause she got taken off, yeah. So that's the one we are watching; 10 I guess.

Michael: It, yeah I think it's 10. I think. I don't know.

Sabrina: It is the one that had Trinity and stuff on it her you know, best friend. That is so so funny. How often do you how often do you perform and where do you perform?

Michael: Well, I'm still new to St. Louis and so this region, I moved up here in 2017 that, right after Christmas that year, and I slowly started reintroducing myself into the drag community because I was on a quest to find myself, when I first moved up here. And in that process I started, after year being here, started performing, and again very slow. So started Bubby and Sissy’s in Alton, Illinois. Taylor de Mornay was my roommate for a period of time, amazing human, and ended up from there started performing at Hamburger Mary’s on House Casts every Sunday or every other Sunday, and spot shows here and there around town but since Covid I have yet to take the stage since. To which there's several things enveloped in that but mostly just safety concerns.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: But I--I'm not sure when my character would come back on the stage. I was supposed to do a show on the 25th for brunch, now life has changed that, so we will see. See what happens. hopefully sooner than later know I can come see you.

Sabrina: Hopefully sooner than later. I can come see you.

Michael: Yeah, come!

Sabrina: A fun one. What goes into getting ready for performing?

Michael: What doesn’t go into getting ready? You know everything from breathing, to paint, to shoes, and pain. Well okay so there are different stages to getting ready; for me there's several things. Like a lot of people are like “you just put too much into it Odette,” like no I really don't, this is important. Like one of the biggest things for me is, of course we pick our music, but I pick my music based upon the crowd I’m going to be in. ‘Cause it's super important that I have assigned, I always take backups with me just in case I get in the room and I'm like “Oh no this crowd is totally not going to love Beyonce let's give ‘em Gladys Knight” like you know something like that. R&B and R&B bad reference, Odette. I, drag for me is my form of meditation. So for me I have to calm myself and I have to get out of myself, so the whole time of preparing, like while I’m doing my face, is literally meditation. Soft music like listen, feeling how it's going and feeling the person that I'm going to be that night. But then of course there's the hair, there's the shoes, that and I'm different. Like I definitely have learned I don't have to work as hard to be beautiful as some Queens do. And I think it's just from the inside, I really do. Everything on the outside is just there like it’s paint by numbers and like a little bit of spatula like who knows. But like I don't-- I could I literally wear burlap sack sometimes and people are like “Oh my gosh that is such a nice outfit how did you get that together?” I'm like literally pulling it out of the trash, O.M.G. But thanks it’s a Walmart bag.

Sabrina: Yes, I can't even imagine 'cause like her dancing like I know how long it took us to get ready and like we don't have to do nearly half of the stuff that you guys do. Like—

Michael: Like hiding kibbles and bits and stuff.

Sabrina: Yeah those are fine. Our hair is usually attached to our head usually but.

Michael: There’s that one little curly que just flying out.

Sabrina: It's a lot harder--I feel like it's a lot harder-- it's really hard to change them 'cause you know you got the 5 billion things of hairspray

Michael: And the wires all in it.

Sabrina: Oh my gosh. Especially when we were in a hurry you know like it’d be, for point it would be slicked back in a bun then you have to have it like halfway down for your next thing and like.

Michael:Oh yeah.

Sabrina: Like combing through the hairspray. Like, oh God please stop.

Michael: I love.

Sabrina: What are the biggest challenges to doing drag and being a drag artist?

Michael: That question is so individual like it's meaning-- it's different for every person. For me as a performer being in recovery, it is--it's hard. It's hard for me to truly allow myself to feel as free as I once used to feel because I get to a space where I am mentally invincible. Like I can do anything, I can-- I can take on the world, and for an addict that can be very frightening.

Sabrina: Understandable.

Michael: And so could you feel like you can you can slip up and you can use one time and everything will be okay.

Sabrina: Right

Michael: And that's just not the case. So, I have to monitor myself mentally. I have, for the first time in my life, I have a support team that they assist me with keeping me in check and keeping me humble, but at the same time going back and forth into into the dressing room because you never know. You never know what you're going to get. That's always a frightening place for someone like me.

Sabrina: Understandable.

Sabrina: Is there anything unique to the drag scene where you live compared to other places in the country or world?

Michael: You know I've lived all over this fair country of ours, 'cause I'm a runner, and I would honestly say this region is very, very interesting because when it comes to the entertainers in this area, there is--there is a sense of family. But because Saint Louis has such a thriving history of pageantry there is quite a bit of competition too in the mindsets of entertainers. And that's, that's not my stick, like I've already had my national crowns. Like, I’m good. I don't want your job, boo. I just wanna show up and help you make your show great, like what can I do to help you? But when you're someone who is genuinely that, that person who wants to give, I found that even that itself seems that threatening because people aren’t used to it.

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: And so it makes you question your motives too. And so everywhere else I've lived there's been a general understanding that we're just all in this together, we’re all just bumbling men in gowns trying to make our best.

Sabrina:Right.

Michael: Here it-- there's been a little bit of a different experience. I wouldn’t say it's negative, every-- everywhere has their perks, for me personally I know I have to stay-- stay as far back as I can from--from that energy.

Sabrina: Yeah sounds kind of negative.

Michael: I know it does, doesn't it to? I don't want it to. St. Louis is wonderful. But--

Sabrina: Not like you sound negative just like the whole aspect of that.

Michael: Yeah, they're great. They're doing their best.

Sabrina: Alright then what has the COVID-19 pandemic meant for your life as a drag artist?

Michael: My life as a drag artist pretty much stopped when COVID happened, and that's just--- that's just out of fear and concern for not only myself, but my business and my life revolves around people of the older community and I don't want to risk their lives too. But again everything is about perspective, so COVID has done amazing things for the art culture as a whole because people who are serious get-- had the opportunity to really refine their craft in the privacy of their own home without the influence of others, which is super big; like entertainers get too mixed up with what other people think about them. But when you're stuck at home having to create your own art like from trash, like what do you do? You begin to learn you.

Sabrina: Yeah you can just work on yourself and who you are as.

Michael: Exactly.

Sabrina: That's awesome.

Michael: That's been cool to watch.

Sabrina: It's like kind of almost like a blessing in disguise in that sense.

Michael: Definitely everything is, isn't it?

Sabrina: I hope so. I'm still trying to figure some of that out but.

Michael:Oh girl don’t make me cry.

Sabrina: How do you identify in terms of your sex, gender identity, and gender expression out of drag? What pronouns do you use in and out of drag?

Michael: Yeah. So out of drag I take whatever; just don't be derogatory. Like don’t-- like I'm not about not about negativity all, and so when someone projects that on me then, then I get very flustered. But I like he/she whatever, I don't--I'm not a carer. like whatever girl you say what you need. When it comes to, I think this was the best thing I've ever learned, when it comes to my sexuality it's what happens between the sheets.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: No my orientation is what happens between the sheets. My identity is what happens on the streets. And so I am, in all actuality I may be a beautiful gay man, but like sex happens like once or twice, last week it was three times a week, but like that’s nothing. But like, but if you identify me as just those three moments, then you're negating like hours and abundant life that no longer has a label, if that makes sense.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: So, I would much rather just be a human.

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: Instead of being labeled by my sexuality or being labeled by my-- my orientation, whatever.

Sabrina: Right as like a gay man that dresses up in drag and does whatever, you're just here, you do what you want and you’re—

Michael:Yeah.

Sabrina: Here to live.

Michael: Hello!

Sabrina: YOLO.

Michael: YOLO.

Sabrina: I hate that but yeah.

Michael: My YOLO days are coming to an end. You tried—you said that the 8th time, been there.

Sabrina: Has drag influenced your sex and gender identities and how?

Michael: I mean there’s been times. You know, you see that one straight man, you're like “I got legs for you babe,” that’s happened. I would say for the most part no. I-I keep—I keep Odette kind of on a shelf in the aspect of who she is. She is too busy to be bothered with frivolous things as sex or-- if that makes sense.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: So and at the same time my body is still owned by Michael and so if someone is to feel compelled to feel a certain way I have to be present. Does that makes sense?

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: So it, it has to give respect to the vessel owner.

Sabrina: You want somebody to love you, want you, as you not just as Odette.

Michael: Exactly.

Sabrina: I like that.

Sabrina: Has drag influenced how you think about gender?

Michael: Oh, most definitely. Definitely. Especially when it comes to my brothers and sisters in trans community. Like it--it took me the longest time to understand fully like, and I still don't like so I can never put myself in any of any of their shoes, but I definitely respect them. There is this energy that comes from an individual who is trans that is just powerful because they have owned who they are so much to the level of risking everything.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: Like what do I risk but a few glances and like some scoffs? They risk the vulnerability of like being seen and being heard and fighting for that to a level I will never understand it.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: And I love them for it. Like I love their tenacity, their--their ability to look past and just push for what they want. If we all had that strength.

Sabrina: Right if only.

Michael: Seriously.

Sabrina: I--there's a few girls that I went to school with that are transitioning. Then it's like they both look amazing just from like the pictures we don't, we're not like super friends you know, but like of course they post pictures of everything and like they both got these you know nice beards and stuff like “yes you work it” like you look so good. Like good for you to be you, man.

Michael: Love it.

Sabrina: It’s just funny 'cause the one girl actually liked the guy I was dating at the time she got little upset because like she wanted to go to the dance with him and like now, well, now you’re a dude. Cool.

Michael: Sorry for ya.

Sabrina: Have your sex and gender identities influenced your drag? I feel like kind of answered like all of those like together.

Michael: Feel like there’s a lot about sex, Jesus.

Sabrina: Oh well you know.

Michael: Well. Um, eh, meh not really. Yeah, like just because of the separatism that is over the two characters.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: No my, off the record, in my trashy days who knew what I would bring home. We don't talk about that no more.

Sabrina: We all gotta have that hoe stage, it’s okay.

Michael: No, no more, clear mind please, please. I was young once.

Sabrina: How has drag impacted or changed you? Has drag impacted your confidence as a person when you are out of—out of drag?

Michael: Definitely. Definitely. Drag has changed everything for me. When I first started performing, it was a means of getting dollar menu food that turned into a voice for my community. That allowed me to know that we as individuals hold the choice to be who we want to be. And it’s that choice that dictates our daily actions and our daily goals. And so for me, drag is taught me a lot can happen quickly, and the evolution of the human is very slow. It is being willing to go to each stage of it. And so it's allowed me to see people for where they are in their journey and not judge not-- not feel any kind of way 'cause there's nothing to do with me.

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: One of the greatest things that I-- I focused on and like learned in drag is like I refuse to never have an emotional reaction to anything that doesn't immediately affect my health or my wallet. So, if I'm not bleeding and they're not stealing from me, what the hell do I have to worry about? Like I’m like, “Okay. Tell me more about how you feel baby.” And I--if it wasn't for drag I would not have had that understanding at all.

Sabrina: Do you ever have like a conflict with yourself of like, like being Odette? Like people think you look great or beautiful this way, do you ever think like you is Michael is not as attractive or vice versa?

Michael: Uh yeah. All the time. Very good question. So I when-- I only go out as Odette. I do not go out as me. Predominantly because of that feeling itself. I feel like a fish out of water if I'm in the club, I feel like if Michael is there “Who brought this librarian in? Who is the weird guy, you know, sitting in the corner?” Because like that's her world and that like the community—people-- sometimes you just want people to see you, and your character sometimes stands in the way of that.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: And so that's definitely been a point but also at the same time I'm-- I'm mixed race. So, I'm black and white, and growing up in South Carolina you're just not supposed to exist.

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: And so I've also grown. Like I was cultivated in that society of separating myself from myself and it's-- it's-- it's easier that way, but at the same time it can be very difficult.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: And then to create something as beautiful as the studio you realize that both can live as one and change lives together.

Sabrina: Yeah, that's-- that's one thing I love alike bout dance and performing is like you can be you but then at the same time you can dress up and put all this makeup on and have all these costumes, glitter, sequence, you know, and like be dazzling and out and crazy.

Michael: Exactly.

Sabrina: And you know just feel loud.

Michael: Yeah, exactly.

Sabrina: If you could go back in time as Odette what advice would you give to your younger self? So, like if it both as Odette, so.

Michael: That’s going to make me cry.

Sabrina: We can skip it if you want, I don’t want you to cry.

Michael: No, it has to come out eventually, I'm sure. One thing I would say, there are two actually. One is make sure that you don't put shows before family, go to that fucking party. And the other is you don't have to try everything to accepted.

Sabrina: Yeah. That's the problem is people think like so many kids and everything out there it’s like oh you know you have to do this to be cool to be accepted and it's not.

Michael: It’s not the truth.

Sabrina: I rather be the loser. I--I was luckily very lucky with all that in um I've always had to try really hard at school, so like I could have been a massive pothead you know? I could have done this I could have done that, but I was like no like I'm focusing on school. I already have a hard enough time trying to do this, okay, like I don't need help. Like I'm--I'm a square; I didn't like start drinking till I was 21, like I only smoked pot a few times only 'cause it's been brought to me and I was already drunk, so I was like fuck it whatever, girl.

Michael: YOLO.

Sabrina: But I--I don't know I'm very, very, very lucky in that sense of and now I just live through my guy. He's-- he's had his fun and tried his stuff, so you know, it's kind of nice having that, 'cause then you can hear about it, so like it's like, I'm okay like that one I'm good with. Thanks.

Michael: Right. I get that. Oof.

Sabrina: Alright this is a long one. I'm curious if and how your social identities have impacted your experience of drag, or vice versa how drag has impacted your identities. Can you share about how one or more of your social identities such as gender, race, class, age, geography, religion, science, sexuality, disability, etc. and or the interaction of these social identities have impacted your experience of drag and or how drag has impacted your experience of this social identity?

Michael: Yes, that's a long question.

Sabrina: Uh-huh, I was like do we need to go over again? 'Cause I might need to.

Michael: That’s a long one. So the one I'm going to start with is my identity based in race, because being mixed race. Like in this a lot of people today “why is that such a thing?” It's very much a thing because you never, you never feel like you have a side--

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: An argument, or with a group of people, like where's the other? Like can we bring out an other parade? Like where's that one? Bring me an other parade.

Sabrina: Right 'cause it's like who do you like especially with things now like who do you stand with? Do you stand with like black lives matter do you stand with you know white privilege? Like.

Michael: All of it, all of it. I am a product of love. Period.

Sabrina: And that should-- that's what should be important.

Michael: That is what is--all of us are products of love. Some, Lord willing, all of us are products of love and in that like that in itself gives us all merit to show up. That gives us the opportunity to-to stand and have a voice. And so for me like my drag is entrenched in 100% acceptance and love. And how can I best serve someone else? But again, I--I'm a person that outside of everything I do my best not to, not to attune to labels. Like I have to, and I love the fact that there are, there are classes that now go over this because it is. It’s important to some people.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: But at the end of the day why is it important? Isn’t it more important that we just come together, and we create change? Why do we have to know what our origin is to do it?

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: 'Cause maybe our origin isn't meant to be our future. Like and that is, like for me that's one of the biggest, the biggest areas of conflict when I'm having to go to that space mentally is I can't--I don't want to look at how we're different.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: I want to look at how we're the same and let's move forward with that.

Sabrina: Right. When I was little like in grade school and stuff, like everybody used to give me a hard time 'cause like, until my--my siblings father left on my 15th birthday, I--he was my dad.

Michael: Okay.

Sabrina: He's who I always thought was my father, then after, 'cause my mom went to get child support from him, they had her do one for me, and I found out he was not like my father, you know. Go figure my mom was 16, she was a baby, but like growing up kids always gave me a hard time it's like oh you know “Are you Mexican?” I'm like no I'm white like I don't understand why it matters anyway. But--but he, I don't know what his father was, but he was redhead, but his mother is Mexican and Native American.

Michael: Okay.

Sabrina: So I do have that little bit you know but like when I was little, I-- I didn't know. So I was like “Why are you asking about?” Like of course not, blah blah blah, you know? Like and you know, you always have that thing it’s like oh Hispanic, not Hispanic. I'm like do I wanna put that on there, maybe get you know, this or that?

Michael: Right.

Sabrina: But I just always like identify just as white 'cause that's mostly what I am, that's-- I don't know. But in the same sense in that as like I am part you know all of these--these other um, races. God I was like what is the word?

Michael: What is that?

Sabrina: What is that word?

Michael: What is that?

Sabrina: So it's like I can identify. Like especially in the summertime, she bronzes beautiful.

Michael: I love it.

Sabrina: But you know, I don't know. It's like I'm-- I can make some good Mexican food; I don’t like refried beans.

Michael: Love it.

Sabrina: I don't like spicy. You know like, I--I mean I've never had it like quite as difficult. Like I can't understand the whole quite mixed race you know.

Michael: Yeah.

Sabrina: So I'm just like, I don't know. I'm the same thing. Like you are who you are, it doesn't--it doesn't matter.

Michael: Exactly.

Sabrina: Like I don't care what you are. If you're a trashy person you’re a trashy person. If you're a good person, you're a good person. That's how it should be.

Michael: Exactly.

Sabrina: No questions.

Michael: Some of us are just good people who have done bad things.

Sabrina: That's fine too, that fine.

Michael: Okay, good. That made me happy. Tell me I’m okay!

Sabrina: As long as you’re not killing puppies like.

Michael: No, no, not at all.

Sabrina: Everything else we can kind of eh.

Michael: That one kitten. I’m kidding.

Sabrina: It's like if it was a cat maybe, I’m dog girl so.

Michael: Same. Same.

Sabrina: I can show you my puppies then.

Michael: Yes.

Sabrina: Alright, that long ass question, we’re good. Alright, so how do you define drag?

Michael: I think Ru said it best like when she said “We were born naked and the rest is drag.” Drag is what we put on as our shield, to step out in the day. Whether it is a police uniform, whether it is doctor scrubs, nurses’ scrubs, bartenders, badge, whatever, like drag is what we put on to bring about our best life and how we feel we're bringing about our best life. For me I am a chameleon of that art. I can-- I can wear whatever to make whoever feel a certain way, 'cause they know the day-- it all revolves around how you make someone else feel; so hopefully all drag uplifts another human. We both know that's not always the case, but the goal is that one finds their own strength serenity inside the art.

Sabrina: Yeah. Yeah I see how like there's so many different ways you can come about it like 'cause we've talked about that in class quite a lot.

Michael: Right.

Sabrina: It's like, I don't know I describe it as like love. Like you get to be who you are with no if ands or buts, it's like it's just you being able to—yeah, you are who you are. You get these families and like those are those are families, you are family, you know it's love it's being able to express yourself, just be you.

Michael: Exactly.

Sabrina: What do you think is the purpose of drag? Kind of hit that too with the definition but.

Michael: Yeah. It’s uh I would yeah, I would say they're pretty much one in the same like those things answers are pretty much the same thing. The purpose… The purpose of anything is solely based upon with that individual makes it. Like I could say the purpose of my new floors, so it looks beautiful in here while someone else says the purpose, so I feel good. Like or the purpose-- it's all dependent upon what that individual sees as the purpose, so I can’t—I can’t answer that for everyone, but for me I think the overall purpose is to find myself.

Sabrina: Yeah. Oh, another sexual question.

Michael: Oh, sex is everywhere.

Sabrina: What do you think drag is sexual? Why or why not if so, how in what way?

Michael: Do I think drag is sexual?

Sabrina: Do you--It’s worded weird. Do you think drag is—do you think drag is sexual?

Michael: Okay.

Sabrina: I may have just said it a little messed up.

Michael: No, you’re good.

Sabrina: I was like wait what? I was confused too. Wording is hard, okay.

Michael: No, it’s alright, I get it. I’m dyslexic. It can be it can be very sexual, again it depends on what that person brings in.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: I--there was for a time I was looking for that kind of attention via drag and it, no more. Period. But it's like it can be, let me just say that. Like being a teacher can be sexual, being a donut maker can be sexual, like better glaze that again. Like.

Sabrina: I mean there’s holes in the donut. They don't make costumes as teachers for nothing.

Michael: I know. Oh, you librarian, you. Yeah, it’s all, anything can be. That question’s so interesting. Is dog grooming be sexual? It can be.

Sabrina: Oh, I like the way you caress that dog.

Michael: That mane.

Sabrina: That just makes me think of like for the season of RuPaul like Nina?

Michael: uh huh Nina Flowers, I love her.

Sabrina: No, not her. But I do I love love love her. Season 10 with Nina Bonina.

Michael: Okay yeah yeah yeah.

Sabrina: She comes out she got these big go hips, big ole tush, big ole breasteses, you know it's like every single look she does is very sexual, like you got this girl but.

Michael: All of it.

Sabrina: I mean I feel like we should know the answer, how do you feel about RuPaul's drag race?

Michael: Well, I do have mixed feelings about it.

Sabrina: Okay.

Michael: So, first feeling is I do love how Ru has worked diligently to make us a household name, a household product. Like we as an art form-- you can't go into a house in America and not have fall-- someone not know what drag is. Like it's, it's a thing now. So it’s done amazing for the community as a whole of giving us a spotlight.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: I think it's also done a detriment to our community as in what's expected of entertainers.

Sabrina: I can see that.

Michael: One of the hugest shifts and one of the biggest internal conflicts I have, is the fact I cannot go into a space and truly be able to serve and feel comfortable and welcoming predominantly because people have attuned themselves, especially new entertainers, attune themselves to make it about them. When again, it has zero to do with me and it has everything to do with who I'm serving. And I think that's one of the biggest frustrations I have, is we're expected now as entertainers to be catty, to be backstabbing, to be all of that and that’s--I refuse to do that. I have no time for that.

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: And so that it's a double-edged sword like I'm glad I can have these conversations and open now with kids who are going to school to study it like, I was buying heels in the back of a Goodwill like in sneaking out the back door with them.

Sabrina: Like don't see me.

Michael: Out of fear persecution and now it's we can talk about it so I love that. I just wish there was more diversity in what's expected of us.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: And so…

Sabrina: Yeah, it's very competition based very—

Michael: There's no-- there's no competition besides for you to you.

Sabrina: Yeah 'cause at the end of the day you are doing it for you and yeah.

Michael: Exactly.

Sabrina: Yep. If you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene, or the drag community what would it be and why?

Michael: It was just that.

Sabrina: Yup. Two in one.

Michael: Yay! Mazeltov.

Sabrina: What do you think are misconceptions people have about drag? Where does it come from? What do you think would help change that?

Michael: Well you can't change anything without changing an entire species of man. It--I think one of the biggest things is that I do not want to be a woman, like that--that's--that's one of the biggest things when I talk to or meet people who've never met a queen or entertainer for the first time and they're meeting me and they're like, “So do you like being a woman?” Like, oh God, no. This is expensive and this is like-- this is time consuming. I would much rather be on my couch with a bag of chips right now. Like curled up watching some scary movie with my dog like, that-- that's me and so.

Sabrina: I don't like being a woman either if that helps.

Michael: You're welcome. I'm happy to be able to wash it off for you. So it's--it's one of those things of like I--I wish people, when they-- when they look at an entertainer, they see the person. I wish that people would see the entertainer.

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: And not, not like superimpose what they feel that entertainer is or wants to be.

Sabrina: Yeah, I think that's one of the biggest issues with like any, you know anybody that's different, you know. Being gay, being trans, doing drag like, it’s like “Oh well this is what I think so that's definitely what you have to think and feel, right?” No, that's not how it works.

Michael: Exactly.

Sabrina: Like for Halloween, do you watch like American Horror Story?

Michael: Oh yeah, I love it.

Sabrina: Okay so they did the hotel. So, my family kind of did that for Halloween, my stepdad dressed up as, what's the guy’s name? The man who was dressed in drag.

Michael: Okay.

Sabrina: So my my stepdad did that. My stepdad’s real straight.  
Michael: I love it.

Sabrina: You know?

Michael: I love it.

Sabrina: Like he did it for fun you know.

Michael: I love it.

Sabrina: He, my stepdad is also a very interesting character. He was feeling himself, he had his makeup on, you know like—I don’t know, he you know, it's like it's for you. You have fun with it. Don't impose anything like no he's really, he's a very straight man.

Michael: Right.

Sabrina: You with my mom, you know whatever. But I don't know. I just, I'm also very. very open, so I am like just don't push yourself on other people. It's not right or wrong. But let people be people.

Michael: Right.

Sabrina: If you choose one thing you want people to know about or learn about drag, what would it be?

Michael: Ah. That it's not concrete. That there, no--no two humans can answer these questions the same way.

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: And it is-- drag is something that must be experienced and it must be, to fully understand it, it must be done. Because there is there is a shift that happens within the individual that they feel the sense of power that they've never felt before. No matter how ridiculous they think they may be—

Sabrina: Right.

Michael:--when they wash it off they miss it. Hands down. Like I've yet to meet someone that's like “I would never do that again.” Like when you wash it off and you go back to you, it's that feeling that you're like, “Oh I see.” Does that make sense like?

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: There is. There is a there's an energy shift that's just unremarkable.

Sabrina: Yeah, like I can slightly relate to that because of my dance experience you know, it's like it takes so much work and it's so hard but like at the end of the day, it's so much fun and you can't wait to go do it again.

Michael: Exactly.

Sabrina: You know, it's like all the praise you get all the attention you get like it's nice.

Michael: Yeah exactly.

Sabrina: So.

Michael: So the studio name *Effervescent studios,* it comes from a friend of mine who, when he would always come to the shows, regular tender, he would say “you're just so effervescent.” He was like, “Every time you take the stage it was literally like refreshing.” He’s like “Just like bubbles in champagne,” and so the studio kind of inhabits that-- that essence of that--that feeling you get when you're in drag. It's the effervescent freshness. It’s the-- it's no matter—again, no matter how ridiculous you may feel, once you take it off, the effervescence, you feel it's-- it's dwindling after that. It's, that's--that's what I want. That's what I want to encompass in it.

Sabrina: That's great cause as you said that I looked at your sign and I see the bubbles.

Michael: Yeah.

Sabrina: I was like it’s champagne!

Michael: You welcome! That's where they come from.

Sabrina: That's awesome.

Michael: Thank you.

Sabrina: Of course.

Sabrina: Well, thank you so much I appreciate your time and everything and answering all my fun silly questions.

Michael: Thank you thank you.

Sabrina: Of course.

Michael: Yay.