

# IFQT S1E3 Transcript

**Samuel Smalls, Jr.:** My name is Samuel Smalls, Jr. I'm 18 years old. When I started working on the project, I was living in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. But I've since moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I talk a lot about my lived experience as a queer Black youth. And how I navigate femininity, my Blackness, my queerness, the intersections.

When I was a queer baby, I wish I had something like this to listen to. Cause I just knew whenever I would go through something that I couldn't be the only one. And I think this podcast builds community in that way. I think it's also beautiful that we build a community. We have different ethnicities, different races, different sexualities, different gender expressions. But we all have something that unites us, which is our queerness.

Through that, we have so many things that we just get about each other. I think it's so important to have these conversations with varying perspectives because the queer spectrum is broad and it's long.

## Theme Song (sung by Alex Masse):

*Woke up on the right side of the rainbow*

*Feeling bright, gonna put on a good show*

*There's a skip in my step*

*I'm doing my best*

*And I guess that you could say,*

*I'm feeling queer today.*

*I'm feeling queer today!*

**Wallace:** Hey everyone, I'm Wallace. I'm 16 years old. I use he they pronouns and I'm from upstate New York

**Samuel Smalls, Jr.:** and once again, I'm Steven Smalls Jr. And welcome to the I'm Feeling Queer Today, the podcast that amplifies the voices of queer youth.

**Wallace:** This is episode three, queerness, Blackness, femininity, and faith.

So Sam, we started the episode with you talking about the importance of addressing intersectionality. As queer people of color, you and I are both automatically navigating space with awarenesses that not everyone has access to. But we also do have to address there are more intersections than just those of race and sexuality.

**Samuel Smalls, Jr.:** Right. As I said before, the queer spectrum is broad and is long. Not just in terms of how people identify their sexuality and gender, but also all of the other aspects of life. The first segment we are going to hear addresses a few of those intersections. I had a chance to chat with Z Cosby, a musician and activist from Indianapolis, Indiana, who identifies as a Black queer femme.

**Wallace:** For listeners who are unfamiliar, just like sexuality, gender also has a spectrum. The queer conception of *femme*, F E M M E, is a femme identified person who does not always dress or act in a quote, traditionally feminine way, instead is one who expresses feminine identity through feminine associated behaviors, interactions, and political views.

While keeping that in mind. Let's take a listen to their conversation now.

**Samuel Smalls, Jr.:** I'm Sam, pronouns are he, him, I'm 18, I live in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

**Z Cosby:** I'm Z, my pronouns are she, they, I'm 19. I live in Indianapolis.

**Samuel Smalls, Jr.:** And for our listeners, I'm Black and Z, you are.

**Z Cosby:** Also Black, biracial, half white, half Black.

**Samuel Smalls, Jr.:** So, I want to talk about intersectionality. Intersectionality, as both being Black, being queer, and you also being mixed, I think that intersectionality is a very big part of our lives.

Every part of our identity is in some way related to the other, some positive ways, some negative ways. Absolutely. What was your journey on realizing the different parts of your identity and accepting them and kind of bridging the gaps?

**Z Cosby:** First. Identified as male. I was totally content as a dude, right? And I always kind of knew that I was interested in everybody and My mom is a lesbian.

My parents divorced when I was like five and she's been dating women ever since so the idea of Someone liking someone of the same gender wasn't a huge thing. It was just like whatever.

**Samuel Smalls, Jr.:** I can see that because, twinsies, my mom is also a lesbian. Her and my dad split when I was very young, and she's been dating women ever since.

**Z Cosby:** And then, when I started to be like, "Hmm, maybe I don't feel comfortable in my gender." It took a turn, and it took more steps to accept it's a larger change to who I am, so therefore, more people are uncomfortable with it. This is how it feels, but I'm getting there. I'm comfy with how I am. It's just a matter of if other people are or not.

And I'm trying to learn not to let that bother me. Their opinion does not change how I need to express and how I need to be honest about my day to day.

**Samuel Smalls, Jr.:** I've been lucky enough to have a lot of family that just accept me because my mom is like, he's who he is. If that's not okay with you, then you don't need to be in his life.

And she's trying to fight the battles for me, but What I've realized is that when I'm trying to embrace non-masculine, when I want to dress a certain way, when I want to do the gender bender day at school, when I want to join the majorette team, I get these kind of sly and veiled attempts to steer me away from femininity.

I've realized, and I'm pretty sure you can attest to it, that femininity, especially in men, is very, very frowned upon in the Black community. And now I'm witnessing the attacks on trans women specifically by Black men. The discourse about womanhood and the gatekeeping of womanhood between Black cis women and Black trans women.

It's such a deeply rooted discourse that must be very very very hard to navigate as a Black trans femme. How have you been trying to navigate that and what are your ideas and thoughts about it?

**Z Cosby:** I hated masculinity. From the start, I never wanted to be one of the boys. I never liked the idea of me just being a man.

Femininity is just being at complete and total comfort and one with yourself and just knowing that I am safe in this moment and nurtured. Masculinity feels like hostility and repression. 90 percent of my friends would be girls and then there'd be the one "dude friend." And through my entire life, I would look at full grown men and how they interact in the world and be met with immediate discomfort.

Talking to men, my voice drops about six octaves. And, um, all my giggles go away and I don't smile and it's just very "Yeah. How you doin'?", you know, like boring as hell. And I got tired of doing that and so now I have a comfortable friend group and those are the only people that I tend to interact with. I can just exist as me and they can exist as them and we're all chillin'. And then I have band practice and that's where it all happens, right?

It allows me to speak on the things I need to speak about and it allows the other people in my band to speak on the things they need to speak about and it creates a release. And then when you start doing shows, you can take it public and take up even more space, just rip and be who you are and stick to what brings joy.

**Samuel Smalls, Jr.:** For me, when I was younger, sadly, I wanted nothing more than to be one of the boys, because I felt like that's where I was supposed to be. And so, yes, I'd rather go and dance and sing with the girls. But, I was sitting on the sideline waiting to get picked for the basketball team. It hurt my feelings. But then I would get in the game and be like, "I don't want to play this. This is not for me."

Once I got older and I realized who I was, it was so liberating. I felt like, I do not have to pretend anymore. Because when I was pretending, it was like, there's one way to live your life, and this is how I'm supposed to be living it, so I'm going to live it like this. Once I found out there was more than one way, I said, "well, I'm going to live it how I see fit."

I'm still trying to figure out what the balance is, and what my balance is. Because in one space, I could be the queenest of the queen, and that's why I love to live. But also, in another space, you're the boyest of the boy. It's interesting, because everyone's perception of what's masculine, what's feminine, what's toxic, and what's healthy is different.

How do you navigate this landscape as a Black, queer, trans person?

**Z Cosby:** For me, generations and generations, I feel like we've been taught to just be rough. Because, like, the world's against us. We have to be prepared for anything. We have to hunker down. We can't focus on ourselves. We have to just get through life.

We're constantly on guard. There's never like a break. There's never a moment of breath to assess yourself. You're just worried about the outside world and what it can do to you. And so when people in our community take a step back and try to focus on themselves and find this queerness or femininity or whatever they got going on and they choose to express that it's so out of the norm, they're immediately ostracized for it because, "How can you possibly think that you have the freedom to do this when I am fearing for my life every day?"

But we're both in the same situation at the end of the day. They just see that we're different and think that our lives are easier.

**Samuel Smalls, Jr.:** It makes a lot of sense. I see that often, we don't see that we're fighting the same fight. I've noticed that people talk about this agenda of trying to make everyone gay or that the queer people are bad guys and they're trying to groom kids and ruin in the world. While they're sitting next to someone who is Black and queer. You're saying that kids should not be able to watch the same show that if that person had growing up, their life would have been so much better. And I think that at the same time as they're saying this, they're trying to ban books about Black history, at least in Florida, and teaching that slavery benefited Black people.

And while we're so busy trying to fight each other about, "Hey, two boys should not be kissing in that cartoon," they're ripping away and revising our history because they don't want either of us to win. And Black people we're in this protection mode because we do not want the emasculation of the Black man so the white man can take over.

We don't want to assimilate into whiteness because we see femininity and mental health and all these progressive things as white things, and we don't want Black people to be like the white man. And I think once we can realize that they're not white things, because there are so many Black queer people, and Black queer people will lead.

The biggest and the strongest Black liberation movements because we, we don't want to be like white people either.

**Z Cosby:** I will do anything in my power to make sure that nobody views me as a white person. Because the thought of somebody seeing me that way, it hurts so much internally. So like, a white man will walk up to me, and they'll think that I'm one of them.

Especially if they also have locks like wool. They're like, "oh my god, I love your hair, dude. I've just been working on mine for a couple years. How do you get yours to look so good? It just didn't, mine just didn't do right."

I go, "the key is being Black."

And he goes, "are you...?"

I'm like, "yeah, uh-huh, uh-huh."

And he goes, "Oh, well I feel stupid."

And I was like, "yeah, you should." And then he walked away. So it's just I would rather deny that part of me. completely and take whatever comes with that, then try to even attempt to exist like that.

**Samuel Smalls, Jr.:** And once we unite against people that are causing us oppression and marginalizing us, I think that's when the biggest steps can be taken.

Very quickly, before we close, I have one little game I want to play. It's called Top 5. 5 is my favorite number. 5-15-05 is my birth date. So, I like to ask my guests to list their top five something. So I want to ask you, since you're a musician and artist, I want to know, what are your top five songs to sing?

**Z Cosby:** Let's do "Tyrone" by Erykah Badu. Let's do "Sweet Pea" by System of a Down, "Pretty Pretty" by Goose Flesh, which is my band. "Poor Unfortunate Souls" from The Little Mermaid, cause obviously. And then, one more... oh, "Drive" by Incubus.

**Samuel Smalls, Jr.:** So, , it was such a pleasure talking to you. Would you like to tell the people where they can find you? Or your band or what's coming up for you in your life.

**Z Cosby:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, uh, my Instagram @zjcosby, C-O-S-B-Y, our band has an Instagram, we're goose flesh, but our Instagram is @gooseflesh1312.

**Samuel Smalls, Jr.:** It was a great time speaking to you. I hope you have a great day.

**Z Cosby:** Thank you too.

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**Samuel Smalls, Jr.:** I really loved getting a chance to hear from Z.

**Wallace:** I can really relate to what Z said. I just really feel that whenever I'm assumed to be white, that there's just a part of me that's really being disregarded. And then there's of course the worry that some of my white friends are only friends with me because they see me as white versus being seen as my true self, which is why I feel a lot more comfortable talking about race and my racial identity with my friends of color because I feel like Even if

they can't directly relate to my experience as being biracial, they can still relate to my experience as being a person of color.

One thing that Z mentions that helps her navigate the world is making music with her band. As a writer and performer yourself, how does your art help you express yourself as a Black queer man?

**Samuel Smalls, Jr.:** As someone who's primarily a theater artist, I hope to inject myself, my queerness, and or my Blackness into every single thing that I do, every monologue, every play that I'm in, every musical that I'm in, every song that I sing, and every piece of art that I create.

But especially my Blackness because theater is such a white dominated industry, and because it has such deep roots in racism, the industry is so dominated at every single level. by people that do not look like us. It looks like our only outlets and our only abilities to shine are in pieces like *Hamilton* or *In The Heights* or an August Wilson play because it feels as though those are the only places where Black people can exist.

And so that's why one day I hope that like I'll not only be someone who sings dance and acts but also writes and produces and directs art that's made for people like me, by people like me. Because I believe that diversity can happen, not where diversity is just supposed to happen.

**Wallace:** Aside from being an actor, you're also a writer and poet.

In this next segment, you talk with fellow producer Trudy Poux about how journaling has also served as an outlet for your self expression.

Hey, Trudy. Tell us about what inspired you to do this journaling segment with Sam.

**Trudy Poux:** I sat down with Sam to talk about journaling, and I was very excited to be able to do so because his work is very emotionally moving and very enthralling. And anytime I consume it, I'm like, "I just want more." It's so great. And it was really fun to have this conversation as well because journaling for me is super helpful with the kind of aspect of out with the old in with the new that we need to have in life, I'd say, on the day to day.

And just being prepared for things to change and shift. And I think being able to process those feelings and emotions. And also, of course, a very fun part of it is me thinking, what is future me thinking? While they're reading what I'm writing. So that's kind of meta. I kind of love that. And yes So I'm so excited to present journaling with me, Trudy, and Sam.

I could not find my old journal, but I did find an old sketchbook.

**Samuel Smalls, Jr.:** I have no joke about five journals. I had a journal before I had a phone, like, so my journals kind of used to be my phone.

**Trudy Poux:** Looking back on journals it can be like "this was a different person. This is not really who I am anymore." The passage of time is so different in a journal than it is in real life.

**Samuel Smalls, Jr.:** I can tell exactly where I was in my life by reading what I was writing. One, my handwriting gets a little better because of course I got older, but also my writing just in general got better. My way of expressing myself got better. When I was writing songs in 8th grade, that didn't really make a lot of sense.

I could go back and revise them, you know, make them make sense.

**Trudy Poux:** So you look back on your journal entries and you're a little embarrassed because you're talking about things in such a melodramatic way?

**Samuel Smalls, Jr.:** I look back and I'm like, "this is not that serious." I had a speech and debate class. We had an assignment where you take a story of your life, and you craft it into a speech.

It's a shared experience among a lot of queer youth, but I fell for one of my straight friends. I think he knew I liked him at the time. See, I called it my Disney love story. His codename was Adam, because I thought that Adam was a perfect Disney prince name. I took my life, and I paralleled it to a Disney princess.

So yeah, I'll just read the paragraph.

*Like most stories, my Disney story started before I met my prince. You see, I had a princess. She fit perfectly into my Black and white still picture movie. I dated these princesses because I thought that's what I was supposed to do. I dated these girls because everyone told me that I was right.*

*They were attractive. Very beautiful. Intelligent. Well, at least most of them were. They were funny. [00:19:00] And I thought I wanted to be in this Black and white story. Until I met Adam. That was the first time I saw color.*

Like, the person that I was then, and I am now, is so different. I look back and I'm like, ooh girl. For one, I did not like that boy that, that much.

But I still use my journal to express. Having my journal in 2020 saved me in a lot of ways. Cause I was like, "I'm going to sit here and map out a three book series with a spinoff TV show, the successor to Divergent," because I had the time to do so. I don't know what spurred me to think that I'm just going to pick up where Veronica Roth left off and continue her story with the best fanfiction ever made, but she was going to buy it. I just knew.

Get a journal and you can create in ways you never thought possible. There's something kind of special that I can't explain that's different than the pen and the pad, that you can't really find in technology. Especially as a queer person, because there's so much that goes on in our [00:20:00] heads, in our worlds, there's so many of us who fall in love with our straight friends, sometimes we just need somebody to talk to.

And most times the person you want to talk to about it is the person that's making you feel it. So you go to your journal, and you write, or you create, it's like a weight is lifted off your shoulders. Then when you get older, you have this book. This book's of your trials, but more importantly, your triumphs.

Wow, I made it through this. I made it through that. And I made it through that too. That's also a beautiful thing.

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**Wallace:** I do definitely think that sharing any journal page is very brave because I feel like a lot of people will journal when they're in harder times in their life. It's always just really comforting to know that other people also write in hard times.

**Samuel Smalls, Jr.:** In these journals that I've had since I was in 6th, 7th grade, they're sitting under my bed in my dorm.

And I love that, even though I'm cringing listening to the things I wrote in middle school. Before this, I never shared my journal with anyone.

So, our next segment relates to my story in a variety of ways. In this clip, taken from the Future Perfect Project's original series, *Queer Youth Animated*, we meet Adam, not the one I wrote about, who also now lives in Philadelphia, but like me, grew up as a queer man of color in the South.

In terms of intersectionality, this piece speaks to the idea of the intersection between queerness and faith, but instead of journaling privately about his struggles, Adam shares them verbally with members of his church. Let's take a listen.

**Adam:** I'm Adam. I'm 17, and I live in North Philly. My pronouns are he, him. I had a very complicated experience with sexuality. When I was younger, I was a youth pastor in Georgia. On the countryside, you know, the whole church family and the whole dynamic of brother and sister and the rewards and love that came with it.

It's very attractive. When I came out to, like, my church mother, she told me that 90 percent of LGBTQ people were abused when they were young, and that's why they're that way. I remember her sobbing in front of me and telling me that there's a beautiful Christian girl out there for me. I went to one or two church camps.

I wouldn't describe it as cult like, but I don't know if there's any other way to describe it. You know, you have the preacher there at the camp, and he's talking about all these sins. If you ever thought about the same sex, or done something with the same sex, they wanted you to present yourselves in front of the altar.

I had asked God, I was like, "If this is wrong, tell me, because this isn't adding up. What is this experience? What am I supposed to have?"

These girls approached me and they started talking to me and I told them my testimony And they told me that the pastor that had been preaching the whole time was gay or used to be I guess and that he Was married now, so they told me to talk to him As far as sexuality, I think it's toxic to continue to psychoanalyze myself and try to make myself believe that I'm something that I'm not.



There's a stark juxtaposition between how I was, um, existing in Georgia and how I exist in, in Philly. I never found a church in Philly. I only had the church that I had in Georgia. I still love God and I still have some sort of relationship with him. It's even not the same as when I was, you know, preaching and stuff like that.

The next time I preach, I'm going to talk about sexuality. For one, because it's, you know, not a sin. And two, Even if it was, you can't expect to bring people to God with hate. And um, if I ever preach again, and I hope I do, that's what I'm talking about. Definitely.

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**Wallace:** I mean, as someone who's not religious, I wouldn't call myself religious. It's just interesting for me, cause it's a different perspective that I've never experienced before. And I've never really thought about.

**Samuel Smalls, Jr.:** My personal experience of religion and queerness is not like the average queer Black boy in the South.

I grew up in the church. My grandfather was a deacon. I didn't have the experience of being shunned for being gay. I never felt ostracized from God because I'm queer. Someone's queerness might change their relationship with the higher power. And I think that's a very interesting journey that a lot of queer people go through.

Where it's like, these people are telling me that the presence I pray to doesn't love me. Or that I'm going to hell. But my relationship is my relationship. You can't tell me that someone that I pray to and I feel the presence of doesn't love me. I don't think my connection with God is dependent on what someone else says about my queerness.

I think that when I speak to God Or my ancestors, they answer.

**RuPaul clip:** Can I get an amen?

**Drag contestants:** amen!

**Wallace:** And this wraps up our episode today. Thank you for listening. Once again, I'm Wallace

**Samuel Smalls, Jr.:** and I'm Sam,

**Wallace:** and you've been listening to.

**Wallace and Samuel Smalls, Jr.:** *I'm Feeling Queer Today.*

**Wallace:** Be sure to join us next week for episode four, where we talk about queer representation in media. And, if you like what you hear, please rate us and share the show with your friends, family, or both.

And don't forget to ask yourself, "how am I feeling queer today?"

We hope you enjoyed our episode. For more information and resources about it, check out the show notes. Or visit the episode page at [thefutureperfectproject.org/podcast](http://thefutureperfectproject.org/podcast).

**Samuel Smalls, Jr.:** If you or a young person you know between the ages of 13 and 24 is currently in crisis, check out the Trevor project.org for lgbtqia plus specific support through Text and Chat, or call 1 8 6 6 4 8 8 7 3 8 6.

You'll also include this information in the show's notes as resources. To learn more about the Future Perfect Project and all of our free arts programming for LGBTQIA plus youth, visit [thefutureperfectproject.org](http://thefutureperfectproject.org) or find us on social media @thefutureperfectproject. *I'm Feeling Queer Today* is produced by The Future Perfect Project with support from Radio Kingston, WKNY, AM 1490, FM 1079, Kingston, New York.

This episode was produced by me, Samuel Smalls Jr.,

**Wallace:** and me, Wallace. Featuring Z Cosby, Trudy Poux, and Adam.

**Samuel Smalls, Jr.:** Our theme song was composed and performed by Alex Massey and produced by Emma Jane Seslowsky. Additional music composed by Alex Masse, Frankie Gunn, and Epidemic Sound. Episode mixing and mastering by Julie Novak, with assistance from Emma Jane Seslowsky.

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