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A Conversation with Anonymous (3)

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GLBTQ Alumni Oral History Project

Conversation with Anonymous Participant (3) (Grad. Yr: 2000-2005)

April 24, 2015

Conducted by Alexander Pagan-Mejia and Jazmin Nicole Lopez

Location: Phone

Length: 63 minutes

Keywords: alum, ally, Catholic shame, college, identity, Iraq War, Jesuit, microaggressions, multicultural, oppression, post-college, social justice, queer/dyke

Transcript:

Jazmin: April 24, 2015. It is 3:30pm and are you aware that you are going to be recorded for this interview?

Participant: Yes, I am aware of that.

Jazmin: Okay, so we are going to begin with this interview. Um, first question, how did you decide to come to Holy Cross?

Participant: Um, that's a good question. Okay, um, so I, uh, grew up in Southern California and I had only ever lived there and I really wanted to experience seasons. So I wanted to go somewhere really different, um. I applied to places up in, uh, the northern west coast. I applied to a bunch of places on the east coast. I, also, wanted to go somewhere that my family couldn't drive to. So, um, and then I narrowed my search because I was looking at Catholic colleges, um, I was brought up Catholic and, uh, my spirituality was really important to me, so I wanted to have some sort of spiritual community. I didn't have a car and I knew I wasn't going to be able to have a car, so I wanted to be on a campus that I could walk to go to mass. Um, because I would go to mass every week. It's kind of weird, I feel like I'm entering a time warp talking about this.

Jazmin: (Laughs)

Participant: So, yeah, I was, I was a really big part of my youth group. Uh, in high school and that was a huge support system for me and we would do, like these, outdoor retreats that like really were, very, um spiritual in nature and felt a little less churchy and um, so I really wanted to have that community. So, basically, I was looking at top-tier schools that were also Catholic that were far away from San Diego. Um, I went and visited some of the schools, which was a real big deal for my parents. Uh we never flew anywhere on trips anywhere but I guess they saved up enough money to take us out there and um when I visited the Holy Cross campus the students were very nice and like, we were like wandering around and someone uh said "oh, are you guys lost?" and they helped us find where we were going. And like uh so we went there in the spring and all of the flowers were blooming and I had never seen brick buildings like that before because they don't have that in Southern California.

Jazmin: Um

Participant: So, I was like there's clock towers and columns and I think the campus was just so beautiful, um, that I decided that that's where I wanted to go.

Jazmin: Well, you basically just described my process as well.

Participant: Yea

Jazmin: I'm from Southern California as well and that was like kind of my thought process.

Participant: Yea

Jazmin: About applying to colleges, I was like I want to go really far away.

Participant: Yea

Jazmin: Where is the furthest I could go? And where I will see seasons and um, I didn't know it was going to be this cold.

Participant: Yea

Jazmin: But, Yea (laughs), but I really yea it was kind of the same thing. I really wanted to get out of California. I live in, um, Downey, California, which is like 15 minutes out of LA.

Participant: Oh, okay.

Jazmin: Yea, and my brother goes to San Diego State. Um, so, I definitely know San Diego.

Participant: Yea.

Jazmin: But yea, that's awesome.

Participant: That's so funny.

Jazmin: Yea, um, but how would you describe your transition from high school to Holy Cross?

Participant: Um, well, I had a boyfriend in high school and he and I were very very in love. Um (laughs), I, we decided to break up when I went to college and then, um, he, we decided to, I mean after I got there, I was like so depressed. We would call back and forth and I would be crying and um for that, I think I was really heartbroken about that relationship ending.

Jazmin: Uh huh

Participant: And I think that was largely about just the companionship and friendship. Um, I was a part of the First Year Program. I don't know if that still exist.

Alex: Yea it does, it's known as Montserrat now. I don't know what it was called.

Participant: I was an FYP-er, um, so I lived in something that starts with an H.

Jazmin: Hanselman.

Participant: Yea!

Jazmin: Oh, I lived in Hanselman too!

Participant: Yea!

Alex: Me three

Participant: So I lived in Hanselman, and um, my roommate, I remember, we emailed ahead of time and we decided to have a phone conversation. And um, we were talking on the phone. And I was like "I'm so nervous about going to college, how about you?" And she was like, "I don't get nervous."

Jazmin: Oh, okay (Laughs)

Participant: (Laughs) Okay. And then I got to school, and she had already been there because a lot of the, um, I think they had, the term they used was ALANA. But basically, students of color came early and kind of had an orientation ahead of time. So she was already there and had made some friends and I think she was kind of like "oh my god, who is this white girl like crying all the time?"

Jazmin: Yea (laughs)

Participant: Um and in the beginning she was not very friendly to me at all.

Jazmin: mhmm

Participant: and um I didn't really know anybody and it's funny, but like not that long into the time I came home one day and there was like a little card and monkey. Like a little monkey from the Holy Cross bookstore with a little Holy Cross jersey on it or whatever.

Jazmin: mhmm

Participant: I opened up the card and it was from her and it was like this really sweet card about um knowing that I was having a hard time

Jazmin: Oh, Yea.

Participant: and just wanting to say that she has my back if I needed her. And it was really really really sweet!

Jazmin: mhmm

Participant: Um and we ended up having a relationship that kind of evolved over the years that we were there um because we were both involved in a lot of multicultural organizing stuff...

Jazmin: mhmm

Participant: ...that was happening around then and um and we took some courses together that were like we took this amazing course that was basically an anti-oppression course um and it really unpacked a lot um of the interconnections between racism and homophobia and classism and sexism. It was based in a, oh what do they call it, a reevaluation co-counseling model. So there was a lot of dealing with the emotions...

Jazmin: mhmm

Participant: ...that are around experiences of being oppressed and being an oppressor and kind of working that all out. We ended up, over the four years, I feel like, having this evolution of our relationship that was really beautiful and I would never forget how she put that card on my little bed um. Yea other than that I started hanging with some other FYPers and I guess just over time I started feeling less sad and less homesick and more settled into being there.

Jazmin: Uhmm

Participant: I, I think I just had culture shock when I first got there. You know.

Jazmin: Yea

Participant: And um I also grew up in a very working class family and there was a lot of um, cultural translation that had to happen for me around being in a community with a lot of very, very wealthy people and that kind of played out in ways that I didn't quite understand in the beginning in ways that I felt like I didn't fit in. But it became clearer over time, like, how much of a role that played, um, in feeling like I did or didn't fit in.

Jazmin: Right, yea I think Holy Cross still kind of feels like that sometimes at least for myself.

Participant: Yea

Jazmin: Definitely, a bit culture shock coming in to Holy Cross. Um, I grew um in a very diverse community and I myself am Mexican-American so when I got here there were a lot of people that didn't look like me and a lot of people that didn't really understand my experiences.

Participant: Yea

Jazmin: So that was a difficult transition trying to explain to people where I was coming from.

Participant: Yea

Jazmin: And I'm sociology major as we mentioned in our email, but like even trying to explain to people in sociology classes if you don't come from a working class family it's kind of difficult to explain the stresses of money.

Participant: Yea

Jazmin: Or things you are worried about.

Participant: Yea

Jazmin: and being on this campus, sometimes you have to pay to go on a retreat or pay for certain events and those options are just not available to you, so.

Participant: Right!

Jazmin: And yea it's a different kind of transition that I didn't expect at all. Um, I knew like being homesick was going to happen and missing my family and stuff, but not worrying about... I didn't think that I was going to have to worry so much about how different I would feel being on this campus.

Participant: Yea

Jazmin: But again, I found resources and definitely close friends that even though they didn't understand my experiences they weren't kind of ignorant or pushing back.

Participant: Right.

Jazmin: About them or saying we don't want, you know, we don't want to associate ourselves with your life or anything like that so I think, yea, at Holy Cross you have to...you definitely have to look for people.

Participant: Yea

Jazmin: Who will understand what you're going through but when you find them they're just like spectacular people that really do care. Um, I think Alex has the next question that he wants to ask you, so

Participant: Ok, one second, can you just hold for one second?

Jazmin: yup mhmm...

Participant: Okay.

Alex: Alright, so the next question is: So you were a student at Holy Cross in early 2000's, what was happening in the world then?

Participant: What was happening in the world then? Umm. I would say that the biggest thing that I remember happening during college was that Bush, idiot number 2, started the Iraq war. Um, so that I feel like was the only external thing that happened that really um put an anchor in that time for me. I was really involved in Pax Christi and we did a lot of organizing and protest against the war and we got a lot of negative backlash from the hugely conservative student body. We were doing regular protests on campus and people were really really pissed off um so yea I remember feeling glad that I had a community of people who cared and who were activists and being in that group in particular there was a spiritual connection between the activism and social justice. Um, but, yea. That was the only thing that I remember particularly.

Alex: Yea

Jazmin: Um, so when 9/11 happened you were at Holy Cross.

Participant: Oh, that's right.

Jazmin: Oh, I mean it was 9/11 and Iraq war...

Participant: Um, I was actually outside of the country.

Jazmin: Oh, okay.

Participant: So I didn't even think of that as being a time at Holy Cross, but yes I was a Holy Cross Student.

Jazmin: Yea

Participant: So I studied abroad. I flew into Spain for orientation. Um, on September 8th of 2001. So, um yea, that happened while I was out of the country.

Jazmin: Yea

Participant: So it was actually weird, we were in a slightly larger group at that point because we had, there were three different sites that Holy Cross would send students to to study abroad in Spain. And so, before we split off into our separate groups we all went to an orientation in Northern Spain and we had just gotten there for orientation and a number of people in the group were from New York City and um, so there were a lot um fear about what had happened to their families and all that.

Jazmin: Do you think um that these kind of events happening, Iraq war and like kind of the divide... Um I think, well me personally, I was really young when 9/11 happened, that when I look back at it, I see our country became an “us versus them” mentality.

Participant: Yea

Jazmin: So, do you feel like that was present here at Holy Cross at all?

Participant: Oh, that’s a good question. I mean it’s hard to know because I wasn’t there.

Jazmin: mhmm

Participant: So that’s really really hard to gauge. I always found Holy Cross, um as a whole, I don’t know how to put this, full of shit. I don’t know, I feel like the majority of the student body was insanely privileged like wealth wise, race wise. Like it was just a lot of really rich white kids and some...there was like a small handful of people who actually cared. I felt like, the students of color and the queer students...I feel like we actually co-organized a lot and supported one another’s events. Because there were so few of us so it was like, we just, those of us who I feel like were on the margins all supported each other in a way that I really appreciated um because I think that the student body culture was so fucking oppressive. Um, I think it was classist and racist and homophobic um in really overt ways. I think that, um, the racism around September 11. I didn’t feel... I think that the country as a whole I felt that that racism was happening. But I feel like people were assholes around the Iraq war starting and that was before September 11, wasn’t it? Or was it after?

Jazmin: Um

Participant: That was after because then Bush was like “they have weapons of mass destruction.”

Jazmin: Right.

Alex: Yea.

Jazmin: I think

Participant: I’m trying to remember...

Jazmin: Yea, because, I think Holy Cross still kind of struggles with, um, I don’t know how to say it in a nice way, trying to like live their mission but doing it in a way that is actually inclusive of people.

Participant: Yea

Jazmin: um

Participant: They want to live their mission in a way that makes them feel comfortable.

Jazmin: Right

Participant: I feel like the Holy Cross community like, the university, or whatever the college, is like we're all about social justice, we're like Jesuit blah blah blah and but then the reality is that they don't want to do anything that's uncomfortable. So they want to take pictures of students of color and put it all over their website. They'll have like an extra week that they can come early but when the students... And we organized hardcore my senior year um around that um... the class was called Multicultural Issues and Learning and Leadership but it was actually an anti-oppression course and like it was not just like "let's all get along" multiculturalism.

Jazmin: Yea

Participant: It was like let's understand systems of oppression and how they work and how they affect us personally and emotionally and let's undo this. Like that stuff that you actually get your hands dirty and you get in and it hurts people's feelings. People have to face things they don't want to face and it's super uncomfortable. We were organizing to try to make that course a core piece of education that like everybody has to take this.

Jazmin: Yea

Participant: And the university was like absolutely not

Participant: Or sorry, college. I keep saying University because I work at University now. Yea I feel like the college was like absolutely not, I think that they just wanted to do lip service. And um yea.

Jazmin: Yea I think if we were going to Holy Cross together at the same time, we would've been best friends.

Participant: (laughing)

Jazmin: um, just so you know. Um, Alex always has to hear me ranting about this as well because I take, obviously as a sociology major, I am always taking courses about anti-oppression or talking about systems of oppression and I'm just like always ranting to my friends "do you know what the patriarchy is?!" And just like going in about all these systems...

Participant: (laughs)

Jazmin: ... that at Holy Cross we're perpetuating and I tell them, you know, it's really frustrating that students look at me like I'm crazy because they're living in these systems but they're benefiting from them.

Participant: Absolutely!

Jazmin: So they don't want to recognize that there contributing to it and they'll say "well I'm not racist, I have a black friend" or whatever and I'm like but you deciding not to participate in Black Lives Matter on campus and you know not talking to your friends about why these movements matter, you're helping a racist system.

Participant: Yea!

Jazmin: And you know we had a huge controversy on campus with like Yik Yak and different social media outlets where people... where students were posting racist comments and just students weren't upset about it, you know.

Participant: Right.

Jazmin: And that was kind of like really heartbreaking because one of reasons I came to Holy Cross was because I understood that Jesuits and Jesuit institutions were very proactive about, you know, being progressive and talking about these issues about oppression. But when I got here it was kind of like pulling teeth and talking to people about it and they would just kind of roll their eyes or you know say "oh yeah, well in high school I participated in this and this" but I was like okay but like you're here now and you have a bigger voice and you kind of just like want to be comfortable, which I think Holy Cross is very pro, like, being comfortable all the time.

Participant: Totally! And it's bullshit because that is against the mission of what the university, or I mean college, says they are. I have to say there are pockets at Holy Cross that I felt like were living the mission.

Jazmin: Right.

Participant: So, the Chaplain's office was amazing. The Chaplain's office were the ones who housed and sponsored and organized Pax Christi which was the group that did all the anti-war protest.

Jazmin: Uh huh

Participant: I feel like they also they were the forefront of getting LGBT rights and groups recognized on campus which I imagine we'll probably talk about it later on in the interview so I won't go into that right now. But, um, I feel like they were walking the talk. And I felt like the college as a whole was absolutely not walking the talk. I mean I had run-ins with the president and I have written him letters since, um, yea.

Jazmin: So you think, like, the Jesuit identity of Holy Cross kind of affected your experiences?

Participant: That's a good question. I think so... the people at the Chaplains office who were doing the really kickass work were two women.

Jazmin: Right

Participant: So they weren't even Jesuits. I don't know how much the two Jesuit guys had to do with anything but the people who were doing the leg work that I was involved in, like anti-war protest and the pro, like, queer space. Making a safe space for queers was coming from the two women who... it was Kim McElaney um and Marybeth Kearns-Barrett? Are either of them still there?

Alex: Marybeth is still here.

Participant: Yea, it was the two of them. It was because of them that I did not have a mental breakdown when I came out. Basically. They were my saviors at Holy Cross.

Jazmin: And do you think there were any other support systems that you had besides the Chaplains office?

Participant: The Chaplains office was huge, specifically the two of them. I went to ABiGaLe that was huge um. The multicultural class that I took... that class was led by a Professor Mary Ni and I um... she was like the Mary Poppins of social justice as connected to like systems of oppression and stuff. And um she goes around to different colleges and starts these programs and gets them going. Um and she started the Multicultural Peer Educators. I don't know if they still exist.

Jazmin: They do.

Participant: Yea, so I was in the first cohort of the Multicultural Peer Educators. Um, and so that class and the people who went through that and being in MPE that was huge. Um, because we were doing anti-oppression work actively and we were talking about this stuff in a really real way. Um, and we did a lot of organizing like we protested and tried to get the multicultural course on, um, everybody's, as a requirement for everyone at the college. And we like went and met with the president. We did a sit-in. All this stuff.

Jazmin: Wow

Participant: And we got a lot of pushback, um, and it didn't happen, um, so yea. I'm trying to think if there was anything else.

Jazmin: And did they explain?

Participant: Specific professors, um, I was in the Spanish department so Jorge Valdés. I don't know if he is still there, he was a huge support. Professor Nickoloff in Religious Studies. I mean he was amazing. Um, so yea I felt like I could go to particular professors for support as well.

Jazmin: And did you decide to come out at Holy Cross?

Participant: Yea, so, I, um, I came out to myself actually when I was abroad. So, I had um a boyfriend for the first two years of Holy Cross, um, we started dating, I don't know, halfway through freshman year and um we broke up in my sophomore year. And I couldn't put my finger on it but I was starting to feel kind of just unhappy with the relationship and a little bit depressed. And it's hard because I loved him as a person and we were co-organizers together in the multicultural work. Um, he was in that class with me and um he was just like the sweetest guy ever. Like he was really kind, he was. I mean he was a straight guy, a straight white guy who went through this whole multicultural course... for basically like every week we were talking about how he's an oppressor. At least I got a break for a couple of weeks, like oh this week, we're going to talk about women and oh okay I have this experience of being oppressed. But he was so committed, so absolutely committed to all of these pieces and dismantling oppression and um he was just a really great guy. So, anyways we broke up and I couldn't put my finger on why. Then I went abroad and I realized... I was like holy shit I like girls. And then I was like... I went through this really horrific um phase of internalized homophobia and self-hate. Which is kind of crazy because like you know, rewinding back, I was involved in all of this ally work for the LGBT community and I did all of this organizing stuff to help support gay people and then the minute I realized that I was queer like all of this internalized shit came up. Which really makes me feel like that helps me understand how as a white person I am racist because I grew up in a racist white supremacist society and as much work as I do to unlearn it, that shit's in there, you know and I have a responsibility to constantly unlearn that. And so whenever anybody who is in a position of privilege is like "I'm not X"... fill in the blank... No we're on a spectrum and you can try really hard to unlearn the stuff or you could just be actively racist and not try to unlearn any of it. But it's in there, like it's...it's our society, that's what we're force fed. So anyways, I came out to myself. I was devastated. I wrote in my journal um regularly I became extremely depressed um I didn't tell anyone um for like over six months um... I would write in my journal like "I hate myself, like this is so disgusting, I hope no one ever finds out or reads this"... like all of it was connected to God. Like its not like every statement said God in it, but like I felt like as though everything had this Catholic tint to it and I feel like a lot of that shame was very um united with my faith, at the time. Um, so there was a lot of questioning that and feeling like it was very much a Catholic shame. It wasn't just like "I exist in a homophobic society" shame it was like I live in a homophobic society and I was brought up hyper-Catholic and my spirituality is really important to me. And it's like that was really intimate...um self-hating. So I went through that for like a really long time. I was really depressed when I was abroad and um and then I came back and the summer before senior year. Um, I was hanging out actually at my parents' house and with my ex-boyfriend the one I was with in high school, and I didn't plan to come out to him. Like I totally would have not planned my first person to come out to be my high school boyfriend but it just came out and I told him and he was like he was so sweet...he was like, "You know I never thought of it but I can totally feel it, that totally makes sense." Like, he was just hugely supportive and super sweet and that like really made my coming out process a lot easier so... I can't remember, I think the next people I came out to was when I went back to Holy Cross and then I came out to um a couple of my friends who were gay. And they were like "Oh my gosh we're so excited!" like it was like a party. They were so excited and welcoming and that felt really good. So that was super positive and I started going to ABiGaLe meetings and I would get nervous about like someone was going to see me going to an ABiGaLe meeting, in the beginning, you know. Um, by the end of the year I was super out but at the beginning of the year it definitely took time. Um, to try to do that and yea and there is more to that and I will let

you guys ask more questions if there is more you want me to go into that or what direction you want me to go in.

Alex: I think, I don't know, I think, I sort of relate to your story. I'm Latino and I recently came out as gay.

Participant: Woohoo!!! Yay, Alex!!!

Alex: (laughs) But I, it was a really hard process for me and I think it was because my faith was really important to me.

Participant: Yea

Alex: Umm, and I had a girlfriend for nearly two years and we broke up this past summer. Um, and like I came out to her and I mean, I'm pretty out now. Um, but it was really hard and I think for me what brought me back to accepting myself was my faith.

Participant: Mmm

Alex: Because, I... again, I can relate to the self-hate and I was very harsh on myself. And, like I said, I didn't feel loved by God but then I realized God loves me no matter what. Um, and then I think the support on campus... I think I did receive the help from Campion and right now they still have a confidential group which is very supportive and ABiGaLe/Allies now is called Pride but they're still really big on campus which is um a great resource so...

Participant: That's great. Congrats!

Jazmin: Yea, yea they're having their first, Pride is actually having their first drag show.

Participant: That's awesome!

Alex: Yea

Jazmin: Um, yea we're really excited. We're really excited it got approved and people are really interested in it and are really supportive.

Participant: That's awesome!

Jazmin: I think it's going to be a good time and we're really excited. Um, we've actually talked about this in our course this past week, about religion and you know the coming out process.

Participant: Mhmm

Jazmin: And being LGBTQ what does that mean if you are really religious and also being on this campus? Um, which I think, I think it's a really hard time because while people aren't very direct about saying homophobic comments but there are instances where people just don't care and will

blatantly say something or do something. And I think Holy Cross... Well at least the president that is in office now here on campus... He has been very outspoken about saying we are not tolerating any homophobia or racism on this campus. Sending out emails and stuff. But, again, at least for me, I wish there was more out in the open events instead of emails that people will just look at and delete. You know?

Participant: Yea

Jazmin: And, you know, its hard because you know he has to accommodate certain people but why would you want your campus to feel unsafe for certain people and you know privileged for others.

Participant: Yea, and he has the power

Jazmin: Yea

Participant: Like he ultimately has power to make huge shifts in the culture on campus and emails don't cut it. Absolutely not. That's like a very comfortable way to be like "now, now, now children don't say racist things."

Jazmin: Yea, exactly...

Participant: Yea no shit, sherlock.

Jazmin: And I think... even I'm a part of Women's Forum and I'm like very big on the feminist campaigns here on campus

Participant: Mhmm

Jazmin: and just the fact the Vagina Monologues has to be approved every year by the president is really just frustrating for us...because they have the right to cut out certain um like monologues and say what we can do and can't do and it's frustrating because again they want to be comfortable but second of all you don't have to come to the show.

Participant: We had people protest us when we did the Vagina Monologues. I was "my angry vagina" in the Vagina Monologues.

Jazmin: Oh yea?!

Participant: Yea, we totally had right-wingers come and protest.

Jazmin: Yea, we've had articles being written, you know talking about how the Vagina Monologues does not portray the image that Holy Cross wants to give out.

Participant: Mhmm

Jazmin: It's like, okay well what kind of image did the Holy Cross community want to give out? A sexist image?

Participant: Right

Jazmin: Like what are you insinuating, these women are participating in this in order to feel empowered and you're telling them "No, you need to know your place and stay silent." So, I don't know it was just, it was really surprising to me that we had that controversy in like 2015 where the feminist movement is you know, the new wave is coming up and people are so proactive and are really engaging the conversation but when it comes to something like actually expressing something that is "too sexual" or whatever... People would say "Oh no, I can't participate in that." But of course, I don't know, to me it's what is convenient for some people.

Participant: Absolutely.

Jazmin: And I was just really excited that they approved the drag show because I know there is going to be some article or some person that is going to be outside of the door saying something...but knowing that people are actually going to attend and the president gave the approval will make us feel stronger going in.

Participant: Yea

Jazmin: We're really excited about that

Participant: One of the things that the president...what's the name of the president now?

Alex: Fr. Boroughs

Participant: Fr. what?

Alex and Jazmin: Boroughs

Participant: I don't know if that's the guy we had. I don't know.

Jazmin. He just, he just got inaugurated.

Participant: Who was the last president?

Alex: Fr. McFarland

Participant: Yes, that's what I had. He hated me. Hated me. Um we protested about getting the multicultural course in and that got squashed. He um... we did a lot of organizing around not getting the Vagina Monologues blocked and there was this women who was um Catholic and pro-choice and she was invited to come and speak and then a bunch of people got pissed off and so he made the decision to cut it and so um we had a meeting instead on that day and we were all meeting and talking about it and he happened to walk by. And so I was like, "Oh my god there is

Father McFarland!” So I ran out of the room and was like, “Hi, Fr. McFarland...we’re having a conversation and we’d love for you to join us” and he was like, “I have to go somewhere” and I was like, “ You need to come and join us right now...like you have five minutes” and he said, “No I really have to go.” And so I’m like “come on.” So he came in and he was like beet red. And we like basically were saying, “we want free speech on our campus.” You know?

Jazmin: Yea, mhmm

Participant: And then, you know, how many ever years later, um Holy Cross sends me some bullshit about like, “You need to donate.” And it’s like the 15,000th time that they have written to me about donating. But they were doing this huge campaign because I guess someone had donated a certain amount of money and if we had 50% of all alumni donate, even if it was just \$1, then the person would give like some huge amount. So, I wrote this letter to President McFarland and to and I forwarded it to everyone who I know associated with Holy Cross, so like every alum that I knew and every Professor who I knew. Um, and basically, I said like I don’t agree... I think that Holy Cross is an unethical institution and there are three things that I think need to change and then I will donate but until then I never will. One was the multicultural course,

Jazmin: Uh-huh

Participant: because I talked about the culture on the campus. Um and not matching with the mission. I talked about a living wage for all of the staff who work there because it’s really ridiculous that they have people cleaning out our trashcans that are not getting a living wage. And then I said that they need to get sweatshop um sweatshop-made clothes out of the bookstore.

Jazmin: Uh-huh

Participant: And um, oh no, you know what? I think that was my...and then I said the crusader... I don’t think that it’s appropriate that our mascot should be the crusader because this historically is about genocide of people who don’t agree with us and I think that the church still has to be careful about its history and its colonialism and I think that this is really inappropriate. And he wrote me back, and basically called me a crusader. And he was like, “you’re a crusader because you stand up for what you believe in.”

Jazmin: (laughter) Are you serious?

Participant: Yea, and I was like fuck you, dude.

Jazmin: Oh my gosh! (laugh)

Participant: But like it was interesting because I heard back from a couple professors that were like “Yay! This is awesome!” And I heard back from a couple of alums who were like, “This is great!” and most of them said nothing and one or two people said, “I’m sorry you feel that way about Holy Cross blah blah blah... I love Holy Cross, I bleed purple” And I’m like, go donate then.

Jazmin: Like, I don't know. I, get really frustrated, also with the crusader thing, I always tell my friends...people like... My boyfriend he is not Catholic but I would tell him the history of the crusaders and he would say why would a school ever approve that. I was like, "I have no idea why we still have that here."

Participant: Because people pay money

Jazmin: True!

Participant: Because people are attached to it and people pay money.

Jazmin: Yea...

Participant: It's completely about money.

Jazmin: Yea, and it's just ridiculous and I don't know... this campus sometimes people would say "I'm so proud to be Holy Cross, I'm so proud to be Holy Cross"... but I'm like because you see yourself, you are the image of Holy Cross. You know and I don't fit the image of Holy Cross because Holy Cross is rich and it's white... and it's like this is the image that they are portraying and this is our prime example of people who donate to us. And I'm like I can't donate to you even when I graduate because I probably won't be able to donate to you and if the Vagina Monologues are going to have to be approved every year I am not going to donate.

Participant: Yea

Jazmin: But at the same time, it's people who have no idea what it feels like to walk on campus and be stared at or be asked if you are a student here. Or you know, being looked at in class when they are talking about "minority students"... You don't have to deal with all those microaggressions on this campus, being questioned if you deserve to be here or they're just trying to meet a quota.

Participant: Yea

Jazmin: And or being asked to be on the Holy Cross website because you are like the only person of color in your class. Well, yea they'll say they bleed purple but it's because the purple fits them and to me it doesn't and it has...the mission of Holy Cross has nothing to do with me. So, I start creating my own mission at this point.

Participant: Yea

Jazmin: Because, while they say you know, I don't know if you know but they changed the motto to "ask more" um, so now like all the professor... not all the professors... A lot of the professors don't like it. But a lot of the students based organizations are always saying "ask more" and to me it's like no one on this campus ever asks more about anything you know?

Participant: Yea

Jazmin: If they don't have to deal with it, they don't want to know about it.

Participant: Yea

Jazmin: And I just have a lot of issues with like SPUD and what um, what they promote sometimes. And like the immersion trips because now a lot of students will go on the immersion trips and they'll come back and they'll just party and forget about the reason that they went on the immersion trip.

Participant: Yea

Jazmin: And that really upsets me because you know they'll go and say they had a life-changing experience and... but they really never associated themselves with the people of the community...

Participant: Right

Jazmin: ...and understood their struggle or even cared.

Participant: Like, "I went to go see those poor people and helped them."

Jazmin: Yea, and you got off the hill for once but that doesn't mean that you... that you learned anything.

Participant: Right

Jazmin: Because they'll come back and they have their little group of friends from immersion and then after a while they completely forget the people that they met on these trips. Which I'm pretty sure were amazing people!

Participant: Right!

Jazmin: But then, to them it was just... like you know "I just want to do it because everyone else is doing it."

Participant: That is what I feel like, the university, the college has a responsibility to educate people and a one-week immersion or however long the immersion is, is not long enough.

Jazmin: Yea

Participant: So it's like imagine what that would be like if that person had to take an entire semester or two semesters about learning about oppression and how that works. And then they go on the immersion trip.

Jazmin: Right

Participant: If you don't have the contextual understanding that needs to be taught over time... In that course... that course was extremely educationally rigorous like we were reading people's stories, we were reading theory, we were processing our own feelings, we were listening to other people's feelings and like it was this big picture understanding of addressing these really complicated problems.

Jazmin: Mhmm

Participant: And the systemic problems that are attached to that... You know some little immersion trip is not going to help you unpack how racism works.

Jazmin: Right and I don't... I just I think my issue with SPUD... Did you guys have that when you were here?

Participant: I don't know it sounds vaguely familiar.

Jazmin: SPUD is like a volunteer... community-based volunteering. So people go out into Worcester to these community centers or schools, or organizations and they volunteer once or twice a week for a few hours and I did it for community-based learning last semester and I really appreciated my experience but at the same time I felt that some students would go and they were just there because they had to be there.

Participant: Right

Jazmin: And they didn't care about these people's experiences... They weren't interacting with them. They would prefer to do paper work than actually hear people's stories and again its because it makes them uncomfortable. And I understand that... But why are you volunteering and saying that you want to change the world or whatever, if you're not going to listen to people and what they're dealing with on a daily basis and you're only there for an hour or two... the least you can do is talk to them. You know?

Participant: Yea

Jazmin: They don't want you to change their life; they just want you to be there and to use your privilege of an education to maybe in the future help their kids. You know? And do something about the system that is working against them. And to them, they'll just go and they sit there and write the paper at the end of the year and say, "It was a great experience and I met so many amazing people" but they really didn't gain anything from it because they really didn't want to feel uncomfortable. And that is kind of what Holy Cross is doing... Holy Cross in Solidarity week or month or year or whatever they are doing now... And it's really frustrating... You go to these events to help to bring solidarity to campus but it's the same people showing up.

Participant: Yea, I mean that is absolutely what I found, that it was the same people showing up at the things. You know... When I was there, I'm trying to remember, it must have been my

senior year because I was out... So it was my senior year and there were all of these homophobic hate crimes happening on campus. They were particularly targeting one of my gay guy friends. Um and they were bullying him and harassing him and threatening him. And in the end, the college as a whole did almost nothing. So the students organized and, I think it might have been with the Chaplain's Office, I can't remember but we organized candlelight nights and rallies and stuff and um I remember there was this amazing guy, Dave, who was an amazing ally to the LGBT community and um he got up and read this poem that he had written. And I still remember it years later, um, he kept talking about "No I don't tolerate you, I absolutely do not tolerate you" Like, "I love you, I appreciate you, I don't tolerate you, I want you to be here. I don't tolerate you." Because the president had written some email about like tolerance and how we had to tolerate people um and I just, I felt like that was absolutely the college's response. Here are these hate crimes happening um and a student of ours is being threatened and we are going to send out an email about how you need to "tolerate" one another.

Jazmin: Mhmm

Participant: You know? And it was such a fucking awful place to be gay! Like, it was hellish. And I, like, I started coming out throughout my senior year and a lot of my straight friends, like my gay friends were amazing, but my straight friends they started...they didn't know what to do with me. They were totally confused, they were like we thought you were straight like what's going on and then it felt like when they all knew I was gay, it was like they just wanted to go back to everything is "normal."

Jazmin: mhmm

Participant: And it's like I just felt like they needed me to be a straight person. Like, I don't know how to explain it... like they... I really wanted them to be like "Oh I have a gay friend and there is all these hate crimes happening on campus, like what can I do to educate myself or what can I do to help support her to feel more at home here." Like not once did any of them go to an ally meeting, to an ally event, they didn't read anything about gay culture or gay people.

Jazmin: mhmm

Participant: It just felt like they were completely unconcerned. They were just like "oh, you're gay. Okay. Moving on."... You know and I was like meanwhile I was having this really horrible time being there and I was just like I really created distance between them and I'm actually not in touch with any of my straight friends from Holy Cross.

Jazmin: Mhmm

Participant: Actually, that's not true, there are two people, Dave being one of them and Dave's girlfriend who is a person from the multicultural program. Actually...yea, there's a handful of people who like I've been friends with on Facebook and we would message each other every once and a while. My roommate from the first year...

Jazmin: mhmm

Participant: ...who we like stayed in touch. Um, and a couple of other people who were all in the multicultural group because that group I felt like got it, but all of my friends that I have been friends with from like freshman year who were all... none of them did the multicultural stuff. Um I'm like purposefully not in touch with them anymore. I felt like distance happened and I just was like, you guys have not put in any effort to being a support for me and this is a really hostile place and I just felt that they didn't really understand me. They didn't care. Yea, it's pretty huge there are hate crimes going on and they're like whatev.

Jazmin: Yea...

Participant: So, yeah...

Jazmin: It's definitely...before I came to Holy Cross I was like a very, very quiet person. Um, I was very shy and when I got to Holy Cross... I mean I had experienced racism before I came to Holy Cross. But when I came here I started feeling it more on a daily basis. It wasn't always extreme racism, but it was microaggressions and little subtle things that I would pick up on. And then that's where I kind of decided that I couldn't stay quiet any longer. And people would of course make their little side comments and call me a "feminazi" or "angry Latina" or whatever. It's kind of like... ok, but you, what did they expect when they came to Holy Cross? Like when I talk to these people... like did you expect that there was only going to be people that looked like you? And had the money that you did? So why are you so in shock that there's another person on this campus or in your class that is of color or that has a different sexuality than you and why are you so, kind of like, surprised... but at the same time why are you so angry? And that's kind of what I saw a lot at Holy Cross at least on my end of the racism that I was experiencing. People were really angry at me and blaming me for not having scholarships...

Participant: It makes me so fucking angry! Like even just like talking to you guys about Holy Cross, like I feel like my blood is starting to boil and like...I hate Holy Cross. I hate it. Like I, I, I don't use that word very often. I hate it. Like I've never gone back. I live in Boston now, so I live really close and I know that there is alumni stuff happening. After I wrote that letter to the president and he wrote me back with his bullshit answer about me being a crusader, I wrote to them and I was like take me off all your lists. Like I don't get newsletters from them anymore. Nothing. The only contact I've had with Holy Cross is when they started an LGBT alumni group and I was like yes, I will totally be on that list and I've gone to one or two of their things. But um and when I got this email from this professor saying that this class was happening. I was like wait a second... what class is happening at Holy Cross? I'm really glad that there is an LGBT studies class or queer studies whatever it's called but I fucking hate Holy Cross. And I never want to go back there and I never want to be in a situation like that again. Like I have chosen to live in an area that is progressive and to surround myself with people who understand oppression and who are actively trying to undo it.

Jazmin: Yeah!

Participant: And I don't, I don't ever want to live somewhere being treated so shitty for being gay. And yea, I deal with microaggressions here, but the level of the microaggressions here are so much less. Like it happens less and they're less intense...

Jazmin: Mhmm

Participant: ...than they were at Holy Cross or in San Diego and San Diego is an awful place to be gay, too.

Jazmin: Right

Participant: Um

Jazmin: Yea, I think, I don't know... Like I said, I would have never been really conscious of like how racist people are until I got here and I was just taken aback by the things that people would say...

Participant: Yup

Jazmin: ...here on this campus and feel like it was okay for them to say. Um, and while my first year... I was like, it was good, I was happy and I was like great, but I definitely started noticing that my confidence in my academics started taking a toll um because there were comments being made of my competence here at Holy Cross, being a Latina. Um, and I was accepted into the honors program, but I like left it after a semester. Um, partly like for personal reasons, but also a big part of it was because there was a huge class divide in the program and there was a big obvious race divide. There was only one other person of color in the honors program. And that person didn't want to associate themselves with me. Um, I think they thought that they wanted to fit in with the other white students so they probably thought that they could do that by not associating with the other minority student. And so I was very outcastted in that sense and it was obvious that I didn't have the same experience as everyone else. We had an activity where people talked about what they did over the summer and everyone was like "I went to Africa and I helped people learn English" or "I went to El Salvador and did community work." And I was like, I honestly said, "I stayed at home and watched Netflix" and everyone laughed. I was like, "No, I'm being serious that's exactly what I did." Because I can't afford to go to these places and I was like "I worked in my dad's office and helped him and that was it" and that's because I had to you know. My family needed my help, but everyone, every single individual went out of the country to do some work or did an amazing internship with one of their dad's lawyer friends.

Participant: Right! Exactly. And then they get this leg up because they have all this networking stuff.

Jazmin: Yea

Participant: I didn't... yea. You know, I grew up with a lot of other working class people so I didn't even get what I was, until I got there and then I was like, oh you guys are from another planet.

Jazmin: Yeah and I really wish someone would have told me that before I got here, um because that was a complete, like, toll on my confidence. I started getting into these higher-level classes but at the same time people would do little microaggressions or say little microaggressions that really started affecting me and there was no one I felt that I could turn to because the professors that were in these classes were professors that also had these advantages growing up.

Participant: Right

Jazmin: So, to them it wasn't anything new... It was like "Of course you do work in El Salvador over the summer" and they were kind of like questioning why didn't do anything over the summer. And I was like because my family needed me at home and I couldn't decide to just leave because I'm the oldest and they needed help with the work. So you can't assume that every person in your class is going to be privileged enough to just take off for the summer. And the professor didn't seem to understand, I felt like they were questioning like if I was just being lazy or if I didn't really care but then again it's because they were use to having students come in and say "Oh this is what I am going to do for my summer internship. I'm going to go to Africa." And here I come saying I can't do any of that. So I think that's what I wish someone would have told me before coming to Holy Cross. I would have prepared myself a little bit more.

Participant: Yeah

Jazmin: Um, I don't know if you felt that way. Like if you had anything that...

Participant: Um, I feel like I had, I got a really good education there, you know. That's the one good thing I can say...no that's not the one good thing. I got a good education there. I appreciated all of the um learning that I did around social justice. And that was specifically because of the work of Mary Ni and um the multicultural organizing that we did and I really appreciate a few professors, um Like Jorge Valdés and Jim Nickoloff who provided um a lot of support around that stuff. But other than that, um, and Pax Christi, the Chaplain's Office for sure.

Jazmin: Mhmm

Participant: The two women, Kim and Marybeth, were huge for me. But, um, yeah, given that choice again I would absolutely not go there. Yeah, there is no way in hell. I, um, no longer identify as Catholic... It was during my time there that I decided that that wasn't a good fit for me. And um I actually was getting spiritual counseling from Kim. I would see her regularly and we kind of worked through that and I really appreciated all of the care and attention that she gave as I kind of worked through that process of trying to undo all of the internalized homophobia and realized that yes my spirituality is really important to me and the Catholic church is not a good fit for me...

Jazmin: Uh-huh

Participant: And expressing that and celebrating that and it's not the right community for me. I feel like Holy Cross provided education around that. The Chaplains office did workshops that

were several weeks long where we learned the true history of Catholicism and like the history of women as priests in the early church and like getting back to some of Jesus's radical teachings and all that and I appreciate that and I totally get that some people want that and want to celebrate their faith and try to make change from within and I'm absolutely not interested, I'm like this is not a healthy space for me and I'm out. Um, so the main reason why I chose Holy Cross, I no longer would want and I would definitely go somewhere that was more progressive that had activism as the core piece of the college.

Jazmin: Yeah

Participant: In reality, not just in...

Jazmin: In words.

Participant: In speech, yea

Jazmin: Yea...

Participant: So, I have about five more minutes; so I don't know if you have any more last questions you want to ask.

Jazmin: Yeah, so the final question Alex can ask you and um then we'll, yeah, we'll definitely be done with everything else.

Alex: So the last question just focused on, based on your experience, what advice would you give to LGBT students, LGBT students who are struggling to come out at Holy Cross? Or like also what advice would you give to students like myself who are about to graduate? Who is about to enter the professional world?

Participant: Yeah, that's a good question. Um, I know its cliché, but I would have to say, the first thing I would say is that "it gets better" [laughs]. Like I don't know everything about how Holy Cross is now, but that was the hardest place and everything else has been easier since then. Um, I feel like having as much community... seeking out the community that you need of people who see you for who you are, um and know you and are going to fight for you. Whether that's because they experienced the same oppression or because they are like super allies who are doing their homework to understand it and be there for you. It's huge and um if you, yeah I think finding, yeah I think community is the biggest thing. And just knowing and always remembering that it is bigger than just that place. Um, in terms of looking for jobs. I've listed my LGBT activist stuff on my resume because I only wanted jobs at places that would accept me for who I am and I really find it so much easier to just be out from the beginning at places where I work. Um, and I haven't had a big problem anywhere and I mean all of my bosses that I've ever had have been supportive. There've been a couple of places. There were some teaching situations where there were parents who were uncomfortable with me or maybe one of the other teachers at the school, but I could always go to my supervisor who had my back. So I have found it really helpful to be out in the job hunting process and just having something like that on your resume kind of just already puts it out there without having to talk about it.

Jazmin: Yeah

Participant: Um, but I don't know... but I am a really, really, really happy person. I love being queer and I wouldn't trade it for the world and I have, everywhere that I've lived I've had really amazing, kick-ass queer community. Um, and I, it's kind of funny, I feel like Holy Cross was an alternate universe where it was so hard to be gay and now it's like I live in this world that is so much bigger than Holy Cross, and where there's so many more possibilities you know. You're not so trapped on this hill in a bubble you know...

Jazmin: Yea

Participant: ...it's like this is your extent of your possibilities. Like, there were three out women when I was there. And you know each of us had a crush on the other one but none of us had a crush on each other. So I came out and I didn't get any of the fun part of actually dating or even making out with anybody (laughter). Then I got out and there's this whole queer world. It's fucking amazing. And I mean I guess Holy Cross made me tougher. I don't know...

Alex: Yea

Participant: It's just, it gets better. It's so amazing being queer. I love it.

Jazmin: That was awesome!

Alex: It was a pleasure talking to you and I really enjoyed listening to your story.

Jazmin: I mean I was really empowered um just because I'm struggling to stay positive on this campus sometimes... So it was really nice to hear you saying that you had similar experiences but you came out stronger and um I don't know... I just think sometimes Holy Cross can take a toll on you.

Participant: Yeah, absolutely, when's the drag show?...

Jazmin: We had some identifying questions, so just to like confirm. Your gender identity? Do you want to put that down?

Participant: Um, yeah, female.

Jazmin: Ok, sexuality?

Participant: Uh, queer/dyke and just for background, I use queer because my partners are often trans or genderqueer.

Jazmin: Ok, um, your racial or ethnic background.

Participant: white

Jazmin: Ok and your current or former occupation.

Participant: Um, project coordinator in research institute

Jazmin: Ok, that is it, so we'll email you...

Participant: Thanks so much you guys this was really lovely. I appreciate it.

Jazmin: Thank you so much for speaking to us, it was amazing to hear your story and we really hope to meet you.

Alex: Thank you for your time.

Participant: Thanks, take care. Bye.

Jazmin: You too, bye.