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# A Conversation with Stephen T. Coady

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Stephen Coady  
Meaghan Moran  
April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2018  
Holy Cross Podcast Room (Skype Call)  
Making History  
Professor Stephanie Yuhl

MM: Alright, so today is April 18, 2018. I am Meaghan Moran, Class of 2020. Stephen, can I just get your acknowledgement that you are being recorded and consented to do this interview?

SC: Yes.

MM: Alright, so let's begin the interview for Holy Cross' LGBTQ alumni project. Before we get into your experiences, do you mind briefly introducing yourself?

SC: Sure. My name is Stephen Coady and I graduated from Holy Cross in 1999. Any other additional information you want?

MM: I'm sure we will cover it throughout the interview.

SC: Ok.

MM: Our first section is called Coming to Holy Cross. My first question is how did you decide to make the decision to come to Holy Cross?

SC: Good question. I have looked back on that process many times over the years. I think like a typical 17-year-old it is hard to know what you don't know when you are making that decision. Holy Cross was a prestigious school, is rather. So I was really delighted that I was accepted at the school. I think at the time it had a lot of the right features in terms of proximity to where I was from, which is the Boston area.

MM: Ok.

SC: I liked that it was a smaller school since I hadn't really had a lot of exposure to urban settings at that point in my life. Frankly, it just had a really beautiful campus. I think that something that is probably really important to teenagers and their parents. It really makes you comfortable.

MM: (Laughing) You get sold on the Fenwick Ivy.

SC: You sure do. It's impressive and it kind of makes you feel like it's quite an accomplishment just to get in.

MM: Yeah.

SC: Yeah, so it was one of the best schools I got into at the time and so it just seemed like kind of a no-brainer, that it would be at least a sort of a finalist in my decision making, if not the top choice.

MM: So what was your transition from high school to Holy Cross like?

SC: In regards to what? Is there a certain aspect that you would like me to think about?

MM: Did you struggle to get adjusted at all to Holy Cross or with your roommate? Did you have a good first year, basically?

SC: I think, yeah, I definitely did struggle. I would not say that I had a good first year.

MM: Ok.

SC: I don't know how, I think much of that is very typical of any first year student, what I went through. I was in a forced triple in Wheeler. So it was just kind of crazy to be thrust into a really less than comfortable environment with very little personal space. And you know, it is a very just, I guess a very excited environment where you have a bunch of guys in their first year just kind of all getting to know each other, cramped into that tiny space.

MM: Yeah, in that tiny space.

SC: I think especially for a closeted LGBT young person.

MM: Ok. So you were a student at Holy Cross from 1995-1999 correct?

SC: Yes.

MM: So what was going on at the time in the world that you can remember during your time at Holy Cross?

SC: Let's see. That is a good question. So I'm thinking about things that were going on outside of Holy Cross and outside my life in particular. Well the O.J. Simpson Trial was going on I remember that.

MM: Ok.

SC: Because I can remember my Freshman year, the verdict came down. So that was in the news a lot. I know that probably in my second or third year, maybe senior year, I am not sure what year it was, but Matt Shepard was killed. That was a memorable event. What was going on in the world in general? I'm not really sure what else brings to mind but those were two major events.

MM: Ok, so did what was going on in the world at the time impact your experience at Holy Cross at all? I know you talked a little about how everyone watched the O.J. Simpson trial your

Freshman year, but was there anything else outside of Holy Cross that was impacting your experience while you were there?

SC: You know I am sure there were. Speaking as someone who was an LGBT student there, we – we meaning the few students who knew each other and were out on campus – really were trying, I think, to get some perspective on what was going on in the world, and what life was like beyond our college and out campus. Because at the point we were all kind of going through a coming out process and feeling rather isolated and not really knowing if the experience we were having there was normal, average, unique to Holy Cross in some way or if things were very different maybe at other schools, things like that.

MM: So how did you get out and get this type of exposure? Like, did you visit other schools or go into Worcester at all?

SC: Yeah, actually, I personally did develop kind of a set of friends who were outside of the campus. It kind of started with friends I made on campus and then just kind of branched out and did a bit of socializing off campus.

MM: So did you meet other people at other universities throughout Worcester or in the community?

SC: Yeah, I would say a fair amount. I met a few people who went to WPI and Clark. I think a couple from Assumption and, I am trying to remember. I think even one time our campus student group set up kind of some type of relationship with another student group from, I want to say, Clark. We visited each other meetings a couple of times.

MM: Ok, cool. So what was Holy Cross like during that time period? Like in terms of its classes and its environment?

SC: Can you specify you know in sort of, what was it like in what sort of dimension?

MM: Just like in the campus climate or culture, your experience with your classmates, your professors, or just how you found the academic environment or the social environment?

SC: Well I think I certainly found the academic environment challenging as I am sure you do.

MM: I don't think that has changed (Laughing).

SC: It is of a certain caliber. I went to a public high school, so it was a little bit of a higher level challenge in terms of the expectation by the instructors than I was used to. I felt that, let's see. I sort of recognized that the student population looked a bit homogenous. In my first year, I felt like this is a great school, I am fortunate to be here, and everyone looks the same (laughing). Even coming from a Boston suburb which was somewhat diverse but not very, it seemed to have a lack of, you know, racial or ethnic diversity. But again, you have very little to compare it with at that point in your life.

MM: Interesting. Ok, the next section of our interview is called Coming Out and Being LGBTQ at Holy Cross. So my first question is, if you are comfortable answering it, is that recognizing that coming out isn't a one-time event, when and how did you first come out?

SC: First, let's see. I think I first came out to a female friend. She was probably just more than an acquaintance at that point, but it was someone I knew did have friends either who were gay or just seemed very progressive, you know, in their attitudes. Something just kind of triggered a conversation and I ended up sharing some things with her. I am still friends with that person today.

MM: So, were you out at all during your time at Holy Cross. I know you mentioned freshman year that you were closeted during your time in Wheeler but at any other point did you come out to anyone at Holy Cross?

SC: Yes. I would say my sophomore/junior year I was extremely out. As I mentioned, I was part of a small number of students who were out on campus and knew each other. Let's see, I think it was my junior year we had organized and fought for and achieved recognition by the college as a student organization called ABiGaLe which I now believe has been kind of recombined with Allies. But you know that took a high level of visibility to get that organized. And then, ultimately, I became a co-chair of that organization.

MM: So were you one of the founding members of that group if you were one of the people establishing it?

SC: Yeah.

MM: Could you describe a little bit about what that process was like in getting the group recognized by Holy Cross' community and the campus administration?

SC: I mean, first of all I guess I will talk about why we decided to go down that path. We had kind of a small community and initially there was like a student support group that was run through the Chaplains Office. And so that is how we got to all know each other initially. Over time, the majority of this group was out on campus. We were all participants in the Allies group as well. But you know, the culture in general and in society was not all that favorable to us and there was a quite a bit of latent and overt homophobia. We would all hear individuals making comments and although Allies had presence on campus, it just seemed as though there was this attitude that some people could use negative speech -homophobic speech, slurs - because there weren't any actual gay people around. That it was just this set of mostly young women that would participate in Allies meetings and had progressive attitudes but there were no actual human beings that existed. So what we decided is that it would kind of force people to recognize the existence of gay people as actual human beings on campus as opposed to just a concept. If we organized and became a recognized student organization. So that is what prompted us and eventually we decided that we needed to have visibility and a voice. So the process was very difficult. You know, as a Catholic organization the school was kind of not predisposed to recognizing this as a student organization. We had a really great, I think, great couple of leaders in our group initially, who I think really helped us down a successful path. We got the support of the student government. We compiled a bunch of signatures just from students on campus in

general. Just to reflect that there was a willingness and a desire to have, you know, a recognized student organization. So between getting the signatures and getting the student government to approve of the organization, we kind of built a case and made it more politically difficult for the college to not give us recognition. So ultimately we were successful but it was difficult. I mean, it was certainly not like the ultimate Frisbee club getting recognition, it was a little bit more involved than that (Laughing).

MM: So you said that one of your goals in forming ABiGaLe was to try to make the LGBTQ community more visible at Holy Cross. Do you think you succeeded in that or how did you go about doing that?

SC: Yes, I would say that we absolutely succeeded. I think the fact that there is now this history that you are studying is evidence of that. It kind of came at a time where I think society in general was moving forward and probably other college campuses, particularly ones in cities, were more advanced in terms of having a comfortable environment and having a visible gay student population. But that was changing and really started to change more so after I left the school. So I think my understanding is the school didn't develop like a reputation for being a great environment for young LGTB students and so while people I think started coming out younger and younger and were looking for those kinds of positive environments, Holy Cross was just probably not their first choice. You know, I don't think the College was necessarily resistant to change or the student population was resistant to progress, I just think that because of the kind of institution it is and because of the shifting attitudes in society in general, young gay students were probably just not going there as their first choice as where they wanted to spend their next four years. Although for any students who did come out later, you know how we did, after we went to Holy Cross, I imagine it was probably a little bit more welcoming or at least sensitive environment following our achievement of getting student recognition.

MM: Can you share any specific stories or a story about what it was like to be out at Holy Cross during that time?

SC: Well, I think in general if you were an out student at that time at Holy Cross, you were kind of by default a bit more of an activist than you might be elsewhere. I can say that is true for myself. Basically all of the friends that I had there, we were all active. It just seemed like a matter of course even though none of us set out to do that. It was just sort of like the necessary for ourselves. So you know, we participated things in a much more visible way, we held rallies, we wrote bids for *The Crusader*. When there was, when Matthew Shepard was murdered and there were events on campus, we really spurred those demonstrations to take place and participated in those conversations very visibly. So, I would say my experience at that time meant being out and kind of active.

MM: So you talked a little bit about how you met a lot of the people who helped to start ABiGaLe in the Chaplain's Office through a support group. I was just wondering what other support groups there were, or if the Chaplains group was support system during your time at Holy Cross?

SC: Yea I think that support group through the Chaplains Office really was the core of it. From that just all of us as individuals got to know each other and for many of us developed really lifelong friendships. It was just a really formative time so I think it was those relationships that really provided the support and that support group from the Chaplain's office, they created the forum for that to happen.

MM: So did you join the Chaplain support group as a freshman or was that something you did later on thing in your Holy Cross experience?

SC: I'm not sure if it was the end of my Freshman year or if it was the beginning of my Sophomore year but I think it was probably toward the end of my Freshman year.

MM: So you talked about how you were involved in ABiGaLe but were you involved in any other sports teams, clubs, or campus organizations during your time at Holy Cross?

SC: Yes, I did a whole variety of things. I actually joined the ballroom dance club as a Freshman.

MM: Cool. (Laughing).

SC: Yea, I was the vice president of it my senior year. I actually organized the campus' very first intercollegiate ballroom dance competition.

MM: Oh, cool!

SC: That club was just a lot of fun to do. Yeah, so that was one thing. What else did I do? I worked for the newspaper for a short time as the advertising editor.

MM: Ok.

SC: I can't remember what else I did. I think I joined the sailing club for a short time too but never got deep into that (Laughing).

MM: A lot to do on campus (Laughing).

SC: Always, yeah.

MM: So did your involvement in these groups impact your experience being LGBTQ at Holy Cross? I mean, obviously ABiGaLe did, but did these other groups?

SC: Let's see. I think, you know, relating to other students and, you know, kind of in the context of a club or a structured activity provides a little bit of cover so that you can kind of be yourself but it is not necessarily the main focus of attention. Whereas if you were on a weekend on campus or at an off campus party and it is just a purely social environment, you're focused on a certain activity or a certain topic when you are doing something with a club or a class for example. I think that is a shared experience for the non-LGBT students too because at the time none of them had really thought about their feelings towards gay students, most of them had

never met one before. So it just gave everyone an opportunity to relate on regular things without it having the question of people's gay identity and people's feelings related to that, having to be, like, central (Laughing). It was kind of normalizing I think is a way to put it.

MM: Ok, awesome. So did ABiGaLe, obviously ABiGaLe was more focused on your LGBTQ identity, so how did that impact your experience at Holy Cross?

SC: Like I said, it was just really formative. I think in a way it just really forced me to own my identity and really be an activist as opposed to just a person (Laughing).

MM: Ok.

SC: I have to say I have always had mixed feelings about that. I think for a lot of us it gave us a lot of strength and it was very fortifying. On the other hand, that was a lot of energy that could have been put towards other things that other students focused on, like really sinking one's teeth more thoroughly into academics or other pursuits, who knows? So that was a really a main, a really big focus for attention for me and for other students at the time.

MM: So you spoke a little bit about how by being out on campus you kind of had to be an activist, so was ABiGaLe your way of kind of being an activist on campus?

SC: Yeah.

MM: Ok. If you could do your Holy Cross experience over, would you do anything differently?

SC: Let's see. Well, if I knew when I was 17 what I know now. Without really taking anything away from Holy Cross, I would probably go somewhere else. That being said, I do feel that being there at that time gave me the opportunity to have a major impact on campus life. And would I do things differently? Yeah, I probably would. I don't know how much of that necessarily has to do with being an LGBT student as opposed to just being a young person, but I think experienced things in my first year or so that every student does when you are away from home and just exploring certain freedoms that you didn't have before. I think I went my first semester of my freshman where I achieved the highest GPA of my college career, and my second semester freshman year, I got the lowest GPA of my college career. So you know, things became a little distracting.

MM: (Laughing) Yeah. Did you have any romantic relationships during your time at Holy Cross.

SC: Yes. I did. I had a relationship with one of the other founders of ABiGaLe, and actually he was one of the first co-chairs.

MM: Ok, so how did you find that experience at Holy Cross? Being in that relationship?

SC: Again, it's kind of hard. You know you can't compare it to something else when it is sort of your first time and you haven't gone through it before. You know, it was, I guess I would have to say that we had circle of friends in which we felt comfortable, so it felt comfortable, I guess. As

opposed to being like a couple in a foreign environment where we might have had to sort of like hide.

MM: Ok, so you kind of already knew everyone in your group or circle?

SC: Yeah, yeah. And again at that point we were kind of in the activist mode so we were just, we just had a relationship that felt normal within our kind of cohort.

MM: Looking back is there anything you wish you had known?

SC: Yeah, I wish I had known more about how things worked on other college campuses, what life was like elsewhere. You know because for us, again, we felt like we were sort of in a fight for recognition and were in that mode of activism. And, it sort of seemed like that was just a matter of course if you were a young LGBT person. But, that was not the case everywhere, you know. So I don't think we had the average experience but it was a necessary experience.

MM: So you feel like if maybe you had been in a more progressive or open environment your experience like dating and being out would have been different?

SC: Yeah, or just you know, if we were in a more like metropolitan setting. Like if Holy Cross, if like the campus was located within a city, you know, I think we would have had more just insight into what life was like (Laughing). You know, elsewhere in the world. But, yeah, you know, Holy Cross is just, it has these characteristics that make it what it is which is really, really great for a lot of students, this beautiful, self-contained campus. It creates, I think, for the most part, a safe environment for learning and for developing friendships and kind of exploring one's self, but in other ways I think it can be sort of isolating for students. It attracts a lot, I think, of really well-educated and affluent students. It can give you a limited perspective on what it is like for people in the rest of the world. That said, I have reflected back on the school's mantra of men and women for others and, you know, at the time it just sounds as a slogan, it doesn't seem to mean much, but I do actually think that this school is good at getting students to not necessarily be self-centered in their learning and development and that is a good thing.

MM: So you talked a little bit about how you felt like Holy Cross was like kind of self-contained and you thought that maybe if it was in a major city you felt like you would have had a more open environment. So did you find the city of Worcester not to be a particularly welcoming environment or did you just not go out into the city a lot?

SC: I actually did enjoy my experience in Worcester, especially in my junior and senior year. I did go off, my sort of off campus network expanded and I had kind of had a social life outside campus that to me at the time was really important. But I think it still felt, it's just hard to have perspective. I guess, I was still in a little sort of self-contained group even among, you know, we were always careful to go to specific places and be in groups and really make sure we avoided any sort of risk to our safety and only were kind of like visibly out in certain environments.

MM: If you don't mind explaining, like what were those sort of environments in Worcester that you felt comfortable out in?

SC: Yeah, there were like a couple coffee shops. There was one near WPI that I went to quite a bit. There was a really fun club downtown that had like gay night on I think Sunday nights, that was really fun. So, things like that.

MM: Awesome, thank you. So you touched on this a little bit, talking about how you find Holy Cross' mission of men and women for others important, so I was just wondering, do you think the Jesuit identity and environment of Holy Cross affected your view of your sexuality at all?

SC: Yeah, I think it being a Catholic institution made my identity feel like it just came with hardship and there was just built in struggle related to that. The fact that it was a Jesuit Catholic institution probably made it a little easier and I don't think we would have had Allies and I don't think we would have achieved ABiGaLe's recognition as a student organization if there weren't like a more progressive wing of the church like the Jesuits are.

MM: So you talked about how you found a support group within the Chaplain's Office. So was there like any religious motivation behind that or was it just mostly like a support group talking about life on campus?

SC: That, you know, that is just how it was set up. There was a woman who ran the Chaplain's Office and she recognized that there was a need for this. I don't know how long it existed before I came to Holy Cross, but it was well established even though it was small. It was really the only thing available on campus for a student who was in the closet and looking for help because it was advertised in the, I forget what it is, the flyer that comes out, that lists like all the student activities.

MM: Oh yeah, all the emails in the beginning of the year (Laughing).

SC: Yeah, but anyway. Anonymity was assured and so that is how I found it, just like every other student.

MM: So there wasn't really a big religious element involved in it?

SC: No, not at all.

MM: Ok, so our next section is called Looking Back on Holy Cross and you have already covered some of this, but my first question is based on your experience what advice would you offer to LGBTQ students who are struggling to come out at Holy Cross?

SC: Just find people who are having a similar experience so you can kind of not be alone in that. But also find people who have advanced beyond that and are living a comfortable life and who are not necessarily in kind of a struggle or a mode of activism because it is just, I think, helpful to see that that exists as well.

MM: So based on your experience, what advice would you offer to LGBTQ seniors who are about to make the transition from collegiate to professional life?

SC: I'm not sure I can necessarily answer that because, you know, individuals really need to figure out their own personal goals and values. And I think what is so fantastic about the day and age that we are living in now, as opposed to 20 years ago when I graduated, is having an LGBTQ identity is almost a non-issue now. I think one could almost take it for granted that if you are going to get a job or go to school or go to school somewhere, as long as it is not in a very rural or kind of like, maybe, very conservative area of the country, like the Deep South. I think you are pretty assured that you are going to be in a fairly safe environment and comfortable being yourself.

MM: Ok, thank you. Can you share a story about a moment when being LGTQ impacted an experience that you had at Holy Cross?

SC: It was the whole experience (Laughing). Are you, do you have in mind, something more like an event or what would be helpful to hear about?

MM: I mean, anything that found like, I know you talked about during ABiGaLe you guys planned rallies. Just anything where being LGBTQ impacted like a specific experience that you had while at Holy Cross. I know you have talked about this previously but if there is any specific story or moment that comes to mind?

SC: Well, I can tell you that there were plenty of times where I felt like a threatening situation and looking back I can remember being in Wheeler as a Freshman. You know, I would hear the word fag plenty of times, so you know it was really important to be very concealed and careful. So, I think I was just very withdrawn and private. So I think being a closeted LGBT student at that time meant kind of a lot of loneliness. But, later I think as I sort of found my tribe if you will and became out and active, I think the whole flavor of my experience was just more, became energized, by having that identity and being an activist on campus.

MM: So before I move on to the more demographic section at the end of the interview, is there anything else you would like to add about your time at Holy Cross or any reflections you would like to add in general?

SC: You know, I don't think so. You know, I don't know how wide of a pool of folks your interviewing is but I would just say that, while I think that because I personally know some folks that were there at the time, they would probably say some of the same things. But you know, I think my experience is just my experience, so in no way do I want to speak for a population (Laughing). I am just speaking for myself.

MM: Ok, alright, thank you. So would you be willing to self-identify with some of the demographic categories I am about to go over?

SC: Ok.

MM: Can you just state your year of graduation?

SC: 1999.

MM: And your major at Holy Cross?

SC: Psychology, with a Peace and Conflict Studies concentration.

MM: I have that concentration too actually.

SC: Awesome.

MM: And your gender identity?

SC: Male.

MM: And sexuality?

SC: Gay.

MM: Racial or ethnic background?

SC: Caucasian.

MM: And your current or former occupation?

SC: Marketing and Communications.

MM: Alright, I think that is it. Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me today.

SC: Great, best of luck with your project. I am curious if there will be anything that you will be able to share with any of your participants at the end?

MM: Yes, so I am actually going to type up a transcription of the interview and then I will send it to you and you can look it over and see if there anything you want to take out or edit and then I will send you the final completed copy at the end. I can also send you a link. This a whole project we are kind of doing, like a whole oral history project about the LGBTQ community at Holy Cross, so I will email the link if you wanted to look through any of the other projects.

SC: Yes, I was curious about not so much about my own record but everything that you are collecting. Is the focus of it more the work of compiling it or is there like a research component or analysis that you are going to be doing with all of this data?

MM: So right now for my class we are kind of in the data gathering part but I know this summer, my professor is creating an exhibit about the Holy LGBT community and I think the LGBTQ community in Worcester in general. So I think that some of these interviews might be used for that. I have a friend in the class that is doing summer research kind of in this field too.

SC: Cool. So just on a personal note, out of curiosity. Can you, is there anything you can tell me about why you got involved in this particular research project?

MM: Sure, well so in class we have been studying telling stories that often aren't made visible to the wider community. Recently we have been focusing on the LGBTQ community. So we have read a book about it and have been discussing class how the predominant narrative of Holy Cross, seems how, like, this singular narrative but really there are so many other experiences that students have while on campus. So we have been working to try to make those experiences visible.

SC: Yeah, really interesting. I am also just curious what campus life is like now. I mean as I described when I was there, there was Allies, and it was you know, kind of a small group, and there was ABiGaLe that I was a part of. I think later on that they blended that together.

MM: Yes, I think they are like one group under Pride right now. So I think Holy Cross definitely still has some of that homogenous feel and doesn't have a super vibrant LGBTQ community but I think it is definitely there. I mean, I can't really speak from experience on this, but I do feel like it is a little bit more open but probably not as progressive as like you said, like a school in the middle of New York City or something might be.

SC: Yeah and I imagine that the students who do end up choosing to go there, they don't necessarily want to have to participate in life with their identity as like a leading factor, like I did. They just wanted to be like left alone, like a student, not a gay student, I'm just a student.

MM: I can't speak from experience but I do feel like there is not as much pressure to be an activist, like in your identity forces you to be activist. I feel like that is maybe just not as present here as it was when you were here.

SC: Well, I look forward to learning more when (inaudible).

MM: Yes, I will send you the link and as soon as I finish typing up the transcript I will send that to you too.

SC: Okay.

MM: Thank you, have a good rest of your afternoon.

SC: Thanks, good luck.