

7-26-2018

A Conversation with Keith Plummer

Follow this and additional works at: https://crossworks.holycross.edu/glbqt_alum

 Part of the [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies Commons](#), [Oral History Commons](#), [Social History Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

"A Conversation with Keith Plummer" (2018). *GLBTQ Alumni Oral History Project*. 23.
https://crossworks.holycross.edu/glbqt_alum/23

This Oral History is brought to you for free and open access by the Oral Histories at CrossWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in GLBTQ Alumni Oral History Project by an authorized administrator of CrossWorks.

Interviewee: Keith Plummer

Interviewers: Emma Powell (EP) and Nora Grimes (NG)

Date: July 26th, 2018

Location: Podcast Room, Multimedia Resource Center, Holy Cross via Skype
Weiss Summer Research in the Humanities Associate and Advisor Stephanie Yuhl

Emma and Nora: Hello!

Emma: Hi, um, so I guess we can just get started. Sorry it took us a second to find you.

Keith: Oh yeah, no, that was a journey. Trying to find podcast room [inaudible].

Nora: Yeah, it definitely is.

Nora: And the email is really bizarre too, being like corn boy, earthlink.

Keith: That's the email for podcast room?

Nora: Yes.

Emma: Good old Holy Cross. Um, so, I just have to say the date really quick. Today is July 26th, 2018. I'm Emma Powell.

Nora: I'm Nora Grimes.

Emma: And Keith can you just say that you consent to being recorded?

Keith: Yes, I consent to being recorded.

Nora: Awesome, so we can get started. Our first question is how did you decide to come to Holy Cross?

Keith: Oh, how did I decide to come to Holy Cross? Well, um, I come from like a Catholic family so there was like some pressures you know from parents, especially my dad, to go to a Catholic institution. My sister is an alumni of a, or an alumna of like Holy Cross, so she was like chanting its praises. And you know as I applied it was the most selective school I got into.

Emma and Nora: [Laughs]

Keith: And also I liked, um, my sister, like, she knew I was queer so she would tell me, oh I see all these Ally stickers on the doors Holy Cross is Catholic but you can be queer and Catholic there, I don't think it'd be a big deal and I'm like, okay, well, I don't know I guess it's just what I'm gonna do. So, and I do like identify as a little spiritual so I guess some progressive spirituality like wouldn't be bad for me, so I went.

Nora: Awesome.

Emma: Awesome. So what was the, uh, first transition from high school to Holy Cross kind of like?

Keith: Um, uh, I don't know. I guess it's always tough when you're creating new roots, like I feel like, um, it was definitely new being on a completely gendered floor in my living situation. I was just like living with like all men. I never actually, I guess like I had two brothers but also a sister I had never been in such a homogenously gendered sort of like floor plan in how it was like organized, so, I guess there was a little whiplash with that. I never found that I like was friends with uh, hetero-masculine people, but here I am in a triple with these two guys that are like talking about like their porn consumption and all this other shit and I'm like, oh my God, this is like my first night and I'm texting my older brother and I'm like what does this mean, why are people doing this, for straight boys, oh my goodness. It's gross. But eventually I got used to it and I made some friends. At first I thought that it was harder to make friends for me, so I felt like my first few friends at Holy Cross are very like those first year friends that you met at orientation and are a little weird but it's better than being alone.

Emma: Yeah.

Keith: And, yeah, I'd say that was how the initial transition went. But eventually I got, like, by the end of the year I felt very more secure in myself that I'd had a chance to thrive, I think.

Nora: Awesome.

Keith: It was a bumpy start, definitely a bumpy start. I remember being sad, for a little bit. But I guess a lot of people are sad when they first, it's traumatic 'cause you're living with your parents and you move out. I guess I thought I was going to be openly queer when I got to Holy Cross, but, um, I always wanted to come out to my parents first, so, I just didn't get to like come out to them that summer. Because they were like never together, they don't really like live in the same place so I was like, oh my god, so I didn't come out. I came out to some close friends but I wasn't like the hyper-queer Keith that everyone came to know by like sophomore year.

Nora: Okay, um, so, just to get like I guess a sense of global context and what was going on, are there any like, major like news headlines or things that you, that really stood out to you during your time at Holy Cross?

Keith: Um, okay, so, definitely, I'm pretty sure the Trayvon Martin case got decided like my sophomore year. Black Lives Matter became like a huge movement while I was in college which was cool, it was kind of like the start of those really, really powerful hashtag movements that go viral on social media. I think Caitlyn Jenner also came out while I was in college I'm pretty sure which, that was pretty like cool and like dicey, one of the first mainstream like trans figures in media, kind of like, the trans Ellen DeGeneres moment so, that was cool. Um, what other stuff? Well, my senior year we had the whole regime shift from Obama to Trump, that was like whiplash and horrible so I think like, during my first three years it was like really cute I'd read the headlines like, oh my god Obama did another nice thing that's so cute, thank you, and then [inaudible].

Emma and Nora: [Laughs]

But then like Trump came in and like took the LGBTQ off the website and, you know, the trans ban and stuff like that so it just got really roke with Trump pretty quick. I remember like campus

being really weird the day after the election. The Soc (Sociology) department was basically in mourning, lots of my classes were cancelled. So I'd say the Trump switch, Black Lives Matter, oh, marriage equality happened the summer between my sophomore and junior year, so, that was really cool. So, marriage equality. And, um, yeah Katelyn Jenner coming out. But those are like the main media things that I remember. I'm sure there's a lot that I'm missing, so much was happening, I'm bad with international politics, but, those are like the main things that I latched onto and sort of like social justice-y.

Emma: Awesome. So, you kind of already touched on this a little bit, but, recognizing that coming out isn't a one-time event, when did you first come out?

Keith: I first came out, and like, you know, I think with coming out it's also, you're coming out as something and that label might change. So the first thing that I really came out as was like a gay man. And, that was to my older sister was the first one I ever came out to. She picked me up at work, I worked at Rue21, which is kind of like a bargain, like, Pac Sun or something like that. Anyway, I worked at Rue21 and she was randomly asking me about kids and she was being stupid about adoption and I was like, well, I think adopting's fine, it's whatever, and she was like do you think you're cool with adoption because you maybe don't want to have sex with a woman. I'm like, oh my god.

Emma and Nora: [Laughs]

Keith: And she just really wanted to push it at that point, but she was like dropping hints that whole summer I felt with like, they do like a random pro-gay comment on like "The Office" and she'd be like, yeah that's really good. So I was like, yeah, okay, she just wanted it to happen. So, I like, I came out to her as gay at that point. And, that was that, that was the first time I like came out. And then, after my sister, I think it was my little brother, my cousins, it was mostly like family. I didn't come out to my close high school friends till my first break after college. So, I'd say, yeah I wasn't out in high school. And then, um, I think my next coming out was, you know, as school I became Pride co-chair for sophomore year, so I was very rah-rah queer and basically like, you know, the queer activist on campus. It's really like I think how I got defined in some ways because I was trying to shake things up, do the drag show, update the housing policy to be more gender inclusive. And junior year was when I started trying on the label genderqueer, and that was good. I feel like, and that's when I really started to define my sexuality as more queer than gay, I feel like queer is a more accurate term, more open and fluid and full of possibilities. So, yeah, I switched to genderqueer and I came out, um, I feel like one of the main times I asserted my gender-queerness was on my birthday, I think I had just turned 21, it was before I was like going out for the banger with my friends and [inaudible] and stuff like that, and I prepared this letter to like, uh, you know, the Office of Diversity

Emma and Nora: Yeah.

Keith: and Reslife (Residence Life) and all these people and I wrote this long ass letter kind of like about how I identify as genderqueer, and I felt very erased and invisible in how housing was organized and how I didn't understand how I, just like I'm a very active participant in Holy Cross culture yet I'm in the margins in some ways. Everyone else gets to live with their close

friends and I don't just because you define me through, I guess just genital or some like government documentation. I'd say it would just be much better like, you know, if you just listen to my voice and what makes me most comfortable and I wanna live with my three girlfriends and they're great and they understand my gender identity, I can explore it more freely, like, it's just a lot better place for me to thrive and bond and just do like a rom-com movie marathon on a weekend.

All: [Laughs]

Keith: This is just, this is my place, this is my shit, this is what I want and there's no reason why you shouldn't give it to me. In fact, you know, under Title IX it might be a little sketchy, so, I think with, you know, the pressure of like a very, like, them trying to be more diverse and inclusive, I think one of the things that made me send the letter was that we just had gotten the new diversity and inclusion person on the cabinet, Amit. He had just joined the cabinet and I was like, ooh the time is right, he's out as gay, I'm sure if we hired them we're looking for a more queer friendly perspective, he'll be a good advocate. I made sure to CC Outfront cause I'm like I need people on the inside being my advocate. And they were, they obviously were, they're always doing the pressure. 'Cause I just sent that letter then I went abroad all of my junior year, like, I've given you a year to sort this out, when I get back I expect to live with my close girlfriends. And in an apartment in Williams, I don't want to be off-campus so, I'm gonna do what I want. And they did give it to me, so.

Emma: That's awesome!

Nora: Awesome!

Keith: It was really good. And then I guess when I came back senior year that's when I really started to assert my genderqueer identity to like everyone on campus. And that's when I feel like I really was genderqueer socially. Yeah.

Nora: That's great, Keith. Thank you for sharing that with us.

Keith: Yeah, of course.

Nora: Um, kind of, our next question is trying to get at like, who or what were your support systems while you were at Holy Cross?

Keith: Oh, who or what were my support systems. Well, I think I had some like, good friends. And um, that was good, obviously friends. The Soc department, I found Sociology. I like, I originally was a Math major and before that I was trying out Chemistry and I was always doing a Gender and Sexualities Studies concentration, but that eventually molded more into a major. But, um, it was when I finally took my first Soc[iology] class and I felt like that was the first major that I was really trying on and it helped me, like, deconstruct all these things about me, how I move through the world and how I'm treated sometimes and why some things are taboo and some things are weird but also how like, all that can change and we can redefine the power structure and I can be who I want regardless of who this salient rules are defining the institution of gender. And I felt like, yeah, Sociology really empowered me to be myself but also advocate

for myself. I think it gave me the language to start like, you know to advocate for others. And that was really helpful. That's how like, it was also drama to just get the drag show approved. I had to write this long ass letter situated within cura personalis and diversity and inclusion, and blah, blah, blah, and really try to like sell it. And be like, oh my god, well you give LASO their own night where they get to show aspects of their culture. Why won't you give Pride their own night to share aspects of our culture? Like, drag people were on the frontlines of the Stonewall Riots. They were like, you know, they've always been pushing like the boundaries of inclusion and what not, so I don't know why a drag show would ever be controversial. And even for Jesuit schools it was like, we were a little lagging, you know. Other schools had already had them. So, that was cool. But, what was I thinking? Oh, where was my support. Okay, so my support was in the field of Sociology so my major and the knowledge I was learning was a huge support. My friends, and lots of them turned out to be queer. Then I guess my random romantic interests. First it was like a guy from my friend group, and he was more closeted, but I guess that was like, that was just good for me to explore, you know, myself. I felt like I grew up in rural Pennsylvania, so I felt like I didn't get to explore my identity that much. Like some people asked me on like dates but I wasn't ready so I'd just be like, nah I'm good. But so, he was cool. And then my really long term boyfriend that's been like on and off, Brian, like he, he was a huge support system. I feel like, feeling like a, really like a supportive and loving presence. Someone who like sees the best parts of you instead of like, uh, you know, all the flaws, and can really foreground that and see how they interact with you and they see you, it just like, it helps you step into that identity even more, if they can like see the most beautiful aspects of you. So he was like a huge support system both my sophomore year um, and then I broke up with him before I went abroad, but then we got back together when I got back from abroad and he was a huge support system senior year and, yeah, he was great, yeah. I felt like, yeah, so, I'm thinking my long term boyfriend, my friends, lots of whom turned out to be queer, and, um, just like my studies and teachers and advisors, um, were huge support systems at Holy Cross.

Emma: Awesome. So, you've already kind of touched on some of the groups you were involved in on campus, but um, so can you just talk about them more and kind of how they impacted your experience of being LGBTQ at Holy Cross?

Keith: Oh yeah, definitely. So my main claim to fame I would say was basically being co-chair, but even co-chair sometimes it was just more President.

Emma and Nora: [Laughs]

Keith: But anyway, of Pride. It was cool. When I first came to Pride, I like assumed there would be more of a structure to it, but like, I like get elected as President like the end of my first year, they supposedly have all these other people elected and I get back to campus and all of them basically like resign, like, they just kind of assumed they'd just do a second term, like the Treasurer and the Secretary and they were like, no, we're over it. I don't know, the Pride that I inherited was very disjointed. It was just me and, um, I had to like find a new- Well, then my best friend Natalie, well my close friend Natalie at the time, she was um, she was my co-chair but then she had to like, she really wanted to get more into ballroom so she was like, we really need to find a replacement co-chair for me. So I found that, and this girl Heather, and then we

just started populating the e-board, hosting meetings. Just hoping to draw interested, getting like first year interns and just asking people that seemed incredibly interested to join the e-board. And eventually it was like, it was built to something, and it felt really beautiful that like I'd built something out of nothing. It was a lot because I had just really started to really be openly gay on campus, but, it was also really good for me to just dive right in and really, really, really gay, just be like a power gay on campus. So, that was cool. And, so Pride I think really was the main activity that molded my experiences, it was how I was perceived on campus. It was a huge part of my identity. It was like, very empowering for me to like, you know, host the meetings and do the events and be like the LGBTQ voice of like almost every campus event or fishbowl. Like, I felt that was like, cool. And then, um, I wanted to shake things up senior year so I joined SGA (Student Government Association) Cabinet, I was the co-director of Social Justice, that was cool. I really liked the presidential regime at that point, Emily Breakell who I think you already interviewed.

Emma and Nora: Yeah.

Keith: She was a queer icon on campus as well, I'd say. And during that we did the LGBTQ Visibility Project which was really cool, which was just like the random anonymous quotes all throughout campus. It was a really good like, you know, show people the voices that are obscured and not heard and that they don't, that are rarely thought about at Holy Cross that really centers the whole like, white Christian male narrative, you know, so, that was cool, well, and heterosexual cisgender woes. So, that was cool. Um, I was an orientation leader and I feel like I did that my senior year, and I felt that I did that specifically because I thought it was important for, um, first years to see like a queer person in like a very visible campus position the second they got back, the second they stepped foot on campus. 'Cause I didn't have really good queer representation when I got there. Everyone was so closeted. I went to the Chaplain's Office meeting and it was like, I don't know, just like four people and it was just, it was just, it was just like the queer culture, like, I also Pride, I wanted to develop the queer culture on campus 'cause it was really dead when I got there. So, by the end of it, it was like, I was throwing parties that were like queer centric and it was cool. Lots of people were coming out. And that's not, I don't attribute that just to myself, I attribute that to society progressing a lot in just those four years with marriage equality and shit like that, and visibility and stuff like that. And I think lots of the weird like rebellious and cool stuff that I did just like started conversations with some people. And everyone realized that we're mostly on the same page, like, love is love. Let people be who they are. I felt like there was just lots of trepidation with even talking about queer issues at first. So, student, so, orientation leader, that was cool. One of my orientees ended up being trans, which was really cool. They weren't out when I was doing it, but that's cool you don't even know who you're affecting just by being visible. So, orientation leader, I also did Relationship Peer Educators, which I just, I don't know. I feel like I liked all the political, social justice groups. That one emphasizes, you know, healthy relationships and consent. I was really interested in issues surrounding gender and sexuality, so it felt like a good group to join, peer educators. Um, I'm trying to think of any other activities. I was really involved senior year, it was actually miserable. I was also a retreat leader with Manresa. I did like all the, I did the retreats a lot. So I did Spring Break Immersion twice, I did, I never led Spring Break Immersion

but I did it twice I really loved that. And then I did the Spiritual Exercises once but that I just did just because, um, it was the end of the year and my mom couldn't pick me up on move in [out] day and it extended your [inaudible] five days, to like stay in your room, so that was actually pretty mis-, that was pretty miserable.

Emma and Nora: [Laughs]

Keith: But, um, uh, I also got super sick 'cause my allergies flare up at the same time every year so I had like a huge fever and I had to be quiet and everyone was just like looking at me like being the decrepit person at the end of sophomore year. I think it was just a lot to come to terms with, 'cause I was also trying to figure out if me and my boyfriend were going to stay together because he was graduating that year. It was just, it was a weird time. So, Spiritual Exercises. But I did love the retreats, I thought the Chaplain's Office was surprisingly queer positive space at Holy Cross. They're pretty like, on it, they really see the love and social justice-y lens of Christianity. I remember we, I, uh, Pride co-sponsored a prayer service in solidarity with the trans community with the Chaplains Office, and yeah. So Manresa was cool and I was a leader my senior year. And I did the "Who Am" I thing, because who doesn't love live [inaudible] of being queer, especially at Holy Cross where it's very special for people to be very open about their queer experience. So I was like, hell yeah I'll do it and I'll tell them the whole thing, you know, the gay the queer the trans and the genderqueer, it is a journey, and I'm so glad I was on it, and I'm glad I was exposed to like the different possibilities of my identity and like, uh, that, and empowered to like embrace them. So, that was cool. So I was involved in Chaplain's Office in that regard. And yeah, so I'd say those were my main activities, I did more but.

Emma: That's a lot. That's a ton.

All: [Laughs]

Emma: That's a ton.

Keith: I feel very involved. You know, I really like being enmeshed in the community. I love being like a key voice. I did love being like the queer celebrity, in a way. I liked it but I also didn't like the surveillance and how it was very reductive to who I was completely because I'm a lot more than just queer, you know, if this is what I'm gonna be I'm gonna own it. I'm only here for another year, why not, and Holy Cross needs it. This is just my identity for the rest of the year.

Nora: One thing you kind of touched upon this a little bit earlier, but we were talking, we were wondering if you could talk a little bit more about the first drag show and what that process was like, getting that to happen at Holy Cross.

Keith: Oh yeah, it was like a journey. So I started that in the works maybe towards the beginning of my sophomore year and at first there was like, we don't know if this can happen. But then Amanda Miles, who doesn't work there anymore, she saw the excitement in my eyes and she's like, no, we're gonna get you this drag show, Keith, we're definitely gonna do it. And like, I'm like yes. And Pride for some reason when I got there, and I think its cause it was so disjointed, it had a way smaller budget than lots of the other MSOs (Multicultural Student Organizations).

Like theirs were upwards of \$13,000 plus and Pride was like, \$7,000 and that sounds like a decent bit but it's not like a lot when you're doing activities all year and then you have to do a drag queen who booking like a good drag queen might be upwards of 5 grand. I had to ask around for money, it was really patchwork, CASA gave us like a grand, Office of Diversity and Inclusion gave us a grand. I think there was this whole thing before, it was like the Diversity and Inclusion council which I don't think exists anymore, but they were there and they maybe gave us like \$500, and then SGA diversity maybe gave us \$1,500, and like, it really was like broad based support. People were like, this is gonna happen. We don't care what roadblock you got, Keith, just make it happen. And I was like, yes, I want it to happen. And I, um, they also had me do this proposal process where I had to write, it was around like a three pager about why the program's important situated in the history and the activism and the culture. Talk about what the program is specifically, what exactly is gonna happen, step by step. Also, who is actually invited. And when I first was doing it, like, they're like for the first one you can't really make it open to like all of Worcester, it kind of needs to be more contained. So it was only students, faculty, and alumni were allowed to go to the first one. Technically, I'm pretty sure other people showed up but technically that's what needed to happen. Um, also I had to like situate it within the campus's mission, which, you know, is just like the Jesuit Christianity aspect which I do vibe with, and there's a ton of overlap you know. We're called to be in solidarity with the vulnerable and marginalized and oppressed, and what better to be in solidarity with the queer community, you know, faces like homelessness and job discrimination and public accommodation discrimination and like daily cultural degradation. There's lots of ways we can be in solidarity with them and it fits into our mission and so I submitted that and that was in review process for a month or more, I maybe sent it in February and I still didn't know if it was approved so I don't even have like. Before it's approved I couldn't pay for the drag queen and their rates are just gonna go up, I can't like um book the Hogan ballroom space, and it's like so hard to get like a good spot in the Hogan Ballroom sometimes cause everyone books it almost a year in advance, especially all the MSOs. So I was just working I felt like I was at like a huge disadvantage but eventually, um, I was like getting like texts with messages just from random faculty that were going to this big summit on it where they're gonna make the decision. Meg Fox Kelly was going, I'm sure a bunch of the priest-ies from Ciampi were going. I don't know. That's when the vice president of student affairs, that's when it was all approved, green light, we booked the drag queen, the best slot I could get for Hogan ballroom, maybe late April right before finals, and it was a Wednesday night at 10pm. But, it ended up being super packed it was amazing. Everyone saw it as a watershed moment for our community which was really cool. And like, it was huge, and Shangela was the drag queen and there's just this effervescence like a barrier has been broken at the end, like Shangela sensed the crowd was so into it that she crowd surfed. She literally crowd surfed along the Holy Cross students. And like my boyfriend Brian at the time literally saved her from hitting her head on the computer. Across the crowd, you know, you need to start turning around or you go to like oblivion on the outskirts so he really turned her around and got her on the crowd surf back to the stage and that was just really cool. And I remember everyone encouraging me to get onstage and like everyone clapping for it, like, it was like a huge moment I think for the LGBTQ community on campus, it was a huge moment for me, it was a huge moment for Holy Cross, and it was just all this like celebratory energy like during it and after and everyone came up to me

after and was like oh my god I feel like we're entering like a new era. It was really cool. So the first drag show, roaring success, amazing, and like I hope they do it next year, I'm going abroad, so someone else can handle it. So, that was that. I feel like I ended my sophomore year on such a high note. I got into Oxford. I had my first, I feel like, I had like spice before that, but like my first like long term, more monogamous loving boyfriend and I also, um, got the drag show approved and it was a roaring success and so I just felt like I was just winning, winning, winning. And I also got an internship in New York that summer, so I was just like damn. And later that summer I got a Dana Scholarship. It was just good, I don't know, I was just riding that wave. So, it was really cool and it was big for Holy Cross and they still do it to this day which I think is so important.

Nora: That's great, thank you.

Emma: That's awesome. Um, from the sounds of it I think you're going to say no

Emma and Nora: [Laughs]

Emma: But, if you could do your Holy Cross experience over would you do anything differently?

Keith: I actually, I would have been out from the get go. I think I should have been out from the get go but other than that, yeah, I feel like I definitely, I diced it up and I wasn't. I think I did, I was a very disruptive positive presence for the campus.

Emma and Nora: Yeah, yeah.

Keith: And I, and I liked it and the campus needed it. It was cool, I feel like I really discovered my activist identity at Holy Cross because I don't know if I would have gone on the same path if I had gone to Wesleyan or Amherst, some really progressive, secular, liberal arts school where it was already supportive. Who knows, I might have ended up just doing math or chemistry or something like business. So it's cool that I went to Holy Cross even though it did have some negative aspects, it was an awesome opportunity to cultivate my voice as an activist, as a leader, as a change maker, and as someone that's super passionate about community organizing and social change and gender and sexuality. And I'm not sure that I really would have leaned into that a ton if it wasn't such like, a needed thing on campus and also something, I don't know, something that was important to me as I figured out my identity. So, yeah, that was so, I'd say Holy Cross largely, all the same, I'm into it. Good. But, I think I would've been even more dicey, maybe I should have shook it up even more, that's about it.

Emma: [Laughs]

Nora: Great! Awesome. Um, you also kind of touched upon this already as well, and like, if you could just talk a little bit more about your romantic relationships that you had at Holy Cross and kind of how that experience was for you.

Keith: Okay, yeah, yeah, sure. So my first, um, romantic relationship at Holy Cross was actually with a really close friend from my original friend group my first year. He was more, like, closeted but he'd always want to cuddle me and eventually it turned into, um, you know, like, I

guess like, we had our first make out maybe before one of the breaks, he was like sleeping over in my room and my other roommates were gone and we'd just finished season one of American Horror Story and we were just looking at each other, and like it was just time for it to happen. Like the way we were cuddling was already getting like a little frisky so we both knew that we were slightly into each other. And yeah, we just made out, and that was like my first kiss. And it was just like a, there was a little tongue involved which was crazy but also it was, it was like, I was just really happy that I was figuring it out and it was tough that he was more closeted and we had a very like, I think complicated relationship because of that. We never really put a label on it, but he was definitely like super into me and I think wanted a more monogamous thing, but I felt weirdness cause I thought he was like a little, not only was he like closeted, but he sometimes felt like a little aggressive and stuff or something, or just not good with his emotions is what I mean, you know, he just wasn't good with his emotions. So we had that thing, and I remember we didn't really label it, and then it was Spring Concert and, um, someone was flirting with me and I ended up dancing with them and then end of freshman year I went on a date with them, and I remember it was super awkward because none of our friend group knew that me and this guy were technically kind of together. But not really obviously, we never labeled it, but kind of together. And they're like, oh _____, you could take pictures of Keith before his date tonight, which was really weird, I felt weird. And yeah I hope you're redacting some of these names. You redact the names, right?

Emma: Yeah, we're gonna send you the write up so you can clip stuff.

Keith: Yeah, I'm like, um, yeah, I'm just trying to be more cognizant about naming people, but yeah, I'm just kind of like doing stream of consciousness here. But anyway, um, so yeah, then there was that guy. But he was more like, he ended up being creepy. He took me too, so it was like we snapchatted all summer and texted and then we got to, um, the beginning of sophomore year which was like the Edge, and the Edge is always crazy, you know.

Emma and Nora: [Laughs]

Keith: There's always debauchery happening at the Edge. And I like literally, I got on campus, I got on campus late like just for the Edge, I moved in that same day because, um, I had my cousin's wedding. And, yeah, and I had just come out to my parents after that wedding. And then the day after I'm back at Holy Cross doing the Edge, it's crazy, he's like hitting me up he wants to see me, he takes me to Loyola. His roommate was an RA so he knew this random empty room and he took me to this creepy room in Loyola that was dark, and the beds didn't have sheets, and I guess that was just his hook up room, and that's when I knew he wasn't for me.

All: [Laughs]

Keith: But, [inaudible], yeah I felt like Holy Cross, it was a little, it was hard to do the typical date thing like at Holy Cross a little bit. But then that's just like hook up culture in general, that's the same thing my straight friends are dealing with. I guess with the queerness there's the extra layer of secrecy, but he was out. I don't know, he was just roke, he was just a fuck boy I don't know. And I felt weird 'cause I'm like oh geez, I ditched the person who was super into me for this guy. And I didn't really ditch him, but like I knew it was dicey to go out with someone. So

then there was him. And then finally towards the end of first semester sophomore year, me and my long term boyfriend that I ended up with a lot, he, uh, we had Spanish class together and I could tell there was an interesting electricity, we were always like looking at each other. And eventually we started to like talk on Facebook during class, and then eventually we both like were drunk texting one night and I was like, oh my god, like, how do you even feel about me? 'Cause he wasn't even really like out yet. He just came to visit me, and then he took me to his room in Williams, and it was Christmas, and there were Christmas lights, and it was cute, and we just, you know, it was nice. Like we just like made out and that was the start of something and then we texted all break and then we became official around Valentine's Day and, yeah, we were together, like, a lot. So he's like the main one. I didn't really like, at Oxford, Oxford was, that's not Holy Cross so I don't know if that's relevant, but just to juxtapose, at Oxford I was single and I guess being queer wasn't so politicized there. I feel like at Holy Cross being queer is such a political identity and to be visibly queer invites all this surveillance and opinions and whatever. At Oxford it was just, yeah some people are queer and some people aren't. There was the queer bar and you can go to it, and I guess like I didn't do anything serious 'cause I think I was sad that I wasn't with Brian, but like, um, I just, you know, I was very liberated, I had lots of flings there and that was fun. And it was just, it was so much easier finding people. It's so much more disjointed at Holy Cross, there wasn't, and I feel like that's changing there's way more of a queer community and by senior year I really saw it taking root. We had this Group Me and like all like these random queer students were on it and we'd keep adding people and we'd like tell people, oh were at this kegger at this place you should come, and like, we'd storm in like a queer herd.

Nora: [Laughs]

Keith: So that was cool. I guess like, just from sophomore year to junior year the big difference was just how much more of an ease, and how there's already such a network at Oxford versus at Holy Cross where there's still so much shame and weirdness attached to it, and there wasn't like a community like there is, like, you know, regarding different aspects of race and ethnicity. You know, very like crystalized communities at Holy Cross campus around that. There weren't really communities crystalized around like LGBTQ identity yet. So I think it was cool to just see that at Oxford. But yeah, then the rest of my relationship is just Brian, so, yeah, I was just with him all the time. He was a good boyfriend. He was nice, and it was serious, and, yeah.

Nora: That's great.

Emma: That's awesome.

Keith: Yeah.

Emma: Um, so the next question is kind of about Jesuit identity. Do you think the Jesuit identity and environment of Holy Cross affected your view of your sexuality at all? Please explain.

Keith: Oh yeah, I think it did. I think, I think, um, I think that in a way it was definitely good that I went to Holy Cross because I had all this random Catholicism baggage from my parents, who are more conservative Catholic and, you know, so I was just like oh my god, so it was good. Like even when I got there I felt like the way at least the main spiritual, it was more the cam- the

student body that I felt wasn't with it yet. Like lots of the administrators and the faculty are like already on like the LGBTQ positive wavelength, and especially the Chaplain's Office. I was very emp-, like the first thing I kind of reached out to was that Chaplain's Office support group, like, my first year, and it was cool to see how Catholic and Jesuit, I mean Jesuit Catholic is one thing. I mean Catholicism and queerness aren't oppositional and how you can really like nourish your queer identity with like, Catholic values, and you can be like an activist with those values. I just like, I thin being at Holy Cross really helped me not view religion and Christianity as something that was inherently harsh or bad for like the flourishing of the LGBTQ community, that like, it just kind of needs to be reengineered, or that the right aspects of it need to be spotlighted and the hierarchy needs to be reengineered. So there's definitely lots that can change about Catholicism, especially the institutional church, but the way Holy Cross approaches it is cuter, and social justice oriented, and I really like that, and, um, what am I thinking. Oh, and I even wrote like for my Dana Scholarship, the first essay I wrote I think was about how being a queer leader at Holy Cross but also working within this framework of Jesuit values and how like they really feed off each other and there's a ton of overlap. I didn't find it that hard to articulate justice for the LGBTQ community through like Jesuit ideas, it's not, there's not like a huge leap. The only leap is like the dogma that explicitly states, oh, like, being trans and having same sex relationships is sinful. But there's not much of like, any of the stuff that actually has a rationale, that like, has like an ideology around it and not just like a rule, some of those are very LGBTQ positive if you interpret them in the right way. So, that's how I think about it.

Emma: Awesome.

Nora; Yeah, that's great. Um, our next section kind of involves looking back on Holy Cross, so based on your experience what advice would you offer to LGBTQ students who might be struggling to come out.

Keith: Hmm, I, I'd take advantage of lots of the resources there. I feel like the Counseling Center, although sometimes I feel like the Counseling Center is understaffed and you can't get an appointment as regular as you should be able to. But definitely start using the counselors, and like if you don't like one of them then switch, you can switch, don't like stick with a person that you don't feel is like, 'cause there are some that just aren't very literate in LGBTQ identity and you just have to accept that and move on and get a new one. But anyway, so use the counseling service that's just something available to you that comes with your tuition I'm pretty sure. And then also the other resources like the, um, through the Chaplain's Office there's an LGBTQ support group. And I saw so many people that initially came to that group that were like shivering, they were scared, they were quiet and then months later they come out flourishing making progress, coming out. You need to like start to like, um, at least find someone or like some space that you can like talk about being queer because if you just internalize it, and have so much shame around it and let it circle round and around your head, it's not gonna get you very many places. And you definitely have to be cognizant of how, um, coming out can affect your circumstances. Like will your parents keep paying your tuition if you're queer and openly queer, like, definitely consider that, and I would say milk your parents for the money first and then come out, in that context. But, or like just be like segment how you're coming out and flourish in

different spaces, I don't know. But definitely start to expose yourself to different mentors and supportive figures, and also, if you're brave enough start talking to your queer friends and coming out to close and trusted confidants. That would be, like, my advice. Oh, and come to Pride events, obviously, go to the drag show, straight-ies come to the drag show all the time, it won't like out you. Go to the drag show and go to "Breaking the Closet". I think "Breaking the Closet" specifically, that's very Vagina Monologues-esque that shares all these campus narratives, would be perfect. You can definitely like see like all these different narratives that spotlight a queerness that might resonate with you. And just, at least know that there's a vast queer community at Holy Cross even if it's kind of covert and weird sometimes and disjointed.

Emma: Awesome, so, based on your experience what advice would you offer to an LGBTQ senior who is about to make the transition from, um, I guess college to the real world?

Keith: Oh, that's tough. I've only been in the real world one year, people, and my first job right now is an LGBTQ nonprofit, so it's really easy for me to be openly queer. I don't know what it's necessarily like if you're one of those people that goes to like a JP Morgan, is like a macho, you know, sort of culture or something like that. I do know that with the work I do, like um, at least, I think it's around 90% of the fortune 500, or fortune 1000, I think it's higher than that, actually, have like protections for like sexual orientation. And then I think it's in the high 80s they have policy for gender identity, so. If you're going to work for a big company, odds are if you review the policy that you have recourse, if people are being weird to you about being openly queer, so. And there's also normally professional development opportunities specifically for queer employees now 'adays, 'cause it's a segment for diversity that we want to cultivate and retain and recruit. Like, you'll see that lots of different banks at least and different programs specifically have programs that recruit LGBTQ students, LGBTQ potential employees, I should say. So, I'd say look at the policies of your organization, assess the workplace culture, maybe you don't need to go in guns blazing but if it looks like it's gonna be cute then why hide that part of yourself, I'd say. So, understand the recourses you have in the workplace and also assess the workplace culture, and ultimately do what's best for you. If it's better for you to be out and, um, even if it is like a little miserable, just be out. And also, jobs are such a dime a dozen, just switch if it's creepy. Like, suffer and switch, just get out of there if it's weird. Like, obviously that's like a privilege statement and there's different class barriers to just switching, but like switching jobs isn't that hard and once you have your first job, like, you have more experience and you can just switch to the next one. I have lots of friends that like, maybe went through three jobs their first year. Your first job usually isn't your best job, so, don't get trapped in a toxic place that's like, diminishing you or just not helping you be happy when you can switch.

Nora: Awesome. Um, so, our final question, it's kind of trying to see if there's an experience or a moment or a memory that you haven't mentioned yet in this interview, um, when being LGBTQ really impacted that moment. At Holy Cross.

Keith: Yeah, that's tough to say. Oh, there was um, at graduation me and Emily Breakell did a protest because there wasn't going to be a Lavender Graduation, so we cut all this rainbow ribbon and anyone who wanted to support us in being like, Holy Cross you're so stupid for not having a Lavender Graduation, like what the hell, diversity and inclusion, what are you doing.

And lots of people wore it, and it was fun. I was like, ooh, it's my last day at Holy Cross and I'm still protesting this is the way I wanna go out.

All: [Laughs]

Keith: And we had like a station at a table in the DCU center just like cutting, pinning, cutting, pinning, and it was just like a production line and like, it was just like, it felt so appropriate to end Holy Cross like that. And then it was so cute, my, so like, I come from a conservative Catholic family but by the end of it, you know, I did all this activism, my majors ended up being super queer, my mom proof read a lot of my papers so she learned a lot of gender theory on the side

Emma and Nora: [Laughs]

Keith: Anyways, so, you know, I'm walking into the DCU center and I look up and I see like in the corner it's like my siblings and my mom and stuff and they were holding these signs that were like rainbow and they say Keith Pride on them. And it was so cute, obviously I got a ton of photo ops of it, you can check them out.

All: [Laughs]

Keith: But like, it was really nice, and it just felt like whoa, we've really progressed a lot. And there's so much power in being vulnerable with your identity and really like advocating for yourself and others. I'm just like, so much can change, things change so much. Like at Holy Cross they changed. In my personal life, in my family things changed. And, yeah, it's just amazing how much, um, you know two years, like, used constructively can really like redefine, like, your circumstances. So I thought that was very touching, and cool. So that's an experience I think being LGBTQ affected. I think, lots of times I feel like I was recruited for random campus events because I was like the de-facto LGBTQ voice, so I was just like, okay I'll be a speaker on that panel, whatever.

Emma and Nora: [Laughs]

Keith: Like, and I was just like, that's interesting. Or I would be recruited to be a leader on like, um, a retreat like Manresa. I feel like part of it was they were trying to fill in the LGBTQ diversity on it

Nora: Yeah.

Keith: I think I filled that niche on the student orientation team too, so. I think that was cool. It was also interesting how, you know, it's tough to find like very openly loud and proud queer folk at Holy Cross, so it was interesting what sort of spaces I was asked to inhabit or opportunities I got because of that. Um, I think, uh, I don't know, it put me in touch to lots of cool faculty and queer faculty, my LGBTQ identity, which I felt was cool. That was really nice. I think just, even just like holding hands with my boyfriend across campus, that was like, you know people took it as a politically statement. I didn't mean it that way I just liked to hold his hand. And it was like cool, I still remember fondly just walking around campus like out on the Hoval, cuddling up on a bench or like the Dinand steps and how, it's cool that like, you know, it's something that I didn't

really see on campus when I first got there. I didn't see like literally any same sex couples doing that, so, it was cool to like, you know, usher in. Like [inaudible] would be like fuck that, people should be able to do anything. Well, not anything, but like.

All: [Laughs]

Keith: People should be able to, freedom to express their love for others within a good taste level and it should be the same standard for queer folk and for cis hetero folk. That's what I'm talking about, the same standard. It's not like I want it to be crazy promiscuous in the streets.

All: [Laughs]

Keith: But [inaudible] is important and I just really like being with my boyfriend, breaking those barriers. Like I remember one party we were at, it was a Pride party actually, it was one of the first big Pride parties, because I had a senior boyfriend I could throw parties in his room which was nice, because I'm not gonna throw a big party in like my Healy dorm. So like, I threw like a big party and I remember me and him standing up, like making out on one of the counters in the kitchen and just like thinking this is visibility on steroids and like, you know. It's just fun to be, this campus needed it. [Inaudible]...things queer. If I can make it queerer I'll just do it, especially for Holy Cross 'cause it needs it. And, yeah, so I definitely was always slanted on being queerly visible and stuff like that. And I feel like that's all that's on my brain at least.

Emma: That's awesome. Um, so we just have to, for the end of the interview, we just have to run through, like, I guess

Nora: Sort of like categories

Emma: Demographics.

Keith: Like demographics?

Emma and Nora: Yeah.

Keith: Okay, yeah, that makes sense. No, I was a Soc major, they're very critical, like, you know theorizing my qualitative data.

Emma: Yeah, yeah. Exactly. So, um, your year of graduation.

Keith: 2017.

Emma: Uh, your major at Holy Cross.

Keith: I was a Sociology and Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies double major with a concentration in Latin American and Latinx Studies.

Emma: Um, your gender identity.

Keith: I identify as genderqueer.

Emma: Your sexuality.

Keith: I identify as queer.

Emma: Um, your racial and ethnic background.

Keith: Um, white. Eastern European.

Emma: And then your current or former occupation.

Keith: Oh, my current occupation is, um, uh, I'm sorry I don't know why I'm blanking. I'm a communications associate, uh, an LGBTQ nonprofit dedicated to LGBTQ workplace equality. So, I'm largely in charge of like copyrighting, graphic [inaudible] and marketing and stuff like that. So that's cool. And I also forgot something that I want to mention now.

Emma and Nora: Yeah. Yeah, of course.

Keith: The Digital Transgender Archive [DTA]. That's crazy, that's crazy that it's housed at Holy Cross. It's there. I, that was a huge activity I did too, which was one of my favorites. I ran a session, like, I did a two hour session once a week with like different people and we digitized and processed different stuff for the site. And I'm like, whoa, if that's one thing that makes you think about Holy Cross, we are the first place to house like an online repository of transgender history.

Emma: Yeah.

Keith: And as that relates to my, um, connection to Jesuit Catholicism that really makes me in tune with, whoa, it definitely was God's plan for me to come to Holy Cross, to shake things up, to have opportunities to work with this groundbreaking archive that just so happened ended up at a Jesuit university, like, whoa. Like, there was like a God's plan to it. I definitely feel spiritual about the whole experience, Holy Cross and the Digital Transgender Archive being there and my development as an activist. So like, yeah, Digital Transgender Archive. A crazy, a crazy important form of scholarly activism, what are the odds that it would end up at a Catholic institution? It's a wonderful space for trans students. I feel like since it started becoming an activity that lots more students have come out as trans and like. At first I was one of the only openly trans students, but now, like, different people apply for the housing accommodations that I did. And different people are out as like different gender identities, and like, that's so amazing I attribute a lot of that to like housing such an important body of research and also making that form of research so collaborative with the student body, I feel like that was such a cool angle that all the students can volunteer there and be connected in a positive space. There was one other nonbinary student that was like, yeah this is the one space where I really expect everyone to use my pronouns that are they and them. Oh yeah, and if you can record that my pronouns are they and them, because they are. So yeah.

Emma: Yeah! Awesome.

Nora: That's wonderful.

Keith: But yeah, just the DTA, I'm sorry that was a long side note.

Emma and Nora: No, no, yeah.

Keith: That was one of those, I put it on my resume. I mean, it's like, it was a wonderful [inaudible]. I did research with it one summer too, where I did, after I was gone at Oxford I, um, in the summer I started to like, start doing some research at some archives in London then I came back and tried to get some different stuff. I went to like this international conference in London for like LGBTQ archives

Emma: So cool.

Keith: It just creates so many different opportunities. I went to the oldest transgender conference, Fantasia Fair, through the Digital Transgender Archive too.

Nora: Oh, yeah!

Keith: So, it's just a really cool place and I really thrived there and I can't believe I forgot to mention it please make sure that's in.

Nora: Of course.

Keith: 'Cause the DTA is everything. KJ Rawson is a wonderful advocate. He's one of the main people I was talking to while I was abroad that was helping me figure out how to get housing, the best avenues to take. Like he was really helpful behind the scenes advocating for me on the committees that were created to determine if gender inclusive housing was an okay thing. And just, like, relaying information to me. 'Cause during that process, uh, they didn't really tell me anything. Like I sent it in September and I wasn't getting any updates, I didn't hear back 'til April that it was okay I think. It was March or April, it was a really long time. So KJ Rawson is an amazing trans, out trans professor that created an amazing body of research and an amazing collaborative space for like, LGBTQ and gender and sexuality interested students that creates loads of opportunities, not only digital humanities, but sociology and gender and sexualities studies, and then also, he just offered the first Transgender Studies course, which I love that, it was one of my favorite courses that I ever took at Holy Cross. So yeah, it think that's - I just didn't wanna forget that, I'm so [inaudible]

Emma: No, yeah, that's awesome.

Keith: I can't, I can't believe I forgot the Digital Transgender Archive, it's so important, such a formative place.

53:03-54:14 Cut. Discussion of acquisition of letter for physical exhibit.

Keith: So, yeah, sweet. It was wonderful talking to you.

Nora: yeah, you as well!

Emma: yeah!

Keith: Yeah, keep me posted if you need anything else. And yeah, I want the transcript obviously and probably lots of the names redacted, but yeah.

Nora: Absolutely. Yeah.

Emma: Of course! Thank you so much for doing this.

Nora: Thank you!

Keith: Yeah, of course, thanks for talking with me. Sorry it was like difficult to originally find each other on Skype.

Emma: Oh no, that's okay. It's podcast room. Corn boy. It was weird.

Emma and Nora: [Laughs]

Keith: Alright, bye!