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A Conversation with Mario A. Leiva

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Interviewee: Mario Levia ’14
Interviewer: Nora Grimes ’19 and Emma Powell ’20
Date: July 2018
Location: Podcast Room, Multimedia Resource Center, Holy Cross via Skype
Course: Summer Research Project 2018

Interview Starts at 3:03. The prior audio was recorded during technical complications and is not necessary.
Nora: Um, okay, so just to start off I have to kind of say, um, some things for, about consent, so today is July 25th. It’s 8:07am. I’m Nora Grimes.
Emma: And I’m Emma Powell.
Nora: Um, and we’re here with you Mario. And, can you just consent to being recorded for this?
Mario: Um, is this a video recording or is it just like a voice recording?
Emma: Yeah.
Mario: Okay, yeah.
Nora: Okay, awesome. So I guess we’ll just start off with our first question which is how did you decide to come to Holy Cross?
Mario: Um, actually, Holy Cross was my first choice when I was looking into colleges. Um, and in the Fall I ended up going to an Open House and I stayed with a prospective student there and since then I was kind of like, this is the place I would wanna be. I really fell in love with the campus and it was just amazing to see it at night and occasionally activities we were able to do there, um, especially for that one day I thought what it was gonna be like to do that for four years. So I was like, yeah, this is it for me.
Emma: Okay, awesome. And so what was, um, that transition from high school to Holy Cross kind of like?
Mario: It was a lot simpler than I thought. I adjusted super quickly like, in fact, there was no adjusting period for me. I managed to make friends everywhere I went. Everybody there seemed super friendly and open. Nothing about being at Holy Cross was difficult, I mean, aside from the schoolwork of course.
All: Laughs.
Mario: Can’t do much about that. There was just always something to do, people were always interested in doing something or writing something or doing something to _____. That was pretty exciting.
Nora: Okay, awesome. So the next question is trying to get at like global context and like what was going on in the news at the time that you were at college. So, were there any current events that you remember having an impact while you were at college?
Mario: Um, the main one I remember was when um, actually there were two. Gay marriage and also when Saddam Hussein was killed [Osama bin Laden]. Saddam? I wish I could remember his name. Ah, yeah, leader of, um…I can’t even remember that either. Do you guys know?
Nora: Yeah, it’s-
Emma: It’s Al Quadia
Nora: Yeah, yeah.
Mario: Yeah, Al Quadia, yeah, okay.
Nora: Yeah.
Mario: So, when Obama finally released notice that he had been killed there was a huge riot, I mean massive. Everyone, it was like 12, midnight actually, and everybody just rushed outside and everyone was
in the library and literally just started raving in the library. It was insane. And then towards the end of it, like around like 2 or 3 o clock in the morning, um, there ended up being an actual fight where students were fighting with each other because there was a, there was a group of students who were against the celebration because they thought that his life, or rather his death shouldn’t have been celebrated that way. Um, and, there was another group that was fighting them because they believed that these students were being unpatriotic. And public safety got involved. It was insane.

Emma: Wow.

Mario: Um, but I mean the second event which was about gay marriage was actually, it, it was nothing like the reaction they had towards the death of Hussein [bin Laden]. Um, it kind of just went on, the only people that did notice were those who were involved or kept up with the news related to it.

Emma: Okay, very cool. Was there like anything happening when gay marriage was legalized? Did the campus react in any way?

Mario: There were a couple of people that did react, but mostly to other students who were wearing the marriage equality paraphernalia.

Emma: Yeah.

Mario: So, if somebody was walking around with a human rights shirt on, or, um, one of the Holy Cross shirts that we had created in Allies, or ABiGaLe/Allies. I think it’s called Pride now?

Emma: Yeah.

Mario: Yeah, um, one of the shirts that the group created, uh, some people were actually getting attacked. Not physically, not to say that that’s not bad either, but they were verbally attacked and they were just saying very, very, not really good things. I wasn’t one of the people that was attacked, but most of my friends who were out, were. And by most I just mean, like, mostly people who were, or are LGBT, about maybe six or so.

Emma: Yeah. aSo, um, the next question is kind of about coming out at Holy Cross or beforehand. And it says recognizing that coming out isn’t a one-time event, when and how did you first come out?

Mario: Um, I first came out my freshman year at Holy Cross. Um, I didn’t come out initially when I, when I first got there because I wasn’t sure exactly how I would be like, uh, not just at school but personally at home. And if I was gonna come out, I told myself I was gonna be out always.

Nora: Mmhmm.

Mario: Um, so it was eventually whenever I did come out that it would be to fully embrace being out in all aspects of my life. And when I came out I was going into, I think my [inaudible] when we came back from Spring Break. And nothing really seemed to change much except for the fact people, well I felt even more comfortable and people felt even more open towards me.

Nora: That’s wonderful.

Mario: Yeah-

Nora: Were there some people? Oh, sorry go ahead.

Mario: No, go ahead.

Nora: Oh, no, I was gonna say were there some like people or different groups that you were involved in at Holy Cross that you felt more comfortable coming out to and sharing your identity with than others.

Mario: Um, not really. What was really holding me back the most was my family, and how they would react. I never really felt inhibited when I was at Holy Cross. Everybody even if we may have had different point of views or coming from different places. Um, because we were in school, it didn’t register to me whether or not I would have some negative backlash just because well, it was school. And to me it just didn’t seem like, a point of concern?
Emma: So who would you say was your biggest support system at Holy Cross? Not just about being LGBT but also like your friends or professors.
Mario: Well, for sure my friends.
Emma: Ya.
Mario: Well, I do remembering having, well it wasn’t much of a fight, it wasn’t much of a confrontation but a it was just kinda a remark that someone made about me, once, throughout the four years I was there. Where, I was at a party with a group of friends and one of my friends was a little more than intoxicated and I was trying to help her take care of herself. But, then her potential love-interest came and got involved. And he was being super handsy and I was like hey listen ‘Like just no, let her be because she’s not feeling so great right now.” And then he, I can’t even remember what he said but as soon as he said it, I was like I don’t know if this is homophobic but I think it might be. Oh, I think it was, no, I can’t remember. It was pretty much something along the lines of like ‘What are you gonna do you’re gay. You can’t stop me.” And, the following day, when I actually had enough time to process what was going on. I told my friends and they were like “Wait are you kidding me? He said that!” and as soon they figured that out, they pretty much retaliated against him and they were like “How could you say that like he was actually just looking out for her best interest and it was just really stupid and dumb and inconsiderate of you to say that at that point.” Especially when all I was really doing was helping her try to get back to her room so she could just rest.
Nora: Yeah, wow, so um I guess our next question is you kinda touched on this already. But were you involved in any sports teams, clubs, or other campus organizations?
Mario: Um, in the beginning I was only involved in two clubs but the towards the end I was only ended up being involved in one. I was involved in ABiGale and Allies at the beginning and I was also involved in, I don’t know if they have it still but it was like a cultural committee? Like world cultures or something?
Emma: We have like the MPEs which are the Multi-Cultural Peer Educators. I don’t know if that would be similar?
Mario: No, we still had that when I was there.
Emma: Oh okay
Mario: It was a different group specifically centered around different rights of passages, and different rights of cultures and just bringing awareness to Holy Cross about them. I think it was a cultural group something along the lines of that but not the Multi-cultural group.
Emma: Ok, that’s really cool. I wish they still had that. That’s cool.
Mario: Yeah, um so most after my sophomore year I mostly kept up with Allies and ABiGale.
Emma: Do you think ABiGale and Allies, excuse me, impacted your experience of being LGBTQ at Holy Cross at all?
Mario: Yeah, just because it was nice to see other people, other Holy Cross students that were there that were also LGBT. We always got together and we just talked about not only was going on within the lgbt, I guess quote on quote “sphere” but also um what was going on with our current problems, situations. Some of my fondest memories are actually of us going out places and having a good time. I am not sure if you know this but in Worcester there used to be a LGB..a gay club and the first time I actually had gone to a club was there. (laughs)
Emma: Oh awesome!
Nora: That’s awesome!
Mario: Yeah, and I only ended up going because Allies and AbIGale told us about it. And they were like “We’re going, you guys should come, too!”
Nora: Oh cool!
Emma: Yeah, that’s cool!
Mario: I was just going to say that Club ended up going through so many name changes, it was crazy.
Emma: Yeah, I feel like that happens for many bars in Worcester. We have been doing some research for the Worcester Historical Museum on gay bars and a lot of the names, and the pop ups they change overtime. Which is, well pretty interesting.
Nora: So, if you could do your Holy Cross experience over again would you do anything differently?
Mario: Um, I don’t think so. There was- I feel like I got everything I needed to do out of Holy Cross. I don’t really have any regrets. Well, yes I do but in the long run I think something really good came out of it. So I don’t know, I think I am okay with it. More than okay, I am actually pretty happy with it.
Emma: Ok, so the next question is did you have any romantic relationships while at Holy Cross?
Mario: Uh. I didn’t until my last year at Holy Cross. I was dating a junior while I was a senior. We met during summer research. And it lasted six months. Because at the time I thought I was ready but I wasn’t and obviously it reflected on it, and on our relationship and I was like I am sorry I really can’t do this anymore. And we just broke it off.
Nora: So our next question, is more related to the Jesuit-identity of the college. And would say that Jesuit and environment at Holy Cross effected your view of sexuality in any way.
Mario: It didn’t really effect it so much, as what I saw rather than my own personal view. What I saw was that basically everyone was closeted. Even though there was maybe fifteen people in ABiGale and Allies that were actually involved. And some of those people were LGBT but the rest were not easy to see. Like, obviously there were more than 15, 10 people who were LGBT at Holy Cross. And it was obvious because all the online dating apps would be like- “What do you mean your only 5 minutes away? There are like 10, 15 people here that are less than 5 minutes away, that aren’t going to ABiGale and Allies. That was one of the main reasons why I decided not to date anybody at Holy Cross, just because I was out and I didn’t want to hurt someone else’s feelings who didn’t want to come out.
Emma: Yeah, that makes sense. So kinda looking back at your Holy Cross experience, what advice would you offer to a LGBTQ student who is struggling to come out at Holy Cross.
Mario: Look for the resources. I was actually thinking about this yesterday because right towards the end of the sophomore year I started to get more involved, with I think, there are two groups that you can go talk to. You can talk to ABiGale and Allies but if they are too gay for you, you can always go talk to the Chaplains. I know the Chaplains used to have like a weekly meeting of other students who are LGBT who are not ready to go ABiGale or Pride way yet. I think Father Martin? Is that his name? I can’t remember the Chaplain’s name I think his last name is Martin.
Emma: Yeah, maybe. And then Marybeth Kearns-Barrett
Mario: Yeah, her wife, I mean her husband. He used to run the Chaplain LGBT group before she took it over. And he was a good resource to go talk to if Pride is not what your looking for. It’s another way to find someone who is going to listen or not judge you for being gay.
Nora: Also, based on your experience, do you have any advice you would offer LGBTQ seniors who are gonna make the transition from college to post grad life. The real professional world.
Mario: Yeah, I actually felt pampered at Holy Cross in terms of the LGBTQ community, well among other things, but with the LGBTQ community there was always like a clear group of people who were pro-LGBTQ things related. So, like you want to do something related, you know where to go to share that interest, or share that experience. But in the real world it’s a little bit harder so you have to be more of a go-getter to find what interests you the most. So make sure, like I signed up for “Meet-Up” which was actually a great way to meet LGBT people in the area you are in. Or look up your nearest gay bars if you are looking for a LGBT fix. And in the real world you very rarely find a person outside of your own circle or group or co-workers that just happens to be LGBT. And it is gonna be harder if that’s what you are looking for to establish a strong link with LGBT people and to expand your circle if you are not going out of your work and your own friends to look for more LGBT friends.

Emma: Ok cool, could you share a moment where being LGBTQ impacted an experience that you had at Holy Cross in particular?

Mario: Um, I am not entirely sure if I understand the question.

Nora: If there is just any one moment that stands out positive and negative. You gave a good example earlier when you talked about standing up for your friend and that other man had a really nasty comment. Like that is an example of something negative. But just when you feel like your identity as LGBTQ impacted some, one moment?

Mario: Um, during the alumni weekend I was asked to talk about my experience at Holy Cross. So that was really impactful being surrounded by different aged alumni who are LGBT and just talking to them after the panel just because they all came up to and were like “Wow! Holy Cross really has changed, I wasn’t sure if I should even come back because of my own personal experience here.” Some of them didn’t even know ABiGale, Allies and Pride had an alumni panel and they only came back to Holy Cross because they were a part of a different group or a sports group and they came back. And as soon as they walked into Hogan they were like “What do you mean ABiGale and Allies? The straight-gay alliance? What? I should’ve been here instead of going to the other clubs.” So that was a really positive experience. It was nice to see that past alum appreciate how much Holy Cross has changed.

Nora: That’s wonderful. Thank you for sharing that with us. That was actually our last question. But we just have to run through quick questions. What was your year of graduation?


Nora: And major at Holy Cross?

Mario: I was an anthropology major.

Nora: Your gender identity?

Mario: Um, my gender identity is male.

Nora: Your sexuality?

Mario: Gay.

Nora: Your racial/ethnic background?

Mario: I am not sure what my racial background is but I am latino.

Nora: And your current or former occupation?

Mario: I work as a tax accountant.

Nora: Ok, awesome thank you so much for taking the time to speak with us, Mario.

Mario: No problem.

Emma: Yep, it’s been really awesome! Have a good one. Thank you for everything!

Mario: No problem. Have a good day.

Both Emma and Nora: You too!
Everyone: Bye!