

**LAFAYETTE COLLEGE**  
**LGBTQ ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**Interview of**  
**Jennifer Wellnitz '19**  
**Conducted by**  
**Mary Armstrong**  
**May 22, 2019**

Special Collections & College Archives

David Bishop Skillman Library

Lafayette College

2019

Wellnitz

MARY ARMSTRONG: This is Mary Armstrong. I'm chair of women's and gender studies and professor of women's and gender studies and English at Lafayette College. It's May 22, 2019. And I am here on campus with Jennifer Wellnitz, class of 2019. Hi, Jen.

JENNIFER WELLNITZ: Hello.

MA: Happy to interview you today. I will start out with the usual formalities to get them out of the way. If you could state your name, confirm your participation is voluntary, and that you've been given your informed consent.

JW: My name is Jennifer Wellnitz. I am here of my own volition. And consent with information.

MA: Wonderful. The usual request is to, if you'll let me take a photo for the queer archives project. But honestly, your photo is already all over the queer archives project.

JW: Yeah, I've had a bad history with those photos. So at this point, let's just cut our losses and go with one of those.

MA: That is more than fair. So I thought that I[00:01:00] might get that reaction. But yeah, so Jen's storied history with the queer archives project that we're very proud and honored that she's part of is something we'll

be talking about. So I'll give you a preamble that you already know, which is that the questions, which are a set of questions we developed for all the interviews, are prompts.

JW: Yeah.

MA: So the idea is that this is your story. You tell it the way that you want to tell it. And you talk about the things that are important to you. The main thing to keep in mind is that each prompt is intended only to jog your memories. There may be memories that no prompt jogs because you just want to tell them. That's fine, too. The interview does not have any particular structure that we need to have it have. But we want to hear what you want to say. It's very much the story of your time at Lafayette. You're about to graduate, but we will go on record by saying that you've completed your honors thesis and all your grades are done. And so before, in order to capture your interview before you go on to glory in North Carolina. We're doing this early, as we did with one other interview in the past. [00:02:00] So personal pronouns and name you prefer me to use?

JW: Jennifer Wellnitz. I tend to go by Jen. And she/her pronouns.

MA: Excellent. And your definition of yourself as a member of the Lafayette community is, what will we call you? An almost alum? An alum?

JW: Alumish.

MA: Brand new alum - alumish, OK. Alumish, excellent. You get your own category. I like that. And your class year, of course, is this year. And how do you identify yourself, if you do, as a member of the LGBTQ+ community?

JW: The simple answer is transgender and bisexual. Both of those categories don't quite fit, but that's when I start to go into deep semantics about my identity. After a point, you just have to cut your losses and take a label.

MA: Absolutely. And deep semantics are more than fair. You know I love them myself. So that's just a question [00:03:00] to... People tend to ponder it, to make sure that they answer it the way you want. I'm making sure we're recording. Hang on for just a second. Yes, we are. OK, we had a little trouble with those recorders before. So rather than professionally describing yourself, of course, why don't you say a few words about what you're about to go do? Because it's exciting and interesting where you're headed.

JW: Yeah. I'm headed back - actually, I'm from this area originally, grew up there - to Raleigh, North Carolina doing a PhD program in computer science at NC State University.

MA: That's fantastic. And what are you going to work on?

JW: You pick an advisor, like end of your first year. And that determines what your project will be. But I hope to

work [00:04:00] essentially on similar things I did for my thesis, which was - because interview and context and such - emotional agent architectures and their application in narrative settings, like video games.

MA: OK, so you're thinking about continuing the same kind of work you did for your honors thesis.

JW: Same kind of work, but not that work specifically.

MA: All right, that's, well, congratulations on going on to your PhD.

JW: Thank you.

MA: Absolutely. So we have a special interview in a couple of ways. One is that you're interviewing up to the minute. So the reflection back across time is not really the usual reflection of back across time, which makes it actually wonderful, because your memories are actually a sense of now. Although, to be fair, four years ago is four years ago. And that's a chunk of time. So a lot of change can happen in four years. And [00:05:00] that's one thing. And the other thing is that you're the first interviewee who has had an inside position within the queer archives project. So that makes you a special interviewee. And in full disclosure, you and I, I've not only had you as a student, but you have worked as my EXCEL student for a couple of years. You've worked on the team, and you've been absolutely critical to the

development of the digital humanities portion of the queer archives project.

JW: Thank you.

MA: So yes, you have been. And I will say it repeatedly, that we couldn't have done it without you. So I'm very happy to have a chance to talk to you today about your experience as a person, as a member of the community experiencing Lafayette, but also as a person experiencing the queer archives project as it developed. So a reflection generically on campus and how it's changed over your four years. Safe for LGBTQ+ people, the community visible, community's, of course, very, very complex. Community visible, [00:06:00] people were out. How you've seen it when you got here versus when you're leaving, very, very broadly.

JW: OK. First, before, change over four years, just general, and this aspect specifically, I don't feel has really changed at all. Because, grand scheme of things, four years, chunk of time but not that much time. Not a cultural shift amount of time. But safe, yes. I would say relatively safe, but not necessarily comfortable. I haven't seen much personally -- and that may be my own privilege and my own luck -- direct harassment to a person, but there's a lot of homophobic rhetoric just amongst the student body [00:07:00] when they think they're alone, when they think they're all amongst cis-

gendered or straight people. And that creates a sense of unwelcomeness. So while there's not much that I know of, at least, direct harassment now, the culture in the student body, and in different sections of the faculty, as well, is still dismissive to hostile, if that makes sense.

MA: So less incident-based. Like you say, it's not so much incident-based as it would be --

JW: It's not not incident-based. But less so, yes.

MA: OK. So rather than overt homophobia, a more, [00:08:00] the likelihood that you will hear something is still really there, making for a chilly climate.

JW: Yeah.

MA: Climate's hard to describe. It really is.

JW: Yeah, no kidding. There's an interpretive path for that.

MA: Absolutely.

JW: My freshman year, I have two stories for this. One's mine, one's a friend's but I don't, naming names and such. So just something that happened. But my freshman year, I lived in McKeen Hall, because I came in. I a, wasn't out, but b, didn't start to unpack my own gender identity until my, [00:09:00] until my freshman year. But as in, one week into freshman year, I realized I was trans. So that wasn't a thing for me. Looking back, I was still hyperaware of it when searching for schools.

But this story's derailing pretty wildly right now, so I'm going to get back on topic with it.

MA: That's our interview so far anyways but yes.

JW: I lived in an all-guys floor, because again, not only wasn't out but didn't know that about myself coming in. And it was a nightmare. That floor, first, outside of just this story and outside of that floor's effect on me, I think if this were an interview project specifically about misogyny on Lafayette campus and rape culture on Lafayette campus, that would be just a [00:10:00] rich tapestry of stories.

MA: Wow.

JW: But relating specifically to my experience and to the queer experience, I remember there was one time that I was in my room. I was just laying in bed. And the walls are thick, but the doors are thin. So you can hear usually anything out in the hallway, even if you can't quite hear between rooms. Although McKeen, I think I could still hear into each of the other rooms relatively clearly. All the other places I've lived, the walls have been a bit more insulated. But that's beside the point. But anyway, there was a large group of probably just most of the people who lived on that floor. Essentially, most of them were good friends and hung out a lot. And then there were other small pockets that weren't really close with them, myself and my roommate being one of them, as



well as a friend of mine who lived on the floor and then just [00:11:00] a couple of other groups of people. But of the, I don't know, 20, 30-ish people who lived on there, probably 80% were kind of their own tight-knit group. But anyway, there was a time that I was just laying in bed, maybe a week or two after realizing I was trans. This was very early in my journey with that. That most of that group and the custodian for the floor at the time, who was typically very nice and kind of palled around with the guys on the floor there, happened to be right outside my door. Because they were essentially right outside my neighbor's door, who was, I guess, one of the more popular folks in that group. [00:12:00] Or at least that was one of the more popular spots to hang out. And they ended up getting into a conversation, and an already-unpleasant conversation outlining, surrounding this, about what they would do if they were on a date and found out that their date was trans. The overwhelming consensus was murder. So that's the sort of thing where it's like, no, no one's directly come at me. But it's clear the culture is still unwelcoming.

MA: Wow, yeah. That's a powerful story. And gets at the way that climate maintains itself. It doesn't necessarily have to be directed at a person. It's just happening.

And if you're near it or around it, you understand what the lay of the land is, which is, this is --

JW: And that was my freshman year. The other story, not mine [00:13:00] and I'm not going to name names, but this year, there was, a friend of mine was just at Lower, going up to the soda fountain, getting a drink. And just walked by a table of a couple of people, like three guys maybe, who were having a conversation about... And mind you, this is in Farinon, 30 feet from the GSRC. So not only blatant but also a little stupid. Of "I've never seen any gay people on this campus. If there were, I would punch them. And also, if there were gay women, I would fix them." So typical violent homophobia, violent homophobic rhetoric. And that's this year.

MA: Sandwiching, yeah.

JW: The climate hasn't changed [00:14:00] in my four years that I've been here, in terms of outside the queer community looking in, right. The other part of that question was, how has the community at Lafayette changed? That's a hard one to unpack because I would say... The easiest way to look at it, the easiest way to define that is structurally. And yeah, there's been pretty significant change. Was it last year or two years ago that QPOC started?

MA: Just last year, I think.

JW: Just last year. So when I came in, the queer groups were, there was Quest, right, BCD, and then not really a group but Safe Zone, which, not a club but student-run, for the most part.

MA: Yeah. Were they doing the trainings then?

JW: They were doing the trainings, yeah. Those have been going on. [00:15:00] I was a part of all of those at some point. And now, I think Safe Zone still exists, but I haven't really heard anything about it in a while.

MA: It's getting restarted, I think. Trainings were offered to faculty not too long ago, again, for the first time in a while. There's a poster out in the hall right now saying if you want to be Safe-Zone trained. But it's very recently restarted.

JW: It probably took a year off, yeah.

MA: I think so.

JW: Because I did it my sophomore year. And then it's getting revamped this year. That's only...

MA: Yeah, that sounds right.

JW: But yeah, so it was those three that made up the queer community, in a structural sense, at Lafayette. And now, BCD may get restarted next year. I don't know. But there were three meetings this year. It very much went by the wayside. [00:16:00] Quest has shrunk significantly. And then other groups have popped up. So I'm trying to make sure I don't forget any. I think, in

terms of new groups over the past four years, it's QPOC, Queer People of Color, and PALM. I can't remember the acronym, though.

MA: Pride and leadership...

JW: Mentoring.

MA: Pride Association for Leadership and Mentoring.

JW: There we go.

MA: It took two of us, but we got there.

JW: So both of those are key words now.

MA: Well done. (laughs)

JW: But yeah, so Safe Zone's sort of around. Quest shrunk. BCD gone, maybe comes back, hopefully comes back. It is a niche that I think needs filled.

MA: Yeah. And it's student-run, right, so it really depends on who's around and who's got the energy [00:17:00] to do it. That's kind of its point, is its anonymity.

JW: Yeah. At the end of the day, it's just, is someone willing to pick up the torch, right. And I'll get into that later.

MA: That's fine.

JW: But yeah, so structurally, the make-up of the queer community, as seen by student groups, is different. Yeah. Yeah, I think that's my point there.

MA: Yeah. So structurally, there's been, if that's one way to trace it, there's been --

JW: So tracing it structurally, yes. There is difference. Tracing it, in terms of, I don't know, culture within the community, it's hard to say. Because it feels like there's been changes, but that's also in terms [00:18:00] of, I was on Quest board for two and a half years and very aware of Quest board this year. So other than my first semester freshman year, I've been involved in Quest board. And I've watched that change. So it gives you tunnel vision, a little bit, of Quest board is the queer community now, right. And so anything within that, which ultimately is a group of eight, six to eight people. Changes within that feel more earth-shattering and ground-breaking than they necessarily are. Because Quest already represents a specific niche of the queer community here. And then Quest board is a very specific niche of that specific niche. So you're dwindling down to, it feels like there have been cultural shifts within the out and very active within the community [00:19:00] queer people who have been involved in Quest. So you're really narrowing down there. And in terms of wider community, I think without... Because I stopped going to BCD my junior, did I still go my junior year? Maybe a little bit. I stopped going regularly after my sophomore year. And I think that was a good way ironically enough especially as a member of Quest board at the time, to get a pulse of the, what is the queer community like? And

what is the queer community feeling at Lafayette? That is not Quest-affiliated specifically. But yeah, so it's hard to say about the queer community at large. I think the structural changes do also preclude a bit of a cultural change. Queer people of color have their own space now. That's great. The PALM, the mentoring thing, there's now a stronger focus on [00:20:00] not explicitly queer academics, but a professionalism.

MA: Connecting to faculty kind of thing.

JW: Yeah, right. So yeah, I think those, as well as being structural changes, shift the culture, as well. But I'm also a big proponent of, people have always been people. Nothing changes that much. And I don't know. That was a winding answer to that.

MA: No, it's a great answer. And it's also, you're acknowledging the limits of perspective, right. Any person, even if they're involved, or maybe especially because they're involved, they're going to get a very specific slice. In a lot of ways, though, that's why we do interviews. Because it's trying to accumulate slices from everywhere, to try to get some sort of fuzzy picture. So I think it's super helpful, even if we have to acknowledge that the representation of the perspective of one person isn't going to really tell us the story of Lafayette. Because there's too many stories involved.

JW: [00:21:00] Right. Unless I was actively involved in all of those groups and was also simultaneously involved in none of them and stayed closeted. There are a myriad of different queer experiences here.

MA: Yeah, that's absolutely right. And that's part of the complexity of it. Would you say, I mean, a person who would come on campus now, and they would decide or know that they are queer-identified in some way. They would have more options? They would have more options now than they had? More places to go, more people to reach out to? Do you think there's just as many not-out people --

JW: I would say no. Or not no, but that it very much depends on the person. So BCD's gone, and that's a niche that none of the new groups fill. So coming on campus as not an out person, Quest can be intimidating, right.

MA: Absolutely.

JW: And at least from my time on the board and also, I know [00:22:00] the board of this past year. I know the board of next year. So I very much trust that that, as a culture, is continuing. Quest really tries to be nonthreatening to new members and be very allies-welcome, so that people can come in, a, as allies, or b, as like allies.

MA: Yeah. Quote unquote allies.

JW: Which a lot of us did. So we try to foster a culture where you don't have to be out. But you walk into the

room with a rainbow flag in the window, and you feel out, even if you're not...

MA: Yeah, you've done something.

JW: I like that the GSRC is so visible, but it does have a fishbowl effect.

MA: Yeah, that's always a mixed bag, right. Pride of place is also exposure. And that's a difficult thing for that group. You don't want to be hid in a back corner, because then we'd all say, look, they shove the queer kids in the back corner. And you can't [00:23:00] even find the place. You don't know it's there. It has no climate impact. And then when you put it front and center, it's like, well, this is fairly intimidating to anybody who isn't ready to just be straight-up out. It's hard.

JW: Right. So coming in, if you're not ready for that, you might not engage with the queer community at all until or if you are. And so without that option of BCD, that's a niche that desperately needs filled that's not.

MA: It really does explain why BCD is so important. Because you're not going to solve it with where you put the GRC center,

JW: GSRC

MA: GSRC center.

JW: And then Quest, over the four years that I've been here, has been shrinking a lot.



MA: Why do you think that is?

JW: It's hard to say. I think there are a number of reasons.

But [00:24:00] when I came in my freshman year, first semester, obviously I wasn't on the board. I was just coming. Quest was 40-ish, maybe. Probably at any given meeting, there would be 25 to 30, and then 40 amongst the rotation of people who came to a lot of meetings but not every week necessarily, although many did. And then that spring, I got on the board and was actually VP of social programming. So events coordinator, essentially. So that was a nightmare, because I did not know what I was doing. And then for the two years past that, I was treasurer. And then this year, I was not on the board. I think [00:25:00] it's hard to say, right, if this is how it's always been and how it is for every year, or if it was different before and then now is like this. Because even when I was on the board that first semester of my freshman year, I didn't, it's hard. I didn't know the in and out of the board or the culture or the dynamics there. Quest board drains you. It is, at least right now, kind of the prevailing culture. I didn't come back this past year, even though ethically, I probably should have. They were a little short-staffed. But I didn't come back because, direct quote essentially, I did my time. There are moments that are rewarding, but you just feel like you're banging your head against a wall.

MA: It's really, really hard work. Because explain, what wall were you banging your head against? [00:26:00] That it's difficult to shift the culture? It's difficult to work in that group because people have different ideas? Or what's the head-banging?

JW: There are a lot of different aspects of that. So for one, at least, I guess it would be my junior year, mostly. Last year, mostly. But there have been several schisms within Quest board in years that I've been there. Which, you know, that complicates things. And I think a big part of it was often, Quest board ends up being a group of queer friends. And I a, don't think that's avoidable, and b, don't think it should be avoided, per se. I don't think there is an inherent problem with that. But it does mean that when friendship drama happens, it very much affects the dynamics of Quest board. [00:27:00] So for a lot of that year, things were very tense. I think we had two people leave the board, out of eight.

MA: Wow, yeah. Those organizations are very difficult, the small place where everybody knows each other and they're friends. It's such a challenge, absolutely. Well, you did do your time, clearly. It's really giving something to the community, as a student, to try to make that stuff work.

JW: So it's sort of in-group fighting, I guess, is a way to put it. That's one aspect, for sure, of what's difficult. Another is Quest has had a really troubling relationship with the administration. So I've been here and been an active part of Quest for a lot of different eras of OID and GSP, right, which are also [00:28:00] keywords now. When I came in, what's the policy on naming administrators?

MA: Functionally in their job? There's no problem.

JW: All right. When I came in my freshman year, and then it really started to fade my sophomore year. Cristina Usino was our advisor. Freshman year, incredibly involved. She was at almost every Quest meeting, right. Sophomore year, we barely saw her, right. And so I think that was about when Dean McKnight left, and her job shifted a lot.

MA: Lot of changes. Structural.

JW: So yeah, she was stressed. She had more work. That's fine. But we had no administrative support my sophomore year. I think that's pretty safe to say. So we are trying to do things that - like condom bingo, we need to book Marquis. [00:29:00] Students can't book Marquis.

MA: You need help.

JW: Yeah. And we weren't getting it. And we weren't even able to communicate. And we would try to reach out, like look, we need to be able to communicate more. And then it wouldn't happen, except for, I had forgotten about

that. I think this was still my sophomore year, yeah, because it was still Cristina. Liliana Madrid came in last year?

MA: I believe so, yes.

JW: But there was one meeting that we hadn't really heard from Cristina in awhile and we asked her to run a meeting to try to get her more involved with Quest and re-integrate her back into that space, because the new at Quest didn't know her. And she was so culturally important to Quest my freshman year, right. I remember actually, I don't know, halfway through going to the GSRC which was at the time her office and asking her who to talk to about trans stuff. Where can I go, who can I turn to. And I was pointed towards the counseling center. So very present, very relevant, is a way to put it. And gone my sophomore year.

MA: Tremendous shifts. And Dean McKnight left right around then, as well.

JW: I think that was specifically the catalyst that shifted Cristina's role in that, for the culture around her. So the new people didn't know her. And we were trying to re-integrate her. And so we had her run a meeting. And I guess there was just a lot of miscommunication about what the topic was. Because specifically, we wanted to have a meeting about productive versus destructive anger in activist spaces. Because we had been having problems

with [00:31:00] people derailing meetings by just going on tirades. And so we wanted, and we figured, especially with Cristina's background, OK. Yeah, she'd be great at helping us unpack that. She misinterpreted, and it ended up, I honestly can't remember the meeting. But there a lot of issues with it. Myself included, but a lot of people were very uncomfortable in that meeting. And that was just it. It was kind of over. So yeah, that was an interesting cultural shift. And then junior year, Liliana Madrid came in. I still can't place everyone in the hierarchy.

MA: She came mid-year, so that might also, might be why it doesn't feel like the memory is from year to year. It's not quite the year to year, but yeah.

JW: And then Grayson - at the beginning of this year.

MA: That's correct, in October of this year, yeah. Or excuse me, of 2018. So last semester.

JW: Right. [00:32:00] But also not quite at the beginning of the semester, coming in a little later.

MA: Absolutely.

JW: I think Grayson technically is the one who took over Christina's job, but Liliana was filling that role in the interim.

MA: And there's been reframing and restructuring of OID three or four times while you were here. So part of what you're describing is just a structural, administrative

change in campus life. Positions have changed, and titles have changed. The GSP person has, their title has changed three or four times. So you're describing a tremendous instability institutionally around that. I think we've settled into where we are now. But you've lived over a time of radical re-organization over and over again.

JW: It had notable negative consequences of -

MA: I think that's fair.

JW: -- with that organization being up in the air, that organization wasn't that helpful to us.

MA: Absolutely.

JW: And that's what it's supposed to be, if I'm understanding it correctly. But Liliana Madrid came in especially because it was halfway through the year. [00:33:00] And we had essentially, for the second semester of my sophomore year, been operating like, All right, fine. Cristina's not going to help us. Essentially no administrative support. We're going to do what we're going to do alone. Liliana came in and very much wanted to do a role similar to but different from what Cristina was like my freshman year. And at that point, the culture of the board was very much very wary of administration. And also, it was a different board composition. And that specific board composition was less interested in administrative support, especially

because it felt like... Whether or not that's accurate, I can't say. I think it was. I was on the same page as the board. It felt like administrative oversight rather than administrative support. We felt very stifled, maybe. [00:34:00] We felt very observed and very, almost talked-down to. So there was a lot of tension my junior year, between OID and Quest. And that tension's, from what I can tell, that tension's pervaded this year. I wasn't on the board, but it has.

MA: Wow. It's a tremendous re-sorting. And the four years have been times of great structural, but also, I want to say climate change around the relationship between the student group. You know best which is Quest and the administration.

JW: So there's the internal issues that just, maybe they don't happen sometimes. But they're bound to arise at some point. And then fighting against administration, and [00:35:00] all of those are sources of structure. And then it has been very difficult, as Quest board, to work with other groups. I guess I can't say for certain, because I was always in Quest or Quest-affiliated, so I don't necessarily know the culture of outside Quest looking in. I don't think Quest is well-liked on this campus. I think there is a really strong perception of Quest being regressive. And I'm not sure where it comes from. I'm not sure why it's there. And I know

specifically last year, we had a whole meeting that was very much like, sent out everyone in our mailing list. Everyone who's ever attended a Quest event or has ever decided not to attend a Quest event because of some problem. We want to change. [00:36:00] We want to make this group what you want and what would make you comfortable. But we're not sure what we're supposed to be doing right now. Please come and tell us. One person showed up. I feel like the culture of the campus is not wanting Quest anymore. But that's, a, you know, it's hurtful. Right, I've put a lot into that organization, as have many people.

MA: When was this one-person meeting, this fact-finding?

JW: Last year, last spring, I think. It was very much like, I think we had already done elections. It was very much like, new board coming in. We want to change things. We want to make Quest, because we had noticed declining membership really rapidly. At that point, it was maybe 20, whereas it was 40 my freshman year. It's maybe like 15 now. We had noticed declining membership, and we especially noticed declining membership amongst people of color. And we weren't sure what we were doing to push people away. But we didn't want to. [00:37:00] We weren't actively trying to fill the negative role that people have of us. But I remember even my freshman year, people in BCD that were distinctly not a part of Quest



really not liking Quest. And I could never get out of them, especially as a member of Quest board, why. I haven't been able to place what's wrong with Quest, but I'm really... I worry about it a lot. Because there's already, BCD is a niche that's not being filled right now. I think Quest and QPOC fill similar niches, but QPOC for a very specific population. And Quest is supposed to be a generalist. If Quest goes away, there isn't a general, anyone can come, allies are welcome, GSA-type queer org on campus.

MA: [00:38:00] Understood. So somebody comes in, and they're 17, 18 years old. And they're a brand new student at Lafayette. And they say, where do I go to talk to peers and feel like I... And there's nowhere. Unless they identify with queer people of color, and that's the organization they want to be part of.

JW: And if so wonderful.

MA: If they don't identify with that group, they're lost.

JW: Right. And I want to make it clear that I'm very happy that QPOC exists. I think it is a niche that needs filled.

MA: Understood. Understood.

JW: But I am worried about Quest and Quest continuation. And I think that, while there is this culture of, for some reason or another, Quest is bad for the queer community, no one's suggesting an alternative. And it would

probably be, at a minimum, if Quest stopped existing, if it wasn't put back up next year or the year after or the year after that, at minimum, that's one year where students come in and there's no group.

MA: Do you think that the name [00:39:00] hurts it?

JW: I don't think it helps. I think rebranding might help. I don't think that's the thing, though.

MA: No, that would be too simple. But I'm just wondering if it's a variable at all.

JW: Sure, yeah. I could see that.

MA: Interesting. Thinking, so somebody comes as a new student. And they want to be a member of the queer community at Lafayette. And there's the issue of the student groups. They also need support elsewhere. And I'm thinking about your experience, in terms of well-being, psychological and physical. Because that's also another part of that. There's student groups and peer support. And then there's relationship to the administration. Sort of that was really nuanced

JW: Very structural areas.

MA: --and yeah, very nuanced description, too. Because there's been so many changes during your time here. You've bookended a complete re-organization in many ways. And you bring up a lot [00:40:00] of interesting things. I'm thinking the dark side of the moon for, the queer kid

on campus is partially getting the counseling and the healthcare.

JW: Yeah. I think I'm in the minority when I say this. I've had an excellent experience at Bailey's as a whole, honestly. But specifically focusing on the counseling center. So I went there my freshman year, halfway into fall semester, maybe. And I met with Dr. Forbes when she was still here. And then once she retired, before she retired, even, I switched over and started meeting with Dr. Garrison. And I have had a very positive experience there. They have helped me immensely. And I actively recommend them and the counseling center to anyone on campus who's struggling and needs it.

MA: [00:41:00] That's marvelous to hear. That's great. That means something's working. That's wonderful.

JW: And then, in terms of physical healthcare, I found a women's center 20 minutes away that's able to do hormone-replacement stuff for me. And then Dr. Goldstein, while not particularly knowledgeable about trans healthcare, has been open and pretty good about names and pronouns. But in general, I've had a pretty good experience.

MA: Good, I'm glad to hear that. That's really, that's wonderful. That's just marvelous. So just very generically, we've covered a lot. One thing, just to say it, because it can be really important. Other aspects of identity - race, ethnicity, [00:42:00] religion, class -

any of these kinds of things relative to your experience as a member of the queer community? Just the intersectional moment to think about for a second.

JW: I wanted to bring this up at some point, so this is a good place to do it. I have had ultimately a very comfortable experience here. I'm very privileged in that. And I think it's worth acknowledging my own privilege to frame this interview. So I'm white. I am not religious. Middle, upper-middle class. I don't really know what the cut-off is. But I'm not --

MA: If you can't speak to it, you're probably doing alright, is usually the rule of thumb.

JW: So all these factors are working in my favor and making my experience, but also even just my queer experience, much more, much easier. So I don't have anything really [00:43:00] insightful to say about intersectionality, because my identity is not particularly intersectional. And I'm very privileged in that.

MA: Oh, I think you said something insightful, though. I do think that people don't always realize that. They think they don't have identity. So it's very valuable and thoughtful what you said. So thinking, I think I'm springboarding off Quest a little bit. But one of the things we typically talk about is social life. And I'm thinking that means friendship circles and peer support. It also means once, I forget who I was interviewing, but

I said the dating scene. And they roared with laughter because there was, of course, no same-sex dating scene, no queer dating scene, any of those kinds of things. But your sense of social life for members of the queer community.

JW: I think people find their own groups. I think for a long time, the people who go to Quest was an expanded close friend group. And that also, interestingly [00:44:00] enough - especially my sophomore year, a little bit my junior year, and not quite as much but not insignificantly, my freshman year, and also still - the overlap between people who go to Quest and are active members of Quest -- like go to most meetings or are on the board -- and TRAP floor which is table-top role-playing, like Dungeons and Dragons. That Venn diagram's almost a circle. There's a huge overlap. That is a very queer-friendly floor but also a very queer-centric floor.

MA: What is the name of the floor?

JW: TRAP.

MA: T-r-a-p? Trap?

JW: Yeah. Table-top Role-playing Appreciation Program. So especially my sophomore year, or my junior year, it was like 60% of the board was on that floor. And then so many of our regulars, I guess, were on that floor. That's always been a very [00:45:00] openly queer space. My sophomore and junior year, it was very, it was almost

more about being queer than the actual focus of the community, which we did have the kind of re-shift of, alright. Friends are nice, but be on the special-interest floor if you have the special interest. But yeah. So for me, those two groups, which were closer to one group with stragglers, that was my social scene. That was my social circle.

MA: That's fine. I know it plays out in different ways for people. So the friendship scene could look like Quest, could look like other organizations. And then people have their different groups. And obviously hobbies and things like that. Dating scene probably overlaps with that?

JW: Yeah.

MA: OK, so tell me about Greek life.

JW: So I'm not Greek-affiliated. [00:46:00] I don't have much to say, other than there's not a great history and not necessarily a great culture. I personally am not a huge fan of Greek life, but I don't want to disparage anyone else's choice to be a part of it.

MA: It sounds like it did not really play any kind of significant role.

JW: None whatsoever.

MA: Okay, that's fair.

JW: Because what, was I going to rush a frat? I definitely wasn't out my freshman year, so I wasn't going to rush a

sorority. That doesn't... And even before I factored in queerness, I was just not interested.

MA: Disposition and also identity was pushing against that. And I mean talk about cis-gender, hetero-normative. Just the structure of it is based on cis-gender identities. It's quote-unquote boys and girls, right? Fraternities and sororities. This is, these are not queer spaces in some very profound ways. So yeah, I wasn't putting my money on you [00:47:00] involved in Greek life, to be honest. But I never make assumptions.

JW: I think with our two years of work on QAP, it's pretty clear I'm not. I found the equivalent of that community in Quest and TRAP. That was my circle. That's the equivalent, socially, for me of Greek life, what it is for a lot of people who are a part of it.

MA: So you felt basically like you didn't have to be part of Greek life social scene, even though you weren't part of Greek life. You had your own social scene, and you had your own friends. Because there was none of that, I got pulled into Greek life. I didn't rush a fraternity and sorority or do whatever, but I had to go there to have fun or whatever.

JW: That just wasn't a part of my college experience.

MA: OK, absolutely. How about athletics or any of that?

JW: No. My involvement has been very queer. Because specifically, it was, I was part of BCD. I was never the

person who ran it, though. And [00:48:00] we've moved away from that topic, so just to say this so that it doesn't get lost. I think a lot of what's happening with BCD is that, for a while, when I came in, it was very much a separate group from Quest. We didn't get that many people coming in. At the same time, we didn't get that many people coming into Quest. So it filtered down to just the people who were also already in Quest. And we were mostly all out. Didn't really need it. And we're really tired.

MA: It's too much of a list.

JW: It was just another thing we had to do. And it just dropped.

MA: It sounds almost, well, this is speaking, thinking, knowing its history well. But BCD makes sense coming from students who need the space, to create the space for other students. And that's almost, by definition, different from Quest. They're opposed, in a way, because they serve different needs. That's all.

JW: And the people who became the, were in BCD and were running BCD but were [00:49:00] essentially just a smaller group of the Quest people, were people who needed that space, especially probably their freshman year. And then didn't later but wanted to provide it for other people who weren't showing up. And part of it, it's hard to advertise a secret group. And so I did, I was part of



BCD. I was on the board of Quest for two and a half years. I did Safe Zone for a semester. That was a nightmare. Specifically, it was, we were trying to revamp Safe Zone and do more with it. And we got 70% through what we were planning on doing. There's the one-on-one, like what are gay people, don't be homophobic training. We were trying to make more advanced-ish topics, in terms of queer theory. We wanted to have one specifically devoted to, let's really unpack gender, instead of just saying, be nice to trans people. We did most of [00:50:00] the work for that and then were told to stop. So most of us just left. We were done. I think we quit in the middle. But yeah, so queer org, queer org, queer org, queer archives project.

MA: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I think it's really worth noting, because the institution doesn't always, but you've just given an incredible amount of time and effort to the queer community at Lafayette. And I could say thanks from Lafayette. That's a lot. And that does make a huge difference. And you are here to be a student, right. You have a job to do, and it involves actually academics, which we should talk about. But without a doubt, that's a lot of time and energy given to, as a person who's been in clubs like that. Many, many times, they are that ask with a capital "a," is big. Emotionally, psychologically, in terms of your time, in terms of your

sleep, your organizational powers, your energy, it just, it takes a lot. So you've given a lot to the [00:51:00] college. Yes, absolutely. Talk to me about academics. So there's classroom climate relative to LGBTQ issues. Certainly, there's climate versus academic content. So you can talk about, they're very different things. They can overlap. They can be really different. So [of the?] climate really generally, across your classes and across your professors.

JW: It's person by person. And I feel like that goes without stating. But it's very much not only just the professor, but also the make-up of the class. And those two things combine in whether or not a class is going... What the culture surrounding queer identity is in any given academic setting. So in computer science, I had heard stories of some unpleasant things that had been said by professors offhand. But overall, computer science was not [00:52:00] hostile, in any way, to queer identity. And when I came out and asked my professors to change name and pronouns, they did. There was no problem there. So again, another layer in which I was lucky. That could have gone very differently. And so my experience has been comfortable, but it wasn't necessarily bound to be, I got lucky. But so in terms of climate in most of my classes, because bachelor of science degree is more than 20 classes. That was the bulk of my academic experience

here. Neutral leaning positive, but mostly just not really existent. And there was not a terrible climate. There was a couple of people, maybe, in the major who weren't great. But there was a relatively positive climate amongst the student body in that major, as well. So very neutral-feeling. [00:53:00] And then outside of that, I don't remember having really any big experiences that really related to queer identity, other than taking your sexuality studies class. Which then, moving onto content, that's it, right. And you know that. I'm really glad that the queer theory course, very excited for that. Sad I never got to take it.

MA: Sad I won't have you in it.

JW: But yeah, that was queer content in academics. I think there's maybe an English class that delves into queer literature.

MA: There is, Professor Smith's taboos class. Yeah, sexualities in literature. Yeah there's been very little up until very recently, yeah. So 340 was your one experience.

JW: And then I think, from friends who are in [00:54:00] anthrosoc, the deviance class covers it. But that's problematic in its own sense.

MA: Deviance is a little problematic, yeah, as the main framework, sure. Yeah, because you're deviating from something. And that sounds like normal, but OK.

JW: So big picture, it was 340.

MA: So that's the main thing. So working away in computer science, which was neutral slash accepting, absolutely fine climate to do your work. And then one class that had the content. OK, well that's, yeah. That's a description that makes a lot of sense to me. And faculty, as a general rule, it sounds like they were accepting, fine.

JW: Yeah, I'm trying to think if I've had a bad experience with faculty. There were faculty that I just chose not to be out to, not necessarily... I didn't know I would have a bad experience but didn't [00:55:00] necessarily trust that I would have a good one. And didn't want to deal with it, should that go south. But anyone that I actually came out to, which is most, if not all, of my professors junior year onward, it went fine.

MA: Well, that's good to hear. I don't think we would have heard that story five or six years ago. So that's really --

JW: And again, I don't think that's true for everyone here today. In fact, I know it's not.

MA: So discipline-specific, to some degree.

JW: Not even discipline-specific. I think there really is an aspect of luck. I know friends who took a religion class that I could have also taken, even with the same professor, who had a terrible experience related to their

queer identity. I took a different class with the same professor, and it never came up. And so it didn't matter. There's an element of just luck of the draw.

MA: So you're that slice we talked [00:56:00] about, of experience. But you have friends who would be, say, in a class in the religion department, where they would come out offended.

JW: Oh, yeah. For sure.

MA: So yeah. So we've still got problems. You just didn't happen to have them.

JW: Yeah. I've been lucky. And that was, I spoke at the 2019 equality rally, the one this year. And it was a little rambling. I was a little all over the place. But what I was trying to say is, I've been lucky, but there's still work to do. And that's what I want to get across in this interview, as well.

MA: So if we saw Lafayette as a place with a density of transphobic, homophobic, anti-queer experience, that density has thinned. So 20 years ago, if you went through it, you would inevitably hit a dark spot. And now, you could thread it. All your privilege taken into account, luck on your side, et cetera, you could thread it. Because the density is thinned. You're not going to necessarily hit a dark spot. That said, there's plenty of dark [00:57:00] spots that people, you could have hit along the way.

JW: And it's not that I hit, not again, that experience freshman year. I lived with those people for a full year afterwards.

MA: That's a dark spot in my, yeah, that's hard.

JW: But in terms of anything structural, I've been lucky. And I think there still are those dark spots for sure. But I think there are fewer of them, right. Because I want to acknowledge how far Lafayette's come, working for the QAP thing, all of that. Clearly, yeah, there's still work to do, undoubtedly. But we are way better off than we were.

MA: I wanted to make sure that we had a chance for you to reflect on the queer archives project and your work. So whatever you'd like to share about that. It's a unique question to you.

JW: Yeah. That was an incredibly rewarding experience. I am, I [00:58:00] remember, at the end of my sophomore year, I was choosing between continuing some kind of generic computer science EXCEL research and doing the QAP.

MA: I remember that now. I'd forgotten. That's right, yeah.

JW: I chose right, yeah.

MA: Good. I'm glad.

JW: I'm very happy that I was a part of this. It's been an incredibly rewarding experience. I think it's been also just like, outside of I'm glad I did it, I'm also glad

it's being done. And so I wanted to put in the work to make it happen, because it's a good project, right. And it's been interesting to watch, as well, of not heated, but arguments we've had about what to include and why and when. And honestly, I'm still not, my personal opinion doesn't quite align with our strategy. But looking at all of the different things that go into [00:59:00] this sort of project --

MA: The complexity's amazing, really.

JW: Yeah. And especially when you first look at it, and you see a web structure, it's like oh, OK. That's a lot. And then the more you interact with it, OK, this makes sense. There are interviews, and then there are things. And then they're all just connected with topics. And so it starts to feel really simple. And then you being in the behind-the-scenes of, why did we pick those topics? Why did we pick those items? How did we get those items? The complexity's amazing. How many meetings we've come into of sit down and, usually it's me, of just bring up a topic that we weren't really talking about. And it's like, well, so here's this thing about the structure that maybe we should talk about. And then that's the whole meeting. Because you get into something, and especially with the topic we're working with, are LGBTQ people considered a protected population in [01:00:00] IRB stuff?

MA: No, they're not.

JW: Well, that's kind of messed up.

MA: It's interesting, isn't it? And in fact, I will say we went through the full IRB review because, honestly, I just thought it was incredibly important for us to treat LGBTQ populations as protected groups, although they are technically - unlike prisoners, children, and the elderly, et cetera, this standard group that's used, I think, by the APA - and to be fair, the chair of IRB at the time, and I had a lot of conversations where we were in absolute agreement that then we have to up our standards ourselves, basically, to go through full IRB. We got exempt, but we still did the whole thing.

JW: Yeah. And regardless of the technical distinction, these topics can put people at risk. And so working with the content that we're doing, we have to be so careful. I'm sure [01:01:00] that there are things that we've done that are fumbles, and that will change over time. Or things that we've missed that we need to add or need to change, right.

MA: No doubt. No doubt.

JW: But I'm really proud of all of the work that's gone into it. I'm very happy with the project. And I'm very proud to be giving the interview.

MA: That's nice. Well, you have been absolutely integral to the project. I'm personally grateful.



JW: Thank you.

MA: Absolutely. I'm personally grateful. But really from the perspective of the college, you've made an incredible contribution during your time here. And you are not exaggerating when... I was thinking about, this morning, about doing this interview. And I was thinking, the first year of our work, so last year, this year, '18-'19, we built the site. But '17-'18, all we did was talk --

JW: Structures.

MA: About the complexities. It was just like picking knots.

JW: We did a good amount of items at the end of the year, but we had only [01:02:00] two interviews up there. It was all the, build that data model. Figure out, yeah.

MA: Well, you've been absolutely indispensable, really. You've been a founder of this. And I will go on record saying that Jen has been willing to... I think we've had a good, in our teams, which have had some students come and go, a good culture of open conversation about problems. And people see this as that, or we need to change it, or we need to talk about it. And you've been a huge contributor to those conversations. And they're the most important part. And I'm very proud that you are part of this. Yes.

JW: Thank you. That means a lot.

MA: It's just such a pleasure. And it has been such a pleasure to have you part of the project. Come back

often. Revisit constantly. And follow the work that you've been so formative for. One of the things, [01:03:00] actually, and you saying things we added, things we don't. One thing that always comes up in the interviews is important events on campus, so we can make sure to capture them for the site. What has happened while you are on campus? Speakers, people. This is your moment to think of, you know.

JW: My list. So I've been here for two equality rallies. We have a good bit on 2017 and not so much yet on 2019. But been in both of those. And 2017, I was still a big part of Quest. I helped plan it. Every year, specifically either Quest does it, another org does it, or, typically for the big-ticket ones, it's GSP itself, because the budget, right. There are a couple of big-ticket events. So we had, in terms of speakers, I can't remember which year each of these were - I think it was my sophomore, then my junior - [01:04:00] of when Jacob Tobia came.

MA: Oh, they were here. That was some years ago, yeah.

JW: They were phenomenal. Janet Mock came, as well. She was also wonderful. So those speakers, of taking trans and nonbinary people and giving them a platform here, very grateful to that. On the flip side, in the last two years, three years, the Mill Series has cemented itself as giving platform to very unqualified people to make just inflammatory remarks for the sake of making them.

So give and take there. That's something that should go away. And then in terms of... It's not so much an [01:05:00] event and the like, this is a student org that put on the event, but the election, 2016 election dramatically affected Lafayette's culture. I think it also very much separated, like, it was easier to ignore and assume that someone held similar or at least compatible opinions to you beforehand. And then the election happened, and it was very much like, you're hyperaware of who, yeah, yeah. I remember there was a walk-out and a rally at one point. And it was not like impromptu. We planned it in like a week. That's not something I've seen much since. There were a lot of protests at football games. And the, what did we call it? [01:06:00] I was briefly a part of that. A lot of different orgs that represented minority populations banded together and drew up a document that was, sort of like a list of demands of the institution. Very similar to the letter that sent for the --

MA: Oh, the institutional transformation, it led to this committee. Yes, yes, yes.

JW: Did that committee every get off the ground?

MA: Yes, it exists. Yeah, there's an institutional equity committee now that emerged from that. That was very effective. I know what you mean. It was a great list. I do remember that.

JW: And that was like, I talked earlier about, it was very hard for Quest to work with other student groups. Collaboration has been really difficult. That was one moment where that was not true. Campus was united [01:07:00] there. And not, not to say there wasn't, not infighting, but disagreements about what should be in it and how to word it. But honestly, not much, if any. I'm sure that existed, but I can't, I don't really remember any big issue. It was very much like, all the groups contribute what they want. And I think that was the same year as the equality rally, when that was sent. So we very much mirrored, the queer community sectioned, essentially, of that list of demands. Kind of became the equality rally letter, for the most part. But it was very much like all the orgs came together. And this is what we want. And we just compiled that. It was like a 20-page letter that we sent. And it was a lot of bureaucracy around it. But it was taken seriously. We met with administrators [01:08:00] several times. And then now a committee exists because of that. I think that was a huge moment for Lafayette and for marginalized students in Lafayette.

MA: That's great. Yeah, that's great you mentioned that. That had real impact. It absolutely did, yeah. Well, wonderful. Anything else you'd like to add or say?

JW: I think I touched on everything that I distinctly meant to. Oh, I had spoken about this in my speech at the equality rally, but that's not recorded, which actually is part of what we were asking for. But I think it's worth noting, [01:09:00] right, the administration's pace. Not that they haven't... I think it would have been my junior year, because I think it would have come after the letter. But it may have been my sophomore year and been a part of, this isn't happening. And we've been trying to make it happen. So we're going to publicly announce that this is something that we're demanding, of gender-neutral housing options for freshmen. Or across the board, so they are available to freshmen. It's been incredibly disappointing. And the big points of the letter, and I know you have this on the site already, for the 2017 rally were, more queer focus in academics, which happening slowly but surely. But I'm sure you can attest to all of the walls you're hitting.

MA: I can bear witness [01:10:00] to the slow pace, yes. Yes, and the amount of energy relative to the change has been probably equivalent to what you experienced as a student, right, which is, pouring your energy in and getting, moving an inch. But yeah, at least it's an inch.

JW: And the other topic of that letter, I can't remember exactly what specifically was included, but it was trans

well-being. And it was focused on better trans healthcare at Bailey's. I don't think anything came of that. I could be wrong. Because I don't have the... It was specifically like, making HRT, and I think even wider trans-related operations, right, trans-related surgeries, covered by the school's health insurance. I don't have the school's health insurance, so I'm not sure how it's affected anything.

MA: That was part of it, as I recall, yeah.

JW: Do you know if anything's happened with that?

MA: Not that I know of.

JW: But that tracks. It was gender-neutral bathrooms in all new [01:11:00] construction and updating of old buildings. No. Yeah, we have officially made some headway, right. But --

MA: That remains a frustration and a disappointment, yeah. Housing has been just so intractable, so intractable. The bathrooms and the housing and the, oh my goodness.

JW: So specifically, there are still many single-use restrooms on campus that are gendered.

MA: It's inexcusable.

JW: There's no reason for it.

MA: That's correct.

JW: We, at one point, either before or after the rally - I can't remember - Quest was actively fighting with administration about housing and bathrooms. And I was on

both of those. I don't think I took point per se. But actually, I did on housing. I was the one who was talking to res life, for the most part. And then bathrooms was someone else, who was taking point. But a lot of that was also still going through Cristina. And the communication there was kind of an issue. But [01:12:00] there was as, two years ago, it was like, yeah, over winter break, we're changing all of the single-use bathrooms to gender-neutral. Perfect, wonderful, great. It didn't happen. And the excuse we got was so emblematic of, Lafayette's doing better but needs to change. This is where it needs to change. The excuse we got was, the signage didn't match.

MA: Really?

JW: Yeah.

MA: I've never heard that. That's awful.

JW: That was two years ago, or I guess a year and a half-ish. There's actually, one of the other special-interest floors. So all the special-interest floors except for Mafia, the music floor, are in Keefe. And at least TRAP, from before I came - I think this may have been mentioned in another interview - had gender-neutral bathrooms. We decided that our bathrooms were gender-neutral. And the signage [01:13:00] there changed my junior year or sophomore year. The signage there for those bathrooms,

that we had already specified were gender-neutral, they've done well for Keefe. But --

MA: It's not overall. It's just targeted.

JW: And it was also because those bathrooms are all single-use. So they didn't have an issue changing those. And all single-use bathrooms should be gender-neutral.

There's one person in there. But --

MA: Understood. I've made this argument many, many times. It just baffles me utterly. I do know of a faculty member, who shall remain nameless, who, in her building, took a piece of paper. Wrote "toilet" on it and put it over the gendered bathrooms -

JW: Perfect.

MA: -- over and over until they changed. They changed the sign in response to her doing that in an academic building, because it was too... It was like, come on. Come on. We're just needlessly insulting and alienating and marginalizing people by leaving the sign up. So she would just cover it with [01:14:00] a piece of paper every day. And eventually, they got so sick of it that they changed it. But that's, you know, that's absurd that that has to come to that.

JW: And so on at least TRAP, but I think other floors, even non-special-interest housing in Keefe, all of our bathrooms are gender-neutral and the sign has been updated. In MAFIA, which is in Ramer, they have gender-



neutral bathrooms in that they keep ripping the signs off. And then the administration keeps putting them back up. And they have specified and said, I don't know, in their constitution or something. But they made it clear, no, we are deciding these are gender-neutral bathrooms. We have people just scattered throughout. It doesn't make sense, right. But administration will not stop tearing down their signs and putting the gendered ones back up. So even where no one's fighting against it, we still [01:15:00] can't just get that done. And then housing was the big one. The bathrooms were disappointing. Housing has been infuriating for me. Because, whichever year it was that I did this, I was talking to res life about gender-neutral housing. I made an appointment with them and went in to talk to them. And I had to explain myself five times to get across why room-by-room gender-neutral housing would be important to students. And it just baffled them. Because there are versions of gender-neutral housing. All of them are only upper classmen. And as far as I know, all of them are GPA-locked. So if you're not a good student, you don't get to be comfortable. It's really baffling and really disturbing. And so what were arguing for was [01:16:00] an ability for, you have the drop-down that's like, what do you want your freshman dorm to be, single-gender by room or by floor? Or I think it was building or floor

because, I don't know. But we wanted there to be another one of just not, you know, of a section where any student could live with any other student as their roommate, especially open to freshmen. And isn't a GPA-locked or, you know, there's not a problem with... They created something called gender-neutral housing. It's still gendered by room. It's no different than other housing on campus. And they had a gender-neutral bathroom that they eventually changed back to being gendered. I could be wrong on that, because it's, I've been very cemented in Keefe for the past three years.

MA: Understood.

JW: But I'm almost positive that's what happened. [01:17:00]  
And so it's one of those examples of Lafayette like, oh, we hear you. And then doing something but slowly and wrong, and then patting themselves on the back because they did a great job. You know?

MA: Yes, I do.

JW: Absolutely just...

MA: I do.

JW: And specifically the, having to go and really defend why someone could ever want this. I got a big scholarship to come here. That's why I ended up here, right, because Lafayette was a nice school. I liked it when I toured. Not yet knowing that I was trans, and that's why I was looking for this. But on college tours, I couldn't think

of any questions to ask. Like, I don't know. I'm a high school senior. I don't really know what metric to judge you by other than, at what level are your dorms gendered? Because I very much didn't want to be, just in [01:18:00] a room but especially on a floor or in a building of all guys. I knew I was uncomfortable with that and didn't know why. Lafayette didn't have that option. I wanted that option coming in. And having to justify that and just, I guess justify the existence of trans freshmen, right, is appalling.

MA: To people who would not understand, no matter how often you probably explain it. Which is already wrong that you have to explain it. But people, when you explain it, will absolutely not understand what you're talking about. Which is a huge problem, in terms of staffing, understanding these issues, and training being necessary. Because even if the job is on you, which is unfair, to explain, well, what good is explaining if no one understands you?

JW: And when... The thing that really just infuriated me in that whole process was eventually they're like, OK, why don't we, I forget who it was from res life. But why don't we come to a Quest meeting? And we can talk about what you guys are [01:19:00] envisioning for this gender-neutral housing? Perfect, that sounds great. They came

and advertised the things that already existed and then left. There was no suggestion.

MA: Gotcha. That hurts. That's hard.

JW: It was very, so, a microcosm of Lafayette's relationship with marginalized students of proclaiming its own diversity to get them here, patting themselves on the back, and calling it a day when they're here, uncomfortable, and don't know what to do.

MA: Yeah. And then not listening or being able to hear when someone tries to explain.

JW: And just like I had said earlier, Lafayette's come a long way. I've had a very comfortable experience here, for the most part. But these things need to be addressed and need to be changed.

MA: Yeah, they need to be systemic so it's not a matter of luck.

JW: And further, even without the, OK, they did the bathrooms wrong. They did the gender-neutral housing wrong. The things they do right, they do in like eight years, right. If I come in as a freshman and notice [01:20:00] something that's not there that I need, right, and then I ask, I need this to be done. And it's done in a decade, cool. I was really sad for those four years that I was here. Yes, you are helping students in the future. And I'm glad that you're doing that. But you're not helping

the people who are here. You are not serving your community.

MA: College time and student time are different things.

JW: Yeah. And I get that administration's tough. And you have to go through a lot of hoops. But administration makes its own hoops.

MA: As I've often said, if it was suddenly illegal to do X or Y, they'd find a way to solve it in a day. As I've said many, many times, it was with the pronoun use, actually, issue when I was on diversity. I was like, you know what? If it was illegal not to provide people options for pronouns and names, we'd find a way to fix this tomorrow.

JW: I remember that. Oh god, yeah.

MA: There is a way to do this. So case in point. But your point is well-taken, and I'm so glad you brought those things up. Yeah, they're very, very important.

JW: The [01:21:00] other thing being, yes, if it was illegal, they'd do it in a day. I have the sinking suspicion that if Kirby asked them to, it would be done in a day. But you know, the alumni like the Mill Series instead.

MA: Well, it makes a big difference who's paying attention and who isn't, right.

JW: Yeah.

MA: Jennifer, well, anything else to add?

JW: Just that I am very glad I did this interview and very glad I worked on the QAP. And it's been a pleasure.

MA: Well, it's been my pleasure, too. Jennifer Wellnitz, class of 2019. Thank you for the interview and especially thank you so much for all that you have contributed to Lafayette as a leader, as an activist, and for me personally, for all you've done for the queer archives project.

JW: Thank you.

END OF AUDIO FILE