

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

**Interview of**  
**Peter Theodore '97**  
**Conducted by**  
**Susan Basow**  
**August 10, 2018**

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Lafayette College

2018

Theodore

SUSAN BASOW: OK. We are starting the interview. It is August

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PETER THEODORE: 10th.

SB: 10th, 2018. This is Susan Basow interviewing Peter Theodore. So to begin, I need you to state your name and just confirm your participation --

PT: Sure.

SB: -- is voluntary and you've given your consent.

PT: Peter Theodore, and I'm voluntarily participating in the oral history, and yes, I give my consent.

SB: Yay. OK, and I will take your picture after. We do that. So just to start, this is a set of questions. Just what personal pronouns should I refer to you?

PT: Oh, he.

SB: He. OK, terrific. Describe how you're connected to Lafayette, what year you graduated, what years you were there.

PT: Sure. So I attended Lafayette College [00:01:00] from 19-- well, you know, August, I guess, 1993 through May of 1997. I majored in psychology, the Bachelor's of Science, because at that time, there were two separate --

SB: Yeah, there still are. Yeah.

PT: So I was a Bachelor of Science. I graduated with honors.  
Dr. Susan Basow was my honors thesis chair --

SB: Yay!

PT: So anyway, I'm happy to expand, but.

SB: Yeah! Yeah, yeah. No, that's great to start. And how do you identify as a member of the LGBTQ community?

PT: I identify quite proudly as a gay male. I have cisgender privilege, not that I'm proud of that, but just clarifying.  
(laughs)

SB: Right.

PT: And, yeah. So but I identify as a gay man.

SB: OK. And how do you describe yourself professionally? I mean, what's your [00:02:00] work?

PT: Sure. Well, I guess my -- the first thing I usually say is I'm a clinical psychologist who both works as a professor -- I'm not full professor right now, but assoc-- an associate professor -- at the California School of Professional Psychology in Los Angeles. I also work as a clinical psychologist at the West LA VA so I work with veterans doing disability comp-- comp and pension evaluations, and then also have a small private practice. So I'm a practicing, you know, clinician as well. Research-wise, I'm not as -- it's not a research-intensive place where I work. It's more of a teaching focus,

student-centered kind of learning place. But in terms of my research, that's always remain-- actually I should say it's really remained addressing LGBT issues, which I think branches back to Lafayette because at Lafayette, I needed to use [00:03:00] or felt it was most accessible to use a student population. And at the time I was there, there really wasn't a visible LGBT population on campus. So I decided, OK, maybe I can investigate homophobia, you know, in a college student population. So I kind of started there, and then as soon as I could, after I left Lafayette, I just started working in research as a -- at that time, a research assistant and kind of worked my way up, but started doing kind of substance abuse related research with primarily -- I guess it was kind of somewhat narrow within the LGBT community because it was with gay and bisexual men. And since that time, really I've branched out a bit so it's not exclusively substance abuse issues, but really looking at LGBT health disparities. You know, so I still have an active research life, but I've certainly focused more of my time, I think, around teaching and clinical practice.

SB: Right, great. Thank you.

PT: Sure.

SB: [00:04:00] So let's get to your time at Lafayette. What was the LGBTQ situation during your years at Lafayette?

PT: Yeah, so.

SB: Yeah, what was the climate like?

PT: Interestingly, well it was very homophobic. When I started, I remember my first year -- I think my first semester at Lafayette was difficult. I wasn't out yet as a gay young man at that time. So I believe -- oh. I believe I was even -- is it recording?

SB: Yeah.

PT: OK. (laughs) So at that time, I believe -- I mean, I hate to say this, but you know, since I was relatively unhappy because it was a very conservative, homogenous, heterosexist institution, there weren't -- [00:05:00] at that time, as far as I knew, there weren't really any out, you know, faculty even so I didn't -- I didn't even feel like I had that many role models, originally like in my freshman year. So I ended up looking to transfer and I remember I had actually applied -- where was it? The total opposite (laughs) of Lafayette. Oh my God, why am I blanking? Poughkeepsie, New York has --

SB: SUNY?

PT: Vassar.

SB: Oh, Vassar.

PT: So I had applied to transfer to Vassar. I will say in the long run, and it didn't even take me that long to get to this, by the end of my first year, I had a very different life because I had formed a good set of friends and I feel like I'm actually very happy I didn't end up transferring. And in the end, I had a great experience at Lafayette because I think that it kind of forced me to really become more of an activist and to really speak out. There was no [00:06:00] -- there still was no really visible gay community on any of the levels, from administration, to faculty, to students. So at the -- I think it was actually around the middle of my freshman year, I ended up coming out in a relatively public way on campus. And that's when I realized, for me, and this certainly is not everyone's experience, but for me, coming out was such a positive, you know, experience. I certainly had some backlash and negative aftermath events that occurred, but I also had a lot of positive events. Some of the faculty wrote letters to me, were very supportive, and that was very warming. People on campus who may -- who I otherwise wouldn't have given a chance to befriend me because I would've in my own mind anticipated, you know, that they were more conservative or homophobic than they necessarily were, you know, [00:07:00] they started opening up to me -- not about

their sexuality but just embracing me. And so I think that was really pivotal in kind of starting to change my experience. So one of the things I became very involved with, I think, from that point on was -- it probably isn't there anymore but was at the time called FLAGB, Friends of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals -- well, and bisexuals -- see, we were trying to be so inclusive.

SB: I know, yeah.

PT: And we were missing the mark on many levels, but (laughter) anyways. So yeah, but I think I became more and more active in that. So I think, I don't know what year, but at least in my last two years, I think I was heading up, you know, FLAGB. So, yeah.

SB: And FLAGB stood for Friends of --

PT: Right. Right, yes exactly. Yeah. Actually, I used to joke with some of my friends that it was actually Peter's Friends. (laughter) And I say that kind of tongue-in-cheek, but [00:08:00] literally too because there really weren't any other people -- until my senior year, I think there really weren't any other students who were open -- openly LGBT, you know, on campus. So, oh so yes, I think I started to share my sort of coming out experience.

SB: Yeah.

PT: So let's see. I think the Association for Lafayette Women used to -- I don't know if they still do but they put on sort of an annual event for women's -- kind of Take Back the Night. And I believe it was at a Take Back the Night kind of rally outside of the student center, Farinon Center, where lots of people, they brought in -- students were coming forth too but they brought in a few people from the outside to -- I remember there was a folk singer, and I think one or two activists from the community who came to speak out [00:09:00] about feminism. And some students were stepping up and talking about feminism, and sexism, and rape. And so it was a very serious event, but no one was talking about heterosexism or homophobia, and I was not planning to really say anything. I kind of went just as a passive observer. But the more I sat there listening, I heard people like getting closer and closer to talking about things that would be more relevant to the LGBT communities, but no one was really saying anything. So I finally just felt the drive to stand up. And at the time, I remember thinking I want to dispel the myth that no one on our campus is gay. And again, I know I'm being very -- not very inclusive by just saying gay, but -- and I felt like not only was it a myth, but I started to feel [00:10:00] more like a hypocrite. So I decided I wanted to



stand up and say something, so I -- it was my, sort of my turn, in my own mind. I got up and went to the microphone and sort of announced to everyone. I think that's even sort of how I phrased it. I think I said, you know, there's this -- I think I was very nervous and was talking around, you know, in circles for a while, and then I finally got to the point and basically said, "You know, there's this belief, this myth on campus that no one is -- no one is gay, and I'm living proof that that's -- that is a myth because I am." And I blank after that. I can't remember what (laughter) I said after that. All I know is that it was empowering, you know, and it was a very positive experience for me.

SB: Was there a reaction right away, or?

PT: Yeah. I think, well OK part of the reason, I remember, why I felt that I could come out in that -- in that [00:11:00] manner was because -- it's not like I planned it, but strategically it sort of made sense also because I assumed it would be a pretty welcoming, accepting crowd because it was a Take Back the Night, you know, event, and I was right, I think. So when I finally did come out, I think, yes. There were people applauding and cheering, and I think, you know, surprised. And people who may have

thought that I was gay, I think they were just so happy that someone finally said something, so.

SB: Yeah. This was the end of your first year?

PT: Yes. So that would be -- that was in -- by that time, it was probably spring of '94.

SB: Yeah, spring '94.

PT: Yeah.

SB: Actually, that's my memory too. I associate it with you somehow declaring on the steps of Farinon, you know.

PT: (laughs) I literally did. I mean, it's awesome and strange at the same time.

SB: I know. It was very brave, very courageous. And did you know other LGBTQ individuals or anyone who -- on that [00:12:00] umbrella?

PT: Yeah. At that time, in all honesty, no. Well, a few but no one really close -- I didn't really have any friends. I didn't know anyone my age. You know, I think I had only come out to myself and actually I was very fortunate that I had parents who, you know, not everything was positive, but in the grand scheme, they were pretty -- you know, I had a pretty accepting set of parents. And I remember I came out to them literally just a few weeks (laughs) before I left to go to Lafayette because I remember thinking -- I already had the mindset that this was a secret I was carrying

around, and I had this sense that I was gonna need support, and that it was -- that I would have difficulties, and that I knew my parents always -- well, I won't go off on too many tangents (laughter) but my mom even more than my dad. [00:13:00] But I just, I had the sense that she would want to be supportive of me when I was at college, but that if she didn't know the truth and she didn't know why I might be calling home for support or emotional, you know, support, it's not gonna -- it's gonna be meaningless. So I came out to them a few weeks, you know, before college. And as I said, fortunately they had, you know, a very supportive, you know, response. I mention that only because since I had only just come out to myself, I wasn't really involved or active in the community. So I really hadn't even had the opportunity to get to know other likeminded individuals.

SB: Yeah. So during the four years that you were at Lafayette, did you become aware of other members of the community? And how do people find each other, and were -- you know, were there activities or, you know, hidden code things?

PT: You know, that's what was so [00:14:00] interesting about Lafayette. As much as I had an amazing, I think, academic experience, and because I formed a good support group through friends of my own, they were all allies. None of

them were LGBT-identified. In fact, I've -- without naming names, I found out a few people that I was even friendly with -- I wouldn't say close friends, but friendly with -- weren't out while we were there but they've come out since leaving Lafayette. So I think that really speaks to the power of this sort of stifling homophobic culture that existed back then. I'm sure some of that is still there but I hope that it's been gradually changing. But yeah, so as much as I came out, and I was -- part of me didn't -- it's not -- this wasn't the reason I did it, but I had certainly hoped that that might be -- there would be a little bit of a domino effect. There really wasn't. I certainly [00:15:00] made a lot of good friendships, some people I still -- not that I'm super close with, but some I keep in touch with over Facebook. I mentioned my friend Lisa, and I do consider her a good friend because she and I have stayed in touch. She was very progressive and LGBT-friendly and affirming. So I feel like if I hadn't come out the way I did, some of the friendships I formed, like my friendship with her, wouldn't have happened. But in terms of finding other people on campus who were LGBT, it just didn't happen. I remember -- hopefully you're comfortable with me saying this -- I don't even remember why I thought, but I think I knew that you -- I didn't know

whether you identified as lesbian or bisexual, but I had a feeling you were part of the community. But even we never really --

SB: Yeah.

PT: -- talked about it, which I respect. I'm sure you had your own, you know, your [00:16:00] own life and your own reasons why. But that too always seemed a little odd and strange to me and I think speaks to the power of heterosexism in the world and in our culture, but also in this microcosm at Lafayette. It wasn't very welcoming or easy, I guess, for people to be themselves and to really speak out.

SB: Yeah. Besides your friends, were there other sort of supports or allies that you had among --

PT: My --

SB: -- the faculty, or I don't know --

PT: Yeah, I was gonna say, I remember -- maybe it was my -- I don't know if it was sophomore or junior year. I think there was a visiting professor [redacted by QAP reviewer]. It's funny how memory works. These names are coming up that I haven't talked about in ages. And she was very out on campus, so I got to know her. I never became super close with her, which I thought [00:17:00] that was kind of a -- that was a lesson in a way too because I felt like

that was -- I think, you know, this is all my perception, but also an example of sort of the divide in the gay community. And I kind of felt like I saw her getting close to other women. It was very difficult for me as a male, and even as a gay male, to get close to her. But a lot of that, I'm sure, was my own stuff too. But certainly she was a visible presence on campus and I think she created some events. Through FLAGB, I certainly was very active in trying to create awareness on campus. And so I had a group of friends who helped to brainstorm and develop activities we could do on campus, but again none of them were really -- at the time, at least, none of them were out. So and I think my last couple years there, there was someone in the English department. [00:18:00] God, I'm realizing now. (laughs) Am I -- I don't think I'm outing people because I think these people were all open on campus.

SB: They'll have a chance to -- yeah.

PT: OK.

SB: Yeah. Say whether they want to be named or not.

PT: Yeah. So, OK great. So Professor Smith? I think Ian Smith?

SB: Ian Smith, uh-huh.

PT: Yeah. Again, I didn't have a super close relationship with him. I can't say like he took me under his wing. I

honestly don't even know if I ever had any specific conversations with him about my -- about my sexuality, but I do remember taking one of his literature courses and, you know, always loving to look at the symbolism in the things we were reading. And so many of the books he had assigned were LGBT-themed, or at least had remnants of like, you know, racism, sexism, and homophobia. So those types of conversations emerged in class, and I guess it was sort of an unspoken [00:19:00] level of support. I don't even know if he knows that, but you know, it was there for me. And Sidney Donnell.

SB: Yes, Donnell.

PT: Donnell.

SB: Yes, Spanish.

PT: Yes. I think he must have been -- I think he was faculty advisor one year or something for --

SB: For FLAGB?

PT: -- FLAGB. So that must be how I got to know him. I mean, that was good. He was a support, a little bit. Again, I was never super close with him, but I knew that he was there. But I think it's just so different from the experiences that I hear from people who went to larger universities, or even the more progressive, you know, liberal arts colleges who didn't have to think about any of

this. Like they have very active, visible gay communities -- and not to say there aren't their own struggles, you know, but if you wanted, it's there. None of that existed at Lafayette [00:20:00] so it really did have this kind of stifling reality.

SB: In terms of, so the administration or anything, were there like resources that you felt you could go to, like the counseling center, or health center, or deans, or anybody on that level?

PT: Yeah. I think on the administrative level, I think that people did -- I think they did their best and I think that if I had sought out -- if I felt the need to seek out more, I think it would have been there. I didn't really ever question that. I do remember, as I shared with you before we started recording, my freshman year, I ended up switching dorms because my first roommate was very -- was kind of your stereotypical jock. I think he actually [00:21:00] failed out of school even after that first semester or maybe at the end of the first year. But I only mention that because it was just -- we were such opposites in so many ways and he was very homophobic, and I remember just getting -- I used to get like harassing, you know, homophobic messages on -- (laughs) this dates us, but on my voicemail or my -- no, my answering machine. (laughter) I



don't think there was voicemail. So you know, and they disguised their voices. I never knew exactly who they were, but that was happening.

And then I think -- and this was, I think, before I came out on campus. There was one day that I came home and on my dorm room door, on like the message board or whatever, someone had -- I don't remember exactly what it was. I think someone had written "fag." [00:22:00] I just remember the word "fag." I don't remember what else was on it. But at the time, it was very threatening to me. It's not like, not to be melodramatic. I wasn't fearing for my life, but it certainly was very emotionally threatening. So I reported that to -- I have no idea if she's still there, but Deborah Hoff who at the time was -- I think she was like the residence life advisor and her position, she arranged all the dorm assignments for people. She was incredibly supportive. She was very lovely. She was very upset for me. And so she worked, I assume, I don't know how hard it was to do this, but she helped me switch roommates. So that's when I left Gates Hall and I switched into, whatever, Ruef Hall. So this is funny because the roommate that she ended up pairing me up with [00:23:00] was a young, Black, male student who I believe at the -- I

have no -- we've never kept in touch so I have no idea how he identifies now. He was not public on campus, that I know of, but he was open with me about being bisexual. Nothing ever happened between he and I, and he and I weren't even close friends, but I guess that's actually someone on campus that I did know of, and he was actually a roommate of mine for the semester. But even that, we were just very different people. But outside of that, you know, that was it. But you know, I wonder, OK, somehow she had the instincts to match me up with him. So the second part of my first year was, partly because of that, I'm sure, a more positive experience. And I started -- this was on the questionnaire -- I started getting more involved with [00:24:00] college theater. Actually, I did that for my first semester too. So I guess I continued being involved with college theater. And of course, there are stereotypes with that too, but within the theater community, there's bound to be a lot more acceptance, and there was. I formed a lot of friendships with people in the college theater groups, you know, that ended up providing support, you know, through allyship.

SB: Yeah. Well, what's the terminology people used at the time you were in school too, you know, as part of the community? I mean, what words were used?

PT: To refer to sexual --

SB: Yeah, yeah.

PT: I used to say sexual minorities because in all honesty, back then, it wasn't even as much in my awareness and no one really ever talked about transgender, you know, or gender diverse or gender fluid people. So I think it was mainly like -- it was very boxed, very compartmentalized --

SB: Gay --

PT: Gay, lesbian, bisexual.

SB: Lesbian, bisexual.

PT: Hence, FLAGB.

SB: Yeah. FLAGB. Right, [00:25:00] there you go. (laughter)  
So you already talked about that the social scene was really not a thing for sort of gay, lesbian --

PT: Yeah, the social scene, at that time, at least, at Lafayette, it was very driven by Greek Life, ugh.

SB: Yeah. That's what we're gonna talk about too, yeah.

PT: OK, because that's a whole other story.

SB: Yeah. So what was the impact of Greek life on your experience?

PT: Hmm. So the second semester of my freshman year -- by the way, I just want to say I'm very mindful, every time I say "freshman year" I want to correct myself and say first year --

SB: My first year. I know.

PT: (laughs) So anyway, but my first year, I remember, oh God. One of the fraternities -- man, and now I can't even remember what the fraternity was, but it used to be at Lafayette and then they were, I guess, decolonized and they were trying to come back onto [00:26:00] campus. It was two --

SB: DU?

PT: It was only two Greek letters. Yes! Delta Upsilon.

SB: Upsilon, yeah.

PT: OK, wow. Good! Yes, it was DU. They were trying to come back on campus. Well, I think they did, I think.

SB: They did.

PT: OK. So they were -- I had heard about that, and which was so ironic for me probably because of my own internalized issues. I was never that into Greek life from the beginning, but for some reason, a couple people I knew from my hometown who also went to Lafayette were considering joining DU, and they were sort of marketing themselves and trying to come back to campus as being a more diverse and accepting fraternity, which I feel like I -- in a way, I was going to say, I was duped. I bought into that, and so I actually started pledging. There wasn't ha-- I don't know. It wasn't like the typical hazing. I don't really

remember exactly what the pledging consisted of at this moment, [00:27:00] but I just remember that my intention was to give it a try and to possibly join DU. And then I found out through the rumor mill -- because I still was not out on campus yet -- that there had been some discussion amongst some of the heads of DU that were trying to recolonize, that they had heard that I was gay, and that that was going to be a problem. And I just heard it from other students through the rumor mill, and it pissed me off. I became very angry, and hurt, but I think actually more angry than hurt, and I decided that I'm not going to be part of a system that, you know, that subscribes to this or that fosters it. So I guess the official term would be I "de-pledged." I turned in my whatever, I don't even know what it was, whatever I had to, and I just -- I de-pledged. [00:28:00] And I was not quiet about it -- not that I made a scene when I de-pledged, but I certainly was very vocal to friends and people if they asked me why I de-pledged. And I wanted it to be known that this is unacceptable, and this is how it made me feel, and the fact that there were all these rumors. No one even came out and asked me. And (laughs) of course it shouldn't be an issue anyway, but if people were worried that it might be an issue, someone should have a conversation with me about it. And I don't

know if I was that articulate back then in talking about it, but I do know that that was very much how I felt and what I was trying to communicate. So anyway, so I was never really a part of the Greek life. Some of my friends were. A few of them were in fraternities. So certainly not every, you know, frat brother is the stereotype. There were some great people I know who were in the fraternity system, but that does lead me to think about how I ended up -- since I had de-pledged [00:29:00] and I was not in the fraternity system, a couple of the other non-athletic groups that I was involved with, I ended up getting involved with McKelvy House. Is that still there?

SB: Yeah.

PT: OK, great. That was a wonderful experience. I think Curlee Holton?

SB: Yeah.

PT: OK. So he was the faculty in residence at the time that I was there. And I had a few friends who applied and ended up living in McKelvy House at the same time, and that was -- you know, I guess it's known as being, or at least it was known as being a little bit more people who were -- you know, thriving and craving more of an intellectual [unintelligible]. It was also a beautiful (laughs) mansion I had never lived in before. I was like, "This is cool!"

And it was off campus. So I think some of the experiences I had my fresh-- my first year kind of, you know, motivated me even more to try something [00:30:00] off campus. So I ended up living there and I think for the most part, I mean, the other students who were living there were -- there was diversity in terms of political views and I think there were some people who were not necessarily anti-gay, but certainly more conservative in their political views. But the majority of people in the house were pretty progressive and liberal, and I was free to be me and no one questioned it. And I made some good friends while I was living there. And actually, now that I think about it, there was one other student who was a year ahead of me who did come out to me. That's the thing I'm remembering now, is there were two or three students who came out to me during the course of my tenure as a student there. They were all women. (laughs) So going back to this one student, so when we were -- we were both living in McKelvy House and she came out to me, and I think she was open to other students in [00:31:00] the house. But she, for her own reasons, was never really that open on campus, and I -- we unfortunately didn't keep in touch so I have no idea how she progressed or what the evolution of her kind of sexual fluidity was. I don't know if she identifies now as part

of the community or not. But that's just another example of -- it felt like this secret. Like she would come out to me, and we would talk to each other, and we became pretty good friends, at least that --

SB: Yes, during that time.

PT: -- those couple of years. So I did McKelvy House for one year and then the last two years that I lived there on -- well, the last two years, I went back on campus and I was living in -- I think I put it -- Ruef Hall? No, not Ruef Hall. Ramer, I think it was?

SB: Ramer.

PT: I was on the -- the reason I was living there was I was living on the Straight Edge floor. And a very -- well, we're not friends anymore, but [00:32:00] a really good friend of mine, when we were at Lafayette at least, was [redacted by QAP reviewer], who as far as I know is not part of the community, but he was always a wonderful friend, wonderful ally. I think that was sort of his mission. Like he was one of the pioneer students really trying to start -- I think he was one of the founders of Straight Edge, and I was good friends with him. So I mention this only because I wasn't entirely driven by this mission of Straight Edge, to be totally -- I guess people usually think of Straight Edge as anti-drugs and



anti-alcohol. That really wasn't my, you know, mission for joining Straight Edge. I think it was because I was good friends with [redacted by QAP reviewer] and I felt like other students who were living on the floor seemed like they would be OK with who I was, and I felt like I'd be comfortable there. And for the most part, I was. There were a couple of things that happened on that floor too, never involving, you know, my friends, but some [00:33:00] of the other residents who weren't so gay-friendly. So I kind of learned differently. But my overall experience while I was living there, you know, I think it was a good decision.

SB: Yeah. Can you speak to what some of those experiences were?

PT: Some of the negative ones?

SB: Yeah.

PT: The one that comes to mind is -- and this brings up a kind of -- again, it's a diversity issue and kind of international differences. One of the students who lived on the floor -- because that was the thing. In that dorm, I think there were a lot of -- it was known as a dorm where a lot of international students lived. I don't even remember but some of the floors may have at that time been dedicated to different cultural groups. But one of the

other students living on the Straight Edge floor was  
(pause) -- God, I don't re-- he was Middle Eastern. I  
don't remember if he was Egyptian? [00:34:00] But I know  
he was Middle Eastern. He had very strong views that were  
strong anti-gay views. And since I was a pretty open  
figure by that time on campus, there were a couple times  
that we clashed, and I just remember there was one time  
when he ended up snapping at me. Not that he got  
physically violent, but certainly what he was saying, he --  
I don't know if we had an argument. I don't know remember  
how it happened but he ended up telling me if -- oh, the  
gay people in his country are either killed or (laughs) --  
God, why am I blanking on this term too? Excuse me for  
using blunt language because I'm forgetting the technical  
term, but having their penises cut off.

SB: Oh, yeah, castrated.

PT: Yeah, castrated. And I didn't, in all honesty, as horrible  
as that is to say to someone (laughs) who identifies that  
way and is that way, I didn't take it as a personal threat.  
Like I didn't feel my physical safety [00:35:00] at harm.  
I knew it was just him expressing his cultural views and  
how much -- I guess in his mind, hatred he had for gays.  
But it certainly wasn't pleasant.

SB: No.

PT: That's the one that comes to mind.

SB: Yeah, yeah.

PT: But I also, again, know that that's -- there were huge cultural clashes there, so.

SB: Yeah, yeah. Athletics, any impact on your experience at Lafayette for LGBTQ individuals?

PT: Yeah, I -- (laughs) never been much into sports or athletics, so no I never really got -- I mean, I know that's huge, was huge, at Lafayette. I'm sure it still is. So no, I was never really involved in athletics.

SB: And what about academics? You talked a little bit about some classes that you took. How was the classroom climate generally [00:36:00] about LGBTQ issues?

PT: I mean, that's a great question. I think, since I majored in -- well it's funny because when I started out there, I was pre-med. When I began, I was pre-med, and then I think by the end of my first year, I declared psychology as my major. Sexuality really wasn't talked about very much at all in most of the pre-med courses I took. I think in the psychology courses though, I don't really remember a lot of conversation specifically around LGBT issues, but it did come up from time to time, and certainly there were influences such as yourself that -- you know, I think that you had written a text on the psychology of gender.

SB: Mm-hmm.

PT: So certainly, in -- and I don't think I ever took a course from you on psychology of gender, or did I? I took a course from [00:37:00] you. No, I took counseling psychology from you. But clearly, that's part of who you are so that came through in the classroom. And I think psychology is a field, in general, where certainly there's still a lot of institutionalized, you know, oppression that exists, but I think we also are more advanced in our thinking, at least many of us, relative to other fields. So being in psychology, I think, yes. I felt very comfortable to be able to -- as comfortable as I could be in terms of my own development at that time to talk about sexuality. As you know, my honors thesis was on homophobia or homonegativity.

SB: I still talk about your -- that research in my classes.

PT: No, that's great because we published it together!

SB: I know.

PT: Yeah, so clearly that's an example of how I knew that it was accepted. And I'm sure if there were a way for me to have developed a study working [00:38:00] directly with the gay community as opposed to just the gay issue, faculty would have supported me in doing that as well. I think, I mean, I said this -- I think this was on the recording, but

if not, I certainly said it to you. Even though I had applied to transfer at one point, one of the reasons I was so happy that I didn't transfer is that I honestly really felt like I got a tremendous education at Lafayette. And being in the Bachelor of Science psychology program, you guys were great in research training. And I always felt like I could research anything I wanted, even if it was LGBT issues. So, yeah. So my academic experience there, I think, was very inclusive and welcoming and allowed me to explore what I needed to explore at that time.

SB: So there wasn't any course that you took that you felt sort of stigmatized or the, you know, content was sort of a negative [00:39:00] thing.

PT: Not really, because in all honesty, if I think of even some other faculty, when I think of other courses I took, I remember my first year, I think you guys -- I think it was relatively new, your -- the curriculum you guys -- the core curriculum you had developed -- but part of it was initiating the first year seminars. I don't know if that started with my year, but if not, it was relatively recent. But I remember the first year seminar I took was -- I don't remember the official name, but something relating to paradigms. And my instructor was Pat Donahue. There were two sections. The other section was Suzanne Westfall.

Both of them were, you know, of course because they're both in English, and at least Suzanne was obviously very much in theater, you know, were very progressive-minded, and so always weaving in looking at literary themes [00:40:00] and symbolism around LGBT issues as well as sexism, and racism, and oppression, and diversity. So from the get-go, like that was very woven into a lot of the courses I took, but I also had enough, I guess, self-insight to be choosing courses that I figured would cater to what I wanted. I really don't have any memories, you know, of any particular courses or instructors where I felt, you know, threatened or, you know, silenced in any way. It's not to say that that didn't happen once or twice, but they're obviously not, you know, strong memories for me.

SB: Right. Aside from that, coming -- that Take Back the Night event at the end of your first year, are there any other like campus events or public memories that relate to LGBTQ issues, or [00:41:00] speakers, or anything else?

PT: Let's see. I think we did -- and I think that, again, this was largely through FLAGB, but I know (laughs) -- I remember once we constructed a closet on the quad as an experiential activity and had students go in the closet where we had written all of these homophobic epithets all

around to try and give them a taste of what it might feel like to be in the closet.

SB: Wasn't this National Coming Out Day, like in October?

PT: Yes! Yeah, yeah, yes. Thank you. So yes, that was for National Coming Out Day. And I want to say, although I don't remember the specific events, that I think we tried to do -- to develop a couple of events around World AIDS Day too. I think -- no, I don't think that Lafayette -- when I was there, I don't think that Lafayette had already brought out a [00:42:00] piece of the World AIDS quilt.

SB: I know it was there. I don't remember what years it was.

PT: Yeah. But for some reason, I remember thinking about that a lot when I was a student and talking about it with other students. I don't know if we mobilized enough to actually get it that, or if it had been there before maybe or we're trying to get it back --

SB: Yeah. It might have been there before.

PT: But anyway, so in terms of specific events, I don't know. That closet stands out (laughs) to me. And I know we brought -- I don't remember specifics -- we brought in some speakers as well. I also volunteered. I have no idea what it was called, but I volunteered for some sort of student group where -- and I don't remember who the faculty person involved was -- but we went around to local -- what were

they, high schools, I guess -- to talk about HI-- not, we never talked about LGBT issues per se, but we did talk about HIV-related issues, like HIV prevention. So I was involved with [00:43:00] that. So that's on the periphery, but certainly connected. Yeah. That's all I'm remembering right now. I'm sure other things might pop into my mind, but.

SB: OK. Do you have, I don't know if, you know, it's been a few years (laughs) since you've been there, but do you have any sense of how things have changed or haven't changed at Lafayette? I don't know if you, you know, have kept up at all with Lafayette.

PT: Yeah. I have to the extent that I still get that -- I've always given them my new address so I still get the Lafayette Magazine, and I was very -- or it was very heartwarming. I was very touched when I saw a few years back, I think, there was an issue where the cover of it showed in front of Skillman Library a big like pride celebration. And I think there were a bunch of students wearing different colored pride shirts. And then there was a huge [00:44:00] article within the magazine, and I don't even -- this wasn't the alumni magazine. This was the school publication. I remember reading that and just



thinking, oh my God, this is amazing. Like it's wonderful to see that --

SB: They accept change (laughs)

PT: -- because nothing like that would have happened when I was there.

SB: Yeah?

PT: I had hoped that that was a sign that things were changing. I remember from reading the article, seeing FLAGB doesn't exist, but I think there's one or two other student groups that have formed in place of it. I'd love to know if there's actually a group that exists of LGBT-identified students, as opposed to just friends of. Do you know if that exists?

SB: There is.

PT: OK.

SB: Not all members of the community are part of the group, meaning there's -- with lots of student groups it's, you know, dependent upon sort of personalities and stuff like that.

PT: Yeah. Yeah, but hearing you say "members of the community" just there implies even outside of groups, [00:45:00] you know, means that clearly there's been a change because there is a visible community.

SB: Yeah.

PT: There wasn't -- I mean, that was what was so interesting to me when I was a student is that not only was there not a visible community, if there was an invisible community, (laughter) I mean, it was so invisible that I couldn't find it. So, yeah.

SB: Just to go back to that, so there was -- I mean, in terms of your own dating and finding romantic connections?

PT: I always say that -- I mean, I did -- there was someone I dated my last couple years, not at Lafayette but at one of the -- I think he was from -- I think he had just graduated but he was from Muhlenberg College, so in that area.

SB: Oh, uh-huh. How did you meet?

PT: Well, I'll tell you, but what I was gonna say is just I used to, because I don't talk about this very much anymore, but I used to always say that Lafayette was great for my development as a gay activist but not so great for my development as [00:46:00] a gay man, romantically or sexually, because there really wasn't -- I didn't date very much. My first three years there, I don't think I -- or no, my first two years, I didn't date anyone. I mean, that was a struggle for me. I remember with all my friends, watching them doing their typical college shenanigans and I was always like living through them, in that area of my life. There was a student a couple years ahead of me who

-- well again, I think she's pretty open, at this point in her life, but at that point in time, she was not open -- again, which I think is remarkable because she sort of took me under her wing knowing that I was a gay man, but she wasn't iden-- either she wasn't identified or she just wasn't open about it. [00:47:00] But at the time she, I remember, took me a couple times to New York because she wanted to introduce me -- she was involved in the theater scene and she wanted to introduce me to a couple of her friends who were gay. Or, I don't know about a couple, but at least one. And actually, this was an older man that -- well, (laughs) my age now.

SB: (laughs) Really old.

PT: It seemed old. (laughs) So, but yeah, I mean, come on. I was, what was I at the time? I was probably 19, maybe. And she took me to New York and she introduced me to this guy who -- I don't know what he was but I'm guessing -- I don't even think he -- I'm guessing he was in his forties. I don't even think it was thirties. So it was very weird and kind of odd, like I -- because it's one of those things where you think, "Well just because he's gay doesn't mean that I'm gonna connect with him." But it was so sweet and I thought -- I mean, I really appreciated it because I had no real social [00:48:00] gay life at Lafayette. So I went

and I met this guy, and you know, it turned out to be a great thing because he offered me free tickets. He and I went on a quote-unquote -- I use air quotes -- date because nothing really happened other than seeing the show. But I went to see "Love! Valour! And Compassion!" He had tickets to go see that. So for me, being at -- in all honesty, to say this, even though I said, I -- in the grand scheme, I loved Lafayette in many different ways. I was also a little bit trapped in terms of my sexual identity. So to feel kind of -- I keep saying this, but -- stifled or suffocated in that area in certain ways, to have the ability to, you know, to have a friend who took me to New York to introduce me to someone, to then go see a play like "Love! Valour! And Compassion!" was amazing. And then I remember one year when I was at Lafayette, through FLAGB, [redacted by QAP reviewer] -- I know [00:49:00] she'd be comfortable, you know, being part of this -- she was our -- it's funny, it was just like a cute name we gave her -- our cultural liaison. (laughter) She ended up discovering -- because at the time it was not that well known -- she discovered "Rent." Like I remember her reading about it, bringing it to my attention, saying, "Oh, we should try to get funds together to go do a school trip." So we ended up getting together a bunch of students through FLAGB and we

went -- we all went to see "Rent," having no idea how relevant that would be to my life, not because of HIV, but just because of the gay community. And I had an ama-- it was again another amazing experience that I had while I was at Lafayette because of other students, but not really students who identified as LGBT, at least not at the time. So [00:50:00] socially, that's as far as I feel like my connections were with the gay community.

SB: Right. And there was no -- so with other schools in the area --

PT: There was really no inner -- yeah, there really wasn't much connecting or cross-fertilization. There was one time, and this was actually how, the one person I did date, which was my last -- we didn't date the whole time, but I mean it was within my last two years at Lafayette. I don't even remember how I connected with him but there was a student from Muhlenberg, I think, who reached out to me. And this is what I -- I'm trying to recreate this memory. I think this is the only way I can make sense of how it happened. We must have put together -- one thing that I do remember we did through FLAGB, we created safe zones at Lafayette. And I think we developed -- we put together a workshop [00:51:00] relating to safe zones --

SB: And [redacted by QAP reviewer] was part of that.

PT: Oh, OK. And I think we had advertised in the community about that, and so there must have been this student from Muhlenberg College who reached out to me wanting to come to it. So I think that's how I met him. His name was Bob. (laughs) For what it's worth. So he came to go to that event, and he and I actually started talking one day and he had a similar -- Muhlenberg, I always felt because they had a much stronger theater department there at the time at least, they were more progressive than Lafayette. I think it was still a relatively conservative school like all of the little Lehigh Valley colleges, but they were ahead of Lafayette in terms of their progress on that front. So I don't know that he had the same exact experience, but certainly there was not a huge, you know, gay community there either. So I think he and I did connect on that level and we actually [00:52:00] started dating. So I did finally in my last year, or second -- or maybe it was my junior year -- have an experience where I think I dated him probably for about six months or so. So I was finally able to -- I think that was actually my first, you know, gay sexual experiences too. So that was -- I was like, finally!

SB: Finally! (laughter)

PT: And my junior year? But a positive reflection on Lafayette. I'll say when I was dating him, I didn't feel like I had to keep it a secret. I think I was -- I mean, because I was so kind of open on campus at that time, I actually felt safe and able to introduce, you know, friends of mine at Lafayette to him. So I would say he was my first significant, you know, boyfriend, but it's still very different than the average college student. I didn't have, sadly I feel, like I didn't have a lot -- (laughs) I mean, in all honesty, since I'm more progressive-minded [00:53:00] about this, I didn't have a lot of one-night stands. I didn't have the ability to be experimenting, you know, and having fun sexually. So the one experience I did have, and certainly I could have sought it out in other ways which would have probably been unhealthy, and fortunately that didn't happen either, but I did have this one, you know, relationship in college that just kind of randomly happened. But again, it wasn't someone on our college; it was at a neighboring college.

SB: Yeah. How could Lafayette better support LGBTQ students now, and also for alums?

PT: Yeah. OK, well that's interesting because you mentioned to me before we started the formal interview that at Lafayette, there has been a lot of progress in terms of

forming sort of a, I don't -- I guess an -- a queer  
[00:54:00] alumni group, etc. I don't know about any of  
that, actually. I've never been contacted and they have  
all my contact info.

SB: So you never heard about it.

PT: No. No. So again, the only sign that I -- the only thing  
that led me to think, "Oh, there's been some progress," was  
that article that I saw in the *Lafayette* magazine a few  
years back. So yeah, whatever progress there is at  
Lafayette, I don't know the answer to that, but I imagine  
if I don't know about it, I'm sure there are some other  
students who would be happy to be involved, you know, who  
don't know about it either.

SB: Right.

PT: That would benefit, you know, you guys at Lafayette to be  
able to broaden it a little bit.

SB: Absolutely.

PT: So, yeah. So asking me like what can Lafayette do, or what  
can people at Lafayette do, that's hard for me to answer  
because I don't really know what anyone -- I don't know  
people's specific [00:55:00] jobs. But figuring out  
mechanisms or ways to reach out to more queer alumni  
certainly, you know, would be important. Like if they



started something, great. But run with it and figure out how to get that out more broadly.

SB: Yeah. All right, that's great. I'm surprised you hadn't heard about it.

PT: Yeah.

SB: Anything we haven't touched on that relates to LGBTQ issues at Lafayette during -- especially during your time?

PT: No. I mean, it's been so long since I've thought about all this stuff, but I th-- no, I think we've covered, you know, most of it. I mean, I will echo just because even though I said it earlier in the interview, you weren't out -- at least I didn't know about it -- you know, when we were working together on our dissertation -- not dissertation, (laughs) on my honors thesis project. Even though, [00:56:00] yeah, it would have been wonderful if that relationship were different at the time, by the same token, I felt incredibly supported by you. And so even without us ever really talking about our personal lives much, you know, you certainly were a good example of -- going back to the question about faculty -- of how I think students who needed support amongst faculty, who had enough insight, or at least were far enough along in their own identity development to actually seek it out, you know, could find that. I mean, I don't remember my exact thought process to

how I even ended up -- maybe you can remind me (laughs) if you know -- but how I ended up matching up with you to do my honors thesis. Yeah. But somehow, through unspoken, you know, words --

SB: Yeah. I mean, [redacted by QAP reviewer] knew more about my personal life. She used [00:57:00] to take care of or check in on my daughter and dog. I had a partner, you know, living -- or so maybe through her it might have been more --

PT: Yes. Well I think on my own, I had sort of -- not that I figured out anything about your personal life, but just from the classes you taught, I mean, and maybe -- I don't know, maybe even the safe zone program, I just knew that, OK, you would be a good fit for the type of project I wanted to develop. And then yes, certainly I was good friends with [redacted by QAP reviewer] and I knew that she had a good relationship with you. And so I think it's probably through her that I heard from time to time that you were in a, you know, relationship with another woman. But interestingly, again, I just -- we never spoke about it. So, you know, so I don't know how much that has changed on campus for students but -- and that would be a way, I think, for making students feel more comfortable themselves coming out. Maybe that would [00:58:00]

encourage even more student advocacy and activism if faculty, you know, are more open about their personal lives than they were when I was there. I'd be curious. I don't know much that -- not necessarily for you yourself --

SB: Well so you might be --

PT: -- but in general. I --

SB: -- interested to know. I mean, there have been a few like lunchtime get-togethers between queer student and queer faculty where --

PT: That's awesome.

SB: You know, I mean -- yeah the students still obviously need support and models, and they have questions, you know. I think as you say, certainly we know the importance of role models and to know people can lead full, happy lives.

(laughs) You know? Even if parents and family members perhaps are not so accepting and stuff. So I mean, there was a change afoot, more needed.

PT: No, but I think that's incredibly important because as I'm sure we were both aware, in the literature, both [00:59:00] for -- especially for LGBT youth, but I think it has -- you know, for college students as well, thinking of the upper spectrum of youth and young adults, the biggest risk factors for depression and suicide is -- you know, are really the sense of isolation. And having family

acceptance is the biggest protective factor against that. Well, in college, your college community becomes your family. So I think the more support and even engagement that there is, you know, between students and faculty on that front, I think it's incredibly important. So I'm thrilled to hear that some of that is occurring.

SB: Yeah. We'll make sure to get you on a mailing list.

PT: Yeah, yeah.

SB: Anyway, let me thank you formally.

PT: Sure.

SB: And I want to take your picture.

END OF AUDIO FILE (59:47)

#### ADDENDUM

SB: Okay, so we are talking -- we're adding in and talking about the *Princeton Review* and Lafayette being named the most homophobic school.

PT: So I remember during my freshman or first-year orientation, already from the first week having the sense that this is not -- again it's going back to how I felt at the time,

which has changed since then -- but that first week feeling this is not a good fit for me. I'm not going to be able to come out, even though I had already come out to my parents. I already had the sense this was a very conservative, unwelcoming environment. And I remember standing in the school bookstore, flipping through books, because I guess in my mind I was already thinking about -- maybe I should think about transferring. I remember finding the *Princeton Review* and thinking how [00:01:00] completely ironic it was that here I am my first year -- or my first week -- at Lafayette during orientation, flipping through the *Princeton Review*, seeing all of those categories, because I didn't know about that book before I applied, and seeing that Lafayette was ranked number one as the most -- actually what they even labeled it -- I think they call it the "most ostracizing of gays on campus" was their category. And when I saw Lafayette, the irony was that several of the colleges I applied to -- they were all sort of these small private liberal arts colleges in the Pennsylvania area -- several of them were on there, but the biggest irony was that Lafayette was listed as the very first. So, unfortunately, I think the reality was what it was, but that certainly kind of cemented my thinking at a very pivotal point during orientation. So that's when I

flipped to the other category, which was -- I don't know what they called it -- the most "affirming [00:02:00] of gays" and was looking at the colleges and universities listed in there -- I think Vassar College was one of the ones listed -- so that's when I started thinking about transferring.

SB: Well, I'm glad you didn't. All right, signing off again.

END OF ADDENDUM AUDIO FILE (02:16)