BasowSusan 202010622

MARY ARMSTRONG:All right, this is Mary Armstrong. I am a professor of Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies at Lafayette College and also in the English Department, and it's June 22, 2021. And this is our first post-COVID interview for the Queer Archives Project at Lafayette. And I am sitting here with Susan Basow, Charles A. Dana, Professor of Psychology-Emerita Lafayette College. Incredibly happy to have her participating in the project today, and we're going to start, Susan, with the usual formalities. Before we go into the deeper part of the interview, every participant in the interview is asked to state their name, confirm their participation is voluntary, and that they've given their informed consent. Would you mind doing that for me?

SUSAN BASOW: I'm happy to. I'm happy to be here. My name is Susan Basow, I am participating voluntarily. I have given my informed consent. [00:01:00]

MA: Okay, marvelous, and I haven't actually asked you about taking a photo. But we can take a photo now, if you -- if you like, or we can use one. But do we have your permission to use a photo for the site?

SB: Absolutely.

MA: Absolute … so, we'll let you pick it. So, there you go.

SB: Okay. Sounds good.

MA: All right. Marvelous, and, in fact, a series of photos perhaps because most of our interview transcripts, and certainly ones for faculty have used earlier faculty pictures, as well as, you know, various presences on social media, and then a recent one. So if that's okay with you, we'll use some of those .

SB: Yeah, and I know, you know, Lafayette has that sequence of pictures because my department dug them up for my retirement party, some of the older pictures. So --

MA: Oh my gosh.

SB: -- that would be -- yeah.

MA: Well, that's easy. So I'll talk to John Shaw --

SB: Yeah.

MA: -- who put that together and we'll get an entire photo spread all for you. That'll be wonderful. okay, great. Thanks. That's helpful. All right. So some general things about the interview [00:02:00] the questions are prompts, and in your case really only prompts because your length of time at Lafayette will be something that will guide you more than my questions, is my thinking. And of course, you can decline to address any suggested topic, but the main thing is that the story is the story of your time at Lafayette. It is your story.

So the Queer Archives Project is not trying to get any particular story. We're interested in LGBTQ history in all its shapes and forms, according to what the person wants to share. So the idea is we'd rather hear from you than me, and you could -- any story or thing that you want to share, please share. We will send you a copy of the transcript for review before it becomes available to anyone else. And certainly, if you have any memorabilia or anything that you want to contribute to the site, you can let me know. So here's the nitty gritty: personal pronouns and name?

SB: I use her/she and my name is Susan.

MA: Okay, so that was easy one, which sets [00:03:00] you up for a fairly -- this sounds hard, but it's meant to be a really short question. How do you describe your relationship to Lafayette, so defining yourself as a member of the Lafayette community?

SB: Yeah, I was a faculty member for 43 years in the Psychology Department, and I also was part of the Women's Studies program as it was initially called.

MA: Okay. Marvelous. So there's two routes in Lafayette there. And so that's 43 years. So what is the first -- what year did you arrive?

SB: I arrived in 1977.

MA: So arrived in 1977, and retired --

SB: Retired in … July 1, 2020.

MA: And are much missed, if I could add an editorial comment. How do you identify as a member of the LGBTQ community? What's the sort of term -- terms you prefer or way you'd like to talk about it?

SB: I think, you know, currently, I would identify as queer. I like the ambiguity and flexibility [00:04:00] of it. So that's what I'm most comfortable with now, although I like the term lesbian. But it seems to be sort of an old term now.

MA: Yeah, it's interesting how it has become, it has moved from a radically sharp declaration of identity to something that seems old-fashioned because it's gender specific.

SB: It seems old-fashioned, yeah.

MA: Yeah. I see that too. And anything else to add? Just in terms of personal information?

SB: You know, I think the time at Lafayette is a time when I evolved in terms of my own understanding of my own sexual orientation. And so, you know, as the time at Lafayette moved from my initial arrival, when I identified as strictly heterosexual, you know, to the time I left where I identified completely as queer, you know, that I sort of went through a number of different stages and that of course affected my

experience at Lafayette, so I'll speak to that [00:05:00] when it's relevant.

MA: All right, yes. Okay, that's wonderful. And that makes a lot of sense because you have an enormous timeline. And I guess for the sort of the framework you're describing is that you become a queer-identified person somewhere within that timeline.

SB: Right.

MA: And so it changes your perspective, even as you are engaging in Lafayette all the time.

SB: Right. Exactly.

MA: So that makes a lot of sense, and just speak to that as, of course, as you please. And let's see. So, the 43 years is a long time and your time on campus, you saw a lot of changes. And you went from an assistant professor to a full professor with a named chair, you were involved in Women's Studies, slash Women's and Gender Studies slash Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies, and then we can talk about that as well. But you've had a number of different positionalities. Of course, that comes with tons of service work, right? So lots of [00:06:00] a varied and storied career at the college. So we can start any way you want, and I thought the, the best way to sort of begin our conversation would be to just ask if you could sketch out the big picture sense of how you see issues around -- and they

might be different categories -- gender and sexuality, right, the way you would engage with them as, say, WGSS person thinking about them as important categories. How that changed over these 43 years. It's a really big question. So it might be topics, it might be eras, but just to sort of let you open the conversation, and we can follow where you lead.

SB: I think that makes sense, and, you know, when I think about my own personal trajectory, I think it in some ways, it is both a product of and reflected in Lafayette's trajectory over that timespan as well. When I first came, which was 1977, the college had been now seven years into co-education. [00:07:00] I didn't realize that when I first got there, or when I was hired or accepted the position, but it was a very male-dominated, particularly white, you know, heterosexual, conservative, male-dominated. Obviously, there were only fraternities, and so the student life was just a very bizarre one. I had gone to public university, you know, and just a very different -- and an all-women's college, Douglass College. And, you know, so I really felt I had landed in another culture altogether. The faculty, on the other hand, was quite mixed. And my department of eight people in Psychology, half were women, and they were wonderful and it was great. So I felt very supported, and I actually hadn't known that, that there was the

rest of the college when I had interviewed for the job. I came in. [00:08:00] I was already identified as a feminist. I had just finished writing a textbook on the psychology of gender. I had a background in counseling psychology at which I also worked at Lafayette for my first sort of 10 years, part time in the counseling center. And so I mean, I had a strong sense of allyship, although that term was not one used at the time. This was, you know, 1977. You know, I felt comfortable with people, you know, in the LGBT community. Again, it wasn't known as the LGBT community, and I think that my identification as a feminist was one that unbeknownst [00:09:00] to me, but subsequently understood, made people think I was a lesbian from the get-go. I remember when I interviewed for the position, I wore a three-piece pinstripe suit, pantsuit.

MA: Did you really?

SB: I did, and I didn't even think twice about it, you know? So I mean, I am femme appearing. I've always been, but, you know, not necessarily femmie in my behavior otherwise. And anyway, so I think people thought I was a lesbian. I didn't know that. And I did have a very unnerving experience my first year, where a colleague, a friend, who was very well-meaning, asked me after I had been there a few months, whether I was a lesbian, and I said no. And she said, "Well, you could tell me.

It's okay." I said, "Why are you asking?" And she said, because there's a rumor around amongst students [00:10:00] that I was lesbian, and this one student said that I had come on to her. And I was completely freaked out. First of all, there was no student I was interested in. I didn't identify as lesbian, and I didn't know who was. This colleague did not tell me who it was. But all of a sudden, I had visions of *The Children* -- you know, Lillian Hellman's *The Children's Hour*.

MA: Absolutely.

SB: So this is my first year.

MA: That's terrifying.

SB: It was terrifying. And my friend was saying, "I just want to warn you," you know, and the warning clearly was being a lesbian, or being an out lesbian, or students thinking you're lesbian is bad. So that really colored my experience for the next 40 years, pretty much.

MA: Wow. I guess and it's associated with predatory behavior, which would be the worst disaster that you could have happen as a --

SB: Oh my god! And I could -- you know -- and the thing was, I had come -- I mean, this was the '70s, I had come out of sort of the personal growth movement, I did lots of groups, [00:11:00] so touch -- which was nicknamed "touchy feely." And so I was a

person -- I learned to not do it -- that, you know, would touch somebody's shoulder or something like that in just a general way. Maybe I had done that with a student. I mean, that would have been consistent with the way I did, I stopped all touching. For sure.

MA: Yeah. Yeah.

SB: As a counselor, I didn't do that. But I, you know, if I was talking to a student, they were upset, you know, I might have put my hand on their arm. I mean, nothing sexualized. So I was very freaked and so I curtailed some of my sort of warmth, interpersonal warmth with students. So nobody should get sort of any idea that I had any romantic, sexual interest in them. But it was also a message about being gay at Lafayette. Being out at Lafayette, and, again, I had this illusion of protection because I was not lesbian. It did, though, make me think if I were that would be even more frightening. [00:12:00] So when I actually became aware, you know, several years later, really -- about five years later that I actually did have sexual feelings, and that was an outgrowth of just opening my mind to sort of the realm of, you know, connections. I remember reading Adrienne Rich's *Compulsory Heterosexuality* and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's, *Female World of Love and Ritual*, and just realizing I totally had always had my closest relationships with women. And, you

know, and then sort of recognizing that maybe I had not let myself be aware of sexual feelings I might have. And so it was a gradual process for me, and I have to say, I was totally supported by my colleagues and friends. I was part of a group that started the Women's Studies Program at Lafayette. We were six women, and we met one summer in '82. And we met almost every day, I think, [00:13:00] for several -- you know, for like six weeks, or maybe it was even eight weeks. We read widely. This is how I read those articles, which are outside the realm of my psychology reading. And it was life-changing for me, and really expanded my -- or spurred my own personal growth in many ways. Intellectually, and, you know, certainly, in terms of my gender exploration and sexual identity exploration. But it was a process that was shaded by that first experience of, it would be a bad thing to be gay at Lafayette and to be out and known that way. One of the members of the group was Lynn Van Dyke who was, you know, tremendously brave and kind and very supportive, and she was out to us, but not necessarily on campus and the campus in general at that time, there was no one who was known to be out. There were [00:14:00] people, students and faculty, who were suspected of being out, but nobody was sort of publicly out.

MA: That would be the like in ’80s -- like in the late ’70s, ’80s.

SB: Yeah. This is now --

MA: Nobody’s out, basically.

SB: -- in the ’80s.

MA: Yeah. Yeah.

SB: I would meet students or get to know students, sometimes through the Counseling Center, my work there, students would come. They were unhappy in Lafayette because it was really a difficult place to be if you were queer, and they were struggling with that not so much their own identity, though there were a couple who were struggling with their identity, but more just how do you deal with the campus environment.

MA: That first experience is so classic in the sense that you can be disciplined with homophobia or with sort of, you know, cisgender demands, even if you’re not violating them, and they will teach you what you need to know regardless of -- right? [00:15:00] So you, had you were burdened with homophobia before you had any identity.

SB: Right. And it set the, you know, standard for like what’s accept -- what’s okay and what’s not okay. Especially vis-à-vis students.

MA: Yeah. That’s high stakes stuff too. Yeah.

SB: And students were I mean, I was already -- at that point, I think I taught my first psych of gender class ’81 or ’82. And so I was including materials, certainly about homophobia, there. And I actually included it in all my classes and you know, at some -- depending on which one I was teaching, but -- and when we offered the intro to women’s studies class, it was part of that.

MA: Would have been psychology of women at that point?

SB: It was not psychology -- there was no course before I offered --

MA: Or it was psychology of gender?

SB: I offered it as a psychology of gender course because --

MA: Okay. I wondered, because I know sometimes classically, they start as --

SB: Yes --

MA: That’s very interesting.

SB: -- because in my previous employment, I had been at [00:16:00] the College of New Jersey. Then it was called Trenton State College. I was in the Counseling Center, but I could teach. The psych department already had a psych of women class, and I wanted to offer something. And I also was, because of my counseling background, I also was very much concerned about men’s -- you know, I thought men were even more affected

by gender, then, then women were, and women were talking about it but men weren't. And I saw the cost to them in terms of, you know, recognizing their own emotionality in terms of relationships, and, you know, just the way -- dealing with feelings, all of that. So, I mean, I also I wanted to include men. So that's where I --

MA: That's interesting.

SB: -- I started teaching a course on masculinity, femininity, and there was no textbook which led to my developing the textbook.

MA: Oh, okay.

SB: That's how I got into that.

MA: Oh. Oh.

SB: So my textbook [00:17:00] was published for the, in the first edition in 1980.

MA: So you wrote the book.

SB: I wrote the book.

MA: Excellent.

SB: And, so then I want to teach a course, you know, in that, so I taught the course, I guess, in '81, when it was -- my text was available.

MA: That's marvelous. You wrote your own textbook, in a sense, and that's really interesting.

SB: I wrote my textbook.

MA: And that aligned with all your reading in women's studies, which was happening, pretty much simultaneously --

SB: It happened, sort of the summer after I taught that course. So yes, I mean, my mind was, you know, expanding, expanding, especially interdisciplinarily. You know, I was grounded in psychology, but then with the exposure and the readings that we did, and the discussions that we had, I saw a whole other sort of world. In particular, I remember, the French feminists blew my mind. It's like, what are you talking, writing with the body, that is like, it's just so ridiculous. You know, and -- [00:18:00]

MA: Hélène Cixous and --

SB: Oh, my god, Irigaray, and it just was like, oh, my god. But, you know, it was great to know these things. I had no idea.

MA: It scrambles your mind beautifully, doesn't it?

SB: Totally scrambled up. So anyway, the student reactions, I have to say there were a range of reactions, first of all, to feminism in general, but certainly to the exploration of, you know, sexual diversity and, and homophobia, which was, you know -- you know, heterosexism, and, you know, the American Psychological Association, American Psychiatric Association had

already removed homosexuality as an abnormal disorder, but that was just in ’73. So there was still obviously people thinking that it was a disorder.

MA: That’s not that long of time.

SB: It’s not that long of a time.

MA: That’s pretty -- yeah.

SB: You know, and it was --

MA: Right. That makes a lot of sense.

SB: -- it was controversial then and probably continues to be so [00:19:00] but -- you know, so the, this was still the mindset of if students had heard anything, it was often in the sense of, you know, disorder. Yeah, you know, and I made sure when I used to teach the course, that was labeled abnormal psychology that I made clear, this was not, we’re not studying that because it is not abnormal psychology.

MA: Yeah. That’s so interesting. It’s like the front lines of a certain sort of movement from illness to not a state of illness.

SB: Yeah.

MA: It’s -- you’re right on -- the right on the act -- like the ground is changing under your feet.

SB: Yeah, exactly. So --

MA: Wow. How did students respond to this material?

SB: You know, it varied. I mean, there was so much that students were getting in their college education. Fortunately, I think that was, like different from what they grew up with. So they were being exposed to lots of new ideas. I mean, especially at that time, I mean, majority of our students came from conservative, privileged families, you know, and there wasn't much diversity [00:20:00] among the student body, so just recognizing that not everybody lives that way, and not everybody's, you know, way of being -- you know, being in the world is because somehow they were too lazy or whatever some fault of their own. I mean, starting getting introduced to systemic forces, you know, and cultural issues and social pressures and -- I mean, that was sort of a -- for a lot of students, this was how they grew. I mean, it was wonderful. It was part of what made my job feel like I'm doing something in this world, you know. I'm opening -- I'm helping expand students' minds and perspectives in a way that hopefully makes them better citizens and people in the world.

MA: It's sort of -- it's like, on the forefront of the new liberal arts education.

SB: Yes.

MA: It's like, what liberal arts education does, right?

SB: I know. I felt like --

MA: That is so exciting. I mean this is --

SB: It was exciting.

MA: -- really amazing.

SB: There were students who were not happy about it, to challenge their teaching. You know, that what they had. There were students who were religious, who, you know, are offended [00:21:00] by things. But I have to say it was -- there was a self-selection factor in terms of students who chose to take my classes, and again, I think -- and, to some degree, I was happy with that, that I had a reputation some students who didn't want to take my classes, like, that's okay for me, but I do remember that there are also students, I remember, I just sort of picture, you know, groups of football players with their arms crossed, and just, you know, sitting in the back of the room, and, you know, and then getting evaluations at the end of June, I'm sure from them, I was a feminazi, this was "feminazi" time, you know.

MA: Right. I remember that emerged as a term in the '80s.

SB: Yeah, in the '80s, and you know, and ugly to boot. That's an evaluation that sticks in my mind. But there were always students who really opened up, and it was exciting, and I worked with wonderful [00:22:00] students. So I mean, that takes us into, so really, the '80s. And then as we get to the '90s, the

world is starting to change a bit. I'm also feeling more comfortable with my identity

MA: As we leave the '80S, if I may interrupt, you're starting to work with the Women's Studies program also. Right?

SB: Right.

MA: So that's starting to parallel?

SB: Yes, it's parallel. So the first women's studies offering was, I think, in '82 --

MA: That sounds right to me.

SB: -- or '82 or '83. And, you know, there were courses in departments. So having this intro course was really important to sort of pull together a minor, which we went for in '85 and I think was effective in '86. It was always a struggle, getting courses offered regularly. It was a struggle getting staffing for the intro course. The school was very slow [00:23:00] in supporting the program in any financial way. I didn't get release time. Sometimes, you know, the departments would graciously allow a faculty member to get credit for teaching in, you know, the intro course. But there often wasn't any sort of extra money for hiring an adjunct to do it or an overload and this went on for years.

MA: Were you teaching yourself in W--

SB: Yeah. I was teaching the intro course.

MA: All right. Because I was thinking you were mentioning teaching in psych, and I wondered, you were also having this parallel experience in Women's Studies.

SB: Yes, you know, but I -- maybe I taught three or four times? We would rotate. The group of six, which slowly dwindled to a group of three. But then we added some people who were interested in, in getting involved with the program, but we sometimes hired an adjunct [00:24:00] when we got money to do that. We had one section a year. Initially, we team-taught it. Again, that's very labor intensive, although it was exciting to do that. And that but then we each, you know, had just one person one course. It was a constant battle to get staffing. And then we finally did get, I think, because I got schooled in strategies that, as long as you do something for free, you aren't going to get paid for it. This was from a women's studies directors meeting from NWSA that I think we all decided we were going to refuse to do this anymore unless there was a stipend and so magically a stipend happened.

MA: Lo and behold. Wow, wow.

SB: You know, we couldn't get course leave, so we got a stipend, [00:25:00] but we did all the programming and stuff like that. And we brought in amazing people. We had Audre

Lorde, you know, and it was a mind-blowing experience. This was in the ’80s.

MA: Audre Lorde came to Lafayette in the ’80s.

SB: Audrey Lorde came to Lafayette. She was in Colton -- in Hogg Hall.

MA: I had no idea.

SB: Yeah.

MA: Wow. She -- she gave a talk?

SB: She gave a talk and --

MA: That’s absolutely amazing.

SB: -- she comes in. And she says I am a Black lesbian feminist, warrior --

MA: Poet?

SB: -- something -- poet. Yes. Something. I mean, her standard introduction.

MA: Yeah.

SB: And everybody was like. She just blew people away. I had to give credit --

MA: Wow. Wow.

SB: -- to Stacey Schlau , who, you know, was part of the Women’s Studies group who, you know, was one of the people who left Lafayette. She was in the Spanish program. She did all the negotiation. Apparently, Audre Lorde, grilled -- put her

feet to the fire, you know, grilled [00:26:00] on the terms of identity, her politics, her this, her that, but whatever Stacey had to do, she managed to get her. It was incredible.

MA: That's amazing. That's amazing. We need to look that up and see how the Lafayette newspaper --

SB: I know!

MA: -- if the Lafayette newspaper reported on it.

SB: All right. It had to be between '82 and '85, because I think Stacy left in '85.

MA: Okay. All right. That's something to look --

SB: It was in those years. It was amazing.

MA: So that's a thunderclap. I mean, that's less than -- that's 10 years after women come Audre Lorde is speaking in Hogg Hall. That's, that's a jump.

SB: It was amazing.

MA: That's a lot to be proud of.

SB: I think I didn't fully appreciate just how amazing she was. You know, I had read some of her stuff, but I mean, as a cultural force, unbelievable. We had lots of amazing people come in, and again, this was organized free labor --

MA: Yeah.

SB: -- you know, from Women's Studies folks. I mean, [00:27:00] I did a lot of it. I wasn't the only one doing it.

MA: "Labor of love" is a phrase that gets used a lot to not use the word "exploitation."

SB: Right. Right.

MA: It's still a labor of love, but it's pretty rough.

SB: Right. I remember we also had -- I had a speaker her, her/his/their name was Dred, D-R-E-D, and it was a person who, this was, it must have been in the early '90s. It was certainly before trans was sort of a more public thing. But she, you know, I mean, I think she at that time, did use she -- but she was in drag, male drag and you know, could, did some -- it was a performance piece. And again, students' minds were blown. We did a lot of mind-blowing at that point.

MA: Yeah. Yeah.

SB: 'Cause minds were fairly closed, you know.

MA: Fairly easy to explode.

SB: So, it was easy to explode. And I'm sure not everybody was thrilled, [00:28:00] but it was exciting times. You know, we felt like we were really opening up the campus and the campus did sort of slowly change. In the '90s, the students -- I mean, everybody was still closeted in the '90s, but as the interview with Peter Theodore, you know, revealed, he was the first person who publicly announced that he was gay on the steps of Farinon as part of a Take Back the Night March or something, I think. I

forgot what year he said ’92 maybe. And then he was, you know, a person was very instrumental, there was a student group called FLAGB, which was Friends of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual, but it was a funny group, because I think there were very few people who actually identified as lesbian, gay [00:29:00] there, but they were allies, for sure. But it was still people were afraid to be part of the group, and then everyone would know that they were gay --

MA: Yeah.

SB: -- you know, or queer in some way.

MA: Or guilt by association kind of a problem.

SB: Yeah, so, you know, it was, I think, important that there was a group that so that, you know, queer students knew that there were at least allies and who they were, but it wasn’t necessarily a support group directly for them.

MA: Like a climate change group.

SB: Yeah.

MA: Like you should … Yeah. Yeah.

SB: Yeah. It did that. And, you know, there were attempts to establish a group, I know, the chaplain at the time, Gary Miller, who was very supportive, and I’m sure he saw people in sort of a, you know, another counseling kind of setting as I did in the Counseling Center, you know, per se, and I know he tried

to establish some group, akin to what was later sort of "behind closed doors" group, but it was so underground [00:30:00] I'm not even sure people knew about -- you know, it was hard for people to know about such a thing.

MA: Almost too well-hidden --

SB: It was so well-hidden.

MA: -- even from, like, queer people wouldn't hear.

SB: In order to be, like safe, it was so well hidden, it was hard to know. So, you know, for students, it was still a really challenging environment, and Lafayette, you know, got named the most homophobic campus sometime in the early '90s

MA: Yeah, '92.

SB: Ninety-two, and I don't think it actually was the most homophobic, but certainly it was homophobic, in the Princeton Review of Colleges, and I know at the time I brought this to -- I remember talking about this in my classes, and I remember some students thinking that this was actually a selling point for Lafayette, that for families who want to send their children to a safe heterosexual school --

MA: Wow. Wow.

SB: -- this would be a good thing.

MA: So it's an advertisement. It's not a black eye. It's an advertisement: Don't worry. There are no queers here.

[00:31:00]

SB: Yeah, or -- yeah, if they come, they quickly leave because they're not happy. And, of course, people did leave. I don't know if there's ever been an analysis of the students who transfer from Lafayette, but I would say a disproportionate percentage were probably, you know, gay, lesbian, or --

MA: Interesting. It's some hidden data that we might never see --

SB: Yeah.

MA: -- which is transfer students being and I wonder too, students of color and just students who feel marginalized.

SB: Yeah. I mean, the students who don't fit in here.

MA: Yeah.

SB: You know, for many reasons.

MA: Yeah. Interesting.

SB: Again, the school has gotten more diverse in many respects, but you know, there's still, like, a dominant type.

MA: Yeah.

SB: Although I have to say the Pepper Prize Lafayette Ideal has changed over time.

MA: Yeah, you've seen that.

SB: Yeah. So, and that's been nice to see.

MA: Yeah. Yeah. I remember in 2010, I think the college did the COACHE survey, and LGBTQ students were -- fifty percent [00:32:00] of them had considered leaving, strongly considered leaving Lafayette that, at that point.

SB: I'm not surprised. Yeah.

MA: So and that wasn't -- you know, that was a decade ago, more or less. So yeah. So that I could imagine. So it was the quote, unquote, safest place for straight people because why would you stay =if you weren't.

SB: Yeah.

MA: So the '90s must have been -- was that one of those, like, sort of -- was there a bit of a -- I'm trying to -- the word's escaping me right now. The sort of swing back to conservatism after sort of that opening up with '92, or they just figured out they're going to pay attention to --

SB: No, I actually think that it was --

MA: Backlash.

SB: There was not a backlash. I think it was more of a slow, very slow, sort of, you know, progress towards more openness. I think some people were very taken aback by the homophobic label. I think Peter's visibility, as, you know, difficult as, as I'm sure [00:33:00] it was, for him at many points and how much he

would have liked to have a peer group, you know, that, you know, he could relate to -- not just allies, but other queer folk -- that it was getting it slightly easier for the people coming behind. I mean, there, that's what, you know, people who are at the cutting edge do. They provide, you know, the first steps on a new path that, that gets wider as more and more recent entries, you know, into the community, you know, follow.

MA: Yeah. But it's lonely out there.

SB: But it's lonely out there. Yeah. And, you know, I think sororities and fraternities at, you know, certainly, are bastions of conservative and traditional performance of gender norms, respectively. You know, femininity and masculinity that works against, I think, much change, [00:34:00] as long as those remain dominant social forces for students, I think it's really hard.

MA: So -- so I'll pause quickly because Greek life is important. It's important in many of the stories that people tell. So what you just said is that it sort of enforces a gender binary, and it heterosexualizes that gender binary sort of because it's built in tandem. Boys and girls, right? As a Greek system. So your sense is that that sort of locks down people into sort of the gender binary, the compulsory heterosexuality, of the culture, that Greek Life is enforcing

that. Because we're adding we're adding fraternities. We're one of like a handful of schools in the nation right now who are -- I mean, swimming against the tide would hardly be strong enough. We're actually adding Greek life and schools everywhere -- many schools are getting rid of it.

SB: I know and there's something also -- I mean, besides heterosexuality, there's something about grouping men and grouping women together that enhances sort of the [00:35:00] traditional gender norms. So individually, men may be nice and considerate or potentially so, but when they are in a group, they're performing who can sort out-macho each other, who can say the grossest thing or, you know, act like they're, you know, macho, even if that's not how they actually act. And women similarly often do that. You know, there's -- eating disorders are much higher. A lot of judgments on the basis of appearance, still slut-shaming, you know, for girls who are sexually active or, a lack of support for girls who are assaulted and harassed. You know, those, that women, it's often the view that they're sorority girls, as opposed to women, and then....

MA: So it dials up the gender role. It doesn't just --

SB: It dials up.

MA: -- reinforce the binary.

SB: It enhances that.

MA: Yeah.

SB: It enhances, I think, those norms.

MA: Yeah. And that's not good for queer life.

SB: No. It's not good for queer life. It's not good for much, truthfully.

MA: No. I was going to say, [00:36:00] or for cisgender heterosexual people's health.

SB: Yeah. Yeah. You know, for men, you know, it also is sort of the, you know, rape myth acceptance and sexual -- acceptance of sexual violence. And, you know, the idea of having to perform masculinity in that, in that sort of narrowed definition is also enhanced. I don't see much good from the Greek system. It's so intrinsic a part of Lafayette's identity, and I've been here long enough, I don't know that it will ever change. I'm not optimistic about change on that level, which means that the college can only change so far. There's a ceiling effect that these institutions have.

MA: That puts a limit on what can be rethought.

SB: Right. On the faculty side, you know, the '90s, there are more queer faculty, [00:37:00] I think.

MA: Anything like a community, or does that, does that start to --

SB: There was a start. We had a faculty member. I'll use her name. You would probably edit it out. But [name redacted]. She was here just for a few years. She was very out. She's very comfortable -- I remember, just, like, just admiring the ease with what she said, Oh, yeah, my ex-girlfriend, this and my, you know, whatever this. She was out in her classes. She was just out, yeah, in a comfortable way, not making a point. It was just part of who she was, and part of her past sort of professional experience as well that there was no need to sort of be in a closet. She did start a faculty and staff sort of support -- not support group, just a group. You know, we met occasionally. She started the Safe Zone program.

MA: Oh, I didn't know that. So she began that?

SB: She began that. Brought that to campus. She was aware of it from some other place she had been. [00:38:00]

MA: And what department was she in?

SB: Philosophy.

MA: Okay, so she knew what that was and she --

SB: She knew what that was. So she was here from like, '94 to maybe '97, '98. So that was going on.

MA: Was that something -- the Safe Zone, was it like a training? Or was it like a --

SB: There was training, a workshop. I can't remember who did it now.

MA: Oh, I was gonna say, was it the Counseling Center?

SB: No.

MA: Or was it the Student Life, or -- that's interesting. Oh, I wonder. I don't know much about the history of Safe Zone and so I wondered --

SB: I don't know who started it. I know, at one point, I gave my materials on the Safe Zone to the archives, so they should be there.

MA: Yay, archives. All right. We'll see what we can figure out.

SB: I mean I gave a lot of -- I don't have materials anymore. I've given whatever I thought might be relevant to the archives.

MA: Okay. Well, that's interesting.

SB: Or to you. Or to you. I think I gave them to you.

MA: Well, that changes the community then in terms of groupings, if you start a group and you start --

SB: Yes, and so people started having stickers on their doors, which was exciting. I don't know how deep it went. And I don't know. [00:39:00] whether students felt any safer. You know, but it was more visible for sure. But [name redacted] left. And then there was some dean that did occasionally -- I don't

know who it was. Somebody in the administrative side, tried to continue some sort of informal get together of LGBTQ kinds of folks, but it felt -- I remember going into something at the Portlock Center, but --

MA: Awkward?

SB: It was awkward. It felt flat. I mean, it, just nothing ever happened.

MA: Yeah.

SB: But I mean, there was more visibility so that -- I would say the ’90s were characterized by somewhat more visibility. You know, the Women’s and Gender Studies program. We didn’t change our name yet. But whatever -- It might still have been Women’s Studies. But anyway, I mean, we continued to sort of [00:40:00] bring speakers in and do programs and have events and try to move the community forward in sort of more progressive ideas and acceptance of diversity of gender and sexuality and all the intersectional identities, really. At one point in the psych department, we had, three out of the 11 faculty members were queer, you know.

MA: Wow.

SB: And there seemed -- this is now the 2000s.

MA: Uh-huh. Did the curriculum change? Did this infiltrate -- I mean, obviously, I think Women's Studies becomes Women's and Gender Studies, like in 2006, or seven right around then.

SB: Yeah, yeah.

MA: But other than WGS, did this affect the curriculum at all? I'm just thinking about academics because you have this great [00:41:00] tandem story about sort of, you're expanding, you have this interest, and then who you are and what you teach, as there are more queer faculty, does it affect the curriculum at all, or is that mostly just the presence of people as identified?

SB: I think it's mostly just people identified -- I did not notice. I mean, again, I always tried to include stuff in the classes I taught. We had a program called VAST, which was for sophomores -- was like a separate sophomore-level seminar that was supposed to be -- VAST was an acronym for Values, Science, and Technology. And I used to teach one on, called "Body Politics," and one of the, you know, the modules was, you know, there's racing and -- you know, race and the body, racing the body, sexualizing the body. You know, we read about Anne Fausto-Sterling. And, you know, we -- I mean, you know, we sort of examined that. That was an interdisciplinary course, but it wasn't necessarily part of Women's Studies. [00:42:00]

MA: But out there, there was a little percolation --

SB: There was a little percolation --

MA: There's not much in terms of academics, unless an individual faculty members, sort of --

SB: Right. Now, there may be, in departments that I don't know about. But I know, to the extent that I was still, you know, heavily involved in Women's Studies, we were always looking to cross-list courses, and I don't remember anything sort of cross-listed that was in a particular department.

MA: Yeah. It's just interesting to me how populations of faculty may change, but the curriculum may remain the same.

SB: Yes.

MA: Except for --

SB: Yeah. You know, maybe faculty are doing things that don't show up.

MA: Yeah, you just don't know.

SB: You know, I mean, one hopes, actually, you know, even though a course may have a traditional title, that may be there, including stuff on, you know, race and ethnicity and gender. I mean, you know, and that could be. You know, it's just not part of the title. Another thing that was happening before we leave the '90s, and this is probably an untold story. And this is about [00:43:00] domestic partner benefits administratively. So

I had a serious relationship in the ’90s, and my partner, at that time, came and lived with me, and left her job, and so I went to HR to see if I could get domestic partner benefits. There was no such thing of course. And it was very frustrating because you know, health care, then and now, is ridiculously expensive, even though she, I guess for a while, had a COBRA policy that, from her last job, but it was really hard. I remember going to the athletics director and saying, “Well, can she at least use the gym as my partner?” No, there was no way to do that.

MA: Wow.

SB: There was nothing. There was just nothing. So, me being me, it’s like,oop! gotta do something about this.

MA: So, the institution is literally not accommodating in any [00:44:00] way, like from the library to the gym to the --

SB: Nothing. There was nothing. Now the gym I thought was minor. You know?

MA: Yeah, that’s pretty small.

SB: It’s really small. Small ask. No, there was no way. She could buy a community, you know, pass, but it’s just like, are you kidding me? This is the ’90s. I’m still nervous about being too -- I mean, I’m not -- I’m comfortable being out with my colleagues and department and HR and everything like that. I

was still nervous in the classroom, and I was a little nervous with people I didn't know. So I had had experience trying to get policies passed, like the childcare center. I knew better now how to make things happen. You have to get it to the right faculty committee and then you have to bring it to the floor of the faculty. So I was part of the Faculty Compensation Committee, might have had a different name then, [00:45:00] or maybe it has a different name now. I don't know, but whatever, the committee that was in charge of benefits for faculty, and we had an open meeting, and I had helped arrange that there would be questions from somebody in the audience about domestic partner policy that our committee should take this up. All right? So now it was on -- this is something we should take up. And so we took it up, and we did a survey of schools as we do, what our comparison schools' policies are, most of them had something and so we proposed something. And the committee was a little divided about it, but we got the majority passed. It was at the end of that year. I was on like, the next year as well. This must be '95, because I was doing this after my experience with my girlfriend, you know, moving in, and 96, and so we didn't get it to the floor. The faculty and business dies. [00:46:00] You know, you have to bring it up again. So now we're in a new committee, and that was this arch conservative on

the committee, and the chair of the committee and I strategize that it was never going to get through again if we had to vote on it again. So somehow, we managed to say, because the committee passed it the year before, and it wasn't brought to the faculty that we should not re-vote on it, but just bring it to the faculty. So we did and I learned my lesson, and this male colleague was also -- I won't name him but he was very supportive, and we strategized. We need to have people speak for this, people who have credibility. I did not feel I had credibility. I felt like I was -- first of all, I would be seen as either, it was just a personal thing for me. And, you know, we wanted people who were seen as clearly cisgender heterosexual males. [00:47:00] And so we got , or I didn't personally, my colleague got, Don Miller from the History department, known as clearly heterosexual and Dave Johnson from the English department. And they spoke very passionately about why this was the right policy, and it passed.

MA: That's fantastic.

SB: On July 1, 1998, after my girlfriend had already moved out, and we had broken up. [Laughter]

MA: Oh, yeah. Okay.

SB: We had a domestic partners policy on the books.

MA: Wow, that's an amazing story. Incredible.

SB: And I don't think anyone knows that I actually was trying to orchestrate this to happen.

MA: That is so amazing. That's a wonderful, incredible story, and it worked.

SB: It worked.

MA: And it was a long time, obviously, coming. But it had, I'm sure, an effect on a lot of people's lives for a long, long time. That's, 1998 is -- that's a while back.

SB: It was a while back. It was before marriage, you know. [00:48:00]

MA: And all the civil business and all this stuff.

SB: Right.

MA: That's huge. Wow. I have to say, hats off.

SB: I know.

MA: Hats off. That's a big deal.

SB: It was like, one of those things, I was just glad to have it done. And I -- I stayed, I was -- I'm not really a background kind of gal, but you know, I was happy to be in the background, and my role be invisible in that.

MA: Yeah. Yeah. It's hard trying to make change that could be construed because it will benefit you as only being done because it will benefit you.

SB: Exactly.

MA: It's very difficult.

SB: Yeah.

MA: Yeah. You have to pull yourself out of it even though you could say to yourself, I would do this anyway. Like, this is really important. But you, it's like you lose your legitimacy.

SB: Right. You know, and so for -- have people speak to it for whom it had no personal, you know, meaning except this was the right thing to do, like it was very persuasive. You know, so it happened.

MA: That's a wonderful story.

SB: Yeah, that was good. Yeah, the 2000s starts, things start getting better. You know, [00:49:00] in many, many ways.

MA: Yeah.

SB: And there's something else I was going to say about that. So, in this, just check my notes, in the 2000s. The other thing I was going to say about the early days was that McKelvy House actually played a role. Students -- McKelvy House had a more prominent social place out, you know, in terms of campus life in my first -- I think in the '70s, '80s, and '90s to some extent. It was a place for students who were willing to think outside the box and not be Greek members, and so it attracted students

who were maybe disproportionately gay, lesbian, so that's where students often felt it was a safe place to be.

MA: Yeah.

SB: Not that everybody was -- I mean, certainly the majority were not gay or lesbian in that community, but because it was seen as a place for people who were smart and open-minded [00:50:00] and -- well, really like thinking about things, it was a, I think, a safe place and attracted those people.

MA: That makes a lot of sense. It's come up in Queer Archives Project interviews --

SB: Oh, it has. okay.

MA: -- multiple times, actually --

SB: Okay. okay.

MA: -- because there were there were some early, queer-identified alums who see their time in McKelvy House as extraordinarily important and saw that as a haven, even though they weren't out for precisely the reasons you describe, which is that it was a place where people were not unafraid of different -- where they were unafraid of difference, and not only unafraid of it, but willing to think and talk about it.

SB: Right.

MA: So it felt safe.

SB: Yeah. Good. I wasn't sure you had spoken to anyone about that.

MA: I'm delighted you mentioned it because that's -- I mean, from your perspective, it sort of gives the overarching view of what people have seen as individual experiences that, that's a part of Lafayette's institutional history for queer people that's actually, that organization is really important, that place.

SB: Yeah. You know, for some reason, I don't know [00:51:00] why -- I mean, I don't hear much about McKelvy. Seems to have receded. Maybe their living-learning communities, I don't know, took some of the energy away, or living floors with themes or (inaudible) --

MA: Historically, it seems to have been extraordinarily unique at Lafayette --

SB: Yeah. Right. Yeah.

MA: -- and maybe it's less unique. Maybe there are other pockets of free thinking, critically engaged students that live together, and that would be a really hopeful reading of it.

SB: That would be lovely if that were true. Yeah.

MA: Fingers crossed. Fingers crossed. Yeah.

SB: The other thing I wanted to mention -- credit; I wanted to give credit, this is Peter's here, but I had another student too, is in the '90s, I had, for a number of years, I had

students doing research on homophobia at Lafayette. Again, outgrowth of, of our reputation as being particularly homophobic. And Peter's, you know, honors thesis was terrific and was published, you know, about how the most [00:52:00] homophobic men are the ones who are insecure about their masculinity. And then I had a student, Kristen Johnson, who I don't think identified in, part of the community, but she was interested in doing it with women. And, as other research has found, as well, you know, negative attitudes towards lesbians had nothing to do with one's own femininity. It was part of other prejudicial, you know, things, you know -- attitudes related to social dominance orientation, and, you know, more conservative attitudes in general, but had nothing to do with sort of --

MA: That's really interesting. It makes it a lot of sense.

SB: --being really feminine. So, but it was fascinating. And, you know, I actually used to always talk about this research in my classes, and students are always impressed when students contribute to research --

MA: Yeah.

SB: -- you know, and so that was important.

MA: What happened to -- well, those projects would have been for your psychology classes and they would have --

SB: Yeah, they were, they were honors theses and they were both published. [00:53:00] And I don't know what happened to Kristen Johnson. Peter Theodore, you met -- I mean, he became, you know, PhD and professor himself. So in the 2000s, already, you know, where things are getting better and more people are out. There was, I think, more acceptance of -- without even sort of thinking about it, I think faculty felt more comfortable being sort of visibly out. I think the younger generation who didn't have the baggage that my generation did, who had always been out -- I mean, the idea of not being out was sort of a strange thing. It was during that time, when, as I said, we had two other members in my department, you know, who were probably 20 years younger than I was, you know, out and, you know, unselfconsciously so, with or without partner, you know. It was fine.

MA: Yeah. Yeah.

SB: Totally accepted. [00:54:00]

MA: Did you -- I'm sorry to interrupt you, but I just wondered at that sort of axis of what you said. Did you see a lot of difference between the divisions in terms of, like the sort of, anecdotally STEM fields are less out -- faculty are less out, students are less out, and that would -- did that sort of hold true at Lafayette or if you could say?

SB: I think it probably did, at least in terms of the people I knew. There were a few -- except for my department, there are fewer in natural sciences and engineering.

MA: That's what made me think of it --

SB: Yeah, certainly humanities.

MA: -- because that's a STEM field, technically. Psychology.

SB: Right. You know, humanities in general -- you know, so languages and English -- were probably the two departments where I probably, you know, knew that people, you know, were a part of the LGBT community then. But we also start getting deans. Now I don't remember when McLoughlin was here, but I think he did a lot. He was so visibly out. He lived, you know, right next to campus with his partner. He had people [00:55:00] over. I think he's the one who started having those pictures with the "Gay? Fine by Me." you know, "Gay? Fine by Me?" or --

MA: Oh, that -- the "Gay? Fine by Me." has an older --

SB: Is it older?

MA: -- history. That's Dan Reynolds.

SB: Oh, Dan! okay.

MA: A student that we also interviewed where they did the inserts into the *Lafayette* and they did all this activity around that. But Paul McLaughlin --

SB: When was that?

MA: Well, the Queer Archives could tell us for Dan's time, but Dan's interview was fascinating about how he starts this and he becomes president of QUEST, because no one else will become president of QUEST. Yeah. And then they start this "Gay? Fine by Me.", which is, I believe in the, in the early 2000s.

SB: Yeah, that would be my memory of that.

MA: Yeah, yeah. So but Paul started a lot of activities out of Campus Life --

SB: Campus Life, yeah.

MA: -- which sort of fires up I think, for the first time -- well, you must I mean -- I'll ask you this as a question you don't see, we have the Director of Gender and Sexuality programs, as a new position --

SB: Yeah.

MA: -- get invented as a result, [00:56:00] actually, of the COACHE survey, that, that in 2010, and that's the first time anybody has ever done anything out of campus life formally, as it -- but Paul was Dean of Students. And you're right, he sort of started to fire up what is Campus Life's job, in terms of, you know, making the campus, you know, queer friendly, essentially.

SB: Yeah. And, and I think he was effective in that. You know, he was personally very warm and engaging. And I think a

lot of students gravitated to him, both gay and straight. And I think -- I remember activities, both in Farinon and outside on the quad, you know, where people were speaking, and it just was something that 20 years before would never have happened. And so I think it was a marker of just how Lafayette had moved, you know, into being a more inclusive community. I certainly, you know, [00:57:00] by, you know, sort of, by the end of, the of the 2000s, you know, I had students who were out in class, you know, and occasionally I would come out in class. So, you know, it was, it was all feeling a little more comfortable at that point.

MA: That makes sense. It's funny, what you say too about Paul makes me think about the power of our administration and staff, and sometimes we think it's just out faculty or out students, but --

SB: Students have much more to do with, you know, then probably the dean -- the dean-level positions, you know, especially ones that interface with students, you know, and communities.

MA: Yeah. So this is, where your sense is that it's a -- there's a bit of a relax at Lafayette in the 2000s that first decade.

SB: Yeah, definitely. You know, and that continued. I mean, I think it parallels with the rest of society, really. Things

have become much more open, inclusive, and, you know, terminology has changed. You know, we've expanded, you know, the alphabet soup, [00:58:00] you know, of identities. And, in fact, it was, you know, so I -- it's sort of a funny sort of, bookend, so the beginning of my career, and the end of the career, sort of by like, the last time or last couple of times that I taught Psych of Gender. So we're now you know, 2018, 2019, you know, I think some of the more sort of, out sort of LGBTQ students saw me as a dinosaur. I was not woke enough for the wokest students, you know, which was just, like, so amazing to me, what it's sort of a turnaround that was from being seen as this wild, radical feminist lesbian, you know, to now being this sort of dinosaur, you know. But, you know, things have changed.

MA: Well, and yeah, attitudes of students have changed --

SB: Yeah, students have changed.

MA: -- around us. They have indeed.

SB: You know, so and, of course, you know, it's been a [00:59:00] joy to see the Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies program, you know, grow, deepen, make inroads into other -- you know, connect with other disciplines and programs, and I think the school is enriched by that. When I hear students talk, they always want to take a course you know, in that, or at least the

students I talk to do, even those, like, you know, the engineering students that I have, you know, who have like two electives in their lifetime. You know, it's like, they really want to -- they heard it's a great course and --

MA: So many young faculty that can contribute to a curriculum like that too, because the faculty come in, in many ways hardwired, a lot of them, for interdisciplinarity even if they're disciplinerized, so they can easily contribute to those larger conversations. That makes a big difference to, the -- being a faculty member has changed I think to some degree. You can be -- you made yourself an interdisciplinarian and that was radical, and now, right, [01:00:00] that's part of academe's history, is that that was so awesome, it started to become normal.

SB: -- and desirable too.

MA: Yeah, and desirable, as opposed to a weird thing to do, right, to interdisciplinary, I mean, Lafayette has -- I don't want to misquote the data point -- but it's something like one out of five of our students get some interdisciplinary degree.

SB: Oh, that's great.

MA: It's unbelievable, because it's the cutting edge of knowledge and people are attracted.

SB: That's right.

MA: So it's I mean, it's a lot to say, but it's a great thing that you were sort of part of starting an interdisciplinary program at Lafayette --

SB: I know. Now it's just --

MA: -- at the helm of that is like, that's a big -- that cracks open the world for a college.

SB: Yeah. And you know, it also -- I mean, I see in terms of colleagues as well, that besides interdisciplinarity, that it is, because we're so much more mindful of diversity as we -- as we in general, not every single department, certainly, but where being part of the LGBTQ community is a plus. [01:01:00] It's seen as a diversity -- you know, part of, you know, enhancing the diversity, as opposed to something shameful or shh, don't let anybody think you are, you know, kind of thing that sort of started my experience.

MA: Yeah. So it's gone from a worry to something we -- we at least say we try to -- right? -- and many do sincerely try to make part of our positive --

SB: Right. Yeah.

MA: -- this is a positive aspect.

SB: You know, I think curricularly things are less flexible, because people just are less flexible. You know, they're trained in a certain thing, getting them to shift or be more

inclusive, or get out of, you know, the way in which they always taught the subject or something like that is a harder -- is a harder change.

MA: Yeah. Yeah. Disciplines. You can change an institution easier than you can change a discipline because they're enormous, and they're embedded in some cases, a century or two.

SB: Yeah, yeah. I mean, the historicity --

MA: The history of it is just so deep. Yeah. Yeah. I can't remember what you said that made me think of this, but [01:02:00] one of the the things that interests me is to ask folks like, when you think about all the things that somebody is, when they're LGBTQ or they sort of discover that, sort of intersectionally, like other parts of your identity, that has also that have often also driven your experience at Lafayette and I'm, I'm thinking very obviously, of you are one of the first women faculty member who were tenured. Like you came into a place whose gender politics are unrecognizable now.

SB: Right.

MA: Right. That can only be, I hope, seven years after co-education 'til, you know, 2020. But, but also other sort of aspects of you that intersect, just to, the --

SB: Yeah. I mean, certainly, you know, I -- certainly sort of coming out when I was in my late thirties, you know, in terms of

age, I felt, in many ways I was aligned with students who were just discovering sort of their sexuality, except I was [01:03:00] 20 years older than they were and you know, that was sort of a strange experience for me. Like, how do I sort of go about exploring this, you know, as a newbie, and yet have this -- yeah, I'm a tenured professor and so on. And, I mean, I was a strange sort of intersection for me, just with age, and gender and sexual orientation identity. Another, you know, aspect for me is also being Jewish. Lafayette was not very -- I wouldn't say it was antisemitic, but it was the sort of the classic Christian country club vibe, you know. And, you know, the stereotypes of Jewish women are also sort of highly sexualized as well, and, you know, I don't know how much that figured into other people's sort of reactions to me. It certainly is part of, you know, definitely my identity. [01:04:00] I never personally had negative experiences here. I have elsewhere, sort of as a Jewish person. I remember, the first time I was teaching on a military base for the University of Maryland, and I remember somebody describing me as a Jewess. And I was like, what the hell?

MA: What is this, 1884? That's just completely bizarre.

SB: It was so bizarre. It was not -- it was 1976 actually.

MA: No, no, no, no. But it just sounds like language from --

SB: The language. I think also, she said a brilliant Jewess but that was also part of -- also a stereotype.

MA: Just stop talking. Please stop, a brilliant Jewess does not make it better, right? Oh, no.

SB: And it was just a weird thing, but still, you know, here I did have that sense of being sort of a minority person

MA: Lafayette's Christian-centric.

SB: Yeah.

MA: The depth of that [01:05:00] is to the extent that the institution really does not realize it.

SB: Yes.

MA: Like, it's that profound here. They -- the college still, I think has not come to grips with that particular aspect, that it's so Christian-centric, that if you said that to most people who have a Christian background, they'd be like, what? Whereas if you said, it's white supremacists, people would be like, "Yes, actually, it is built in." But if you like, I think it's hard to see, there hasn't been a reckoning with it. So I mean, it's sort of the classic stories that Jewish people there was -- for students, there was a sort of a limit, like a quota --

SB: Oh yeah.

MA: -- that there was, right, that that's part of our history, and we sort of say, "Oh, well."

SB: That actually was the era when I was applying to college, and so it was the mid ’60s, my parents told me that, and I didn’t believe them, really. About like certainly all the Ivy’s. That was definitely, definitely there were quotas there and I’m sure Lafayette was part of that.

MA: I think the institution has yet to grapple with that part of its history. It has a lot to grapple with, but that’s ... .

SB: Yeah.

MA: Well, those are important aspects. [01:06:00] I mean, that affects -- I’ve been thinking too, as you were talking about the, we say LGBTQ pretty easily, but you think about people coming out as sort of gay or lesbian or whatever, in the ’70s and that being radical and just things coming off the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual in 1973 from the APA and all those things, but I’m thinking what -- I’m what I’m really interested in what you think about the trans population and the gender nonbinary population, because that has -- you know, it’s probably been typical Lafayette, I think -- and I don’t say that dismissively, but I think it’s typical of the college -- a little bit slow, a little day late and a dollar short around gender identity, pronouns, trans --

SB: Yes. I think that’s true.

MA: Like, what’s sort of your perspective on that?

SB: Yeah. And I think we are. I mean, I have a friend who teaches at Ithaca College, and she tells me some of the conversations she has with her class, which are more so psych of women and women's studies, and women's and gender studies, and yeah, there's a lot more people [01:07:00] who are exploring, you know, trans, especially for biological women who are exploring, being trans. You know, I have mixed feelings about what's going on, I have in some ways, more, I think , think, intellectual sympathy with non -- people not wanting to be exclusively binary because gender can be such a restrictive thing. I think for some people, sort of trans identities are a reinstantiation of the binary. You know, like you feel you are meant to be the other sex because you like all of these things of the other sex. It's like, well, you could like those things, and still be, you know, biological, whatever, but, and which is not to negate the real internal angst people who feel deeply that they are, you know, misgendered. [01:08:00]

MA: The school has changed a lot in its policies, and it seems like it's been on a rocket and it's a good thing. I mean --

SB: Yeah.

MA: We should use people's preferred pronouns. We should use them.

SB: Yes.

MA: And it seems like that has been a big change in the last --

SB: That has been a big change. I mean, I think that you have an interview with Brian Fox.

MA: Yes. Yes, 2010. He had -- he and I --

SB: He was one of those brave students who was willing to be out, to have his transition visible. He came and talked to my class, and he -- maybe several times. I mean maybe he did more than one time. And I think I didn't read his interview. But you know, I know the college really tried to accommodate him, which I thought was an amazing --

MA: Mm. That's a turning point.

SB: -- act on the part of the college because, you know, some years back it would not be --

MA: And it's funny, because when he talks about, in his interview, [01:09:00] as I recall it, and in my many conversations with him, is that it was the students that made his life difficult. Not --

SB: I bet.

MA: Not -- I think he, I think he felt reasonably-- accommodated. He just, he had trouble with his peers in many ways.

SB: Right. Right.

MA: Interesting.

SB: We do still have a lot of, you know, very traditional conservative students. I, I think I have been fortunate in that in psychology, and certainly in my classes, I don't get many of them. You know, but when I talked to colleagues in, you know political -- you know, government and law or political science -- I mean, political science or economics, you know, that they, I think, see more of them.

MA: Yeah. Yeah. And that would change. So, any say faculty members or student majors, but any faculty members' home department or students major is a mini is like a microclimate within the larger institution of what it means to be queer at Lafayette.

Yeah. It's easier in some places than others. Some places change faster than others, it's really not the same experience. [01:10:00]

SB: Right. Some departments, it's just more accepting than others. Not necessarily for the faculty, although maybe that changes -- varies as well. But for the, your, your peers, who often have more traditional attitudes.

MA: Right. Right. Yeah. It's funny. One of my questions are about changes in policies, but I'm so happy that to hear the story already, that you that you, you pulled the strings for the same-sex partner benefit policies. Were there other big

policy changes that affected the queer community? I mean, for people who weren't here, or was that sort of the main --

SB: I think that was the main one. I do think this, you know, use of preferred names and preferred pronouns, which is a relatively recent change, is a good signal, you know, for acceptance. You know, whether --

MA: Yeah, okay.

SB: -- our behavior conforms to that, as is another good thing that students can, you know, change their name on Banner [01:11:00] that's used. Sometimes it has nothing to do with their identity, but it's just a way of respecting variability and diversity.

MA: So, I'm thinking about Audre Lorde. But another big question, towards the end of my questions here, are formative public moments, where you thought LGBTQ issues were debated or, you know, protest, speakers, debates, events. So you mentioned Audre Lorde. Are there other --

SB: You know, I was not here -- I think I was on leave when the AIDS Quilt came. I know that was a pivotal time. I think it was very moving and eye-opening for many people, students, faculty, staff, community. It was sometime in the '90s. Right?

MA: Yes, early '90s.

SB: Yeah, I think I was on leave then or something. But [01:12:00] so I wasn't here. So I missed that moment. But it was one of those moments talked about for many, many years. Still talked about.

MA: It still is and it's been mentioned by a number of interviewees. Yeah.

SB: But yeah. I can't think of other specific speakers. I'm probably forgetting. We've had a lot of interesting speakers but I can't, you know, think of others right now.

MA: Protest movements. There the, you mentioned a number already. You talked about Audre Lorde, which I didn't know, but "Gay? Fine by Me." , for example. So I just wondered if there was anything -- because sometimes people, it's like, Oh, my God, so-and-so came, or this particular thing happened on the quad or or not.

SB: You know, there was I think Peter Theodore talked about this -- this was during his time, and maybe he did it or FLAGB did it. They actually had a closet on the quad for a National Coming Out Day, that people could go in the closet, and then come out of the closet. And in the closet--I mean, whatever, it was constructed--they had like all these homophobic slurs [01:13:00] and stuff like that. I thought that was a --

MA: That's pretty brilliant.

SB: -- consciousness raising moment.

MA: Yeah, yeah. That's pretty awesome. Yeah, yeah. That's wonderful. We should look that up and see if the *Lafayette* covered that.

SB: I know, wrote about it. Yeah.

MA: Sometimes they do. Sometimes they don't. All right. So I think this is towards the end of all the questions. We've covered a lot of time and a lot of different things.

SB: I have to say, I mean, I want to give props to the Queer Archives Project, which I think is one of those events that changes the tone of the campus. The fact that the alumni magazine had a cover issue with the rainbow flag was absolutely phenomenal.

MA: That was a happy day for all of us who work on the QAP, and for the alums, and they earned it. You all deserve it. It's been a long time coming.

SB: You know, so there's greater visibility. And you know, I think, you know, I understand there is a growing alumni network, you know, so that's a huge, huge change. [01:14:00]

MA: It's a big, it's a big shift. Yeah, it's nice you point out the QAP as part of the events. It's nice to think of it that way.

SB: It is absolutely part of it.

MA: Okay. So that brings us to the end of my questions. Covered a lot of ground, a lot of decades, a lot of things. So last thing, you have a magic wand, what would you change about Lafayette right now?

SB: Oh man.

MA: You want several wands?

SB: I'd get rid fraternities and sororities for sure.

MA: Yeah. Okay.

SB: You know, expand the diversity of the student body. Make, you know, curriculum more flexible, especially in, in just interdisciplinary way. Just more visible support, I think, for you know, the many ways in which people are amazingly, you know, unique and people can gather around, you know, various interests and commonalities and there's ways in which [01:15:00] sort of the traditional groupings, I think damp down people's growth and development, so --

MA: Yeah, yeah. A freer, better place --

SB: A freer, better place.

MA: -- where people can really thrive. Yeah.

SB: There you go.

MA: That's a lot with a magic wand but you did it.

SB: Hey, it's magic.

MA: Well, you are magic, Susan Basow, Charles A. Dana Professor of Psychology Emerita. First coordinator of the WGSS program. Changemaker, amazing person, successful teacher, incredibly engaged, successful researcher, mentor, and marvelous queer person. Thank you for your interview.

SB: Oh, thank you so much. I'm glad the program is in good hands.

END OF AUDIO RECORDING.