

Asher M. Daniel '17
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
SpeakOut
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Transcribed by Mim Eisenberg/WordCraft

[ELIZABETH A.]
JANOWSKI:

Hello. This is Elizabeth [A.] Janowski from the Dartmouth College Class of 2021. Today is November 11th, 2018, and the current time is 12:24 p.m. I'm here in Baker-Berry Library in Hanover, New Hampshire, speaking with Asher [M.] Daniel, a former Dartmouth College student from the fall of 2013 to the winter of 2018. Asher is speaking with me from his home in Chelsea, Oklahoma. The following interview is part of the Rauner [Special Collections] Library's SpeakOut projects, an oral history project focused on recording the memories and experiences of Dartmouth's LGBTQIA+ community.

So, all right, Asher, I thought we could start at the very beginning, and let's just talk about where home is to you. So where were you born, and where did you grow up?

DANIEL:

Well, I was born not too far from where I'm at right now. I was born in a small hospital in Claremore, Oklahoma, and then proceeded to grow up in the little town of Chelsea. I think it was, like, only 200 people here. Quite a little small town, where I lived until I left for school. Very small little community, very close knit. A little interesting. My family did not fit in the most, but we're—my—none—none of my family—like some other families was from a small town.

My mom was from California. My dad grew up in Arkansas. So I'm not sure why we came here. [Chuckles.] But we did at some point just settle in this little town and kind of made it ours a little bit, though my family kind of kept to themselves, so I was the one who was the main one to probably interact with the town. My—my brother was a little—not the most social, either, so his—

We're interesting, not having much history here, but, yeah, I grew up in a small town in rural Oklahoma.

JANOWSKI: Yeah! So you mentioned that your family didn't exactly fit in in your hometown? And I was wondering if you could elaborate a bit on that. Like, what—what *is* Chelsea, Oklahoma, like?

DANIEL: Well, first, I would say my town is primarily white, or—there's a fair Native [American] population, too, but for the most part, it's a—it's a very white town. There's not many black people. My mom is black; my dad is white—so I'm a biracial kid. And that was something that you didn't really see much here, and being the—the [unintelligible] was something that wouldn't necessarily be celebrated here, and so—nothing, like, too bad, you know, happened because of that, but just—we stood out in a way that was more interesting, you know?

My—we were not a religious family, and pretty much church is the sole social venue that my town has. There's—you know, a town that has 200 people probably has sixteen churches. But it's a very religious little area, and we're not, you know, religiously affiliated.

And politics is maybe as big of a thing, but we're very—like, my family tends to be a bit more liberal leaning. The community is not. [Laughs.] It was just—we—there weren't that many ways that we did fit in. [Chuckles.] But it was just, you know, we were—also our personalities, and it's a very small town, and talkative and all of that small-town gossip, and, like, “Oh, well, who do *you* know?” And, “Well, my grandpa—he has been here for this long.” And then, you know, everyone's related to each other, and we're not related to anybody, and we kind of stand out and look different, and different beliefs, different opinions. [Chuckles.]

It was—it was just, you know,—it's—it's been interesting because, I mean, I did have friends and stuff eventually, growing up, but I was just being very much, like, almost the antithesis of what this town is. [Chuckles.]—you know, and growing up there. But—yeah.

JANOWSKI: Mmm. So, then, I'm kind of wondering what your experiences in early elementary school and things like that were. How was your social life back then? How was it like interacting with other kids from your hometown?

DANIEL: I mean, I feel like in the early, young ages—I mean, I think—a lot of the things I’ve probably dealt with more—it—it’s odd to me. I feel like I wanted my, like, memories or experiences of racism early on I think happened when I was younger. And not really paying much attention to it because I think, you know, a little kid—they don’t have the same kind of filter that you get when you’re older, and so they do a lot more parroting of what their parents say and things like that.

And, like, I can’t—some of my, I mean, I guess more defining memories of how I fit in with the town when I was a kid came from that. I remember one of my classmates in second grade seemed to have a very big problem with the fact that I was black. But I couldn’t really—I couldn’t figure it out quite yet. Like, you know, I remember there was this one time I went to get a basketball because we were going to play it at recess, and he was, like, “You can’t have that one.” And then he, like, jumped on me, trying to take the basketball.

JANOWSKI: Wow.

DANIEL: I think I, like, lowkey elbowed him. [Chuckles.] I gave him [unintelligible; 6:03], which was not nice, but, I’m, like, “No, this is my basketball, dang it. Like, I’m takin’ it.” [Chuckles.]

Or this was this other time where, like, I remember I was just talking to one of my not close friends but this—it was another kid. He was—we were all at lunch, and, you know, he wasn’t—he was a little shy and stuff like that, and I was—I was a very gregarious young kid, so I—I mean, I’m not super—I’m got shy when I got older, but when I was a little kid, I was very loud, liked the center of attention and would talk to anybody and would—if I thought something was wrong, I would call you out, thinking it was wrong.

I was kind of a bit mean for enforcing—you know, you don’t cut in line. If someone cuts in line, everyone’s going to know about it because that’s not fair. I was that kid. [Both chuckle.]

So there was this one kid, and he was—he was a little shy, and I was, like, talking to him and just, you know, like,—just talking to him at lunch. I remember the same kid who had jumped me—he was, like,—I think he like said, “Why are you

friends with black people?” Like, “Why are you talking to the black kid?”

And I remember thinking, like, *What—like, why—like, what are you talking about?* I was still really young at this point, so I hadn’t quite, you know, figured out the difference between me and him. You know, growing up in an interracial household, I feel like I didn’t see those things in the same way, if that makes sense?

JANOWSKI: Mm-hm.

DANIEL: Like, I became more aware of racial differences as I grew up and was around people who did not have that same background experience, you know? And [unintelligible] that. But that’s—that’s some of—the—when I was a little kid.

I also remember, like, there was [unintelligible]. It was in—I remember in fourth grade—this was something that shocked me because, I mean,—well, that hasn’t been mentioned yet, in the interview, but I am trans, and I grew up when I was a kid—you know, I was, you know, living as female. And I remember I was talking to some of the girls, and, like, in, like, fourth grade, and everyone had a crush on [Raymond] Usher [IV]. Everyone thought Usher was cute.

JANOWSKI: [Chuckles.]

DANIEL: And girls used to talk like, “Yeah, Usher is cute.” But, like, I remember then, like, it was a pretty much unanimous consensus among all these other girls there—they were, like, “Oh, yeah, I think he’s cute, but my mom would never let me date him.”

JANOWSKI: Oh.

DANIEL: And I was, like, “Really? Like, why?” [Chuckles.] Because I didn’t understand it, you know, and that—you know,—which was—made me feel very kind of alienated, you know, as an interracial kid. But, you know, I think a—a lot of my othering experience, I think fell on a racial line, growing up here.

I was the only kid, I remember, who supported [Barack H.] Obama, when the election happening, and I was also the kid

who got called on to speak about when he won, as to, “Well, you’re black. How do *you* feel about this?” [Both chuckle.] Publicly, in class. I’m, like, “Well, I mean, I—I—I wanted him to win, but”—you know, those—so things like that were just kind of all throughout my early years and development.

JANOWSKI: Hmm. Yeah.

I guess, could you tell me a bit about your home life then, what things were like with your family during your early childhood, too?

DANIEL: My—things with my family were pretty good. I feel like I have a bit of mixed sort of history in relationship with my family. My parents—I mean, they’re married. They’re still married today, and we’ve been—there hasn’t been a lot of, you know, drama as far as that’s concerned. But all my extended family lives far away, all in California. There’s some in, like, the Carolinas or, like, other places in the South. And so I don’t have that many family members who are close by, at least family to my mom. My dad has some family that’s not too far away, but he’s not very close to his family.

I feel like—I mean,—at home, things were definitely a bit different. I mean, there was—there was some issues. I mean, my dad does struggle with alcoholism, and, you know, there was, like, some abusive things that happened when I was a kid. But—so that kind of put a—you know, a bit of a mar- —marred lens on, like, how my family life was. It was—it wasn’t perfect. But, I mean, things weren’t, you know, horrible.

I mean, I feel like outside of—things were in some ways very good. My family was, you know, very supportive of a lot of things, you know, when it comes to expression, and I always felt like I’d be accepted or anything like that, if those things were ever things they really questioned, any ideas or beliefs or views I had, they were very, you know, open to, you know, any sort of exploration there.

I mean,—we’re not—we’re not—I say we’re not a religious family. We’re not an actively practicing religious family. My dad’s an atheist. My mom is a Christian. She does identify as being Christian. She believes in it somewhat. She is not

very active with it. And when we were little, little, we kind of danced—me and—me and my older brother, you know, were somewhat raised, you know, with the Christian faith a little bit. We both rejected it very—fairly early on, just because we—we weren't into it. But, you know, so with that, it was, like, when— “Oh, you believe that? Fine. That's fine. If you don't, that's also fine.”

You know, when it comes to academic things or, you know, pursuing, you know, my future—because that was another thing that was very difficult, being from the town that I was from. We did not have a lot of resources academically, which a lot of that—more a bit older—into high school, you know, there weren't—we didn't have any AP [advanced placement] classes or gifted or talented program or any—I was—you know, I did stand out pretty early on as a smart kid. You know, I was good in school, got good—straight A's. You know, standard narrative I think for a lot of kids that go to Dartmouth [Both chuckle.]

But, you know, I was a very smart kid, and, you know, we were trying to find resources for me to use so I could, you know, learn at my pace. And they weren't there, for the most part, and my parents did a lot of fighting, you know, trying to find options, get things available, and, like I said, it wasn't the biggest deal until I started getting older, but that's also when a lot of economic crisis hit, and in Oklahoma, a lot of that cut came state wide with our education, so a lot of programs that were in place to help students like me—you know, from the small schools—I was lower income—you know, to give us resources were cut.

And my family—you know, they did a lot, you know, trying to talk to the superintendent's office, you know, make sure I could do certain things. I remember, like a math class. It was, like, in seventh grade or something. In sixth grade, I was in math. They wanted to put me in a different math class because it wasn't—I was, you know, a bit above the—you know, the level of my peers, and they said they were trying to, like, find a new math class, but then they couldn't do that because they didn't have anything. They were going to send me up the hill but they didn't do it. And the junior high said I could take it with other kids, older kids. But that didn't end up happening.

And they tr- —they were trying—they did do a lot of fighting and advocating and try to, like,—you know, I could get in different options or a different class, but I was able to double up on my math in high school, which is not something they normally allowed, but they allowed for me. And things like that.

Though, also because of the budget cuts. I remember I was in—at one point in time, there was this program that was—you could commute to it. It was at a local tech col- —tech center, where, you know, they had, you know, calculus and physics available on the AP level for students in the area who did not have it offered in their schools. That got cut the year before I was able to do it. [Both chuckle.]

Things like that. I was at Upward Bound, which was very good on, you know, helping to prepare for college because my school did not have—our guidance counselor—when we got to talking about applying for college, she did not know what the Common App[lication] was, was not familiar with it.

I feel very fortunate and haven't mentioned him yet. And it's—he's very relevant, to this now. I don't know when I was going to namedrop him, but a fellow—a fellow Dartmouth student, Dustin Pogger [Archivist note: spelling uncertain]—he—he is from the same town as me. We—we became friends in—we started becoming friends in fifth grade. We were both on the Quiz Bowl team. And eventually became best friends. We have a very complicated history with each other—

JANOWSKI: [Chuckles.]

DANIEL: —we dated at some point. Kind of had this beard relationship when we were in high school, where everyone thought we were just this normal straight couple, though we were doing a lot of—a lot of our explorations, stuff like [unintelligible] LGBT identity was happening. Like, in our closed-door friendships and stuff like that.

But he was also a very smart kid, wanted to go to a different school, and so, you know, our guidance counselor, not knowing anything about the Common App or how to, you

know, leave the state, really when it came to college, we both, you know, did all of our research and looked things up and, like, shared information.

I remember when—[Chuckles.] I remember our junior and senior year. We had these—there was these fly-in—you know, those college fly-in programs. I know there's a lot of them that are available if you don't have the means to go. You know, they'll—you can apply, and they'll send you out—you go see—visit these schools.

And part of it was because, you know, we just wanted to see these schools. We were applying to most of these schools. I was low-key—you know, I was, you know, also loosely thinking, *Well, I'll get an excused absence from school. I'll get to go fly somewhere, and they'll feed me, and, like, I don't have to be in school.* [Laughter.]

I applied to every single one I could find so I could be gone as often as I could. But, you know, we did that. We did that together. We would share things. You know, we'd learn tips on how to apply for—you know, just on the various websites of these different schools and how to navigate the Common App and testing and stuff like that. The guidance counselor was not going to offer the SAT [Scholastic Aptitude Test] at all, which we'd been hoping to take. And, you know, we did a lot of work together, and eventually we both got—both got into Dartmouth. [Both chuckle.] And both went.

But [chuckles], you know, he—like, between the two of us, I mean, that was how we got—I think I've gone on a big tangent now.

JANOWSKI: [Laughs.]

DANIEL: But when schools didn't have a lot of resources available, my parents did a lot to fight to get the resources that we could have. You know, it was just—my parents—they've been very good advocates for me and very supportive. I had a good home life in that sense. There were some issues as a kid. And, like, every family has some things, you know. Addiction has impacted my family, and that has caused some problems.

But when it comes to, you know, supporting me as individuals, supporting me as—supporting me as a kid—I was trans. I got older. All those things, my family has been very supportive.

JANOWSKI: Mmm. All right. Yeah. I think we can move into talking about high school, then. [Laughter.] Since I—I was going to do that anyways, but I think you've given a pretty good overview of what to expect from that now. [Laughter.]

So I guess one question I have for you after just listening to that was: In high school, what drove you or what motivated you to I guess pursue so many different, like, academic things and just, like, excel academically?

DANIEL: Well, I—I feel somewhat naïve because it was—most of it had to do with me not liking Chelsea. I hated my hometown because, you know, like I said, I stood out from it, you know. I was more liberal, non-religious, all those things. I was, like, *This isn't me. These aren't my people. I don't get along here. I want to get out of here. This place is backwoods af [as fuck]. I am—I'm done. You know, I need to get outta here.*

And I figured out-of-college—it was it. I didn't want to go to our state flagships. I had good test—I wanted to, you know,—I had a fairly substantial ego at that point also. You know, like, *I'm smart. I can go to the Ivy League. I wanna—I wanna go and, like, you know, take the world on by storm, you know? Yeah, we got this!*

JANOWSKI: [Chuckles.]

DANIEL: You know, kind of this—it wasn't one of those blind, like, passions to just do well and, you know, you can do anything you want and *I'm gonna—you know, this town be damned. I'm not gonna let this stop me. And you know, I've got my best friend here. He's also brilliant, and we're gonna go take on the world by storm, and this—*

I—I—I miss it, in a lot of ways. I think there was this almost, like I said, the naïve—this blind—I didn't really think about what going to an Ivy League school meant. I just—it was just one of those things of, like: Do well in school, do well on

these essays. Go to Ivy League school, and we'll—question mark—profit. Like, that was how I—

JANOWSKI: [Chuckles.]

DANIEL: —[Laughs.]—saw life at that point. And so we didn't really think about, you know, what it would actually mean to be there. But we just—I definitely wanted out of my hometown. He wanted out, too, at that point. It doesn't mean—you know, he had a bit of a different history. He was—his family is much more—they—they've lived in Chelsea much longer. They are more conservative, et cetera. So he had a different narrative than I did.

As far as my family being more liberal, and stuff like that, I never—when it came to my queerness, that was never something that I worried about. When it came to my family, I knew my family would be, for the most part accepting.

And as I said, I didn't have any worries, but—I wasn't worried about being disowned or anything like that. Him, on the other hand—you know, he had—one of his cousins was kicked out of the house for being gay, and, you know, he was definitely a lot more concerned about how his family would handle, you know, his, you know, membership—you know, being LGBT.

But he also—him—growing up, you know, he kind of embraced it. He had a lot more suppression going on. You know, he did grow up Christian. He was very conservative for the longest time. Interesting, because I would say if you're on a political spectrum of where me and him fall today, he probably leans more left than I do. I'm very left. But he does lean more and more left than me, though at the time, you know, he was a member of the Tea Party [movement]. He was very solidly right. You know, standard for where we're from, but, you know, very conservative. You know, he was doing a lot of—he had a lot of internal dissonance, you know, when it came to, you know, himself and sexuality, et cetera, like that, with, you know, the views and things he was brought up in.

That was when we were very—like, junior highish age. As we got into high school, we started dating and stuff and

became even closer friends, that side kind started falling off a little bit.

By the time we were applying to college, he was no longer quite so conservative, but—and didn't have this [unintelligible]. He already accepted who he was by that point. But, you know, he had—I think also motivation for trying to get out because of that, you know. It was kind of—

I would say arguably more toxic of an environment here for him than it is for me. In respect to being gay. You know, we were without. You know, it wasn't—for us, we had big dreams, lofty ambitions. But he wanted to be a Supreme Court [of the U.S.] justice at the time. [Both chuckle.]

JANOWSKI: Wow!

DANIEL: You know, which—I don't think that's what he wants to do—he wants to do now—I don't think he's—

JANOWSKI: [Chuckles.]

DANIEL: —on the same, like, highway of that road. He's—he's way off that. But [chuckles], you know, those are the things we wanted at the time, and we were doing well. You know, we had success. We—we did our research, we applied for these things, and we were getting accepted. You know, I had—you know, he ended up—he got—we both got into Dartmouth. We both got into Columbia [University]. We both got into a lot of different schools, and, you know—which we weren't necessarily expecting, but, you know, we did good in our college application process.

You know, I got a goo—I managed to get a good scholarship that was going to pay my way, and I'm, like, you know: *Might as well. Let's take this world by storm.* So, you know, we—we decided to, you know, go to Dartmouth together after interesting fly-ins.

But, you know, we—we wanted out. This place wasn't us, this town wasn't us, and we wanted someplace different.

JANOWSKI: Mmm. All right. I guess—it seems like your high school best friend/boyfriend was a very key figure in your life at this point in time?

DANIEL: Yes.

JANOWSKI: Yeah. And I was wondering if maybe you could elaborate a bit more on I guess the role of your relationship with him throughout high school.

DANIEL: I mean, we—we were very tight. We distanced—I mean, [unintelligible], because we dated—technically the first time we dated was in sixth grade, and those relationships never count. But [chuckles], you know, we were—we were close. And it—it's—hard—I mean—it had a lot of forms. I was—you know, it did start off, and it wasn't, like,—even though we—it ended up looking like—you know, we were beards, sort of, at the end of it.

JANOWSKI: [Chuckles.]

DANIEL: Out in the day. But it kind of wasn't at the same time. Like, I mean, our relationship was—it did start—there are elements of sincerity in there. You know, it was not, like,—it was, you know,—I mean,—I mean, for me it was—I mean, I'm bisexual, so, I mean, I was attracted to him and stuff like that.

And I think, you know, his sexuality was a little bit more fluid back then, too. But, you know, we were—we were sincerely dating for a bit, but that—you know, and then—I think in the early part of our relationship, and then that kind of fizzled a bit more into, you know, who we are, but—as we got a bit older.

But we—I mean, we were just—we were very close. We did everything together. It was throughout—we—we were very different people. And I'm not sure always the best. I mean, I was much more shy than he was. And, you know, he had—he—he navigated—he was much more popular, and, you know, we—we were inseparable in high school and stuff like that. But, like, I was—I didn't really have any other friends. He had a lot—he had other friends.

But we were—we were really close. I remember when he first started questioning his sexuality, I was the person he would talk to about it, you know. I was questioning, I would talk to him. So we had a very open, a very candid relationship.

And we were still dating, but, you know, we—it was never, like, a—there was no judgement between the two of us, if that made sense. And we were very much open with each other, I guess, our identities, and when it came to anything else, you know, about, like, just—you know, we—we—we were tight. We're still tight. [Both chuckle.] You know, he's still my best friend.

JANOWSKI: Ohh!

DANIEL: [Laughs.] But, you know,—and he had other friends—we had another friend, too, who was kind of—she was in our circle for a little bit in high school before she went off—because she was a year older than us. And she identified as a lesbian. And so, like, our—a lot of our LGBT [unintelligible] kind of like, you know, operated as a trio of us, between—you know, in high school, which was—

And it was—it was, like—we were out—I don't think any of us were out at this moment publicly in school. You know, it was very much kind of a hi—I—I didn't really have much of a reason. Like, I wasn't—I mean, I did have a reason. I don't think, you know, my peers at school would necessarily be the most, like, open about this stuff, or accepting about these things.

He was even more so reserved about it all. I will also say that I was—maybe partly because, you know, I—well, a lot of my—you know, even my queerness now is more related to my gender identity, and, you know, less so much sexual orientation. I mean, I was—did [unintelligible]. I don't think I ever—I never hid—I don't think I was ever really in the closet about that.

I don't think—I mean, I didn't really—people didn't really know about it, either. I mean, and I was dating at the time, someone who was physically—E-Everyone was assuming I was female, was dating a man, so it—that—it didn't really

feel like if you have a question—it was kind of behind the scene that was hidden by default. But I was not—if someone would have asked what my sexual orientation was at that time, I would have told them I was bisexual, without much of a pause.

I was not open about my gender identity at the time. And that I think kind of kept me more—I appeared more invisible in the closet, if that makes sense, where he had a lot more issues of—you know, he'd get bullied and stuff like that, and people were assuming he was gay, and he was—you know, didn't want that to be attached to him while he was there. And it was a mess, and so he, you know, was very much more about trying to keep that, you know, he was staying in the closet, especially when we were home. You know, he was trying to explore these things on his own. It was a much more complicated situation for him.

It was a very open and supportive and—you know, we did all kinds of crazy things together and stupid stuff together. You know, as young teenageness.

JANOWSKI: [Chuckles.]

DANIEL: You know, we would—if we—if we went to a party, we were at the party together, you know, we would—we picked up a hitchhiker at some point and took him, like, halfway across town.

JANOWSKI: [Chuckles.]

DANIEL: Like, you know, all kinds of stupid stuff. Like, you know, we were—even though we were good kids—like, I mean, we had good grades, we were kind of bad. I mean, we skipped school all the time. Like, that was—you know, it was like—ooh, *we know what we were doing*. We did our homework, like we're find. We'll get turned in, you know. I mean, make up some excuse so we can leave and go smoke, because we both started smoking in high school, which was stupid. [Laughs.]

JANOWSKI: [Chuckles.]

DANIEL: Which I—I've regretted ever since. You know, I've quit a few times, off and on, but I've been struggling with that. You know I think he—I think he still smokes, but—you know, we'd go on our smoke breaks or [unintelligible] or we'd leave campus. You're not supposed to do that. We'd park where you weren't supposed to park. We were bad kids. But [both chuckle] it was, you know,—we didn't want to—we always had each other's backs. It was really—we we're really good. I guess I'm rambling too much, but [chuckles].

JANOWSKI: No, no, not at all.

Yeah, I guess going off of that, I know that high school, especially for members of the LGBTQ+ community, can often be a really tough time,—

DANIEL: Mmm.

JANOWSKI: —just in terms of, like, coming to terms with your identity. And I was wondering if you could speak a bit more on your experience with that and especially how, given your hometown and its conservative Christian backgrounds, how that influenced your I guess experimentation in high school.

DANIEL: Well, I will say that part of—the biggest impact, actually, it had on me was—was when [unintelligible]. You know, I did not come out as trans until I was—oh, was I twenty or twenty-one? I was twenty-one, I think. I may have been twenty. I started coming out to my friends when I was around twenty, but it was on my twenty-first birthday that I came out publicly. And, you know, while definitely went on to college.

And I would say I think the biggest impact that I think my upbringing had—it wasn't so much—actually, because my family was very supportive, that I didn't have the—I guess some of the personal beliefs that were maybe holding me back. I didn't think there was anything wrong with, you know, being queer; it was my—the biggest obstacle, I think, as far as to me was a lack of knowledge.

And I distinctly remember that I did—I did not know—I want to say I was either seventeen or eighteen. And I happened to find just a YouTube video of—I mean, there's a fairly active YouTube trans community, and I happened to find—there's,

like, another trans guy that is, like, —I can't think—maybe Ty Turner or something like that, was I think was the first one who I watched.

And I remember I did not know that trans men existed until that point. And, like, it was—it didn't, like, —I just—I did not know this was a thing in my mind. I—I did not know this idea. I had never heard of this. You know, I feel like it's a little—you know. I wasn't sure of [unintelligible]. I didn't—I—I didn't even—and it didn't even know that trans women were a thing then, either. It was—I mean, pretty much the extent of what I knew when it came to the word “trans” was, you know,—was drag. I mean, that's—that's all I thought it was. I didn't realize there actually was—like, being trans was a thing, that that was a thing that you could do. [Both chuckle.] If that made sense.

JANOWSKI: Yeah.

DANIEL: And so—you know, I had all these thoughts and things like that in my head. You know, my entire life—at that point—it was kind of like—I mean, I did not get the language to ascribe it until pretty late—you know, like, until that moment. And I was just, like,—it was one of those instant—like, you watch this, and you're, like, *What the*—like, mind blown, everything shifting. Like damn!

JANOWSKI: [Laughs.]

DANIEL: And so—and that's why the—actually, some of my more LGBT exploration—some of that came, I guess, later, because I think that was the biggest type of, you know, the community I was brought up in was not seeing many people of the LGBT community. I mean, that were called—I mean, I did have—I mean—like, I had—one of my friends, I mentioned, the other person, her name is Lindsey. She—she was—when she, identified as a lesbian. So I have that. Dustin—you know, he would eventually come out as gay, you know, even though at that time I think he was saying he was bisexual in high school.

And, you know, there were a few other gay students in our school. You know. I think there was—there was about one per grade—you know, other kids who identified as LGBT—

we weren't really close with them, but—we weren't in the same friend circles. [Chuckles.]

But—but, you know,—but that's what there wasn't—I didn't know anyone who was trans. And so, like, a lot of that stuff—I mean, I did not—you know, until that moment, realize it was a thing, at that moment, instantly. Like, so I'm researching everything, and, like, *Oh, my gosh!* And, like, had this, like, miniature, like,—it was just, you know, who I am.

And then I sort of—it kind of—because then I had, like, a whole bunch of questions. I went through a very long period of questions that, you know, kind of somewhat went more into college. This happened right before I went to college, kind of like when I found that video.

So I did mention talking to Dustin back then about, you know, seeing that and being, like, this is really resonating with me. But I think that was the biggest impact, I think, of growing up here. Have for me was mostly a lack of knowledge; it was more of ignorance. I would not have—I feel like I did not internalize too much of the environment because of my family life and different views growing up, those facts.

I never thought—I never had that—I felt this was wrong, sort of thing, that Dustin did, that my peers did. I was, like, “Well, fuck you. I don't care about you.”

JANOWSKI: [Chuckles.]

DANIEL: [Laughs.] So, yeah, I—I was real defiant. I was like I don't mind. I was, like, you know, I don't—I don't mind. So that part didn't have much of an impact. It was more just the, as I said, the lack of exposure, the—not—not having seen it, you know, or had other just peers or mentors or examples in the LGBT community that were kind of in front of my eyes until I got older.

JANOWSKI: Mmm. So during this time in high school, were you keeping your family in the loop about this too, or not really?

DANIEL: Not really, but—I felt like it—I wasn't really keeping them in the loop, but it wasn't because I felt they were going to

respond badly; it was just because I listen to my family that much. [Both chuckle.] Like, it was—I mean, I—they totally don't like this, and I'm probably not a very good kid because of it. Like, I—you know, because even when I got to college—like, my mom was, like, "Call home, like, every week." I call home, like, every other week maybe.

JANOWSKI: Oh! [Chuckles.]

DANIEL: [Chuckles.] I was not a good kid. I'm not really good at keeping up with people and, you know, talking about things, especially with my family. And, like I say, I had some other issues kind of going on, I mean, I would say, which, when I got into college, that also became a much bigger issue with my mental health history, which was—I had quite a few profound issues with that.

But which, it began mostly, it started when I was in high school, late in high school and all of that just started happening, which I don't know how much it had to do with, you know, how to deal with what, but—and so that's when that kind of began. And that [unintelligible] basically I don't really talk about my issues with my family, you know, so I—it was one of those things that if they're going to ask point blank, you know, about it, but, yeah, I'll be honest and didn't really hide anything, but I wasn't, like forthcoming and really talkative about it with them, either.

I did not tell—I don't think I told my parents I was—I didn't tell them I was questioning my gender identity until I was making steps towards transition. You know, it was kind of like a, "Well, you need to know now, so because I'm going to start T[estosterone], my voice is gonna drop. I mean, it would be, like, "What the hell's going on? So I'm gonna tell you now. You need to know." But it was very much a kind of need-to-know basis. [Both chuckle.] Pretty much. I didn't have a problem with it. I knew they'd be fine with it. It was just—I don't know, I was not very open I guess [unintelligible] with my family.

And so I don't have really much of a reason why, because I knew they'd be good with it. I mean, they knew—they knew I was bisexual, I think. I mean, my mom had asked me that at some point. I told her. I would say she was a little—that one

she had a bit more issues with I feel like—than—well, okay, now I'm trying to think.

My family—they all accept it. They're all very accepting. They aren't necessarily the most informed about this stuff, either, though. I never had worries about, like I said, about being kicked out or being loved or anything like that. I still don't have any worries about that. I know they're supportive of me, and I know they do care about me, and for the most part, they had no problem, like, with gay marriage and stuff like that and they're very much like, "Do what you want to do. Be who you want to be, whatever makes you happy."

Like, I knew those things. Though, they also probably—I mean,—I do remember when I first wanted to come out and I was talking to my mom. She was, you know,—I think she was asked or something like that and, like, we were talking about sexual orientation, and I was just talking about, like,—I was talking about Kinsey, I think, at the time and how, like, I was [unintelligible] I thought I would keep my sexuality fluid and stuff like that, or, like, people kind of like, you know,—I was, like, you know,—you have these attractions, you have these attractions, and, like, there's some overlap. Or how some people could be, like, you know your attracted to, you know, exclusively to men and exclusively to women, how some people are between, and I explained the whole Kinsey theory to her.

She was, like, "I don't know about that." I feel like she was kind of like in the whole like, I think if you're gay, you're gay. Or you're straight, you're straight. Like, if you say you're not, you're actually gay, but you're not. Like, she was kind of thinking along the binary at that time. I'm, like, "Well, I know how I feel," so I think I was actually coming out—was in that conversation, where I was trying to explain my argument, not because [chuckles; unintelligible].

But, you know, she was just, like, oh whatever, maybe. They don't know the most about it. I've had several exchanges since I've come out, you know, as trans, and they've been very supportive. My mom still is bad at pronouns, which—I don't—it bothers me sometimes, but she also has never gendered our dogs right, either, so—[Chuckles.] Like, so,

you know, one of those things, you know, where she kind of does that.

But, you know,—so supportive but other times they're not the most informed, and so, like, maybe just also want to go through the whole—the education bit. But, you know, I kind of told them, you know, like, what I needed—when—when they needed to know. I was not that open to them throughout the entire process, I think.

JANOWSKI: Mmm.

I guess one thing you brought up that I'm kind of interested in hearing more about, too, is—I know that, at least in the information you provided to SpeakOut, that you mentioned mental health is, like, a big, I guess, recurring issue in your life?

DANIEL: Mmm.

JANOWSKI: And you kind of talked about how it began emerging in high school. Can you elaborate on, I guess, how mental health started affecting you beginning in your high school years?

DANIEL: Sure. I will say—I mean, I would not—I think the two biggest conditions that I think have had an impact on my life are socially anxiety disorder and depression. And I feel like both of these began when I was—the social anxiety began when I was—you know, that started to be an issue around middle school. But, like, the depression started kicking off, you know, in my younger years of high school, maybe as a result of that.

I remember—I was a very gregarious, young kid, as I mentioned earlier, but I think in my middle school I started getting a lot more shy. And a lot of that had to do with, you know, [unintelligible] I didn't have friends outside of school. I didn't go to church. If I wasn't in school, I was home playing video games. I wasn't the most social. When I was in school, I was fine. Also being in a small town, I was with the same kids since pre-K. You know, I knew everybody. I mean, we had a few new kids every now and then, a kid would move every now and then, but we were with the same group of kids.

And I finally got to, like, junior high was, as I said, because of my being in a little bit more advanced math, I started taking different classes. They moved me from my group of kids, at least for a few subjects, up to the grade above. And so now I was with kids I never knew—I never met before, and I was in this new environment, and—I didn't adjust well, I guess, to that.

And, like, people would think I was shy because, I mean, like I said before, when I wasn't with my own peers, people who I knew better, but I think some reason around junior high—I don't know because—these are things haven't really thought about, you know, too much of myself, because it could also—also co—coalesce of puberty.

You know, I got a lot more shy, a lot more withdrawn, didn't really talk to people, did not really feel like I fit in. It was just a mess of a lot of [unintelligible]. You know, my social life—I was not very good. I didn't talk much, you know, in the cafeteria or anything like that. You know, I was not good with people [Chuckles.]

I had—I had Dustin. You know, he was my friend. We had been friends for a long time, and at that point,—like, I still did have some friends, but he was probably the only one I'd see outside of class. You know, I saw him outside of school. I would not even want to think about seeing anybody else outside of school. Like, it would not be fine. I'd be—I—I'd end up crying and a mess in the bathroom, being, like, *What the hell's going on? I don't—what the hell am I supposed to say? What am I supposed to say to this person?* Like, I just have to skip straight—

My social stuff just went out the window. [Chuckles.] And that kind of, you know,—I mean, that magnified a lot of, I think, you know, like, mid junior high, early high school years. I got—I was—I was working through it, you know, I think a little bit later into high school, not completely. I mean, that—that was something that I—I mean, I feel much better about that now. I've made a lot more progress on that now. Really diminished, you know, now that I've gotten older, but I felt like—I know totally—like, in junior hi- —my junior year of high school and my senior year, my depression started kind

of kicking in. [unintelligible]. You know, it was my first, you know, experience of, like, suicidal ideation, et cetera. You know, it really started kind of taking off, and I didn't really know exactly what to do about it. I ended up being medicated. I was put on Zoloft or something. So I had—my primary care.

It—it was—I think it was really bad at that point. Like, I—I did have—I mean, when it came to the depression at least that was in high school. I mean, I was depressed I have—I had depression. But it kind of was—I don't think baby form of depression at that point, but, like, it got much more severe as I got ol—as things went on. Then I went to college.

But I don't know. I certainly know some of the reasons why. I can't—I don't remember too much. I just know that's when that kind of started. You know, I just—I don't know. We were stressed—when you get older you start thinking about your place in the world, and you feel like, you know, you're working out so much existentialism as a fourteen-year-old, and as you get older, like, you get more of it. I don't know. [Both chuckle.] It did not do well with me.

So I know that—yeah, that started, you know, in high school. And that—that—that—that becomes a much bigger, I think, impact on my narrative as I said as I got into college.

JANOWSKI:

Mmm. Yeah.

I guess switching gears, then, we can move into your experience in college, in Dartmouth now. I guess one lingering question I have from high school is why did you settle on Dartmouth?

DANIEL:

Well, I don't have the best reasons. I mean, a lot of it was because—Dustin's favorite school was Columbia. We did not get in there. He—that's where he wanted to go. We wanted to go to the same school together. We were still kind of dating at the time. We were close friends. We didn't anybody in any of these places. We didn't want to leave each other. So we kind of wanted to go to the same school.

And he wanted to go to Columbia. I was, like, "I'm not going to New York. I can't handle a city. Way too many people.

Way too big. I'm gonna die." [Both chuckle.] So I was, like, "No, I'm fearing Columbia. I'm not going. You wanna go, you can go. I'm not going to Columbia."

And I never got to visit. I was—I guess I'll explain a little bit. I was supposed to fly up there after I got accepted. Didn't end up doing that. And I wanted to go to Wash[ington] University in St. Louis, which he didn't even apply for because he didn't want to go to St. Louis [Missouri], so—which was my number one school. Dartmouth for both was our number two, if that made sense.

And we both really liked it. I ended up feeling indebted to Dartmouth after, because I came out for—for Dimensions [of Dartmouth]. I had this whole fiasco of—I ended up losing all my stuff at the airport.

JANOWSKI: Mm-hm. [Chuckles.]

DANIEL: I—I mean, I wasn't newly eighteen, but I was still fairly newly eighteen. I had been some flying at this point. But I wasn't a pro at traveling, and I had, like, two different connecting flights to get to Manchester. I had one I think it was in Houston [Texas]. Then I went to Newark [New Jersey]. Then I went to Manchester [New Hampshire]. And I think my flight at Houston arrived late, so I was running through the airport, and by the time I got to my flight, you know, it's, like, all the overhead bins were full and so they needed to check my carry-on, and I'm not—I'm not a skinny guy. Like, I was huffing and puffing. I'm like *fine. Do what you need to do.*

I wasn't thinking, because I was out of breath. I just ran through an airport. [Chuckles.] And I didn't realize that, you know, my phone charger, all my identification, everything was in my carry-on, because I wasn't planning on checking this. It was going to be on my person, really, really in my pockets. And I didn't think to take it out.

But they asked, like, "Where are you going?" I said, "Manchester"—you know, because I wasn't thinking much, and as we're getting on the plane—I was sitting—we're stuck on the tarmac for about an hour. And I was just sitting there, obviously kind of dawning on me, and I was realizing that, *Oh, wait, all my stuff was in that carry-on. I don't think we're*

gonna make that connecting flight. If we're going to be late here, I'm not gonna get my connecting flight.

And I was, like, I am going to get there and not have any stuff, and not have any money. [Both chuckle.] And I got there, and I was stuck in Newark, which is—I mean, I don't want to hate on Jersey, but I don't like New Jersey—

JANOWSKI: [Laughs.]

DANIEL: —because of this. That experience made me hate New Jersey because in Newark, I was in there, I'm newly eighteen, I have no money, and no one was being helpful. [Both chuckle.] And so I'm, like, you know, a mess. I'm trying to figure things out. I don't know what to do. Eventually, I found someone who let me borrow their phone charger so I could call my—like, I could charge my phone, so I could call my dad and cry to him, being, like, “What the hell do I do?”

I didn't have any of my stuff. I eventually did get on a flight to—I got—the next morning—they gave me a voucher for breakfast so I could eat something, you know, but I got—I got on to fly out to Manchester the next morning, where I found out my luggage was not there because when I said, “Manchester,” they assumed Manchester, England.

JANOWSKI: Oh!

DANIEL: So I didn't have any of my stuff. [Chuckles.] And so now I'm stuck at Dartmouth. You know, eventually we get to Dartmouth. But I have no clothes, no money, no identification, so how was I going to get on my flight out? I was supposed to go directly from Dartmouth to Columbia and do their fly-in, after—you know, that was—that was the plan, which I'm not doing now. That's why I never got to visit Columbia. [Chuckles.] You know, and I was—it was a mess, but the Admissions Office [sic; Office of Undergraduate Admissions] went above and beyond kind of to like made things okay. They gave me a room in the [Hanover] Inn, like for an extra day after Dimensions was over, and went and bought me clothes in town, and I had all this Dartmouth gear that they bought, some new clothes.

They took me out to, you know,—went to Murphy’s [on the Green] and had breakfast at the Pine. Like, it was—it was—it was good. They—they—they treated me really well, and, you know, one of the Admissions—person working in Admissions—I can’t remember his name; it’s slipping my mind. He drove down to Manchester, where I had to fly out. Was talking to everybody, being, like, “Hey, he doesn’t have his, you know, identification because this happened. We have copies of this I would fax over from home. We need to get him on a flight home” sort of thing.

So they ma- —he managed to get me out of there. And so they did a lot. And at that point, I kind of felt a little indebted. [Laughter.] So I’m, like, *You know what? I like the school. He likes the school.* We decided to go together. So that’s—that’s why I picked this school.

JANOWSKI: Wow. That’s quite the story. [Laughter.]

So you entered Dartmouth as a member of the Class of 2017, right?

DANIEL: Yes.

JANOWSKI: Okay, perfect. So I guess what were some of your first impressions of Dartmouth upon arriving there for your first year?

DANIEL: My first impressions. I mean,—I mean, my very first impressions were fine. I mean, I felt like it was very much kind of like, you know, nice, all these cool people, all these new people. Different people from different walks of life, you know. I loved the environment. I liked it better because, you know, I was no longer in such a backwoods place, and which I think some people—And actually I thought it was almost—because to a lot of people—Dartmouth is not necessarily the most liberal camp —Ivy League that people think of.

But for me, it was, like, *Oh, my gosh! Like, people are sane.* [Laughs] And it was mostly awed, first impressions, to have, like, my kind of, you know, honeymoon period, I think, during my first term—the first few weeks—maybe not first term. [Chuckles.] You know, it was—I liked the environment, though that kind of—I mean, the whole—you know, being

where I was from, you know, I think things are common there, I think, for a lot of Dartmouth students, you know, I think a lot of us are big fish in small ponds, and then we become this fish in a massive pot of all a bunch of big fishes, you know. That—that definitely happened to me, and, you know, Dustin, we both kind of had that feeling of feeling a little bit lost.

And with—I'm not, you know—I'm not from money, so that was something I did end up feeling—I felt that pretty early on. It was a negative first impression of, you know,—I'm trying to remember—I remember one of the people in my freshman floor—you know, we were talking about kind of where we grew up. And, like, it's like—it's not like a—a—a—a—a mobile mobile trailer. I grew up in a trailer. It was common in Oklahoma. We had ten acres, put a little double-wide on it—like, manufactured home, whatever. But, like, I mentioned, I guess, my house was a trailer, and, like, she was, like, "What?"

And, like, "What's that like?" And, like, it was this instant pity. And I'm, like, "What? It—it's a house!" Like, I don't know. Like, that was a big area that I guess I felt at Dartmouth—my income became very—or lack thereof—apparently.

And just—and I guess—and things I hadn't, you know, seen and experienced then I think are—classes were difficult my first term.

Outside—and I know you know Dartmouth—it's a hard school. But, you know, I did not know how to study. You know, I did not have to study where I was from. You know, our school was small enough—I got by in high school. I didn't have—we didn't have any hard classes. And it—I mean, and I did take—we didn't have AP in high school, but I was able to take some classes at a local college.

But those—I mean, I think in my composition class at Rogers State University, which was this—where I went to nearby—I had—you know, I—I came out of class with an A. I didn't try that much in that class. You know, it was fine. You know, I mean, I got a B- —I think I got a B-plus in my Writing 5 maybe, maybe a B. I can't remember. It was—it was, like, below the median but—[Chuckles.] I wasn't, like, put off. I'm,

like, I am trying here! I don't know what the hell I'm doing—like, I am trying to write as good as I can. Like, what the hell?

And I wasn't doing very good, because I wasn't used to having to study, and work at a certain level, because I hadn't taken classes that were—really had prepared me for that. So that was a bit of a shock—you know, adjusting to that.

And I think—I don't know because I don't think it was homesickness, but I think being on my own, I think, with my depression and the way I think and my—and like I said, I wasn't social, so my social life at this point was still—it wasn't as bad as when I was junior high, but, I mean, in early college it was still pretty bad. I did not know how to make friends. I did not know how to talk to people. Dustin was closer to my freshman floor than I was. I did not—you know, I wasn't very social. I was trying to make friends, stuff like that, but I was not doing a very good job, you know, because I—I was very isolated, I think, during, you know, a lot of my time at Dartmouth.

But, like, you know, I'm also not—I'm not social, so that was real bad for depression—that got actually a lot worse. And it was not horrible for certain—parts were like the school; parts of me felt very out of place. I felt like there was, again,—and almost—almost a different vein of things.

I mean, when I was at home, I felt out of place because, you know, I was the black liberal queer kid, you know, who doesn't, you know, go to church. And at Dartmouth I kind of felt out of place because I'm the, well, the poor kid from rural Oklahoma. So it was a different kind of out-of-place-ness, but that was the thing when I first got to Dartmouth. So I didn't quite feel at home there. And with the social stuff, didn't really make that many friends that quickly.

JANOWSKI: Yeah!

I'm kind of curious, then: Where did you look—start looking to find community at Dartmouth? Where did you find a sense of belonging there?

DANIEL: I will say I don't think I did find a sense of belonging until after I already left on a medical leave and came back.

[Chuckles.] I didn't get my sense—I—I—I think the first time I actually found my sense of belonging at Dartmouth was when I joined Phi Tau, which was—when did I join? I can't—I can't recall. I mean, I know—I know it was a spring term. I can't remember which year. [Both chuckle.] I want to say spring of '16. Yeah. Spring of 2016 I think is when I joined Phi Tau, because that was after—that was after one of my medical leaves.

I had already, you know,—I took—I took—Japanese was the language I took, going—my freshman year, I—I tried to do LSA [Language Study Abroad]. Suicidal ideation got exceptionally bad while I was there. I had to come home in the middle of it, before I—you know, ended up in a mental institution in a foreign country. [Chuckles.] But then, *I had get outta there!*

So I went on medical leave, and so—so I don't think I ever found my community, really, freshman year. And I still—I will say—It was not—like, gender identity was kind of on pause at this point, my exploration around that. I—I got started with it when, you know, I first—first there. So, I'm like, *Okay, I'm not home now. I can kind of experiment with my dress, something like that.* I wasn't even sure where I was going with that.

But then just life and—there was school and, you know, all that sort of just took priority, and I—I—I—I don't really know why. I don't really remember much. But it was, like, I mean I remember things. But like, most of my Dartmouth, you know, time was a little depressive, foggy, because I was depressed pretty much the entire time. But, you know, I know that wasn't the main concern on my plate at that point.

It was, you know, I was—you know, I went to Dick's House. They had a regular therapist there who I loved to death. I think I can name drop her, with Sarah [Y.] Chung. She was—whole—I—I—she—she saved my life I don't know how many damn times I was at that school.

But, you know, I started seeing her I think in my freshman fall. But our conversations were just about, you know, getting me, kind of, week to week, you know, with my freshman

anxiety issues and stuff. And until I left, on that medical leave.

And like I said, these things were in kind of the background, you know, but I didn't—anything with my identity exploration was kind of like—well, I still really didn't have any friends. And I had friends—like, I had acquaintances and stuff like that, you know, on my freshman floor. People in my LSA, I did talk to. I still talk to them a little, I'm Facebook friends with them.

No one I was close to outside of Dustin. And he was having his own issues, adjusting. And so being supportive for him—you know, we were probably a bit too insular at that time, but too much—all of our stuff was on each other's plates. You know, making sure *he* was okay and that I was okay. I didn't really branch out and find a place until I came home.

Gone for a year. Came back. And things were really bad that sophomore year, that sophomore fall. I ended up hospitalized for a suicide attempt.

JANOWSKI:

Mmm.

DANIEL:

And then—which—you—you would think it would stop another medical leave. It didn't, because I'm, like, I just got back from a leave. I can't go another one right now. So I managed to get through that and stayed in school.

But then—I think that—I think that actually was a lot of it. After that suicide attempt—that would be fall of 2015—my—I felt—I kind of had a period of feeling better. Like, okay, I was in this hospital. It was, like, you know, miniature new found lust for life sort of thing for a little bit. And at that point, I was, you know, a little unsure when it came to my—

I remember that fall—I started questioning my—my gender identity things were coming to the forefront, and things around my sexuality, and I was, you know, finally trying to date a little bit, you know, because me and Dustin—we had broken up at this point. We broke up freshman fall. We were still both friends. We still—like, I think he's still lived in my room pretty much. But we did officially break up. [Both chuckle.] So we weren't—you know, so, but, so, no—nothing

changed in practice, but we were no longer a couple. And we're open to, you know, seeing other people.

But, you know, so I started, you know, dating around—you know, being all friendly and things and trying to meet people that way. I was exploring more with my dress—you know, dressing more masculinely. I think—I don't know if it was that fall—no I think it was in the winter term I cut my hair. I can't remember. But, you know, I—I—I started, you know, trying to—you know, I—I was gradually starting to dress more masculinely, presenting more masculinely.

I think at that point I was—you know, I was more considering, you know,—you know, transitioning my gender identity, but had—things I hadn't brought up to my therapist yet. So those were things in my own head and things I was doing, though after my attempt and after coming home from winter break and I got back, that was like the first thing I did that, like, winter term back, was I met with my therapist.

And then things kind of quickly began progressing, and the, you know,—okay, I identify, et cetera. I remember I went through kind of a—a non-binary sort of thing, thinking—you know, I was always questioning things, of, like, you know,—now I identify as a binary trans man. Then, I was kind of, like, *I don't know all of these things*. Like I didn't feel like I had the same narrative as a lot of the trans guys. I've been recalling—I was, like, you know,—or what I thought was the narrative that trans men had to have, like: “Oh, when you're three, you think this” or “You said this when you were three.” I didn't have that. I did not remember gender when I was a kid.

But I—you know, that started happening. And that spring, I was looking for a new community at the same time because of my—I mean, I was—I—I kind of had a community with the Native Americans at Dartmouth a little bit. I was not Native myself, but Dustin was. And that was where he hung out a lot, and a lot of other kids from Oklahoma were there. And so finding where the cultural community—I hung out there a lot. That was more of my community at that point.

But there was this new—you know, when I was questioning my gender and when I eventually got around to changing my

own pronouns, you know. I was—I was kind of wanting a new community and just wanted a place of my own that was more me. And so I went to a rush at Phi Tau. I played a lot of video games. I love video games. I fit in really good.

But Phi Tau was great for me as far as finding a community. And that was actually the first time I actually felt like I found *my* community at Dartmouth. It was the first time I had friends who were at Dartmouth that were not connected with Dustin. And, like, pretty much all my friends before that were his friends, too, and were probably closer to him than they were to me. So that was I think the first time I felt community in that community.

So it—it took me a while to really find a community at Dartmouth.

JANOWSKI: Yeah.

Can you elaborate a bit more, I guess, then, on how you received support, or if you received support as you experimented with your gender orientation, in light of joining Phi Tau and stuff like that?

DANIEL: Well, I was going—I think that was—it was—the reason why—that was one of the reasons why I did join, but one of the reasons I did like it so much, especially, during that time, was—every—I think all of my friends that I had were very supportive of my transition, you know, but it was still, like,—it was—it was just everyone that I was friends with at that point did still kind of know me before I began transitioning, so they were still kind of—you know, they had to do the whole transition with me thing—you know, of the—getting used to the new name and pronouns and stuff like that. They were pretty good at it from the get-go. Most people were.

But, you know, I know there was still, you know, an adjustment period and stuff. When I was with Phi Tau, when I, you know, first came there and rushed and signed my name on the books, you know, it was under my new name, with my new pronouns, as I identified. [Chuckles.] So everyone there just—they knew me from that point—like, if that makes sense.

JANOWSKI: Mmm.

DANIEL: So it kind of—I don't know—it was a bit different and kind of felt a bit more welcoming and inclusive, or it felt like they knew the new me—to—more, so it didn't have all of my old stuff. [Chuckles.] I don't know. They were—it was very—a very supportive environment, an incredibly supportive environment. I know—and there were a few other trans individuals who were in the—Phi Tau at the time, which was nice.

And it was—it was very, very welcoming. I mean, I loved Phi Tau as far as how they were—you know, the language that they used with that. And it was, you know,—I mean, a lot of our—that's what we prided ourselves on, was being inclusive. And, you know, I definitely felt welcomed and at home.

And I think that's also where I got more friends of my own, other members who were part of the LGBT community at Dartmouth, was after I joined Phi Tau. And it was—it was very supportive, and very affirming in the sense of, like, you know, these were people who only knew the other side of—since I began identifying as male.

With other people, it was kind of like,—you know, it was—there was—there was an adjustment period, especially with people I didn't know super, super well. [Both chuckle.] It would be, like, "I kind of know you. Like, you know, we talked a little bit my freshman fall. You know, like, "I'm very different." And, you know, I feel like there's a lot more, like, just, you know, a lot more difficulties with those—that peer group a little bit.

But not in a bad—I mean, not too much. I mean, my friends were supportive, but I did really like having a new place—like, new beginnings. And I was also doing a lot for, you know, my social stuff. Right? That was the other reason why I wanted to join Phi Tau was, you know, almost like as an experiment to try and get rid of my lingering social anxiety right? [Laughs]

It was, like, *Well, I have*—you know, I spent my entire time at that point—I think I had been maybe in three basements. No,

not even that. You know, I did not go to the fraternities at all. I did not do much Pong. I did not do much social life. [Laughter.] I would [unintelligible] myself. You know, I guess it wasn't a very—I didn't consider rushing before that except—I eventually got the idea because—I mean, when I first heard of Phi Tau my freshman year, I was, like, *Oh, this sounds cool. They play a lot of smash. That sounds dope.* I was, like, *Fine.*

But I, you know, definitely, [unintelligible], you know, was not going to—because there was another reason also, I think, kind of sparked some of my—my desire to, you know, put things forward. I remember A Chi O [Alpha Chi Omega, now Xi Kappa Chi] was having some sorority event, you know, a rush event and stuff like that. The fall before I had—had come out. And, you know, I was getting stuff on their list and stuff like that.

And it was, like—I never really considering going Greek at that point, because I didn't know what the hell I was doing as far as—I'm not joining a sorority. [Both chuckle.] And I'm definitely not—I don't identify that now. Like, you know, at that time, I hadn't, you know, really explored through things as far as, you know, my gender identity. And I knew I wouldn't feel comfortable in a women's space.

I was, like,—you know, I was mixing with co-eds, but, you know,—so I think that I thought—outside of the co-eds, though. That was a lot of the social spaces and kind of find a place at Dartmouth where, you know, that weren't kind of gendered at that point. And I was, like, *I don't feel comfortable.*

But, you know, I knew the co-eds existed but—I didn't—you know, I was—I knew I should probably check them out, but I kind of procrastinated and I was shy until that happened. I was, like, *You know what? I want to go to an event. I want to go to a rush event.* I swallowed my—I—I was getting exceptionally involved in that day. It was, like, *Yeah, I'm gonna be here. I wanna talk to people.* And, it went well, and so I rushed, and it was all good. [Both chuckle.] It was nice for the friends.

JANOWSKI: Yeah. I guess just, like, being a student here currently, I recognize that—the—like, Greek life on campus is a huge part of the social scene here.

DANIEL: Yes.

JANOWSKI: And I was wondering if you could kind of touch more on your perceptions of Greek life and the social scene at Dartmouth and stuff like that.

DANIEL: I mean, I don't know, I actually, like,—I remember I—I was not being very fond of the Greek life and the social scenes. I mean, I don't know if this was [unintelligible] too much, but I also didn't really understand like,—I wasn't sure how much of that was just me and my own social hang-ups and stuff, and how much that was the, you know, system. I definitely had a lot more—I'm in a spot where, I mean, at this point, you know, I tend to have maybe—probably not the best view of the Greek system, you know, being a place that has a lot of problems, you know, especially, you know, the fraternities.

And I think, you know, there is—at least when I was there,—I mean, it's been a little bit since I, you know, left—not that long, but, like, half a year. You know, [unintelligible]. But I think—you know, it's, I mean, I tend to have, you know, not the best view of that. But I also thought that was a situation where, you know, it came to my view about co-eds, was—I don't know. It was very—

It was, like, I didn't like the Greek system at Dartmouth, but for me personally, in my house, it was probably, like, easy—I think, you know, the most—I remember as—I said, I think, the first time, I also reached a point in my life outside of Dustin—you know, finding what I identify as a community for me. Like, I actually feel like I belong, you know, and that was still part of Greek life. [Chuckles.] So I can't, like, hate—I didn't hate it too much. But I did feel like, you know, especially in [unintelligible], you know, when, you know, the gendered nature of Greek life.

And there's been a lot more progress on that. I don't know how many—I know that several other [unintelligible], you know, traditionally co-eds, like,—I mean, obviously, Alpha Theta, Tabard and Phi Tau, I know were open, you know, for

trans individuals I know of. Some more sororities I think we opening themselves up too. [unintelligible] I think was. I think [unintelligible] was. I'm not—I'm not—I can't remember now at this point, but I know that was branching open.

But I know that for, you know,—that was something that, you know, I would not—that—originally came to my own rushing experience. And if I wanted to apply and join one of those communities, like *really* be part of those communities, then there was that whole question of, like, *Where am I gonna be accepted? Where will I be—you know, where will I belong?* Outside of the co-eds. You know, *Even if I do identify as binary—as a binary man, I can't, you know,—*

I would not feel comfortable rushing the traditional fraternities, you know. And, all right, and the communities [unintelligible]—you know, it was—I did have my issues with how it dominated the social scene on campus, were more personal and just,—you know, I don't really want to go into—I didn't have that many friends. It—it seems very weird to go into a basement with that many people and that where obviously you don't know anybody. Like, not having any friends where I was gonna ask, “Hey, do you want to go out tonight?” Like, [unintelligible].

You know, and I kind of—I just wish there were a few more options, especially because I'm not a heavy drinker, and I feel like a lot of the Greek activity, you know, lined itself up to lots of Keystone.

JANOWSKI: [Chuckles.]

DANIEL: [Laughs.] And it was not—it was really like [unintelligible], I guess, if that makes sense. I don't—I—I, you know, kind of wished I had a little bit more stuff. And that's—and that is one thing that I do kind of regret because, as I say, since I was not very outgoing, there was a lot of—I know there are a lot more organizations on campus and I remember I didn't actually ever end up getting super involved with, but that I had intentions to. Mainly after I had joined Phi Tau. I remember I kept meaning to go to Spectrum meetings. And I don't think I ever did, just because I was still a depressed person who never went to class and never left my room.

But [chuckles]—so I—so going to meetings and places was not something I did after. Unfortunately, I did find a community at Phi Tau—after I did find a community at Phi Tau—*I found my community and I don't need to do anything else. Now I'm gonna stay here, hibernate, and try to make it to my classes when I can.*

[Chuckles.] But you know that, you know, did not branch out much after that. But, yeah, I think—so I mean, I—I [unintelligible] I might not be the best—have the fairest opinion of Dartmouth, and like how they—you know, the Greek life, dominated things and skewed things for me because I know there *are* some alternatives there. That I did not access because I was just not functional enough to do it. So—you know,—the Greek life is still the dominating, the easiest thing, the thing that was most talked about and most pushed, kind of unavoidable.

You know, I mean, you *can* avoid it—you can definitely, you know, be—being a, you know, unaffiliated—definitely, you know, okay. But I think, you know, you're going to be stuck with the Greek life no matter what there.

JANOWSKI: Mm-hm.

One thing I wanted to touch on that I think you mention a little bit is your involvement or, I guess, I don't know, lack of involvement in the LGBTQ community at Dartmouth?

DANIEL: Mm-hm.

JANOWSKI: And I was just wondering: Did you really get involved in it? Or how did that play into your life while you were here?

DANIEL: [Chuckles.] When it came—when it comes to the community, in the official, like, sense [unintelligible]. I did not. I was not very—I was not a very active student on campus, you know,—

JANOWSKI: Mm-hm.

DANIEL: —with the [unintelligible]. But I was—I mean, I used to have a lot of friends, who—I mean, I pledged Phi Tau, had a fairly—I mean, I—I—I still—I still think, you know,—I think

the majority—a very similar majority at Phi Tau—was majority LGBT. In some capacity. You know, a lot—a lot of the—a lot of us are bi, you know. We had several people who identified as lesbian, gay. I think—I mean, I was not the only trans person there. I wasn't when I first rushed, I think I was when I left I was in the house, the only person who identified as trans.

But, you know, we didn't have many people in the house. It was a very small—small Greek organization. But, you know, so a lot of my friends were in—I mean, did make some attempts to—I remember when I was first questioning my gender identity, though I did go to see Jesse a few times, you know, so, like, a weekly tea or anything out there sometimes, and talk, you know, when I was kind of in that, you know, stage.

I'm trying to think, because, I mean, I don't know if Dustin—I don't think he really involved in the LGBT community either, despite being openly gay at that point. You know, he—he did graduate a year—he was no longer on campus the last year I was there, because he did graduate.

But, you know,—I don't know, I didn't—I didn't—it's one those things that kind of intended to. I kind of wanted to, but since by, just almost coincidence—like, a lot of my friends were LGBT. And so it was one of those things where, you know, I was not officially part of a c- —you know, like, one of the—I wasn't part of Spectrum or something like that, and didn't do a lot of, you know,—part of the official stuff on it. I still didn't feel—I still kind of felt like I was in the community, to a degree.

I was a part of Sexperts, which was not necessarily, you know, LGBT based. But, you know, it kind of—kind of—segued on the edges of that fringe somewhat, with some of the stuff that we did and [unintelligible]—like, in the education that we did, but—which—that was one of the—like, I joined that because I had several friends who were Sexperts. At least five people in Phi Tau were Sexperts, at that time, you know.

But, you know, I did that because I was kind of wanting to add to, you know,—that was not—it was my attempts at a

more official activist-y level—you know, get more involved. I was more—I did that in the sense of, you know, writing a—you know, the narrative and the voice for “I’m a trans guy on—you know, within that organization.” And, you know, how that, you know,—sex education and some of that—how that applies to the trans pop- —the—the trans people on campus, you know, and stuff. I did try to do a little bit.

But I don’t know. I didn’t—I—I don’t know why I didn’t. [Both chuckle.] It was just one of those things that, like,—it would be on my calendar to do it and then, like, wake up that day and then didn’t want to go to class, and I’m, like, *I’m—I’m not feeling it. You know, I’m gonna go downstairs and eat some ramen noodles and come back up here and—YouTube.* [Laughter.]

So, I—I feel like I might have been more involved if my mental health was a bit better, but it was not, so—you know, my—my class attendance may have been, like, forty to fifty percent, so [both chuckle] I definitely was not going to that. [Laughs.] It was, like, [unintelligible]. But, yeah.

JANOWSKI: I think you touched on this a bit earlier, but I was kind of wondering, too—so as you began your transition, I was kind of wondering how you were—like, how you were communicating with your parents during this time?

DANIEL: It was—I feel like—I remember—I mean, I talked to my family every now and then, you know, every—usually every other week. Even though I was supposed to call them every weekend. And I can’t remember—it was at some point where I had—I had already started talking to my therapist about this, we were kind of—you know, had an appointment with and endocrinologist at Dick’s House, Dr. [John H.] Turco.

And, so, you know, essentially, you know, could talk about my options because of beginning to start T, and I was, like, *Well, I probably should clue them in now.* And—it wasn’t easy, but—so basically it was, like,—kind of like I had—I don’t think I had talked about it at all until I was, like,—I don’t think I had an appointment yet.

But I think I had cut my hair, because I was kind of, like, I had not long, long hair, but, like, I was, you know,—at this

point, I started—right when I started presenting myself, you know, in a much more masculine manner, which I kind of shifted—not overnight. I mean my clothes. I always dressed kind of masculinely. But, like, I mean, I was—you know, I started binding and I, you know, cut my hair, and I think at that point I had changed my name and pronouns, some people in person—my friends.

But I was going to post on Facebook. I—I did end up coming out ini- —eventually on Facebook, because I was, like, *I don't want to have this conversation with that many people*, which was—it was—it was interesting and awkward, because at this point I think I made a new Facebook, because I was not comfortable coming out at home, with all my Facebook friends from high school.

I was, like, *I'm gonna get some fights. Some people aren't going to like this. I'm gonna get some people—like, you know, Why are you on my page?* Like, I don't think I come from a trans-friendly background [unintelligible]. And so I made a new Facebook, just by chance, and I think I had a different—my—my new name on it.

And then after that, I had enough friends—you know, I made a coming-out post. It was before that. I think it was a little before that I decided to tell my parents because I was, like, “Well, you guys got to figure this shit out,” because— [Chuckles.] Otherwise, you're going to find out. You probably want, you know, to hear it from me.

I remember it was—very I guess, non-PC my mom was—because I was having a hard time mentioning it, you know, I didn't exactly know how I start this conversation because I haven't really said anything, and my parents aren't, you know, that knowledgeable about these things, and I was kind of, like, “I need to talk to you guys about something over the phone.”

And, like, “What?” And they said a bunch of different things, and I think my mom—was not very— [Chuckles.] I think she jokingly said, like, “Do you want a sex change?” And, like,—like, she was just kind of throwing things out there. And I'm like, “Yes, that's it!” [Laughter]

She was like, “Wait, what?” It was a little bit—it was funny. I mean, and then they eventually say, “Okay, I guess.” [Both chuckle.] And then you know,—which—because I remember that was—because it was before spring break, and we had a family reunion coming up. [Laughs.] And I remember thinking, *That’s gonna be interesting if I come out by then*, which—you know, that was kind of fun just because I felt like—so my aunts and uncles weren’t—the family on my mom’s side. We all—we all went to [Las] Vegas, which is close to where we all live and, you know, I don’t think—most of them did not gender me right, or anything like that. They weren’t doing anything bad about it. They didn’t bring it up. They just didn’t gender me right.

And so I think my cousins, who were all younger, kind of showed up eventually, and they were all making a very deliberate point to, like,—there were a few incidents, you know, it’s like being, like, “Well, Asher here”—you know, every time they’d say the wrong name. [Both chuckle.] Like, it was great, but—

Yeah, I—I—you know, I—I knew I had to put up with it by that point. By the time I had decided to come out, like, I was already considering, you know, HRT [hormone replacement therapy] and really moving things forward. And so, like, okay, people need to know.

And that’s pretty much when I clued my family in, and they kind of, you know, got updates periodically. I think they mostly figured it out, like, as my voice started dropping over the phone and—[Laughs.] I don’t know. Like, it was, you know,—but—I don’t know. My mom had a distant period, but I think she’s good with it now.

JANOWSKI:

Yeah. I think —moving back to specifically, like, at Dartmouth experiences, I am also interested, I guess, in light of your identities as, like, trans and black and from low income—like, a low-income community. These are all, I feel like, communities and identities that tend to be marginalized, and especially at a campus as small and isolated as Dartmouth.

DANIEL:

Mm-hm.

JANOWSKI: I feel like sometimes it's hard to I guess find a sense of belonging or there's just times where it feels really isolating.

DANIEL: Mm-hm.

JANOWSKI: And I was wondering if you could speak more on if you had experiences where you just felt particularly isolated from the rest of the Dartmouth community because of any of these identities.

DANIEL: I would say the one—income I think was—was the biggest one, the biggest—where that still—I still felt a little isolated until I joined Phi Tau. The— Phi Tau had—my closest friends were also low-income students, and even though I didn't have too much—I didn't—I didn't necessarily know, I guess because many students weren't like me, like I said I had, like, one friend who pretty much had every single—I mean, I knew another low-income black trans guy on campus. [Chuckles.] But, so I didn't quite feel, like, alone, which was a bit of a first.

But it was—I don't know, because it's hard for me to say—and I think it—possibly because,—I would say I don't think I had too much, you know, I guess, experiences as feeling marginalized, outside of [unintelligible]. My income was [unintelligible]. I think eventually it got—later on—I think the community, the peer group I was keeping—

I mean, the places—the places that were a bit more—the places—I don't know if I would have felt welcome. I don't think I made much of an effort to visit or participate in especially by the time I was—you know, by the time I was in Phi Tau, my depression got—I didn't leave Phi Tau much.

So I was—I was very isolated from a lot of campus, just—almost by choice until [unintelligible] supportive and like-minded peers, though [unintelligible] the Dartmouth community at large.

And, you know, sometimes you venture out to FoCo [Food Court], [Class of 19]53 Commons on your own, and, you know, you were sitting with people and like what the—*Who are these people?* [Laughs.]

JANOWSKI: [Chuckles.]

DANIEL: And, yeah, I just felt like it was—it wasn't that bad. And—and I do think that being where I'm from, it's—it might skew me a little bit in my views, but since my hometown are almost like—except the income, which when it comes to being black and from being trans—at least is so many leagues worse. [Both chuckle.] If that makes sense.

I think just by the comparison of being used to that and how that was you know—you know, I—I look at my life now—you know, like I said, I'm back home, and I've been here, you know, for the past, like, six months, and I work in the area, you know. I'm not—you know, I've added some people from back home on Facebook and stuff like that. You know, I don't hide the fact that I'm trans. You know, I live completely stealth, pretty much, here. You know, I don't—this isn't necessarily something I'm open about at home. You know, I feel like,—you know, when you live in a state like this with legislation—you know, that is coming in—in a state—that is as Trump-loving as it is.

You know, it gets scary. [Chuckles.] What are you gonna do? So I feel like in contrast, you know, the experience, you know, being at Dartmouth didn't really seem to sit in or really affect me in the same way. Like, it was still so much better than what I had, whereas, like, here, outside of my income.

But—I don't know. I mean, I definitely I felt like—a lot of my—I feel like my isolation when it came to, like—I feel like when it came to being trans, I felt, like, yeah, this is the first environment I ever actually knew even else who *was* trans. You know, in person being at Dartmouth able to find enough, you know,—it came to being with that part of my identity, I was able to, I think, find enough welcomeness and space among my peers to really feel supported.

And—I mean, they—and it's, like, specifically with the company that I kept eventually at Dartmouth—that was not—like, I know there are parts of that campus where that was *not*—where it's different, you know, where I think, you know, marginalization on those grounds definitely happens more.

But I just did not associate enough with, I guess, Dartmouth at large, enough to really see that as much. I mean because—I didn't go to—I didn't go to, like,—I mean, a lot of, you know, the basements and stuff. I didn't—I didn't seek out a lot of the social scenes and stuff like that, you know, so I wasn't, you know, hanging out at [Chi] Heorot.

JANOWSKI: [Chuckles.]

DANIEL: So—[Laughter.] I don't know if—you know, for those environments, I could probably say a lot more. But since I didn't ever enter those environments, I don't feel like I can really speak to that.

When it came to matters of race, a lot of the issue—being biracial I think was a lot of it, of, you know,—it's one of those things, I mean, when you're growing up at home, I was never able to forget the fact that I was black. Because no one would ever let me, you know, because of the color of my skin. But it was also—I mean, I grew up in a small Oklahoma town that was pretty much all white. I did not have—outside of my family, any black peers growing up.

And I kind of felt almost that on the flip side when I got to Dartmouth and trying to, you know, reach out there, and, you know, be more part of the black community on campus, of not—I felt—you know, the—the other—the conflict of being a biracial kid sometimes, you know, and not necessarily where you fit, you know, in any real space.

Which I know there's a student organization for that, too. I don't think I ever reached out to. [Laughs.] That's a good thing, all the organizations—there were so many. But I just never utilized. [Both chuckle.]

But, you know, I remember that was something that was a bit more, you know, interesting—you know, this part of my identity. Which, you know, that one, you know, I don't think that one ever got completely hashed out in a lot of ways, thinking, just because, you know, it was—not—that—that was kind of a hole left—a hole that left unanswered and un-, you know, -resolved, if that made sense.

But, you know, I felt like definitely things along income lines mostly were, you know,—and there were people who would say, “Hey, do you want to go do this?” You know, “We’re gonna go to Lou’s.” Or, “We’re gonna go to this.” It’s, like, that cost money, that cost money, that cost money, and it’s, like, “No.” [Both chuckle.] “I’m definitely not doing that.” [Chuckles.]

You know, which in the—and I—I—I do feel very fortunate that I had resources that did helped me, and I was a Gates Scholar, so—which—that helped me out a lot.

So, you know, I was getting my—I mean my school was paid for me and Dartmouth—you know, they—they covered up to my EFC [Expected Family Contribution], and Dartmouth was very good at estimating and giving you a fairly gracious cost of attendance, so I got money back at the beginning of every term, you know, it paid for my books and stuff like that. So I was not—it was not—I was not, you know,—you know, I was able—I felt like I didn’t have a horrible experience as far as that goes.

But, you know, it was—that was still—I guess, a lot of it—you know, it was more of along income lines and things like that that I probably noticed the most while I was there.

JANOWSKI: Mmm.

I think one thing that kind of bears mentioning—I don’t know—is the—I guess in light of the current presidential administration and the 2016 election and everything. Were you present on campus during that time?

DANIEL: I was not, which a part of me—I don’t know if I wish I was. I kind of do wish I was because, I mean, I was in Oklahoma during that time.

JANOWSKI: Mmm.

DANIEL: But—because I was—and it was during one of my medical leaves, is when that happened. And I do remember that election and being—I don’t—Like, just the—the sinkingness of how I felt, especially being where I was—you know, I

think, was very—kind of a profound, you know, moment, and I was not very optimistic.

JANOWSKI: Yeah.

DANIEL: But certainly that shook a lot of people to the core [chuckles], I think. But it was—you know,—because it was—I knew the state that I was from. Like, I mean, we had, you know,—and since [Donald J.] Trump has been elected, I don't know how many religious freedom initiatives that had been tried to get past our state, where, like, make trans [unintelligible], like, you know, legal.

I remember not too long ago there was a young girl, like, down south in Oklahoma, who literally became—they—like, were getting death threats from *parents* of other students and stuff like that—like, you know, down at that school. And she was, like, eleven. Like, you know, it's just—this state! [Both chuckle.]

That's what—I felt bad, but, I mean, being where I'm at, you know, I felt a lot more scared I think here than when I lived up there. But—so I kind of did wish I was up there, which—I don't know. I know there was a lot of stuff going on on campus. I mean, I kind of like heard—Dustin—he was there at the time. I was not on campus during the 2016 election.

That was—I don't know. I was—I was at home and I feel like if I were to get outside most people would be celebrating, so I was, like, *I'm not—yeah*. Yeah, that was—I think, yeah, more recently, you know, so the—the language of, you know, the federal potential redefinition of gender and stuff like that kind of, you know, got me—got me nervous just because, I mean, I know I live in a state—if I don't have—the federal protection starts with—I know nothing's going to help me here, so—because I would need the federal—the federal level to step in to keep, you know, things okay here, because it's not a state that is very friendly.

But I was not on campus during the election.

JANOWSKI: Mmm. Yeah.

I guess, then, we could move into your decision to ultimately leave Dartmouth and what kind of led up to that.

DANIEL:

Well, it was—a lot of it was—I—I needed—I—I was not doing well with my classes. My depression was kind of completely unmanageable at this point. I mean, it kept getting worse and worse and worse. I mean, I—I did—I took two medical leaves while I was there.

I think my first one was summer of 2014. I came back fall of 2015. I left again the next summer, which was during my sophomore summer, which I was not—I don't know. I was not feeling very good, and so I left again. But at that point, it was a bit different on, I guess, [unintelligible]. It—it was not—I don't know. Maybe—because I don't know exactly what happened or what shifted in me, because like I said, I was really ambitious out in the world kid when I left high school.

And then by the time I got maybe halfway through Dartmouth, I wanted to be a carpenter and, like, *This is not for me*. I was going to do something in trade. I didn't want to go back to, like, some things—I—I—I—it was too much, too much stress, too many moving parts, too many things to keep up with. I was—you know,—and I was at the time,—you know, was very non-functional. I think my depression was too severe.

You know, it went from—even though a lot of things had kind of, you know, relaxed—I mean, you know, I mean, I did not have another suicide attempt since—after 20- —that fall, 2015. But I still had constant suicidal ideation while I was there. I was—I didn't really understand what was going on. You know, I joined Phi Tau, like I said, I had friends for the first time. In a lot of ways, everything sort of looked up for me, but I was still absolutely miserable and just dejected and—

I think—and then I made more efforts to call home and be more with my family, but, like, it was just the nature of me. I felt I was doing—I can't handle—I don't think I could have handled independence as well. I mean, if I have the choice to isolate myself, I will, and when you do that for so long, it does not do any good.

And so I, you know, I was not happy. I was not succeeding, and I kept trying to, and it was—you know, I remember after my second medical leave, coming back—which, I remember—I did not come back for the best reason. I mean, that was one thing. I mean, being in Oklahoma and that was one [unintelligible] of the medical leave system, as much as I did love it and being—you know, have a chance to leave campus, I did not have quality mental health care in the state.

So, my therapy—you know, my therapist who I was seeing at Dick's House—he was, you know, was probably the best one for me I've ever had—you know, he was with my relationship with mental health. You know, I had more support while I was at Dartmouth, you know, with, you know, my psychia- —with, you know, with Sarah Chung and Dr. [Da-Shih] Hu. I was at Dick's House, you know, and keeping my,—you know, me afloat in certain ways while I was at home, though I did not have the stress and things like that and was kind of in that whole ultra-supportive environment, which kind of, you know, put some of the suicide stuff, it relaxed that. I did not—I was not able to really seek real answers or get real solutions here because there was no mental health care that was available, you know, because I had very good therapy.

And so I remember I did go back, I think, after my second medical leave. It was not—I didn't think I was going to graduate at this point. I felt like—I thought that was kind of, you know, not in the cards for me. But I wanted Dartmouth insurance, health insurance, because Dartmouth health insurance does potentially cover top surgery, and I definitely did not—could not—I wasn't going to be able to afford that without that.

But unfortunately for me, that did not end up going in my favor. I, you know, did not end up doing top surgery because even though I did have insurance. I had made plans for it. And it did not go well. So now I'm in a situation, trying to figure out how I'm going to pay for that on my own. It'll probably be a few more years which stinks. [Chuckles.]

But that was my main reason for coming—which was bad. That was one of the reasons for coming back, was I was

going to try. I, you know, thought, *I'm probably not gonna make it through. I want this insurance. I miss my friends. I'm gonna give it one last shot, see how I can make this work.*

And it wasn't working. I did not go to class. I tried to. I, you know, kept weird hours. I was, you know, a crazy suicidal mess probably at least seventy percent of the time. And I was just, you know,—eventually it was, like, *Yeah, this isn't working.*

It was, like,—I pushed it as much as I could. It was, like, *I'm either gonna leave or I'm gonna flunk out this term.* So, you know,—and then I—since I wanted to keep my options of transferring or—I think technically I still can come back to Dartmouth. My last withdrawal was not a medical withdrawal, and I had not officially transferred. I was going to, but then financial stuff did not work out for my favor at this new school, so apparently I'm just working.

So I think technically I'm still—I still could return! I think I could. I think I'm in good standing with the College. [Both chuckle.] I don't think I'm going to. I think at this point, I—you know, I tried. I tried several times, you know. I'm not saying never, but that's one of those things where something major would have to shift and change in my life for me to think it would be a good—a good idea to try again. I just think—

And I still can't figure out exactly why, but Dartmouth was not the school for me. And I miss it a lot. Like, I mean, it comes to friends and, you know, how that school impacted me, I definitely feel forever changed, and a part of me does have a longingness—a love for Dartmouth as a school, in certain ways. Now that I'm no longer there. Which is odd, because I hated it when I was there because I thought it was killing me.

But now that I'm, you know, done with the school, as far as I'm aware of, you know, I do still, you know, identify with—which is—and it's a little sad, you know,—you know, knowing I'm probably never going to graduate, but it was just, you know,—I—I—I can't fig—I'm not exactly sure what was up, but I was just not able to be successful there very well.

JANOWSKI: Mmm. And how did your friends and family, I guess, respond to your decision to withdraw?

DANIEL: They were eventually supportive. It was—it was one of those things where my family and Dustin—I mean, Dustin was—he had some—not necessarily mixed views, but he—they both saw, you know, me going through that school, and they kind of—you know, they all—everyone saw, you know, the more—the direct result of my mental illness, you know, like that, you know. Once you got called, I ended up in the hospital that sort of thing.

They knew how hard it was for me, and I think as much as they were a little sad, I think they—the relief was too high, if that made sense, because, I mean, I do feel bad for my family, and appreciative—the entire time I was at Dartmouth. They were probably on, like, you know,—constantly on edge, not knowing how—what the hell I was doing, how the hell I was doing or what they might hear. But, you know, so I think there was a lot of relief there.

I know my peers in school, like, I had in Phi Tau—they also eventually did come around. They knew I was leaving because I knew—I knew it was the best decision for me. They knew I put in enough effort. They knew I had tried, you know I had, and knew—

And I don't know. There was something that I think had sincerely shifted in my beliefs, and I'm not sure when I gave up, if that made sense, in trying to make it work, but it was—I had—I remember—because that was when I—I remember when I did finally leave. There was a program. I think it was the term before I left. May have been in winter. Yeah, because I left—I left winter. I remember at the beginning, I think, of winter term, there was this program that was for students who had been on leave of absences and was trying to get them to reconnect and reengage and how to be successful at Dartmouth.

And I remember being, like, *Okay, yeah, I'll do this*. And listening to the other people in that program, I think, was what sealed the deal for me on *I need to leave*, was because I did not have optimism. It was—everybody else—even though they did have struggles, they I guess had kind of

beliefs that they were able to get through it. They were, like, *We're ready to turn things around. Things are gonna be different now. Yay! And this is what I want.*

And they were all kind of committed to this is what they wanted, and at that point I was, like, *I don't know if this is what I want.* You know, I figured I was having enough struggles at Dartmouth as it was, that *what life at Dartmouth is going to lead me to afterwards? I don't know if I have the—the mental stamina to handle, you know, the kind of stress and jobs that, you know, kind of this—this—this path leads to. I don't have the social skills for networking. I don—*

I was—I was—it was very discouraging. I did not feel I could kind of like, you know, work on that level and—very well, and I did not think it was actually what I wanted. I—at that point was really wanting to kind of relax, bring things back a bit more to—the parts of—as much as I do hate my hometown, for the most part, of the social issues and stuff like that, of, you know, one thing that I had missed, which not to say Hanover is a big town, because it's not. But [both chuckle], you know, it was so much busier and bigger and livelier. Things were going on. You had a lot more to keep up with than I was used to. Life back here was very simple, and I wanted things to slow down. And I'm, like, you know, *This isn't—this isn't me, and I—I don't think it's working.* [Chuckles.]

JANOWSKI: I—yeah. So I guess moving into the present day, then, what have you been up to since leaving Dartmouth?

DANIEL: Well, I have been working as—I'm currently—nothing too glamorous, but I'm working as a nursing assistant, went and got certified. When I first got back, I kind of lazed around the house for a little bit. Couldn't find a job. Eventually went to a temporary agency. Got a job as a dish washer at a steak kitchen that was the worst job I've ever worked in my life, because it was, like, super high—it was—it was—it was backbreaking and—not like a small buffet. Like a huge buffet in a casino and I think we also had a diner, and we had this massive, huge dish machine, and there was, like—it was—it was like industrial-level dish washing, and it was awful. And, I mean, I got paid jack shit.

So I was like, *This isn't working, and*—because at that point I had—you know, I left all—some of my stuff was still up there, and I was trying to afford to go back. I got home. I met my current girlfriend, I'm in a relationship. I've been in it for seven months now. You know, who I met on Tinder. It was the first person I ever met on Tinder. And somehow that turned into a seven-month relationship that—I don't think that's how that normally works.

JANOWSKI: [Chuckles.]

DANIEL: But—[Laughs.] I don't know. You know, so I've just been open. Kind of just, you know, living. Like, I still live at home. I have not moved out yet. I just—you know, I possibly could, but it would be—I—with how much money I make right now, I could either live on my own and things be very tight and penny pinching and—or I could live at home and have a little bit more comfort to, say, even work on my other options.

I am, you know, considering going back to school, not at Dartmouth, but I've been considering, you know, another—different college because I did study computer science and all that when I was at Dartmouth. But I really do miss it. I—I loved my studies when I was at Dartmouth, even though it didn't seem like it because I never went to class. But [chuckles] I did love, you know, learning, and I really do kind of want to go back in that direction. You know, I don't know if Dartmouth was the right answer for me. I need a different—different school, you know, for someone like me.

But it was—I do want to go back to school, and so I've been working right now, trying to save up some money to do that and, eventually move out—kind of procrastinating things. Not intending to, but, you know, I was trying to—trying to go to school this past fall. Financially it was not working with that, and so I decided not to do that.

Then try to figure out, you know, where I want to move in my life, but at the moment I've just been kind of working and enjoying spare time with my girlfriend and trying to save some money, so—[Both chuckle.] I mean, not too much has changed, but, I mean, my—my mental health has gotten much better. And I—so I do think it was the right decision for me to leave that school. I have not—my depression—I do

not consider myself depressed now. It has been that way solidly for the past six months, so—which I think is a very big statement—

JANOWSKI: Yeah.

DANIEL: —because I don't—I don't think I'd been happy, you know, before that, you know, for at least, like, six years, so [both chuckle] I think this is pretty big.

So I do think I made the right decision, even though it is hard for me, because, like I said, I do miss it. And it was a blow to my ego in a lot of ways—you know, being as ambitious as I used to be and accepting that it wasn't a personal fault. I don't think that I wasn't able to get through Dartmouth, you know, and not taking it personally.

JANOWSKI: Yeah.

DANIEL: But I think I [unintelligible] to that now.

JANOWSKI: Yeah. Well, that's great that you're doing better now!

DANIEL: [Laughs.]

JANOWSKI: I love to hear that.

I guess, just kind of like some reflective questions: Has your time at Dartmouth, do you think, influenced how you perceive home now in any way?

DANIEL: I think—so—in certain ways. It's—it—I don't know. Dartmouth made me both miss home and really dislike it a lot more. I mean, both—I'm not sure exactly [chuckles] it's odd, you know, because, I mean, it's—it's still—you know, this is where I grew up.

I remember that was one thing. I hated country music growing up, and then I got to Dartmouth and I started listening to country music because it was what I listened to growing up and it was nostalgic. But, you know, I don't—you know, there are some things that I—you know—it's—it's—in some ways, it gives me a lot more hope because there's a lot of things I had problems with going back—you know, up

here, but I was at home. I didn't know of anything else really. I didn't know there was other people or, you know, much more about the world, and so it was a bit more—you know, this is all there is.

Not really—I knew hypothetically I could leave and, like, you know, things would be different, and people are different elsewhere, but I didn't really know—I hadn't seen much of the world back when I was younger. And now I have, you know, and so even though I'm not—I'm no longer at Dartmouth, it's—I mean, I feel like it gives me the best—you know, home seems a lot worse in a lot of ways than it did because, like, I, you know, moved to live in a place where obviously things were not considered the norm.

And, you know, I did not feel like, you know, *I have to keep my, you know, gender identity and race in this kind of ambiguous zone and, you know, not answer too many questions*, and I didn't have to be as fake when I was at Dart- —I mean, here I'm really fake. It's, like, I mean, I pretty much don't give—I don't—I don't state my opinions that often in the public here because I don't want to get in a fight or have something bad going on, you know, but—which is not the best way to live.

But, at the same time, I feel like I have a lot more—I mean, —even though I am back home right now and working on going to school and stuff. I don't—I don't think I'm going to stay here, if that makes sense.

JANOWSKI: Mmm.

DANIEL: You know, I'm just—you know, a bump in the road of—I've been other places. I've seen more of the world after going to Dartmouth, and so—it makes you almost more tolerable to be here with the thought that, you know, eventually, hopefully I'll, you know, be able to get out, in the sense—not in the same way of going to a different school, but I'll move. I'll get a job, and I'll live in a different state.

JANOWSKI: Mmm.

DANIEL: You know, which is the eventual goal, you know, after I get—finally may get a degree and get some higher income

potential so I can more comfortably afford that. But it's not—I think that's part of the biggest way it's changed how I see living at home.

JANOWSKI: Mmm. Yeah. I guess maybe I'll ask the reverse of that question, too, and see if—how has your time being at home since leaving Dartmouth—has that changed the way that you perceive Dartmouth at all or your time at Dartmouth?

DANIEL: [Chuckles.] I guess it—It did kind of shift in a more positive direction, for whatever reason.

JANOWSKI: Mmm.

DANIEL: I mean, I think maybe not—I think maybe that's how we know—like, you know, living with depression works. It's hard to really to remember how you felt, how bad something was when you were there. And I know it was bad for me there. But I feel like I do have a bit more longing, and I miss it more now than I did. You know, it's—I think I can see more the good of the school, you know, or just—it's—I don't know, every now and then, the alma mater will, like, enter my head, and it's just like, you know, you're still this, like, kind of—I feel more connected and more a part of this thinking of Dartmouth and the Dartmouth fabric now that I've left and completely abandoned the school, and my dropping out and everything like that than I did when I was there, which doesn't make any sense whatsoever.

But, you know, I think being back here and that's something I have noticed, you know, and not having more—I mean, I did certainly have peers at Dartmouth. I felt like I had community at Dartmouth. I did feel like—I found places at Dartmouth where I did belong. And I will say at home, that's not the case. You know, I—I mean, with my family it's fine. With my girlfriend it's fine. But it's, like, I have not really found a community here.

Now it's mostly about how will my friends who—either are still at Dartmouth or Dartmouth alums. I just call them. Or [chuckles], you know, I have my immediate family and my girlfriend. I don't do really do much. I don't have much of a social life outside of that, that I'm really connected to and part of here. And so that part makes me miss Dartmouth

quite a bit, or at least the parts of Dartmouth that I did like, like Phi Tau and, you know, sort of the communities I found.

And, like, it—it—it has a very special place, like, in my heart. Now that I don't feel like I'm being wrecked by the school, you know, as much as—how bad and as hard and damaging and—maybe not damaging, but, you know, my struggles with my depression going through Dartmouth. I still now have a much more appreciation for how much I much I've been able to grow, and the things I learned and who I became as a person as a result of that school.

Like, I don't—as much as it was bad, I do not regret going to Dartmouth. I do not regret attending Dartmouth. I don't regret leaving, either. But I—so much about me grew and changed in those years of struggle while I was there that, you know, I can't help but have some sort of attachment to it.

JANOWSKI:

Mmm.

I think I am going to start wrapping up the interview, but I guess before I do that, do you have any final thoughts or comments or I guess maybe advice to current or future LGBTQ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer] Dartmouth students that you'd like to share?

DANIEL:

I would say—I don't know. I mean, I would advise—finding community probably sooner rather than later if you can. Don't do what I did and not do anything. [Both chuckle.] That might be good. You know, but a lot of—and that's what I mean—I might—I think it's fairly a general advice I give to relatives looking at Dartmouth, but, I mean, I think it's sort of that you—you'll find more with and go with LGBT students or other students if you are of, you know, another marginalized group. And not—the students that will have more difficulties at this school other— being able to—

I don't know. There's, like, if—for the struggling students, you know, I want, you know, them to know they're—they're not alone in a lot of ways, and that, you know, for a lot of different, you know, levels if you are starting at that school, I think, this is a school where it's very easy to see and everyone seems to be doing fine, and everybody seems to be doing good, and you have good grades, and they just

aced their damn final, and now they have this internship with—with this company over here, and they're doing research on cancer over here, and I'm sitting here and I have not eaten in the past, like, day and a half, and I have cried for the past—you know, whatever. You're completely in the wreck of life, and you're just, like, *How is everyone else doing okay?*

And the only thing I can, like, just say—like, from my experience—my experience was there, [unintelligible]—That. Is. A. Lie. And everybody is on that struggle bus. It's—[Both chuckle.] Everyone dies a little bit. And some people are dying more. I don't want to, like, you know, diminish, you know, your—someone's suffering or their experience because, I mean, it is definitely harder than it is for others.

You know, but it's a very—that school—when you're in that environment, it's very easy to see *everyone's doing good. I am not doing good* and to internalize that and to feel less than or not good enough and stuff like that, and even if you try not to, it's very easy to feel that way, and it's—I don't know. Like, it is one of those myths—it is important to try to find that community, is finding those people who you could really feel that realness and you can see. You know—it's like, you know, your friends. You haven't showered in three days, and it is, like, just dead, and you're just like, *I feel you.*

You know, you need to get to that point where you have somebody that you can see that humanity in people or to feel very—you know, very lonely. Sometimes getting off campus is also very good—you know, to be—it's—it's very insulated and very insular.

And it's a problem in a lot of ways. And I feel like, you can—you can lose sometimes sight or reference for the biggest picture and, like, where you actually fall in the world, being there, and that you're, you know,—and I think getting sometimes to really get out of that and really recenter that and really see that can sometimes be good on grounding someone especially when some things are hard.

But, you know, it's—it's—in a school like—like, you know, you hear the success stories like that. I know that was—that really bothered me, especially when I did drop out of—you

know, from my understand- —I didn't know that many people who dropped out of Dartmouth, you know. But, you know,— and you obviously want to push people to keep going, but also if you—if that ends up being what you do, don't feel like, you know, you are a failure. Like, It happens. People do it. It—I did it. [Both chuckle.]

It depends what people need to do, you know, and just don't—that—that is probably my biggest advice. You know, try to—you know, it's very easy to feel—if you aren't doing well at that school, that you are alone, that other people are doing well, and, you know, we are surrounded by such success and just—you know, everyone has their own path. Everyone has their own struggles. Everyone has their own narrative and way that's going to be right for them. Everyone *does* live at their own pace and try to be, like, that is okay, and that is fine, and that there are other people that have had a hard time here and that this school has wrecked.

And even—don't feel lacking. [Both chuckle.] You know, you're not the only one—like, you know, getting fucked by those midterms, because you're not.

JANOWSKI: [Chuckles.]

DANIEL: Like—[Both chuckle.] [unintelligible].

JANOWSKI: Well, perfect. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me and share your story.

DANIEL: Oh, no problem. I definitely appreciate it. I'm sorry for all my rambles. I went on way too many tangents—[Both chuckle.]

JANOWSKI: No, not at all. Thank you so much.

[End of interview.]