

Thomas R. Kennedy '00
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
SpeakOut
October 23 and 25, 2018
Transcribed by Mim Eisenberg/WordCraft

[DANIEL A.]

FISHBEIN: I'm Dan Fishbein, and I'm joined today by [Thomas R.] "Tom" Kennedy. It is 9:54 a.m. on October 23rd [2018]. I'm in Hanover, New Hampshire, in [Baker-]Berry Library, Novack [Café] 70. And, Tom, you are where?

KENNEDY: I'm in Minneapolis [Minnesota].

FISHBEIN: Great. So let's just dive right into things. I'd love to begin with your childhood. If you could tell me, you know, what it was like growing up in Lexington, Massachusetts, what your family life was like, that would be great.

KENNEDY: Okay. I grew up in Lexington, Mass., which is a pretty historical town, known for its role in the American Revolution, [the Battles of] Lexington and Concord. And pretty upper-middle-class, pretty white, suburban living. And my family—my parents live in Colorado, so I was first-generation Lexington. I didn't have any friends or family in Lexington at all now, because my parents have moved on. But—but, yeah, they grew up in Colorado, so we—we grew up in Lexington, my—my brothers and I. And my household was very supportive, nurturing. Yeah. I don't know.

FISHBEIN: You mentioned you had brothers?

KENNEDY: I have two older brothers. One of them is six years older, [J.] Derek [Kennedy], and then my middle brother, Patrick [Kennedy], is four years older than me. And he is autistic, severely mentally retarded. And my other brother is quite successful. Lives in the San Francisco Bay Area.

But, yeah, it was a generally supportive household. We grew up going to a Unitarian Universalist church [UU], which is a very liberal religion, which is still something I do to this day. I got to UU church, and actually I volunteer there in different

capacities, here in Minneapolis. But—so, yeah, it was a very—

My mom is a therapist, psychologist. My dad worked in banking. But they were—they're both very liberal and progressive and well-informed people, to this day. You know, my whole family kind of grew up listening to NPS [National Public Radio] and reading *The New York Times*, so we're all sort of very—in many ways to our detriment these days—interested in current events, the current state of political affairs. You know, it's annoying. But anyway, that's beside the point, I guess.

Yeah. So, yeah, it was a good—a good, supportive, all-around childhood.

FISHBEIN: When did you come out as gay? Was that part of your experience growing up?

KENNEDY: Yeah. So I—I mean, I graduated high school in '96, and I first started sort of thinking about the gay thing when I was probably about eleven, twelve. I remember making—creating this *Playboy* and *Playgirl* magazine, with, like, cutouts from underwear advertisements. I made both a male-focused one and a female-focused one, and the female-focused one had, like, pictures of women in bras and stuff. [Chuckles.] And then the male one had, like, guys in swimsuits from, like, you know, advertisements or circulars or—or magazines or whatever.

And so I definitely had interests in sort of both, I think. I guess I wasn't sure. But I knew that I—I knew that I—you know, the interest was in both sexes, I guess, at the time. And that was around age of eleven, I think, or so.

And then, you know—and my parents bought me a book when I was pre-pubescent, I guess. It was *Changing Bodies, Changing Lives*, which is a kind of good read for someone who—and a good purchase for a kid who's trying to figure out lots of things. You know, and that's had lots of information in it about both gay people and just puberty in general and sort of just a general good sort of overview of sexual education for someone growing up. And so that was kind of a resource for me.

And then my parents had a—I discovered my parents had *The Joy of Sex* in their bedroom, so I kind of used that as material, I guess, to sort of explore things. In any event, I—so I went to—we went to church, like I said, Unitarian Universalist church, which at the time was sort of doing this thing, that has now become very commonplace amongst the UU congregations, which is this sort of welcoming congregation, where they put, like, a rainbow flag out front of the church, and they—and they openly advertise as being accepting of all, you know, genders and orientations.

So that was sort of happening at the time that I was growing up, and—and then I was beginning to explore, although I was very—I mean, as a kid, I was very awkward and uncomfortable and lonely in many ways, depressed in many ways. High school—middle school and high school were very difficult times for me—you know, in terms of friendship, support and just feeling like I had a place.

So, yeah, so coming out was—was difficult, for sure. And it happened sort of gradually. Like I—I—I mean, I—you know, when I was middle—high school, that's around the same time that America Online [now AOL] was sort of becoming a thing, and so there was—and it was, like, the age of, like dial-up internet, so it was like—

So, I mean, I started to sort of explore online when I could, things that interested me. And one of them was sort trying to discover my own sexuality. And so, like, I would have—you know, ended up in group chat rooms on AOL, and—in the end, I ended up meeting someone through the internet, through AOL, but actually was also gay, a kid in my high school that was one year younger than me, and he actually worked—or lived in the same town as me, Lexington.

So we ended up meeting when I was in between my junior and senior year, and then—so in between his sophomore and junior year at Lexington High [School]. And so we ended up meeting and ended up sort of dating for eleven months, basically the entirety of my senior year in high school.

And during that time, I still really wasn't out. You know,—I mean, I had—you know, we dated, and I sort of created the

sort of story that I told my one other close friend that I had, Ethan. I told him that I was dating this girl named Suzie, when really, I was dating this guy named Dave. And so I—I created this sort of story that I told him for months upon months, about how I was dating this girl from camp, summer camp, when in fact I was dating Dave.

And he knew Dave. Ethan knew Dave, too, but he didn't know that I was dating him, so it was like—it was like I created—you know, I—I told this false narrative about how he was, like, a friend of mine and we were just friends and that I was dating this girl Suzie, but Ethan would always be, like, "Well, where's Suzie? Why—can I meet her?"

So that went on for a while, and then eventually, near the end of my senior year, I—I told Ethan that Suzie was actually Dave. And it created—it didn't—it didn't come out as well as I had hoped. Ethan kind of rejected that. I mean, I did sort of propagate, perpetuate this lie for a long period of time. But Ethan eventually sort of—we sort of lost—the friendship disappeared.

So that was actually—I'm kind of getting ahead of myself because that was the end of my senior year. So between my junior and senior year—and this was around the same time that I started dating Dave—I did come out to my parents. And the reason I came out to my parents was because I actually attempted suicide between junior and senior year, so I had—I had been at camp for the summer. I was—at that point, I had gone to camp for seven, eight, nine years. I was a camper and then worked my way into, like, counselor-in-training, and then I was an apprentice, and then ultimately, I became counselor my final year, which was that year. And I was a photography counselor at camp in Vermont.

[End of first session]

FISHBEIN: It is October 25th at 11:09 a.m., and I am in Rauner Library. And, Tom, are you still in Minneapolis, Minnesota?

KENNEDY: Yes, I am.

FISHBEIN: Great. So, yeah, continuing where we left off our last interview, you were telling a story of how you worked at a summer camp in high school and the kind of mental health struggles that you went through while you were there, so if you could, you know, maybe just start that story from the beginning, that would be—that would be fantastic.

KENNEDY: Okay. I'm trying to remember exactly what I was talking about, but I think I was talking about high school life and coming out, coming out process. So I came out to my parents after a suicide attempt between junior and senior year in high school, and during that time I was obviously very depressed. And it was kind of was a byproduct of that summer when I was working as a camp counselor in my camp, where I had been a camper for—since about the age of nine up through becoming a counselor-in-training and then an apprentice and then finally, the summer that I was there, I was counselor. And I was the photography counselor.

And I was just in a really tough spot. I—you know, I don't think—I—you know, my parents look back or in hindsight after—especially after I came out to them and—and sort of deduced that the reason I was depressed was because I was gay. But really that—for me, that really wasn't a big part of it. Like, I always felt like the gay thing wasn't really going to be an issue. It was sort of a non-issue because of the—soft of the environment which I was brought up—you know, going to the Unitarian Universalist church, which is very openly welcoming and then also being just in a family where, you know, my parents were always very progressive. It just wasn't—the gay thing wasn't—wasn't the thing that made me depressed.

You know, I was just very—I felt very isolated, I felt very lonely. It was a tough—it was just a really tough time for me. Very lonely, depressed, isolated. And camp sort of exacerbated the feelings that I probably felt before I went to camp, so then ultimately when I—at the end of—I had one 24-hour day off. During the 24-hour day off, I went home to Boston. Ended up taking a boatload of my mom's Xanax and then ended up waking up the next day and, like, I was really groggy and out of it. And ultimately, I came clean with what I had done.

And so then I was sent to a psychiatric hospital in—outside Boston for a couple of weeks, and during that time is when I came out to my parents. And they were the first people I came out to, I think. My mom was—she cried tears of joy because she was so excited that she had a gay son because she's a therapist and now she had another check—I'm being very sarcastic here, but she had—you know, in—in her mind, she had another—another—you know, another check box that she could put next to her—you know, her credibility as a psychologist. And now actually one of her main specialties is seeing parents of kids with—that are—that are gay or have disabilities, because my brother has disabilities.

So in any event, you know, my mom was—my mom was super excited, and definitely wasn't upset about it. My dad was, you know, very—his usual sort of quiet sort of reserved self but supportive in the end—you know, no issues there.

So that's when I first came out to my parents. Then, you know, things got a lot better from there in terms of my mental state, mental health over the course of the next year, and that's when I started dating Dave, who I mentioned previously, who was—you know, I told my friend was named Suzie, and that created a big drama there. But I already talked about that before.

And then over the course of the year, things got better, but I really didn't have a ton of friends, so coming out was a slow process, for sure, and it really wasn't until I got to college that I really, like, decided to be openly out. You know, high school was a—I—I didn't really have any friends anyway, so coming out wasn't going to change that. And, yeah, so I really didn't—and the—the gay identity for me wasn't really a big part of my high school experience.

FISHBEIN:

Do you think you can really separate those feelings of isolation and loneliness from your queer identity? I mean, I hear a lot about those, you know, mental health phenomena—you know, along with depression occurring in, you know, this population especially, so I'm wondering, like, maybe there is, you know, something there that you might not be able to put words to?

KENNEDY: Sure. I mean, there might well be, like, a connection between—for me, the gay thing may have been part of the reason I felt different from or separate from my peers and therefore led me to be more depressed, which led me to be really depressed, which led me to be suicidal. But, you know, I don't—it wasn't like I was, like, you know, having these thoughts of, *Oh, I'm gay, and my parents are gonna hate me. Everyone is gonna hate me. You know, I can't—I can't deal with this anymore.*

You know, that—that would be a common refrain, probably, amongst a lot of people that are growing up in, you know, middle America or less progressive, you know, families and stuff. But, I mean, I just felt—like I said, my parents gave me *Changing Bodies, Changing Lives*, that book, when I was, like,—they gave that before I went through puberty, so I was, like, twelve, and that book, you know, is openly—you know, not—not—yeah, pretty open for its time. You know, this is early nineties. Was—was pretty openly supportive of, like, the gay thing as being sort of a non-issue, sort of like, “This—this could happen to you; it might not happen to you.” Like, “This is what it would mean if it does happen to you,” you know?

And that's what I was reading when I was, like, twelve. My parents gave it to me. And then I went—like I said, I went to the Unitarian Universalist church, which is a very liberal religion, where we actually took, like, a class about sexuality in eighth grade, which ironically is a class I'm actually teaching right now, as we speak, every Sunday at my church here in Minneapolis.

But in any event, so we took this, like, sex ed class, which was very—you know, very open about, you know, sexual health in general and supportive of these different people, so, you know, I—I never really, at least at the time, looked—at the time, I was, like, *The gay thing isn't part of this depression.*

Looking back, you know, sure, it probably had a part to play in sort of like the general feeling of different—you know, feeling different than my peers—you know, like, feeling like I didn't have anyone to connect with. You know, I guess that's where it sort of showed up; it didn't show up in the sort of

general sort of like, *I'm not good enough* kind of feeling. It was more sort of like, *I'm different*. You know, I guess it's a slight difference, I suppose, but—

FISHBEIN: Can you maybe talk a little bit more about Unitarianism and how you kind of found acceptance there? I grew up going to a Unitarian church, so I'm a little bit familiar with it, but I'd love to, you know, hear your perspective.

KENNEDY: Sure. Yeah, I mean, that's just the church I grew up in, so it wasn't really like I had that much of a choice over it. You know, I mean, like every other kid growing up and going to church, you know, it's like the last place they want to go on Sunday morning, you know? You know, and—you know, and—and ultimately, you know, sort of growing up UU led me—as an adult sort of led me to nothing, you know.

And for many years, I didn't go to church after high school. It wasn't until recently, in my late thirties, that I discovered UU again and have sort of connected with that community here in Minneapolis.

But, you know, going to that sort of—you know, as a kid, at least, it was—you know, for me it was less about the—the fun part was less about the Sunday mornings and more about, like, the youth group and, like I said, this—this—I remember vividly, even now, like, some of the activities we did in AYS, About Your Sexuality, which was approximately probably about eighth grade, which is now called Our Whole Lives [OWL], which is the class I'm teaching here in Minneapolis with other teachers, to eighth graders.

And so I remember vividly AYS. There was youth group. There was Church Across the Street (now Neighboring Faiths), which was sort of a class a year, where you sort of spend time going to different churches every Sunday and sort of exploring, like, your own belief system, because the UU sort of approach is sort of: We believe everyone has a right to choose their own, you know, faith system or whatever.

UU's are very—it's a very—it's a very supportive place to go if you're somehow disenfranchised or somehow—disenfranchised isn't the right word, but if you're somehow,

like, you know, not interested in following your previous, you know, more strict religion, you're, like, always welcome as a UU, you know, because they have—you know, around Christmastime they have a Christmas service, they have a Chanukah service, they have a Kwanza service. You know, it's, like, very, like: We accept everyone.

And so, you know, growing up in that church, you sort of—you know, a lot of—a lot of the religious education is sort of catered towards, like, fostering, you know, your own personal growth around, you know, traditional religious or spiritual values. And ultimately you end up with a church service, at the end of one of the school years, where the—the kids actually run the service and, in the process, read a statement where they read, like, their current, like, belief system.

For me at the time, my dog had just died, so I remember writing or reading my little blurb—was mostly about “I believe in reincarnation” at the time, because my—my—my dog had died, and I believed, like, her, like, turned into, like, plants and worms in the ground and ultimately, like, regrew into, like, life, you know? That was—so that was my sort of—you know, whether I believe that now or not doesn't matter, but at the time it was very relevant to me.

But the point being, is that, like, you know, it wasn't—it wasn't about, you know, traditional deities or something that you see in a lot of, like, western religions. You know, it—it was really about, like, sort of fostering your own growth and progress, you know, growing up, so—

FISHBEIN: I—I want to go back to AYS. Can you repeat for me what that acronym stands for?

KENNEDY: It was About Your Sexuality.

FISHBEIN: Okay. And what—what was that program like? What did you take away from there?

KENNEDY: So the stuff I remember, which is a few things—they're not most of it—and, you know, I can kind of piece together what I did then based on what I'm doing now, because I'm doing the further iteration of it now, as an adult, and teaching it.

But I remember specifically in something—I remember—the things I remember vividly was—well, I remember—I remember putting on condoms on bananas, like practicing putting condoms on bananas.

And then I also remember very vividly this, like,—the day we talked about masturbation, because there was this slide show presentation, where these, you know, black-and-white slides would come up, and then—and then there'd be, like, this little blurb read by the instructors in the group, which happened to be a husband-and-wife team. They were teaching my group, and so, you know, there was a picture of a—black-and-white, simple picture of a—of a naked man, and the blurb said, “Hi, my name is Jeff, and I like to masturbate.”

And then you go to the next slide, and you see him, you know, in front of the mirror, and he's, like,—and then the blurb reads, “Hi, sometimes I like to masturbate in front of the mirror.”

And then later on, you see a slide, and he's got a finger in his mouth, and the blurb says, “Sometimes I like to taste my cum.”

It's pretty freaking weird, but definitely set—like, definitely puts an impression in your mind. Like, I remember that, you know, very vividly. It was—it was a weird experience being in the room at that time when this was taking place. But, you know, it—it—it made its point, which was sort of to—you know, sort of to, like, send the message of sort of, like, sexuality is healthy, you know? And, like,—and if you decide as a kid that you want to explore sexuality like—that's great on you. Like, you know, you—you approach this sort of like, you know, everyone—everyone has the power to sort of decide for themselves, like, how they want to approach themselves in general, you know, and also, like, their, like, sexual selves.

And so it sort of to foster this sort of like supportive yet instructional, you know, whatever and—and—and sort of to give—you know, a lot of—especially that—nowadays, like, there—you know, I'm teaching eighth graders. And so these

kids, like, you know, are very—I'm sure very well informed about some things. You know, like, they have—a lot of them have watched porn or, you know, talked to their friends about, you know, this stuff. I mean, they're all going through puberty. It's, like, natural.

But I think the sort of the point of the OWL—at least the current OWL program is sort of to set the record straight in terms of giving people factual information so that they can, like, you know, dispel myths and stuff that they've heard in school and, like,—and therefore, like,—and then—and then eventually, like,—and maybe, like, tell their friends about this stuff that they're learning.

You know, It's—it's—and—and—so, yeah, that's basically what it was and sort of what it is now, too.

FISHBEIN: Great. So one kind of more question I have about your growing-up experience: I'm from Massachusetts, too. I'm obviously a bit younger than you. But one of the things I kind of remember about being there as a kid was how the state was, you know, really kind of trying to be progressive when it came to gay issues. Like, would you have been aware of those politics around, like, marriage equality at all, and did that kind of help you feel more accepted?

KENNEDY: Yeah. I mean,—I mean, I think it was just—I mean, I don't remember specifically, like, in high school thinking that that—I mean, I'm sure—you know, I think it's sort of like my parents—growing up in that environment—or me growing up in that environment with my parents, like, you know, being around other people that have a similar sort of like approach, and in a community that's generally supportive of, like, you know, gay people, even in the nineties, or early nineties. You know, certainly, like, paid [sic] a part to play in, like, how I grew up and how I saw myself over time.

I can't—I mean, I don't remember specifically, like, you know, a proposition or something that was going down when I was, like, sixteen or something. I don't really remember that at all. I don't even know when the marriage equality thing started. I mean, that—it feels like that started happening a little bit later on. I don't remember that happening in the nineties.

But certainly, there were, like, other things that—that were going on in the world. I can't—I don't remember specifically, like, how Massachusetts was different than, you know, Iowa or something.

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm. What were some of those things going on in the world that you might be aware of? I mean, not necessarily unique to Massachusetts but just in general.

KENNEDY: You mean at the time I was in high school?

FISHBEIN: Yeah.

KENNEDY: I mean, it's hard—I don't want to, like,—I don't really remember. I mean, nineties, mid-nineties in the news? I mean, I have a hard time remembering current events from last year. It's hard for me to remember, like, current events from 1995. I mean, I know that there were—I mean, okay, so 9/11 didn't happen until 2001, so obviously that was pre-9/11. So I don't remember—I think there was—when was Operation Desert Storm? Was that after 9/11? I think it was, right?

FISHBEIN: No, that was—that was before. That was in the early nineties.

KENNEDY: Okay.

FISHBEIN: Yeah.

KENNEDY: Well, yeah, then that would have been, I guess, around that time then.

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm.

KENNEDY: So there was that going on in the world. I don't remember. I should know. I mean, I—

FISHBEIN: I guess to be, like, a little more specific, I mean, in terms of, like, gay issues going on. You know, I think that—like, were you aware of, you know, the AIDS [acquired immunodeficiency syndrome] crisis at all when you were growing up?

KENNEDY: Sure.

FISHBEIN: Did that, you know, factor into conversations with your high school boyfriend, maybe?

KENNEDY: That, I don't—that, I can't speak to specifically. I don't think that that did happen. I mean, I remember the—the AIDS—the interesting thing about the, quote unquote, "AIDS stuff" is that I—it in many ways had more of an impact on me later in life than it did when I was growing up. You know, it—maybe this just a time of my own ignorance or something, but I—I mean, I—like I said, we grew up in a household where we watched the news and stuff, so certainly, like, this stuff came up, I guess, but I don't really remember specifically things about the AIDS quilts or the AIDS epidemic, at least in the nineties. And that maybe—maybe that makes me sound a little bit ignorant or something, but I just don't—it doesn't—it's not something that I specifically remember talking about with, like, Dave, for example.

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm.

[Redacted]

FISHBEIN: So moving forward to your time at Dartmouth [College], you've talked some about how you find, you know, an acceptive—accepting community around your sexuality, you know, with your family and at your church. How do you kind of—did that change at all when you came to Dartmouth? How do you think that Dartmouth as a whole kind of created an environment for that community?

KENNEDY: Well, yeah, I mean, I have mixed feelings about it. Certainly, like, you know, high school, like,—like I said, high school was obviously a tough time for me. You know, I managed to—to end on an okay note, you know, in the end, given, like, the—you know, I got into Dartmouth, and I got into a bunch of other schools that I wanted to go to.

And so, you know,—but—but—but sort of like—you know, I think one of the priorities for me in—in looking at colleges and trying to figure out where to go is that I really wanted to, like, just take a totally different approach towards, like, the

whole gay thing. You know, whereas in high school it was just like—very, like, reactionary and, like, you know, not—not openly out immediately, sort of like wait and see with, like, everyone, was sort of my approach.

It was sort of like I went to college being, like, *I'm gonna be as gay as possible*. You know, like, *This is me. I'm gay. I'm just gonna be really fuckin' gay*. I mean, I shouldn't swear, but, you know, *I'm just gonna be—like, I wanna be out*. And, you know,—and I'm not sure if Dartmouth was the place for me to do that necessarily. I mean, it was definitely a more buttoned-up, you know, traditionally conservative school, where I was trying to, like, come in there and be, like, you know, a rainbow-flag-wearing member of the gay population.

And, you know,—and—and at the same time, I'm not—even to this day, I'm not the most—it's not like I—I went in there—it's not like I went in there with, like, an agenda and, like, tried to change anything. You know, I don't—I'm a pretty quiet guy. Like, I'm—you know, I want—I wanted to be myself. Like, I wasn't trying to, like, go in there and, like, change the dynamic, by any means.

But I also, like, wanted to be, like, openly out. Instead of being, like,—you know, instead of sort of—it—it was—in many ways, it was sort of misguided because, you know, in the long run, like, my life has become, over time, sort of a reversion back to the original self, which is sort of like—just sort of live my life as it is, and if people ask me if I'm gay, of course I'll tell them I'm gay. But generally speaking, like, it's not really anyone's business. It's not a big deal, you know.

And that's sort of the way I am now. But going into college, I was, like,—I wanted to, like, be out, for some reason. Like, I just wanted to, like,—and—and it was not easy because, you know,—it wasn't like I—I wanted to be out, but at the same time, I also, like, wanted to fit in. And, you know, I went in as a recruit for heavyweight crew, out of high school, so, like, I was going to pretty, like, traditionally straight, I guess, you know, athletic clubs, where, like, I *wasn't* out, you know? I mean, I said I wanted to be out. I said I wanted to be this, like, rainbow-flag-wearing member of the gay groups, but, you know, at rowing I was—I was kind of just my same sort

of like quiet, you know, isolated, sort of like lone- —loner person.

But then I was, like, actively involved with Dartmouth Rainbow Alliance and, like, trying to, like, —trying to integrate the two, which at Dartmouth was pretty difficult, you know? It was—you know, my second choice or the other college I was actively considering was Wesleyan [University], and that would have been a totally fucking different experience because Wesleyan, at least at the time, was, like, — compared to Dartmouth, was, like, —it was like Oberlin [College] or something. It was just so liberal—you know, just so open-minded, almost to the point of, like, everyone's gay. It's the sort of—you know, it—it's a given. Everyone's queer. So, you know, a totally different approach, at least in my mind, of how it would have—things would have gone down, whereas I went to Dartmouth, which is, like, you know, like I said, at the time, in my mind, there was—I perceived it much more like buttoned up and, like, you know, sort of, you know, Ivy League, obviously.

Does that answer the question? I don't remember what the question [was].

FISHBEIN: Yeah. Yeah, you—you gave me a lot of interesting information. What made you choose Dartmouth in the end?

KENNEDY: I think my mom had a big part to play in it. You know, I mean, it had—I guess it just had the—the allure of being an Ivy League school. You know, it—it's even, like, a step up or—I don't know, it just seems—you know, I have a lot of regrets about it, in the end, so it's not—it's not actually easy for me to say. I mean,—I mean, the reason the—I feel like the biggest reason was, like, you know, pressure from my parents to—to go to an Ivy League school, you know?

FISHBEIN: Okay. Can you talk a little bit more about that pressure? Like, what role did your—did your mom play then?

KENNEDY: I mean, you know, I guess I was just easily persuadable or something, because I was pretty—you know, in the college application process, I was pretty dead-set on going to a school that was closer to a city. Like, you know, I want- —I

wanted to be near a city, like, New York or whatever, just somewhere different.

And Dartmouth was in many ways—it's almost—almost like going to, like—you know, it's, like, a half hour from my summer camp, you know? It's sort of like going back to Vermont, you know, or New Hampshire. I mean, it is in New Hampshire, but it's really close to Vermont. And, you know, I'm very familiar with Vermont. We had a house there, growing up, when I was in high school. My mom currently lives in Thetford [Vermont], which is, like, really close to Hanover.

And she, like, basically lives on the Dartmouth—it's kind of freakish because she, like,—she rows crew still. She does single—she rows a single. And so she rows out of the Dartmouth boat house. It's like she's taken over my life at Dartmouth or something.

FISHBEIN: Did she live there when you were going to school?

KENNEDY: No, she—my parents were still together then. They lived in Bos- —they continued to live in Boston while I was in school, or Lexington. So she only moved up there in the last ten years or so.

FISHBEIN: I want to go back to your—you said you had—sorry to interrupt. Were you going to say something?

KENNEDY: No.

FISHBEIN: You—you said you had lots of regrets about going to Dartmouth. Can you elaborate on what you meant by that?

KENNEDY: I mean, like,—like I said, I just—in high school I really wanted to go somewhere that—that was going to be very—like, my—the gay thing was a priority for me, sort of like in—in terms of, like, being—feeling accepted and feeling like I had a community. You know, sort of going to a place where, like, I *could* be out and stuff and be comfortable.

And, you know, I—in high school, I remember—this is sort of going back to high school, but I re- —there were a couple of people that were out in my high school, you know? And I

thought they were pretty cute, I think. Well, one guy I thought was really cute. But it was, like, they were, like,—it was—they were really, like, in the artistic crowd or just sort of, you know, eccentric people and I was very isolated and quiet. I couldn't even—you know, it—it was, like,—it was just a—they were, like—the idea of being able to, like, be friends with them seemed like an impossible task.

And so I guess going to college, I sort of wanted—wanted that, somehow. Like, I wanted to be able to be gay and be proud of it and not feel ashamed of it. And—and in the—you know, pre-Dartmouth, I didn't really know that Dartmouth wasn't going to be a place for that. I mean, it—in hindsight, you know, it sort of—it certainly—it certainly wasn't, you know, as—as supportive or as open as I wanted a college to be, in high school.

And, you know, I saw that in Wesleyan, and I don't remember—I honestly don't remember some of—I mean, I applied to a bunch of schools. I certainly didn't get into all of them. But, you know, it was sort of Dartmouth was the only Ivy League I got into, and so I think it was, like, my—my brother had previously gone to Cornell [University], and my mom was, like, you know, basically, like, “You should really do this Ivy League thing again. Like, it—it opens up so many doors. You know, it's, like,—it has the name. and it's near Vermont.” You know, all these things that sort of like ended up being persuasive, I—I guess, you know, because they led me to Dartmouth.

But, you know, in retrospect, I kind of—I always kind of regretted not pursuing my own interests versus, like, my mom's, you know?

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm.

You—you talked about how you weren't—maybe your out self on the crew team. Did you experience any kind of homophobia from there? Was there, like, you know, an actively hostile environment?

KENNEDY: No. You know, I don't think I ever really *was* out on crew. Like, I—like,—like, the approach that I took in my mind—like, I was just talking about, about going to college and being,

like, openly out and stuff was sort of different than how it actually played out, you know? You know, I—I responded to any given situation, you know, with reticence but cautious sort of desire to ultimately be myself.

But, you know, in both the fraternity system, you know, and on the crew team, like,—in my—at least in the fraternity system, like, in my own fraternity experience and on the crew team, you know, that wasn't the place where I felt comfortable being out.

So, I mean, I—I don't—I don't—I mean, certainly going into—into freshman year crew, whatever, I didn't—I wasn't out, you know? I think—like, one of my closest friends at Dartmouth was a female rower named Anna, and she was 6'2". And—and we became really good friends, you know, and I think people thought we were dating at—at one time or another. But that was never the case.

And I don't even—it took me a long time even to come out to her. So it's, like,—you know, I guess I had my mind, like, sort of in a place where I was just—I don't know. I don't know what I had in mind. I guess I just envisioned that it would be very different than it was, and so when I ended up sort of at this sort of place where, you know, it wasn't obvious that I was gay, and I didn't necessarily, like, feel comfortable coming out, I just sort of stuck to myself and did my own thing.

You know, crew—crew was kind of—crew is such—crew, itself, is, you know, kind of difficult, in some ways for me. I mean, I only rowed until about my sophomore year, I think, and then I—I quit because it just was consuming too much of my time. It was, like, too much. And I—I just felt like I wasn't getting—I felt like I wasn't that good, and it wasn't really going to get any better, and honestly didn't really like it. Like, I viewed it like the erg, which is, like, a rowing machine. It's, like, a torture device. And I still do. I hate—I hate the thing.

And, you know,—I don't know. I mean, it—the—the rowing team—I don't remember specifically it being—I do remember—actually, I do remember there being a lightweight rower I was really attracted to, and we went—when I traveled overseas, I—I did a language study abroad

in Barcelona [Spain], and we traveled a bit. And he was on that—on that—on that trip, or whatever. And I remember thinking he was, like, super cute. But I didn't really do anything about it, and—yeah. I don't know. I don't really know how to answer the question because I didn't really—I didn't experience any specific, like, homophobia—homophobia. But I also wasn't out, so—

FISHBEIN: Well, what was the experience like for you to go to Barcelona? What was the gay environment like there, and how might that have been different than Dartmouth?

KENNEDY: Yeah, I mean,—I mean, Barcelona was a real opportunity for me. It was, like,—you know, that was—that was—I guess it must have been sophomore year, and—yeah, I—I—I mean, I wasn't—I still wasn't—you know, I still was selectively coming out to people, and I—I don't remember if I came out to the people I was—I think I might have come out sort of to a couple of the females that were on the trip with me.

But I did—I did go to, like, a gay club once or twice, and that was a great experience. I don't know. It was good. I mean, it was a good time.

FISHBEIN: Do you remember what made that experience, you know, great for you?

KENNEDY: I—I don't really remember the—the going to the gay club experience that well. I mean, I was really drunk, I think. It was actually the night that my parents were in town, visiting. Like, we got really drunk at dinner, and then I left, said goodbye to them, and then I went out to this gay bar, or club. But, I mean, it was just—it was just fun. I mean, it certainly wasn't—it certainly wasn't my first gay bar experience. I mean, my first gay bar was when I was seventeen in Boston. But—

FISHBEIN: What did you think about that experience when you were seventeen?

KENNEDY: I mean, it was—it was good, I guess. Yeah, It was—I'm trying to remember it. I mean, it was—it was a cool bar. I don't really remember, honestly. [Chuckles.]

FISHBEIN: I—I—I guess I want to talk to you some about your—your fraternity experience.

KENNEDY: My what?

FISHBEIN: Your—your fraternity experience at Dartmouth. Which-- which fraternity were you in?

KENNEDY: I was in SAE [Sigma Alpha Epsilon].

FISHBEIN: And what—what sort of environment did SAE create back then for LGBT people?

KENNEDY: I mean, I don't think it created anything for LGBT people back then. You know, it—I mean, I—I—I joined. I mean, I was—I was hesitant about joining a fraternity, to begin with. But since I was rowing crew, I sort of—I felt sort of swept up in the—maybe I was sort of peer pressured, I guess, into sort of—no, no one said to me specifically, like, "You—you need to join a fraternity" or anything. But I just felt like everyone—everyone sort of—you know, at least in the time—I assume it may be the same now—like, over 50 percent of the population—college population was in—in—in the Greek system. And so I sort of, you know, felt pressured to sort of join the crowd and, like, do what everyone else was doing.

And—and so—and—and even though, like, you know, I—I didn't really enjoy Greek parties all that much—like, freshman year I didn't really connect to any specific fraternity over any other. You know, the only reason—the only reason I joined SAE was because that's sort of like where a lot of the crew guys went, the rowing guys. And—and so I sort of, you know, decided to go there based on that—you know, that reasoning. But, you know, it could have just as easily been any other fraternity.

And, you know, it—you know, I went in as a rower, and so I think we were sober. We were drinking prune juice or something instead of beer, whatever. And, you know, I wasn't—I—I—I remember the gay thing being particularly difficult for me. I don't think it was probably difficult for anyone else necessarily, but I remember, like, really being torn about how to, like, deal with it.

Like, you know, it sort of is another—it's sort of another indication—sort of another example of sort of like the gay—the coming-out experience and the gay experience for me, at least in college, was—was almost like a much bigger deal than it really needs to be, you know?

You know, I guess—I guess I—I said earlier how I wanted to be, like,—what I wanted it to be and what happened was totally different, you know? I mean, I wanted to be, you know, super gay, super out, you know, all this stuff. But in the end, I ended up sort of being really closeted, for the most part, outside of, like, you know, being involved in the Dartmouth Rainbow Alliance and other LGBT-affiliated groups like that but—and stuff.

And so in many ways, I sort of led, like, a double life or something, because I had this sort of gay thing going on and then sort of like presumably straight thing going on in these other communities, although I didn't, you know, actively promote that I was straight or anything. I wasn't, like, trying to, like, you know, tell a lie. But I also wasn't coming out.

And—and—and I think, like,—you know, I think that—that's sort of like feeling or need to, like, you know, make a big deal out of coming out is sort of like defined by my college experience, where, like, you know, if I didn't come out or if—I—I felt like I had to make a big deal out of it, a big deal out of coming out, you know?

And now, as an adult, I'm, I like, you know, if I come out, I come out. If I don't come out, I don't come out. You know, it's like—if people ask, we'll tell them, but it's not really, like,—it's not my main—it's not, like, how I—like, at least nowadays, it's not how I primarily define myself. You know, I'm, like,—I'm a lot of things before I'm a gay person, you know? I'm, like,—and—

But in college, it was, like, it—it—it—it had to be this big deal, and—and that's sort of the way that I approached the fraternity thing. You know, I—I didn't come out right away. And ultimately, when I did come out, I—it wasn't just, like, told—told, you know, a friend. It was, like, at a meeting—at,

like, a house meeting, I, like, made an announcement about it. You know, it was, like, I made this big—big deal, I guess.

And there was a lot of thought going into it ahead of time about how I was going to come out and all this stuff, and— and— and— and— and I— and, you know, I made a huge deal out of it, a huge deal out of it when in the end, it really wasn't a big deal. You know, everyone was kind of, like, "Okay." You know, whatever, you know. "Great. That's nice. We support you. Next." You know, and that, you know, sort of thing.

But, you know, I have a lot of—I have a lot of—you know, Dartmouth was a weird time for me in general. Like, I—I—it's not like I had—it's not like I had this, you know, life-defining experience that changed me for the better for the rest of my life, you know? You know, I mean, Dartmouth is—Dartmouth was a really—I mean, it was—high school was a lot worse of a time for me, but Dartmouth was a tough time for me, too.

You know, like, I—you know, I spent the first year or two, like, being committed to this crew thing, when in the end I really didn't want that. It was, like, too much. It was, like, too, I guess, heteronormative in its own way. I wasn't that good at the sport, you know, and—and so ultimately, I quit. And then when I quit, you know, it's, like—it—it—it made me—it made me—it put me in a spot where I feel like I was just kind of a wash and, like, and—and—and didn't really have any friends, because, you know, the thing about college, at least Dartmouth at least, is, like, sort of like you form—you know, form a lot of the friend- —life-long—or friends that last at least through college, like, at the beginning.

And so, like, at the beginning I had all this crew stuff, and then when I dropped crew, it was, like, I had nothing. You know, I had the gay—I had the gay community, and that's basically it. And so especially, like, the last—my last couple of years at Dartmouth, almost every weekend I—I—I traveled to Boston almost every weekend, just to get away because I was, like,—I felt very isolated there. I felt like I couldn't—there wasn't the gay community that I wanted. I—you know, I just feel like I—I really felt like I just wasn't having a good time.

But going back to the fraternity thing, you know, it—it—you know,—so I sort of joined the—the Greek system sort of like unwillingly, in a way. I mean, I—I mean, I—I did it willingly, but I—I sort of—it wasn't—it wouldn't have been my first choice. And in—in retrospect, I would have—I feel like I would have been happier at a place like Tabard or something, like the co-ed fraternity, you know, sort of situation, co-ed house kind of thing. There wasn't an LGBT-affiliated housing option, which I think there is now.

But—and then when I—when I came out, it was, like, you know, sort of like I said, I made a big deal out of it, but in the end, it really wasn't that big of a deal. And in the—in the long run, I think—surely, after I—I became a member of SAE, like, I went inactive. Like, I lived there sophomore summer, right after I became a full-fledged member or whatever, and then after that I was inactive for the rest of the—my time at Dartmouth. I didn't really ever go to any more SAE things, as far as I can remember, after that.

FISHBEIN: Why do you think you made such a big deal out of the coming out experience? I mean, do you think that was *your* decision, or is that maybe like molded some by, like, the environment or peer pressure? Or, like, looking back, why do you think, you know,—you cared so much about a thing and that now you're, you know, a little bit less, you know, into?

KENNEDY: You know, I mean, it's a—it's a good question. I'm not sure I know the answer. I guess—I guess it was sort of this—I guess it was sort of this thing in high school where I saw, you know, these other—like I said, there was this other—that other gay guy that was, like, in high school, that was out and more artsy. You know, I guess I wanted that or something. Like, I—I—I—I perceived that as an outsider, you know, from a distance and said that that's something that I want and sort of went into college, you know, or thinking about going into college, you know—

Wesleyan, for—Wesleyan, for example, was this—at least in my mind, whether it's true or not, in my mind it was this place where I could just be gay and relish in it, and sort of—so that sort of how I envisioned the next step. And then when the college wasn't—or when Dartmouth wasn't that, it—it felt like a let-down.

But in the end, I still wanted to make a statement or to, like, have an impact. I don't know. I don't know if that answers the question. You can ask it again if you want.

FISHBEIN: Yeah. I mean, I guess sort of a follow-up would be—I mean, do you think you maybe set, like, unrealistic expectations for yourself? Like, do you think you maybe, like, romanticized what that experience would be like?

KENNEDY: Yeah.

FISHBEIN: And if so, you know, what do you think led you to—led you to do that?

KENNEDY: What do you think led me to romanticize the experience of coming out?

FISHBEIN: Yeah.

KENNEDY: I don't know. A wild imagination? You know, this desire for acceptance, desire for community that I was hoping for and didn't find. You know, it—it—it certainly wasn't—it was a frustrating experience, you know. What I wanted wasn't what I got. And it certainly gives me a lot of regrets, you know, looking back.

But I don't know. If I had gone to Wesleyan, would it have been that much different? I—I don't know. It's a question I'll never know the answer to. All I know is that, like, the Dartmouth experience was—was frustrating, at least in terms of, you know, the gay thing, for me. I don't know. I don't know if that answers the question or not.

FISHBEIN: Yeah. Do you think there were any times where you feel like you did find community at Dartmouth? And if so, where?

KENNEDY: Yeah. So, I mean—I—you know, I was involved in—let's see, where I found community. Oh, good question. I mean, okay—so, yeah. So one of the places I did find community openly is—like, so I—you know, I started out with this crew focus thing, but—but even during—when I started crew and then later on, like, I really committed—I really committed myself to, like, the thing that I ended up attaching myself to

in the long run, was sort of this volunteer community at Dartmouth—like, the [William Jewett] Tucker Foundation, I was really involved with, and doing a lot of community service activities.

And that's sort of like ultimately where I went after leaving crew, leaving, like, that time intensive activity. I became, like, really involved in, like, community ser- —community service activities. For example, like, I did Big Brother Big Sister, and I did the prison project, I think, --yeah, the prison project, where we meet with convicts and stuff that are in prison and tutor—tutor them and stuff.

We did this North Country Weekend, where we bring a group of, like, twenty-five kids from inner-city Boston up to Dartmouth during—I think during sophomore summer for, like, a weekend of, like, activities and, like, team-building activities and stuff like that.

And I did—I did a bunch of—like, I did a volunteer—I forget what they call it—like, a Tucker funded—Tucker fellowship in the Dominican Republic, so I went down there during the fall of my junior year, to teach English and literacy down in the Dominican Republic, which was a really cool experience.

And I did—you know, I don't really remember everything I did for Tucker, but I think that the lesson—or the—sort of to answer your question, is that I did find it—I did find a community there. And I found a place where I could, you know, utilize, like, my interests and—and—and whatever to,—you know, to further a goal and feel good about myself.

And I did find some good friends there, like my friend [Uriel] “Uri”—Uri Barrera-Vasquez [Class of 1998]. I don't think he works—he doesn't work at the college anymore, but for a while he did work at the college as an alumni [sic] and also was very involved with Tucker Foundation.

So I found good friends there and a good community. It was sort of, you know, separate from the gay—the gay thing wasn't really a part—didn't really have a part to play in that. You know, it was sort of a community I found. It just wasn't—it wasn't—neither here nor there in terms of the gay thing; it was just a community that I found that I—that I connected

with and gave me an avenue for—you know, for growth in college.

FISHBEIN: What do you—what do you think drew you to, you know, community service and spiritual life in the—in the first place?

KENNEDY: I mean,—I mean, you know, I grew up—I mean, the community service thing was, you know, sort of ingrained in me at—from a young age. You know, we did—you know, we did community service activities when I was in middle and high school, through both church and through activities like—in preparation for college, you know, sort of going out for extracurricular activities and stuff.

You know, I did a lot of volunteer stuff, and—and—and I think a lot of it is a byproduct—you're right: It's sort of like the church experience, too, because, like, they—it's very—you—community can be very sort of focused, I guess, depending on your interest or your choices, decisions you make in that—in that community. But there can be a lot of service opportunities through church.

But also, I did, like, Walk for Hunger, and I did various things like that in high school. So then going to college, it's sort of like I had that I guess in mind. And—and—and, you know, my major—I majored in Latino studies in college, in Dartmouth, which is, if you didn't know, is not actually an existing major. I had to, like, petition for a special major to get that major while I was there.

But, you know, ultimately, I wanted to teach—the goal after college was to go into teaching. And I really kind of connected, for some reason, with the Latino experience, even though I'm not Latino in any way. I sort of connected with—I compared—I remember taking a comparative literature class sophomore year, I think, and it was on borderland—that borderland identity. And I remember they were talking—there was this author, Latino author, talking—talking about the experience, like, sort of like straddling the border, being, like, two identities.

And I was, like, *Wow!* I was like, *I really connect with that. That's—that me as a gay person. Like, I'm, like,—I'm straddling two borders too.* Like, I've got this—you know, the

Dartmouth Rainbow Alliance on one hand, where I'm like, trying to be more involved, trying to be more active, trying to be more out, and then I've got this, like, flip side, where I'm, like, doing the traditionally conservative—or at least in my mind, traditionally conservative activities, like crew and like fraternity life.

And I'm trying to, like, blend the two and make them work as one, and that's sort of similar to, like, the borderland experience that Latinos have. And so then I was, like, *Ding, ding, ding. Like, this is what I want to do.* And, like,—so then I ended up taking all these special classes and went to UCSD [University of California, San Diego] for a semester to take classes in Latino studies, which is a bunch of independent studies, with a professor—professor at Dartmouth.

And so I think the—the Latino—that sort of—that Latino side of interest sort of also parlayed over into the—the—the community service thing because a lot of these—I—I often—I remember, did a—a trimester in Newark, New Jersey, where I did—where I worked in the Boys & Girls Club [of Newark] down there and, like, helped—I think I introduced the—I did, like, a drug abuse class down there or something, at the Boys & Girls Club.

And, like, that sort of like—it was a very Latino-intensive community. And so it was sort of like a connection—it sort of brought together both the Latino studies desires I had and also the community service side of things. So that's sort of, I think, what—one of the other reasons that I was very involved in—in Tucker Foundation.

FISHBEIN: Were there any times when you felt like you could really integrate both parts of that borderland identity, to use the term that you were saying? You know, where you felt like you could really embrace, you know, your—your full self, that you remember?

KENNEDY: You know, I mean, it was tough. I mean, it's certainly like—when I—like that—that—that day that I came out to my fraternity, you know, at a house meeting. It's sort of an attempt to sort of like—at least in my mind—to, like, fuse my

two worlds—you know, of being gay and then also being in this, like, heteronormative, you know, environment.

But in the end, it didn't really work out so well. It didn't—I mean, it's not that it did—worked out poorly; it's just—you know, I grew—I—I—I went in one direction, and my fraternity stayed where it was, you know? I moved on.

But, you know, it's certainly, like,—certainly, like, things, like,—every day—I mean, things—and not necessarily while I was at college, but, you know, things—how things play out now, even nowadays. It's like—it's always that way, you know? It's like—I mean, I'm a gay person living in a, you know, whatever world, and, you know, certain things like I do, like, aren't necessarily like what you'd expect a gay person to do. But they still do them. I don't know.

I mean, I play gay volleyball now which is—everyone's gay. But, you know, I also—for a long time now in New York—I played—I played rugby and—rugby and gay oftentimes don't go together in the same sentence for a lot of people because rugby is such a tough, you know, brutal, you know, sport that—that people wouldn't necessarily—you know, people have these, you know, limiting expectations of what gay people can and can't do. And so when you—when you combine that with rugby, it's sort of like a—you know, it's ironic, in many ways.

But, you know, in terms of the col- —Dartmouth experience specifically, you know, I mean, I was—I don't know. It's a—it's a—it's a topic that I—I struggled with, you know, for the bulk of my time there. And I can't think of a specific example where, like, both were, like, you know, in total unison or something.

FISHBEIN: Do you think you could express your queer identity at the Tucker Center or while doing community service work?

KENNEDY: I think sometimes, yes. I don't—I mean, I think so. I mean,—you know, it—it—I mean, looking—looking back—I mean, in hindsight—everything in hindsight is 20/20, right? Or whatever. It's, like, you know,—and I—I sent you those documents that I wrote about SLI [Student Life Initiative] and—

FISHBEIN: Right.

KENNEDY: —and my—just my own perceptions and stuff about things. You know, it looked—based on, like, what I wrote then, how I see it now are, like, so different, you know? I mean, I wrote these position papers that were very—they were very—they took a side, you know, clearly. Whether I, like, agree with what I wrote then now is, like, you know, very up in the air, you know? I think that—I think, like,—I certainly—like, Tucker provided opportunities for me to, like, integrate both my gay identity and my community service identity. Whether or not I took advantage of that 100 percent of the time, you know, not necessarily.

I mean, I think that I—I think the community service, you know, interests played out when I introdu- —when I started that group for questioning and curious folks at Dartmouth, because I was interested in—in, you know, being of service to my community, but, at the same time, in a specific way that was relevant to my own gay identity.

But generally speaking, like, it wasn't like I—I went to—you know, before I signed up for Big Brother Big Sister, I said, "Oh, I'm gay. You know, sign me up," you know, because Big Brother Big Sister isn't really specific to the gay thing, you know. You're just assigned to kids that's looking for support.

You know, I don't remember—I don't know that I ever did a specific Tucker activity that was—that was catered to the gay community or something. But I certainly was, like,—I certainly had—like my friend—like my friend, Uri—you know, I knew him—I guess we must have met at Dartmouth Rainbow Alliance or something. But he was gay, and, like, I was gay, and he was really involved with Tucker, and I was involved with Tucker, and—you know. I—I guess it was just—it was more—it was almost sort of more of a non-issue than—than a big issue at Tucker.

FISHBEIN: Yeah.

So you mentioned a couple of things that I want to make sure we get—have time to talk about, so could you talk some about—just like the context of the Student Life Initiative that was why you wrote the statement before, you know, getting to the content of what you had to say?

KENNEDY: Yeah. I mean, I'm trying to remember. [Chuckles.] You know, I—I read—I reread that statement, and that's basically the context I have in which to talk about it, other than my memory, twenty-year-old memory.

I—I think at the time, there might have been a change in the presidency of the college, and with that, there was sort of the push to sort of—there was—the Student Life Initiative came out, and—and that was this, you know, sort of goal-oriented mission statement to sort of potentially change various structures at Dartmouth to better facilitate, you know, engagement with the community and foster supportive, you know, whatever—lots of—I mean, I'm being very generic right now, but that sort of—what I remember of it is that—is that it was sort of the desire to maybe change things, both in terms of the Greek system and then lots of other things, I think.

I mean, I don't—I mean, I think it probably was about—I mean, I know—I know that nowadays, you know, Dartmouth has these residential life communities, whatever. Like, that never existed when I was there. I don't know that that was a byproduct of the SLI initiative when I was there or not, but it's certainly—like, that's something—like, that would be something like—like what they were trying to get at, you know, back then. I don't know. You know, I don't know what the end results were.

But, you know, it was sort of—I think there was this general sense in the community that—that improvements could be made, especially to the Greek system. I think there had been—you know, and I think it still happens to this day, that there is occasionally, you know, an issue with a specific house around, you know, maybe hazing or around sexual harassment, and that ultimately can lead to, you know, the Greeks—that—that specific fraternity being, you know, banned or something from campus life for a year or something. That's sort of like a common—not necessarily

common, but that can happen. And I think that—that might have happened around that time, that there might have been a house that, you know, had been caught up in some sort of sexual harassment situation.

And so, like, out of that came this sort of, you know, push or, like,—or interest, in exploring—an interest in sort of discussing possible solutions or possible ways to approach this stuff differently, at least as a avenue for discussion, opening of the discussion.

FISHBEIN: And what—

KENNEDY: And, like,—that’s what I can remember about SLI.

FISHBEIN: What led you personally to get involved with that?

KENNEDY: So I’m pretty sure when I wrote that statement, I was the chair of the Dartmouth Rainbow Alliance, because I was chair of the Dartmouth Rainbow Alliance at least one trimester if not two or more. And so I think it was sort of like—sort of thrust upon me as, like, every—all the organizations were sort of like expected to respond to the SLI in various ways or something. I think. I—I hon- — honestly don’t remember. It could either have been that, or it could have been, you know, something that I deci- —I—I decided to do on my own, independently of anyone else telling me to do it.

FISHBEIN: Okay.

KENNEDY: But I remember—so, you know, that doesn’t—that’s a really vague answer that doesn’t help very much,—

FISHBEIN: Right.

KENNEDY: —but—

FISHBEIN: Well, that—that’s fine. I want to ask you right—

KENNEDY: I think—

FISHBEIN: Oh, sorry.

KENNEDY: Go ahead.

FISHBEIN: You—you write in that statement, quote, “Single-sex institutions permeate and affect overarching heterosexist and homophobic behaviors and attitudes at Dartmouth.” Can you, you know, explain what—what you meant by that and why you might have, you know, felt that way at the time?

KENNEDY: So—I mean, like, my—I think a lot of this came out of my own experience in—in—at SAE and—and sort of the process of coming out and stuff and just sort of the experience that I felt, you know, there, in the system, at the time, you know? And looking back now and—and thinking about the current state—well that was not the question, but okay.

So I think, you know, what I was getting at in that sentence was sort of, you know, this general sense—at least the sense that I felt. I mean, this is all—this is very personal to me. I mean, I wrote it on behalf of, like, the gay—the gay—basically the gay body at—at—at Dartmouth. But, you know, I was sort of—of the believe that, you know,—especially in male-dominated, in male-only fraternity life, that there was sort of, you know, a lot of, you know, talk about just sort of gender—gender, like, naming, like,—like, things, or sort of like putting people into boxes unnecessarily about, you know,—and maybe being—being put down on women or put down on—you know, or—or somehow elevating the male, you know, approach or something.

So it was, like, using derogatory terms, sort of—it was just sort of a common thing. At least that’s the way I perceived it at the time. I mean, it’s hard for me to remember that specifically. But certainly, like, that essay I wrote was getting at sort of the general sense, at least in my community at the time, that, you know, male-dominated Greek life was perpetuating these heteronormative, you know, structures through, you know, activities and words and, you know, like inferences and any number of things, and just sort of the process by which you became a member and talked about things. It’s hard for me to remember specifically.

FISHBEIN: And you—you started to express this thought, so I want to make sure you have time to finish it: How do you, like, look

back on that statement now? How might your perspective have changed?

KENNEDY:

Yeah. I mean, it's—I mean, looking back on it,—you know, what's interesting is that—is that, you know,—like you said in a previous e-mail to me or call or something, is that—is that like in the end, you know, nothing really chang- —I mean, at least—at least the way that I envisioned change to happen at that—at that time, like, did not in any way transpire, you know? And the Greek system still exists today. And it seems like they're more or less the same.

But, you know, has—has the world, you know, fallen apart? Has, like,—has—has Hanover caved in on itself because of—you know, of these things? It's, like, no. And, like,—and—am I still of the belief that—that all-male—all-male fraternity is inherently hetero- —inherently homophobic? You know, no. Not at all. At least now.

I mean, back then, I guess I sort of—I—I drew wide assumptions about people and about structures, and—and in the end, like,—like, progress can be made even through, like, traditional structures that can prove me wrong and may well have proved me wrong.

I think that—you know, I think that all-male—I mean, I think after I—I think after I left SAE, like,—and maybe even before I was even there, I—I mean, I know there was a openly gay president of the organization at some point. And so that sort of showed me that, like, you know, maybe I was, you know, not completely—not that I was wrong or something, but just that, like,—like, maybe I wasn't as open-minded as I could have been about how supportive these places can be, you know? Just because I had a very specific experience doesn't necessarily mean that, like, everyone fits into a box that I outlined, you know? And so I think that there can be a lot of room for growth in various ways and that—

You know, I think that—that—the position statement I wrote was, like,—was, like, necessarily one-sided, you know? Because I was trying to make an argument. But it also was kind of closed-minded in the sense that it sort of like made these broad, you know, assumptions or arguments that—that didn't necessarily exist, I guess, [unintelligible] through.

Does that answer the question?

FISHBEIN: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Thank you. I just want to be respectful of time and move on to your other statement. You wrote there that you, quote, “utilized the DRA as a coming-out aid, utilizing its networks and support systems to ensure that I had allies.” Can you talk a little bit more about your involvement with the Dartmouth Rainbow Alliance and what that meant to you?

KENNEDY: Yeah. I mean, that—that—that statement, too, is very—it was very not—not very well written, for one. [Chuckles.] It—it could have used a good edit. But it was—it sort of gives you a little bit of perspective, I guess, on—on how I perceived the community at the time and also sort of where I—where I thought—where I wanted it to go, in terms of being not only a social vehicle but also a place for support for people that aren’t quite sure of their identity.

I think—I was very judgmental in that essay about how, like, social—like, the social support—social support has no play—no place in the Dartmouth Rainbow Alliance, which is, like, totally ridiculous because obviously, like, social support is, like,—also has to be a major priority, and it is extremely important.

And so I—that essay—I’m a little bit more—I’m a little bit, like, even more reticent about its content than I am the SLI one. But in terms of, like, how Dartmouth was supportive, the Dartmouth Rainbow Alliance was supportive for me, I mean, I think—you know, like I said, I—I mean, I came from—when I came from Lexington High School, where—I think there might have been even a Gay Student Alliance when I was in high school. And I was not at all affiliated with it. You know, I didn’t—I mean, I think that guy that I was out—that I was—admired for whatever reason, you know, was actively involved in that, and there were other people actively involved in that, but I was, like, a lonely, very lonely, isolated person that didn’t think he was worth anything, let alone of value enough to go to this Gay Student Alliance.

So going to Dartmouth sort of newly empowered—having recently sort of like come out at home—like, I wanted—you

know, I wanted that. I wanted what I didn't have in high school. And so, you know, I was very interested in getting involved in the Dartmouth Rainbow Alliance in whatever capacity, from the beginning.

And, you know, it—it—it wasn't—I guess it didn't always live up to the expectations I had of it. I guess I sort of—maybe I—maybe I had this expectation that it would be, like, you know, Wesleyan or whatever, whatever Wesleyan is like. I don't even know what Wesleyan is like, but in my mind, Wesleyan was like this, like, super gay school, that all 2,000 students are gay, and, you know,—and I sort of went to Dartmouth hoping that I would find that community.

And, you know, it was—it was, you know, a handful of people, you know, mostly interested in sort of socializing, which is—which is great. And, you know, it was—it was helpful—it was helpful to me at times. Other times, it was a difficult place, somehow. But for the most part, it did provide me that, like,—you know, that flip side to sort of this, you know,—talking about that borderland thing again.

You know, it's sort of like it was—it was sort of that one side, where I'm, like, *This is my identity right now, and then on the other side, is this—these are the structures that, you know, I somehow have to negotiate my identity with.* And it wasn't—it wasn't always easy.

FISHBEIN: What sorts of activities do you remember doing with the DRA? Specifically as the—the chairperson, I think you said, for a term or two?

KENNEDY: What activities do I remember doing? I mean, I remember—remember just a lot of, like,—there was, like, a drop-in group, you know, every week or whatever. I think we would occasionally get together for parties or whatever. It was mostly just a—I mean, it—it—it was mostly just a handful of five to ten people—five to ten people, I think, on average. I don't—I'm having a hard time remembering, like, what specifically we did in terms of activities outside of the meeting space.

You know, I—I—I think for my—for my part in it, when I was president of it, you know, I mean, I did a little bit of advocacy

by writing that initiative response. I also introduced that new group for questioning, serious individuals because I thought that—I thought the LGBT groups should be also supportive of people that weren't sure about their own sexual identity or needed that support, instead of just the social drop-in group with other openly gay people that, you know, are more comfortable with themselves or comfortable with where they're at in—in their life.

And so I was—like, we—and I—we—we—we also went to—I know we went to NGLTF [National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, now the National LGBTQ Task Force] conference at least a couple of times. We went—I know we went to the one—there was one in Oakland [California], I think, and there might have been one in [Washington] D.C. And I went to both of those.

I also remember there was something called the Queer Ivy Conference that would happen. It never happened at Dartmouth, but I remember going to Cornell, and it was happening there, and so I think a bunch of us went up there for that. And that was kind of cool.

But—yeah, I don't remember, like, specifically on campus, you know, whatever, demonstrations or anything like that, although I—yeah, I—it's hard for me to remember. I don't know.

FISHBEIN: Yeah. So I think the second statement that you sent me—I just want to put this on the record. It's an application for NGLTF. Is that correct? And if so, what is NGLTF stand for, and what is that? What is it?

KENNEDY: NGLTF is the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, and they would have a conference, I guess, every year. I don't know if they still do. Its' sort of—I guess National Gay and Lesbian Task Force I imagine would be similar to something like the HRC, although HRC, Human Rights Campaign, is maybe more fundraising focused. And have a policy—you know, things might be very different now than they were twenty years ago. But the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force would put these conferences on that were, you know, two, three days with lots of workshops and different—I mean, it would be a very opportune—a great opportunity to

meet other like-minded folks from other communities all around the country and socialize with a bunch of people, and there would be workshops on any number of things, from, you know, queer identity to bondage. You know, it was, like, all over the place in terms of its, like, content.

But it was—I definitely remember just it being as a great opportunity to feel finally like I had a lot of people around me that, you know, were similar or had, you know, similar identities or whatever. Yeah.

Does that answer the—

FISHBEIN: Yeah, yeah.

So another quote in that NGLTF statement is that you say that you represented “an anomaly at Dartmouth, one of the few who has made the step out of the closet. I lead by example and hope that others will follow.” I’m wondering if that’s the sort of sentiment that led you to found Questioning and Curious, and if you could maybe talk a little bit more about that organization, why you got involved with it, what you managed to accomplish.

KENNEDY: You know, so I think—you know, I think that—I think that the essay that you’re reading from is actually—it was sort of the application to go to the NGLTF conference, and then sort of the fol- —the byproduct of that is that, you know, coming back from the NGLTF conference—like, [Pamela S.] “Pam” Misener, who is the—the main—she was, like, a dean, assistant dean of various things, but she also helped run the Dartmouth Rainbow Alliance for us, as from a faculty perspective.

She—she encouraged me to utilize, you know, information I had gotten from the conference to sort of pursue the—you know, the—the mission or the statement as written in that essay that I wrote, which was sort of talking—like I said, was sort of talking about how, you know, the Dartmouth Rainbow Alliance has been very effective at providing a social means for, you know, social engagement amongst GLBTQ individuals at Dartmouth but that there has been—but there’s sort of a lack of support, you know, in place for people that need to discuss, you know, specific issues.

At the time, specific issues about, I guess, coming out or— or, I'm sure, about their sexual identity. You know, it— it almost feels—you know, that whole—that group, I think, is—you know, I think it—looking at those fliers and stuff, I'm, like, —it—it—it's—I was—I was more integral in—in setting it up, sort of creating the idea of it, and—and—and sort of— beginning to implement it a bit, you know, in terms of, like, location and stuff.

But then once the group started going, I kind of decided I wasn't really the best person to be, like,—I don't know. I just didn't—it was a hard time—I had a hard time providing the support that I was advertising, you know? I guess I felt like I should be trained as a therapist or something, because I was dealing with—you know, the people that—that came—there was a couple of people that came, and I just didn't—I almost, like,—I feel like I didn't really have a lot in common with them, like I was in a different place or something.

I—I do take a lot of pride in, like, sort of creating the group and getting it started, and, you know,—and—and in the end, you know, is it something that's still needed? You know, I don't know. You know, I mean, I think that people discover their own sexuality in lots of different ways.

I mean, it's a big risk for—I mean, I—in a way, that group is sort of ironic or sort of counterintuitive because, you know, these people that—that we're advertising to were, like, unsure of their sexual identity, unsure of their special orientation. We're asking them to come a public, you know, meeting spot, you know, with other people there. It—you know, it—some people came, but I imagine there's lots of people that wouldn't have felt comfortable coming.

I think that—I think it also addressed sort of something that I perceived at the time to be a common occurrence at Dartmouth, where, like,—you know, I think it might— Dartmouth might be different nowadays, but back—at least back then—and I know in the—even just the immediate previous generations, like coming out at Dartmouth is a very difficult thing to do. You know, at least it was.

You know, it's—it's, you know, got this, like, traditional conservative thing going on, *The Dartmouth Review*. You know, it's got this sort of feeling of, like,—sort of like, you know, maybe it's a good place to go to college, but it's not really a great place to come out. You know, a lot of people end up coming out after they leave the college, because maybe they don't feel like they have the community that they need or won't have the support they need or—you know, or they just don't need to come out then.

And—and while I respect all that stuff, I just want—I wanted to make it—I wanted to make—make it so that there *was* an option for some people if they felt that they needed it.

FISHBEIN: Do you think you would identify yourself as, you know, being questioning and curious at the time? It seems to me like you were, you know, pretty confident in your sexuality. Maybe not like, you know, being, like, as gay as you thought you could be,—

KENNEDY: I know. I mean, I—

FISHBEIN: —but it seems like you knew you were gay.

KENNEDY: Yeah. No, I didn't—I didn't—I mean, I crea- —I—I—I helped create that group not because I felt that *I* needed it but because I wanted other peo- —there—there to be a resource for other people. But I—I didn't,—at the time, considered myself questioning or curious. Like, I was pretty—I mean, I think by that time I already had a rainbow sticker on the back of my car. I was pretty—pretty out.

FISHBEIN: Did—do you still think that you were kind of anomalous in your, you know, ability to step out of the closet, to use your words, at Dartmouth?

KENNEDY: Yeah. I mean, I think—I think—I think somewhat, yeah. I mean, I think I was—I mean, I think it was more—it was more common to stay in the closet than come out, you know, so in that way, I do feel like it was somewhat anomalous. You know, I think that—I mean, I think that I'm—I'm—I'm like a—somebody—I'm somebody who, like, you know, is not, you know, not necessarily like the stereotypical gay aesthetic, you know?

And I don't mean to say that in any way to judge anyone, but, you know,—you know, you wouldn't necessarily know that I was—at least at the time, you wouldn't necessarily know that I—I was gay, like, just from saying hi to me on the street. And—and then for me to, like, come out or try to be out, as out as I could, and then, like, given that, you know, it—it—I mean, I wasn't wearing, like, a rainbow sticker on my forehead, you know, everywhere I went. But, you know, I was trying to be—I was trying to be as gay as I could sort of thing.

And I think that was sort of anomalous or rare for Dartmouth at the time, you know? It was—it was traditionally—it was—it was—it was more sort of assumed that you would be, you know, more hidden about that kind of stuff at the college at that time.

FISHBEIN: But I guess—and correct me if I'm wrong—it seems to me like—you know, you said with your, you know, idea of a borderland identity, you might have had some, you know, struggles coming out of the closet in specific spaces that you occupied.

KENNEDY: Yeah. I did. And even—you know, even—I don't think I ever really, like, openly came out to my crew team, you know? It just—you know, it—like, it's sort of the 20/20 hindsight, looking back on it now. It's, like,—if I—if I could do it all again, you know, I wouldn't have made—I would make such a big deal out of it, you know? It—it's like people found out I was gay, great; if people didn't find out I was gay, you know, I don't care. You know, it—it's, like, I'd rather—you know, my priority here is to do a good job at crew and, like, kiss some ass on the—on the boat, you know? That's—that's the focus. It's not on the flip stuff.

And so that's sort of the way I approach life now, is, like, very much like, you know,—you know, I just live my life, and if people find out I'm gay, great; if they don't, that's fine, too. Back then, it's, like, I—I—I had this agenda in my mind about needing to, like, be out, for whatever reason. That was, like, really important to me.

You know, what I'm saying—by needing to be out, I'm not saying that I *was* out; I'm just saying that in my mind, like, this needed to happen. Like, this had—like, I had to, like,—in the long run, you know, I had to, like, be myself. And—and—and to be myself, I had to tell everyone who I was. You know, and that was the struggle that I had, you know, all through college, for the most part, until—probably until close to the end because by the end, you know, I didn't have the fraternity. I didn't have the crew team. All I had were my friends, you know, and the things that I really enjoyed. And by that time, you know, all those things meshed together, so—

FISHBEIN: So what do you—what do you think has happened in the past eighteen years to make you feel like you don't really need to, you know, be out anymore? What's—you know, why did you make that transformation?

KENNEDY: Well, it's not that I don't need to be out. I mean, I—I do. I mean, I need to be myself, you know? And it's important to me, like,—I mean, it's—it's—it's just I have a lot more confidence in who I am now.

What was the question?

FISHBEIN: I—I—I mean, you say—you say now that looking back on it, you know, you—that—that—that you feel like back then, you really needed to, you know, be out and kind of lead with that, whereas now, you don't really do that anymore, and I'm just wondering, you know, what kind of led you to say that. Like, what led you to change your perspective on that? If that makes sense.

KENNEDY: I mean, just personal growth, I think, sort of growing up, you know? It's, like,—I think it was—you know, going into college from the high school experience, where I had been isolated, depressed, suicidal,—you know, really tough spot. I mean, middle school was worse than high school, and high school was terrible. I mean, I never got invited to a high school party. I really had no—I felt like I had no friends.

And, you know,—and—and—and on top of that, I couldn't be myself, you know? I didn't have the confidence to come out, really, until—to anyone. And—and—and—you know, and—

and I just felt really lonely and felt like I didn't have—you know, I needed a change.

And so when I went to college, I was, like, *This is it. Now is the chance. Like, I'm gonna be gay. You know, I'm gonna be out and proud and show everyone, you know, and I'm gonna, like,—it's gonna—you know, it's gonna work amazingly, and it's gonna be great, you know, and I'm gonna be super gay, and I'm—you know, I'm gonna wear a rainbow flag, and I'm gonna—you know—you know, it's just gonna be—*

You know, that—that's sort of the way that I went into college, you know? And unfortunately, it sort of was not really, in my mind, allowed to do that, or something. Like, I—I had put all these—my own roadblocks in the way of that, you know? And then—and then eighteen years goes by, twenty years goes by, and I've done a lot of growing up, you know? It's, like, nowadays, you know, the gay thing is just one part of my identity; it's not—it's not all I am. You know, I'm a lot of other things first.

You know, I play volleyball, as I said, and, you know, the church. I like to travel. You know, all these things, like, come before, like, being gay. Being gay is just sort of tangential to that. But that took a long—that took a lot of growth and a lot of time to, like, sort of like come to that comfortable spot, you know?

But early on, I wanted to, like,—I wanted the gay thing to be, you know, front and center.

FISHBEIN: What is that—what is that growth process like? Can you explain, maybe, what—what you mean by—by that phrase?

KENNEDY: By how much growth I've done in the twenty years?

FISHBEIN: Yeah.

KENNEDY: What do I mean? I just lived—I lived life. You know, I've lived—I've lived in lots of different places, I've gone on to—got a master's degree and a law degree. I have had relationships, but in and out of relationships. I've—I've—you know, even to this day, like, I'm still questioning—even—I'm

actually—like, I have a lot more questioning periods now than I did in college because I'm, like, thinking maybe I could—maybe I'm bi. And I've never, like, been bi before; I've always been gay. Like, well, maybe,—like, the stuff is fluid, you know? Sexuality is fluid. I've become much more open to that concept, you know. And sort of like don't—or necessarily want to get put into, like, a box, you know, all the time.

But, yes, the gay thing is still a—huge in my life. It's still a big part of my life. I mean, I—I play volleyball, I play—you know, I—I go to gay twelve-step meetings because—because that's where I know my friends are going to be. You know, and it's still a big part of my life, but it's just not—it's not, like,—it's not something I need to, like, wear on my forehead or something. It's not something I need to, like,—especially just—it—I—I'm—I'm coming—now I'm coming after through twenty years of adulthood, where I've learned a lot. I've, like,—there's a lot of perspective, whereas, like, when I went into college, I was coming from high school, where, like, again, I was, like, very isolated, very lonely, felt like I couldn't have an identity, felt like I couldn't—felt like I wanted just to do something totally different, you know?

And so I went to college with that motivation, of wanting to do something completely different, right? Now, twenty years of adulthood later, like, I don't need to do something completely different. Like, I've just changed things slowly as they arise, you know. I don't know. It just—it just seems like a natural evolution.

FISHBEIN: Do you think the experience of, you know, maybe not getting what you wanted from being completely different from being that rainbow flag wearer has, you know, kind of been a big part of that, you know, growth process? Do you think you've, you know, learned from your Dartmouth experience?

KENNEDY: Well, there's no doubt I've learned from my Dartmouth experience. Like, I learned a lot about myself and my interests and what I want and what I don't want.

What was the question, again?

KENNEDY: I mean, I guess I—I'm just wondering, in order for you to get to the place that you are now, where it sounds like, you know, you don't really feel the need to kind of prove your—your difference all the time, whether, you know, your past experience of trying to do that and that not really working out was, you know, necessary for you to get to the point that you're now at.

KENNEDY: I don't know that it was necessary, but it certainly—it certainly is all part of my story, you know? It's—it's all—it's—I've—I learned a lot from that, you know? And if I hadn't experienced—you know, I mean, I could have—in theory, I could have probably gotten to the same place I'm at now with just living life generally and without having had the same experience. But I think that I did learn—I mean, I think that I did learn a lot about sort of priorities and whether or not I need to, like, take such a definitive, determined stance on something, in college. Like, I learned a lot through that.

I'm sorry. I'm kind of like losing my train of thought a little bit. [Chuckles.]

FISHBEIN: No, it's—it's okay.

But I—I think another question I have is I asked you earlier, you know, what might have led you to romanticize the coming-out experience, and you said that it was, you know, a desire to find a community. I'm wondering, now that you might not be, you know, romanticizing that experience so much, whether you've, you know, kind of—kind of found that community without doing that. In other words, like, you know, what—what communities are—are you know a part of, and, you know, what—what do they mean to you?

KENNEDY: My communities are hugely important to me now. I mean, I'm—and a lot of them are gay identified, but that's just sort of circumstantial or whatever. I mean, like,—like, I'm doing volleyball, like I said, gay volleyball here in Minnesota, which is a gay great—which is a great group. Honestly, it could be straight volleyball, and I probably would be just as excited about that community. But this happens to be gay volleyball, and it's just a great experience.

And then I'm doing, like, the—I'm teaching OWL at my church, as I said, so I'm involved actively in the religious education part of my church, and teach OWL with three other—four other instructors in my one group, so there's a bunch of colleagues that I work with, which is pretty cool.

And, like I said, I'm in recovery, so I do—I didn't say that, but I said I do twelve-step in recovery, and I go to a lot of twelve-step meetings, oftentimes gay meetings, which is nice.

But, you know, it could just have easily—all this stuff—I mean, the—the—the church thing is not gay specifically. I think—I think all the instructors—the instructors—I don't think any of them are gay, as far as I know. It's just sort of like—it's just sort of one other thing. But it's not necessarily *the* thing, you know?

FISHBEIN: Mm-hm.

KENNEDY: The whole gay stuff.

FISHBEIN: So I want to—I want to ask you a little bit more about the addiction process, if you don't mind, was that something that started at Dartmouth?

KENNEDY: I mean, my—my drug of choice is not alcohol. It's something else. And, you know, I mean,—I don't—I don't know that it is something that started at Dartmouth. I don't know that I would have—I would have ended up in recovery if my life had taken a different path after—after Dartmouth, you know? But it did—it did take a path in one direction that—that ultimately led me to recovery. But it could have easily gone a different path, and then I would have never gone to recovery, and then not needed recovery.

You know,—and Dartmouth itself was not the reason why I ended up in recovery, or the experiences that I had at Dartmouth, although I did—you know, I did experiment with lots of different substances, not at Dartmouth but during my time at Dartmouth, at that age. But I don't know that any of that would have inherently led me to recovery or would have needed to have led me to recovery. A lot of that—a lot of my experience in recovery comes from experiences after college.

FISHBEIN: And can you talk some about the path that you went on after college in the last couple minutes that we have together?

KENNEDY: You mean in terms of that or in terms of, like, career, or what?

FISHBEIN: Yeah, in term—in terms of, you know, both, I would say. You know, maybe start with the former and then move to the latter, or, you know, any way that you prefer.

KENNEDY: So after college, I—sorry. After college, I went to—I went to Boston, worked as a paralegal for a couple of years, and then—and then I went to London [England] for a year and did a master's degree in public policy. And then I went back to Boston for a little while. Then I went to law school in San Francisco [California] and then ended up in New York, and now—and then I was in New York for about six years. I'm licensed to practice there.

And I ended up moving to Minnesota four years ago to actually go to treatment here, to go to rehab at PRIDE Institute, which is a LGBT—it's [the] only LGBT in-patient treatment center in the country. And then I stayed after that, and I stayed here for four years since then.

But in terms of the recovery stuff, you know, things—things kind of got out of hand. I think—you know, I first did [redacted] I think between London and law school, so it was during that time—Boston would have been around 2003, '4. And then I went to law school in San Francisco. And, you know, things just gradually—things didn't spiral out of control right away, but things just gradually got worse and worse.

And then in New York, things got pretty bad at—at some point along the road, and so then I ended up in Minnesota for treatment.

FISHBEIN: What—what do you think led you to drugs, and did that have any, you know, correlation with your identity as a gay person?

KENNEDY: I don't—I don't think it did, necessarily. You know, I don't—I never—like,—like,—I mean, like, I didn't—I never really had

a lot of shame around the gay stuff specifically. Like—like I said, like, you know, I was never told as a kid, you know, being gay is bad or, you know, gays are, you know, bad. I was never told by a parent, you know, “You can’t be gay or change who you are” or anything like that. My parents have always been trying to foster the best person I can be, no matter who that is or what that person desires, you know, or what the person wants to do with their life. And so there was never really a lot of shame about it. I think—I think—I think a lot of—I think for a lot of addicts, like, that could be a big component of their addiction, is sort of shame around either sexuality or—or trauma, you know, something they’ve experienced when they were younger.

I mean, that’s not really the case for me. I think—I think my addiction—a lot of it comes around—I think a lot of it comes down to—sort of where you can trace it to the beginning is the feeling of being “less than,” you know, all through high school, a feeling of not being good enough, for whatever reason.

But it doesn’t stem from a specific instance of trauma that I can—at least that I can remember. So I don’t know that—and the whole “less than” component isn’t really—I don’t see that in a gay—you know, in the gay perspective. I think it’s more just sort of feeling that I’ve always been kind of quiet or reserved or awkward or, you know, any of those things, and maybe that’s the reason I turned to drugs sometimes.

But, I mean, [redacted] is a, you know, a real serious drug, and a lot of people that try it get addicted. So it’s just something—I don’t know that it’s—it’s inherently tied to the whole coming-out experience or anything specifically.

FISHBEIN: Did you experience those feelings of being “less than” at Dartmouth?

KENNEDY: Yeah, I mean, I think so. I mean, I just—you know, I guess I just—like, I didn’t—[unintelligible] “less than.” I mean, sometimes, I guess. I guess—you know, the feelings were almost more internal than—as I guess they always are, as opposed to being, like, actively judged or something. But, you know, just sort of the feeling that,—you know, this whole idea around coming out at my fraternity and making a big

deal out of it. Inherently, it feels like loaded somehow with feelings of “less than.” You know, it’s sort of like, *I need to come out*—you know, the mind-set being that, like, *I need to come out to everyone in this, you know, public forum because I’m different than everyone.*

You know, if I was straight or something, then perhaps—presumably I wouldn’t need to make a big deal out of it, but, you know, there was always the ongoing feeling that—that I didn’t quite measure up or that I had to do something above and beyond my peers.

I don’t know. Does that answer your question?

FISHBEIN: Yeah.

So where are you at in the recovery process right now?

KENNEDY: I’m in—I mean, I’ve been sober now for about nine months. Yeah, doing pretty good.

FISHBEIN: And I read online that you work for a rugby association in Minnesota? Is that correct?

KENNEDY: No. I mean, I—I don’t know where you saw it, on Facebook or something?

FISHBEIN: That would be LinkedIn.

KENNEDY: Okay. That LinkedIn is pretty outdated. I did—I mean, I—I did—I was active. I started playing rugby in New York in twenty—when I lived there and moved there in 2008. And then ultimately, in the long run, became—I was on the board of my rugby team and then became president in 2013. I was president of the—of the rugby team in New York. The Gotham Knights [Rugby Football Club], the gay rugby team.

And then when I moved to Minnesota in 2014, I played rugby briefly, and I refereed some. But I—and then I stopped playing rugby shortly thereafter. I—I played rugby for about a year, and I haven’t played since, so—and I haven’t refereed in about three or four years.

FISHBEIN: What—what are you up to now?

KENNEDY: Right now, I'm—I'm doing contract work as an attorney, so I—I do, like, yeah, contract work. And—and then, like I said, I'm actively involved in volleyball. I mean, rugby is tough on the shoulders and knees, so I'm doing volleyball instead, and volleyball is sometimes tough on the knees, too, unfortunately, but—as I'm discovering. But doing volleyball. I did kickball recently.

I'm teaching OWL, like I said, in my church, Our Whole Lives, which is a sex ed class for eighth graders. And I'm going to meetings two or three times a week, so I'm in recovery. I like to travel a lot. That's all.

FISHBEIN: Do—do you still feel connected to Dartmouth?

KENNEDY: You know, I think I'll always feel somewhat connected. My mom—my mom lives in Thetford, so she's, like, literally, like, ten miles north of Norwich [Vermont], which is right there. So whenever I come to see my mom, I, like, inevitably come through Hanover, you know, and my mom is in Hanover a lot, so I hear about it. So, you know, for that reason alone, I'm—I feel like I'll remain connected to Dartmouth.

But, I mean, I still get the *Dartmouth Alumni Magazine*. I still get—which I read, maybe flip through a little bit. And—and I occasionally—I—I haven't been to a reunion in a long while, but I would go again, so—yeah, I mean, I feel somewhat connected to it. I feel like I'll always—Dartmouth will always have a place in my heart or whatever. You know, it's, like, if nothing else, like, just the whole Upper [Connecticut River] Valley area, just the feeling of New England, you know. That—that part is always sort of there and will always be a part of me, I think. But—yeah.

FISHBEIN: What do you mean by “that part”? What is this region mean for you?

KENNEDY: Well, no, just the Upper Valley, just the—just the—you know, the quaintness of it, the—you know, the Vermont feel. I mean, it's not in Vermont, but it's certainly close. You know, it—it's almost—it—in many ways, it's sort of I'm saying, like, just sort of like New England or Vermont or, slash, New Hampshire will be a part of me—I mean, whether Dartmouth,

itself, is still a part—I mean, certainly—I mean, it is. It certainly is. I mean, it’s—it’s a big part of my life. I mean, it’s really where I grew up, in many ways, you know, because in high school I feel like I just didn’t really have a chance to demonstrate who I was or make friends in any reasonable way. And Dartmouth really was the first place that I got to do that.

And I certainly gained a lot of growth in my academic studies and in my personal—and my interest in volunteer stuff, Tucker Foundation and also in the gay realm, too. It’s sort of—you know, I remember—there was another alum, [Michael E.] “Mike” Glatze [pronounced GLATZ, Class of 1997], who was a few years older than me, and he was very involved in—he was involved—I think he—actually, he worked for *XY Magazine* back in the day, when that was a thing. That was a gay magazine for—put out for,—you know, it was targeted at sort of youth and young adults. And Mike Glatze has his own story, which I don’t necessarily need to go into.

But just sort of like—he was sort of an example in many ways, for me, to sort of—and seeing him as sort of like outwardly comfortable, you know, out approach to, like, seizing opportunities at Dartmouth. I—I feel like I remember him and, like, Peter [E.] Jacobsen [Class of 2000] and some other Dartmouth folks at the NGLTF conference, [unintelligible] maybe.

I don’t know. It’s just—so, yeah, there were—I feel like there are a lot of good memories from Dartmouth and from that experience and a lot of growth. I had a lot of growth during that time, so—

FISHBEIN: Well, I—I know you have to go soon, so I am wondering, you know, if you have any concluding remarks, if there’s anything we, you know, didn’t touch on that you’d like to bring up.

KENNEDY: I honestly can’t think of anything.

FISHBEIN: Okay. Well, in that case, you know, I really appreciate you sharing some time with me, Tom.

[End of interview.]