

Jonathan R. Hopper '08
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
SpeakOut
May 10, 2019
Transcribed by Mim Eisenberg/WordCraft

ARJUNE: So I'm Leanna Arjune, and I am located in the Rauner [Special Collections] Library at Dartmouth College. Today is May 10, 2019, and today I will be interview [Jonathan R.] "Jon" Hopper, Class of '08, as part of the SpeakOut project.

Jon, where are you currently located?

HOPPER: I'm currently in New York City.

ARJUNE: Fantastic! All rightie! So to start off this interview, let's go back in time. Let's go way, way back in time—

HOPPER: Not—not that far back. Not that far.

ARJUNE: Okay, not to the time of dinosaurs, but let's go back to your childhood. What was it like growing up? Where did you grow up? What was it like just growing up in general?

HOPPER: Yeah. So I grew up in a place called Cos Cob, Connecticut. This is a little place just outside of New York City. It's technically a borough of Greenwich, Connecticut. So I grew up there, and I—let's see, I had—both of my parents were together at the time. I have two wonderful siblings, both sisters, both younger; I'm the oldest of the family. It was a wonderful place to grow up, honestly. I—I always gave it crap at the time, but it was a beautiful place to be. I went through school.

I think relevant to this conversation is I first came out—I realized I was attracted to men probably around middle school.

ARJUNE: Okay.

HOPPER: Maybe I—I would argue the way I really knew was my freshman year of college, I had access to the internet for the first time, which allowed me to explore other options of things I found attractive. I knew from an earlier age that as

my friends were going through puberty and they were talking about the all the women they were attracted to, I never quite understood what it was about the women's bodies that they were finding attractive. I had to study it almost more academically than intuitively in terms of what it was that made someone hot or not, because as these conversations were happening, I was, *Yes, that's so great that they have that body shape that we all love so much!*

Instead, I realized, like, what I actually understood very well was the male form. That was something I was very attracted to, and I couldn't find myself—I couldn't stop myself from staring at the water polo players in my school, the football players, soccer players.

So when I was—I guess I was fourteen years old at the time. I was talking with a friend on AOL Instant Messenger—

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.]

HOPPER: —as we did back in those days, and she and I had a late-night conversation, and over the course of the conversation, I admitted to her that I was attracted to men. So that was my first time really coming out. That date was September 10th, 2001. The date is pretty easy to remember because the next day was 9/11. But I didn't realize that was about to happen, so I had just—I told my first person then. I came out as bisexual at the time, which is the unfortunate crutch some of us use, which I always feel bad about because it does give bisexuality far too bad of a rep, because gay men like myself falsely claimed that.

But I told her, and that was kind of the beginning of the process. I took the approach of telling a handful of people over the next three years. I was a sophomore at high school at the time. But by the time I graduated, everyone knew in my class. Most of my friends' parents knew. Ironically, the only ones who didn't know were my own family, because I wasn't really sure how they would react.

You know, you hear comments from family—without—in hindsight, there was no mal-intent; it was just how they were cultured to speak. But the way they talked about flamboyance, the way they talked about gay men never was

really in a positive light, so—they're also a very Catholic, conservative family, so I—I was afraid that if I told them anything, I would lose my family, and that was horrifying. And I speak kind of to the choir about an LGBT person in that if you don't know how your family is going to react, you know that sometimes telling your family your truth results in you losing your family.

ARJUNE: Right.

HOPPER: So I went off to Dartmouth. That's so funny. When I was looking at schools, I remember talking to a classmate of mine from theater who was two years above me, Sam Seppos [spelling unconfirmed], '06. She had just come back from the DOC Trip [Dartmouth Outing Club First-Year Trip], and [unintelligible]. We were doing a [William] Shakespeare play at the time, so she knew exactly where to find all of us, and she was raving about her experience, just how she was meeting the most wonderful people in the world, how it was the happiest place and that she couldn't believe that she was there.

And funny enough is that I had never heard of Dartmouth at the time. I had been looking at schools. I was [unintelligible] my entire life. And I heard her speaking about this place, Dartmouth, a place I had apparently driven by and been, like, *Nah, I don't need to stop there. I've never heard of it.*

And I wanted to learn more, so as I looked at it more, I remember going to a career fair—I'm sorry, no, a college fair at my high school, and there was a Dartmouth alumna who was representing the college at the fair, and I asked her, "Why Dartmouth?" And she said, "You're going to meet the most incredibly intelligent, the most accomplished and the most fun and humble people you've ever met in your life, and you never know how accomplished they are because of how down-to-earth they are. They just want to learn, and they want to grow with each other."

And I said to myself, *That's exactly where I want to be. I love this.* I visited the campus. I loved it from the moment I saw the campus, the moment I saw people interacting on the [Dartmouth] Green. I knew that's where I had to be. And I went to one of my guidance counselors, one of the few who I

could speak to openly about being gay. She, herself, was a lesbian that was well known and a huge resource.

And I told her, “I want Dartmouth.” And she said, “You should really consider other choices. It’s not a great place to be gay.” And I was, like, “Shoot! Because I really like this place.” So she encouraged me to have my applications at the ready for more well-known, LGBT-friendly locations: Brown [University], Columbia [University], Yale [University]. She knew that I’d probably have a better experience if I went there as an openly gay person. And I don’t blame her. That was, at the time, a very fair statement to make. Very discouraging, because I had already applied early decision, and I’d gotten in early decision.

ARJUNE: Oh!

HOPPER: So I—I remember I got to campus for my DOC Trip, and in the back of my mind was, *Okay, I have—I’m doing this, and I’m so excited to be here, but always be on your guard because this may not be a safe place for you, so have your application for Columbia ready. Have it—make sure that, like, if you have to transfer, you can transfer quickly. But while you’re here, you’re doing this with open arms. You’re gonna give it a full shot.*

So I was—I came out on my DOC Trip.

ARJUNE: Oh, wow!

HOPPER: It was—I—it was our first night, sitting down. I did mountain hiking up in the [Second College] Grant.

ARJUNE: Okay.

HOPPER: I’m sorry. I’m sorry. Mountain biking up in the Grant.

ARJUNE: Mountain *biking*, okay.

HOPPER: Well, sorry, I’ll say that one again for the easier [unintelligible]. I came out on my DOC Trip, and I remember that I was doing mountain biking—

ARJUNE: Yes.

HOPPER: —Section A, A-385. We were up in the Grant, and we were sitting down to dinner for the first time. And a classmate of mine, Frank [B.] Glaser [Class of 2008], was talking about— oh, I’m sorry, no. My DOC Trip leader, Stephanie [spelling unconfirmed] was talking about how her parents thought that she was a lesbian, and I had made a comment about, “Wow I’m amazed by how well they’re responding, I don’t think my parents would have reacted that way if they thought I was gay.”

And my classmate, Frank, said to me, “Well, that would stink if you were gay.” And I said, “It does, because I am.”

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.]

HOPPER: Ironically, Frank ended up coming out later on as well. He’s one of my closest friends since Dartmouth. But at the time, he was not yet out. So it was actually great in hindsight. We’ve actually shared this story together, that he was the first person I told at Dartmouth—

ARJUNE: Yeah.

HOPPER: —and the reaction was, “Okay.” Like, there was nothing. There was—there was no—it wasn’t a big deal, and I was shocked and very excited to hear that, because to frame this time and place, when I came out in high school, I was one of the only people out in high school.

ARJUNE: Okay.

HOPPER: This was a time when *Will & Grace* was on TV. *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* had not yet come out on TV. There was awareness of LGBT people, a growing acceptance of it, but still an overall resentment; the majority of Americans were very against gay marriage. My hometown was not very welcoming. I was—as I was coming out, I was called a faggot. I was—yelled at that when I was running track, I was yelled at that when I was pumping gas at my gas station.

ARJUNE: Oh.

HOPPER: From a stranger, strangers I’ve never seen.

ARJUNE: Wow.

HOPPER: So I—I was what I was. I couldn't change that. But that did stink, so I was—I was always ready for the kickback. Fortunately for me, I was not the only one in my class who was entering as openly gay. To my understanding, and I'm sure there's someone who I just don't know, before I—the '08s got to campus, people had come out *at* Dartmouth, but had not been out before Dartmouth.

ARJUNE: Okay.

HOPPER: So we were this influx of I believe there were four or five of us who had connected because Dartmouth had a message board online—

ARJUNE: Nice.

HOPPER: —that would be, like—oh, yeah; oh it's [unintelligible] this was before—Facebook had just started, so a few of us connected on Facebook, but the main method was that there was a message board people would post on, and I think I wrote that I liked Britney Spears on it.

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.]

HOPPER: And [Zachary R.] "Zach" Styskal, my classmate reached out and was like, "Hey, girl, hey." And—[Chuckles.]

ARJUNE: [Laughs.]

HOPPER: And we became fast, fond friends on the Messenger, talking all the time. Ty [S.] Modellmog '08 [Class of 2008], another one I spoke with frequently beforehand—these were the friends I was able to—and a community I kind of built online before going. And that also gave me a lot of strength in terms of being willing to be out on campus. I was already out to a handful of people. We were going to be doing this together, and I wasn't alone.

So DOC just happened. I had the most wonderful time. The [Moosilauke Ravine] Lodge was a wonderful experience for me, where I felt comfortable and happy and safe in my own

skin for one of the first times in my life, something that actually was great because I got involved in DOC Trips later on because of that moment.

ARJUNE: Nice.

HOPPER: I remember getting to campus for the first time. I—when I—I had a roommate, David [M.] Lamb, '08, and he was—we had matched in advance through the process. I had put on my application for roommates a couple of things, but when they asked for four adjectives to describe your ideal roommate, I wrote, “gay friendly” as one of them.

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.]

HOPPER: And they assigned me to somebody who was—who had grown up just outside Salt Lake City, Utah.

ARJUNE: Oh!

HOPPER: And I went, *Okay, so nobody listened to me. How wonderful.* And I ended up meeting David, and David is this *jacked* guy—like, *built*, muscled—

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.]

HOPPER: I'm moving in, he's actually in a towel getting out of the shower, and I'm like, *Oh, fuck, I'm in trouble.*

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.]

HOPPER: And I have to work up my courage to somehow tell him, because I know that I didn't tell him during orientation week that this was going to be an issue. We have to find—we have to solve it ASAP so it's not too late to move my stuff to another room and find a way to switch.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

HOPPER: So the Dartmouth Rainbow Alliance was having a meeting, one of the first stage of orientations for the new freshmen, and I said—I walked into his room. I knocked on the door, and I said, “Hi, I'm heading out. I'm going to a DRA meeting. That's the Dartmouth Rainbow Alliance. It's a gay club. I'm

gay. I gotta go. Bye.” And he looked at me like—I dashed out so quickly, he had no chance to react.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

HOPPER: And we chatted about it later. He’s, like, “That’s fantastic. That’s great. I’m very active in believing in gay rights. I was one of the few people in my high school who was. Can I join the club with you? Are straight people allowed?”

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.] Wow!

HOPPER: And it was—it was—I can’t tell you what a wonderful feeling that was, you know, that the person I’d be sharing close quarters with not only wasn’t out to kill me, he was out to actually be one of my strongest allies. And actually Dave I think ended up being a—an executive member of the Gay Straight Alliance.

ARJUNE: Wow!

HOPPER: He was a very active ally, and one of—has become my closest friend. To this day, we are close friends. We live about ten blocks apart. I was in his wedding party. I was very lucky that I was paired up so well by Dartmouth.

ARJUNE: That’s fantastic!

HOPPER: Yeah.

ARJUNE: Wow!

HOPPER: It was—it was really wonderful. And it wasn’t just David who was supportive. What I found was that because I was so open about who I was from day one, it was just a part of me, so people weren’t viewing me as the gay kid. They were viewing me as Jon. Jon is gay. These are things I know when I meet Jon. And I’m sure—I’m saying that I’m sure there are folks who knew me as the gay guy. I’m sure that was the reputation I had, because it was still a rare thing to see.

But I did meet the other out gay people on campus. I’m saying “gay” because in reality it was mainly, at the time,

cisgendered gay men who I was interacting with in the beginning. Of course, there were many people all across the board, but my initial friend group I made were the other gay men.

I'm going to tell you a quick story about the DGALA [Dartmouth Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Alumni/ae Association] All Class Reunion,—

ARJUNE: Okay.

HOPPER: —which was early October 2004. I had just been on campus for a couple weeks.

ARJUNE: Okay.

HOPPER: And I was seventeen years old. I was the youngest person there.

ARJUNE: Wow.

HOPPER: And there were people ranging from the Class of—I want to say somewhere in the 1960s up into the present, the '08s being the newest class.

ARJUNE: Okay.

HOPPER: And we had people from such vastly different experiences over time, and we had a wonderful chance to connect with people across the generations, to hear how the Dartmouth experience for LGBTQ+ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and others] people had evolved from the 1950s, when there was certainly homosexual activity occurring but never spoken of, up until now, where we're having people who are openly gay from day one.

The ways that people experienced hate, which is an unfortunate part of the Dartmouth history, is that much like we know about misogyny that happened in the early years, homophobia is of course the step—the half-brother of or the close relative of misogyny—people experiencing really just a lot of “you don't belong here. I'm going to make that very clearly known.” Sometimes violence.

But to know that we had all had different experiences but we're all there together was just such a wonderful experience. To learn about the rich history that we had, the history that wasn't spoken of, the history that had not yet been recorded for a project such as this. So I love that this project is happening because it gets to capture those conversations I had fifteen years ago with people across the [unintelligible] classes.

I want to tell another story about Dartmouth alums and LGBT?

ARJUNE: Okay.

HOPPER: I was with an alumnus who was back on campus. I will—for their safety and their sake, I will not mention their name. If you catch them in an interview, I'm sure they might tell the same story.

ARJUNE: Okay.

HOPPER: They were a member of GDX [Gamma Delta Chi] as an undergraduate, and at—some time after he had graduated and before he was visiting campus, it turned into what we call the football threat. It had got—it had a drastic change in terms of the membership and who they were. It was not known, when I was there, to be a very LGBTQ-friendly place.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

HOPPER: We went in anyway because he wanted to go see his old composite and to see what was going on, and there were four of us, all of us openly gay, going into the house, and we were confronted initi- —with extreme resistance. I just sort of walked in the door. Someone blocked our way and said, "What are you doing here? We don't want any of you guys here." And we said, "We just want to go see the composite. He's an alumnus. He wants to go see it." And he goes, "We don't believe you. You're not in this class. You never belonged here. We would never have someone like you in our house."

ARJUNE: Wow.

- HOPPER: He said, “I can show it to you. The composite is going to be”—and he named this class year, and they said, “Fuck you. We don’t believe you.” While this guy blocked our way, and he was a large man who was playing football. He knew how to block us.
- ARJUNE: Yeah.
- HOPPER: He—another—another member of the house went and found the composite and said, “Is this you? Is this your composite?” “Yes, it is. Let me see.” And the guy said, “Fuck you.” Smashed the composite, right in front of us, shattering everywhere.
- ARJUNE: Wow!
- HOPPER: We did our best to avoid physical confrontation. We had some people in our group who were—obviously, we were all angered, all fearful of our safety, what was going to happen, how it was going to escalate. We did escaped. We got away okay. I actually ended up writing a report. Now that I think about it, when I filed the report with S&S [Safety and Security], I never heard back.
- ARJUNE: Oh.
- HOPPER: So there really was no response to this, which is, you know, in many ways telling of itself.
- ARJUNE: That’s really unfortunate.
- HOPPER: Yeah. And it—it wasn’t the only incidence that that was happening. There was an event that happened every spring, hosted by Alpha Delta, which does not exist anymore, to my knowledge, but at the time, AD was a very popular house, the home of the rugby team. Somebody had been walking by the house, and someone on the porch of the house had yelled out, “Hey, fag!”
- ARJUNE: Huh.
- HOPPER: And because of that, we had—every spring, we had something at AD called “Don’t Yell Fag From the Porch.”

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.]

HOPPER: That was—and it was an event that allowed LGBTQ members of the community to come and do a little panel at AD and talk about their experiences of discrimination at Dartmouth, talk about ways in which they can build alliances, ways to make the campus a safer place. And it ended up being really wonderful and constructive conversations that was usually filled every time we did it.

ARJUNE: Wow. Nice!

HOPPER: Yeah, it ended up being a really wonderful conversation. And I think this is an example of where things were coming on the cusp of change. So when before, things would happen and then there'd be no repercussions, it became a "No, this is not acceptable. This is—Instead, this is something we're going to be doing—where we can learn to fix this and grow." It was actually that—that kind of really did escalate while I was there in terms of the acceptance we saw, especially in the Greek community. Having openly gay members rushing fraternities for the first—for one of the first times, where people were known to be gay and still being accepted, as opposed to brothers who—and sisters—who were coming out after they'd already gotten in, so they had to hide who they were to get through the process, and once they were in could discuss who they were. That was changing, as opposed to a "We know that you're gay. We love you, and you're part of our brotherhood either way.

So that was a nice change and something we actually saw, because one year for [Dartmouth] PRIDE, that we—gays, houses, rainbow flags put outside their house if they were an LGBTQ+ inclusive house.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

HOPPER: Or if they wanted—they could know that it was a safe place for folks who were LGBTQ+. And Webster Avenue [in Hanover, New Hampshire] was full of rainbow flags.

ARJUNE: That's so great.

- HOPPER: Yeah. It was so touching. And some of that—I would never have thought when I college career I'd be seeing that.
- So I've been going on random stories. Are there any other—I'm sure there were questions. I've already forgotten them.
- ARJUNE: Oh, no, no, it's all right. [Laughs.]
- So let's go back a little bit—I mean,—
- HOPPER: Yeah.
- ARJUNE: —to—you mentioned that there weren't many people you were comfortable talking about your identity with before you went to college.
- HOPPER: Yeah.
- ARJUNE: And there were very few who you *were* comfortable with. Could you expand on that just a little bit?
- HOPPER: Yeah. Oh, so sorry, one thing—let me—I'm getting called by a coworker; let me just decline that call. Okay?
- ARJUNE: Okay.
- HOPPER: And could you say that one more time? Because it was beeping and I was confused. [Chuckles.]
- ARJUNE: No worries. So there were—you mentioned, growing up, that there were very few people you were comfortable coming out to.
- HOPPER: Yeah.
- ARJUNE: And there were—but there *were* a few people who you were comfortable coming out to. Could you expand a bit on that?
- HOPPER: Yeah. That's a great—great question. The people I told first were the ones that I had the closest relationship with and ones I knew wouldn't be judging me for who I was.
- ARJUNE: Yeah.

HOPPER: So I first told my friend Allie [spelling unconfirmed], because she been opening up to me, and she was sharing details about what she was going through, and I felt it was a comfortable place to be sharing that. It was almost exclusively women who I first told,—

ARJUNE: Okay.

HOPPER: —which is probably a comment on the way in which men are able to interact, how homophobia shapes same-sex friendships among men. I was afraid that that would probably resort to violence, and anyone who was—who *was* my friend might fear that they would also be assumed to be gay. These are all little thoughts that go in the back of your mind, and I don't know if my friends thought the same way I did, but they were certainly concerns that I had.

I actually—I lucked out. I had my first kiss, I was in kindergarten. She was in first grade. Her name was Nicole. And she was my first kiss. We were at a friend's house. As it would have it, she ended up coming out as bisexual in high school as well, so I actually was able to talk to her quite a bit. She became my gay mentor, and which I will forever be grateful for, because she was the first person I could talk openly about desire with, the first person who could—who had been through more than I had so could answer questions I had.

She actually—[Chuckles.] There was a place called Academy Video. It was a video rental place because that used to exist.

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.]

HOPPER: And *Queer as Folk* was a TV show on Showtime that it was on—it had come out on DVD, so she would actually run to Academy Video on my behalf and take out *Queer as Folk*. I couldn't do it on my account because I shared the account with my parents, and I didn't want them wondering why *Queer as Folk* was showing up in their order history.

So she would go to Academy on my behalf. She would grab *Queer as Folk*, and she would leave me a DVD. She'd hide it in a brown paper bag and put it in a—there was a shrub in

my front yard that if you put a brown paper bag in there, you really couldn't see what was going on, so that was a little drop-off and pick-up point.

And real quick: I need to take this. I'm going to put you on hold for a second.

ARJUNE: Okay. [Pause from 25:32 to 25:50].

HOPPER: Still there?

ARJUNE: Yep.

HOPPER: Great. I have the broker coming upstairs right now.

ARJUNE: Okay, great.

HOPPER: Yeah. So Nicole was a great resource for me, and she was the way I was able to form myself more fully as a gay man and be more comfortable with who I was and what—and not feel demonized by these feelings that I had been told were so unnatural and so wrong.

ARJUNE: That's so great to hear!

You mentioned also, as well, bisexuality as “a crutch” for coming out.

HOPPER: Yeah. Yeah.

ARJUNE: Could you—yeah! Could you expand on that a bit as well?

HOPPER: Yeah. So at the time, I had thought to myself, *Well, liking men is wrong, but if you at least like women a little bit, people might not judge you as much.* You know, this false logic we tell ourselves. [Crackling noise.] Sorry. Can you hear me on there? I knocked out my earpiece.

ARJUNE: Yep.

HOPPER: This false logic I was using to allow myself to express desire of men but not fully be a—you know, removing myself from a possible heterosexual goal in life. I eventually realized I was kidding myself to say that. I loved women as friends but

never in a sexual way. So that was something—I probably changed that around the end of my junior year of high school.

The word “gay”—it’s—when you say it for the first time, it—it sticks in your throat and you can’t get it out.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

HOPPER: So that was a wonderful—let me call you right back. I’m sorry.

ARJUNE: No worries.

HOPPER: [At 27:30, starts addressing others and leaves the microphone. He returns at 28:15.] Still there?

ARJUNE: Yep, still here.

HOPPER: Okay. Sorry, I’m running down to the basement right now to toss things in the laundry, and then I can be a lot more fun. But actually, I can talk along the way. If we lose service in the elevator, I apologize. And we can figure that out.

ARJUNE: No worries. Just let me know, and I will call you back if need be.

HOPPER: Okay. Thank you.

So talk to me about—so where was I, and how can I help continue that story?

ARJUNE: We were talking about just the idea of bisexuality as a crutch, and you talked about how the word “gay” sort of sticks in your throat.

HOPPER: Yeah. So for those who’ve had to say the word, when you say “gay,” there’s so much weight behind it. It means so much in terms of not just expressing something you’ve been hiding for so long, but an acknowledgment that the life you had told you would be having is going to change drastically. You’re going to be facing discrimination. You’re going to be giving up the perceived—at the time, it was giving up the white picket fence and the two kids. There wasn’t—it wasn’t

clear if that would ever be acceptable for somebody who was in a same-sex relationship.

I am happy to say that the future is brighter and has changed drastically, but—but gay marriage wasn't legal. People—the idea that a gay couple could raise kids or even be allowed to adopt kids was always up for debate. And I knew I wanted to be a parent one day. That's something that hasn't really changed my desires.

But I—saying the word was kind of a way of—of giving all of that up, of knowing that the person you have been told you're supposed to be, the person that you are are not aligned. So that was a very difficult discussion. That was a very difficult word to say. And I think that was one of the reasons why I had identified as bisexual, is because it didn't throw away that dream. It didn't keep me from being that person that I—I guess I—I never really wanted to be with a woman, but I wanted “it.”

ARJUNE: Yeah.

HOPPER: And—yeah. Eventually, as I came to, you know, get to know myself better and my desires, I allowed myself to say the word, but always with the hope of: *I'll make it work. I'm not going to give up on the dreams I've always had, but it ain't—it ain't gonna be easy.* [Both chuckle.] So that was—that was big. Yeah, that was a hard thing to say. But once I said it, it was a lot easier. Every time I say it—like, I can say, “I am gay” now and have no—no—no concerns. It's amazing, but—Oh, jeez, how many year's its been? It's amazing what—2001?—eighteen years does.

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.] Wow. [Chuckles.] That's—it's good to hear there's been so much—I mean, obviously, there's been so much progress, and it's good to hear how comfortable you are now in your identity. Yeah.

So let's go back now to college days.

HOPPER: Yeah.

ARJUNE: Since, I mean, this is part of Dartmouth's SpeakOut experience and all. [Chuckles.]

- HOPPER: Mm-hm.
- ARJUNE: So you mentioned that you were in the DOC and—
- HOPPER: Yeah.
- ARJUNE: —the Trips really had an impact on that. So you were Trips assistant director,—
- HOPPER: Yeah.
- ARJUNE: —as I've ascertained from your Dartmouth articles.
[Chuckles.]
- HOPPER: [Laughs.] Yeah.
- ARJUNE: So could you speak to your experiences about, like, you identity as a leader in a very, I guess, diverse group of people? Or not diverse group of people at your time, perhaps?
- HOPPER: Yeah. So I—my first way of really getting in Trips was that I applied after my sophomore year for both the Trip leader and well as for [Moosilauke Ravine Lodge] Croo.
- ARJUNE: Yeah.
- HOPPER: I had—I was hoping to get Croo because that was, like, a very difficult thing to get, and I was really hoping I would. And actually, I ended up getting selected for Lodge Croo, which was one of the most wonderful experiences of my Dartmouth career.
- It's funny: I had—oh, sorry—I had done Dimensions [of Dartmouth] that year.
- ARJUNE: Okay.
- HOPPER: And at the time, Dimensions—and I don't know how it currently runs, but Dimensions had—there was a show that was done by the admissions office previously, and they had decided they wanted students to do it. So my sophomore year, a bunch of us had done the first Dimensions show,

students-written, students-directed and performed, which was a blast.

And I found out around that time that I had gotten into Lodge Croo, which was fantastic, and I found out that there were two reasons I had gotten in: one—I mean, besides, you know, I’m a wonderfully great person for the job. [Both chuckle.] But there were two individuals who had really spoken out on my behalf. The first was someone who I had worked with during the Dimensions show. She was an out woman in the admissions office, and she was, like, “Great! We need more LGBTQ+ folks in Croo. It’s important to be seen.”

And I could not agree with that more. There were out people on my Croos when I was a freshman, and it made so much of a difference to know that there were not just gay people, but there were gay people who were being celebrated and being viewed as leaders and that I could be a leader because they were up there. If they were selected for this to be the ones to welcome in freshmen.

And Croo leaders are so fricking cool when you’re a Trippie. Like, these are people who are, like, “Oh, my gosh, you’re awesome!” So to know that those people were the ones who were being highlighted meant that I was in a safe place to be going, which was fantastic.

So when I heard that the—I was told, you know, “The reason why you’re being selected is because you have—you’re out, and you’re LGBT.” And also the other person had said, “We want”—who had spoken on my behalf had seen me host the drag competition during Winter Carnival and was, like, “He can hold a stage, and he could do it in heels.”

So the two of them had really been helping me get through, and one of them walked up to me and said, “Congrats. I heard about Lodge Croo. No pressure, but you have to be openly gay. And, you know, you should talk about being gay and your sense of place talk,” which is a talk that every Crooling gives to a section of the incoming class as it comes through the Lodge. Usually part of the evening program is that a Crooling will go up and be like: “Hey. Here’s who I am. Here is my sense of place at Dartmouth.”

So no pressure, but I definitely had to make sure I was out. And I was very, very, very gay. I made sure that I was the most flamboyant, the most outspoken and most clearly gay person so that any incoming freshman knew that they were good to go. [Both chuckle.]

And I very much—I definitely came out in my sense of place talk. Actually, I then also passed that tradition on, where I made sure—I was told by one person, and I told every future Crooling, “By the way, you’re on Lodge Croo. You need to be openly gay, and you need to tell them point blank that you are.” Because of how important this is, how important it is to hear those words, especially because when you have a bunch of folks with crazy hair and a tutu on, it’s hard to tell who’s gay and who’s just being playful, because tutus are fun to wear for everyone.

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.]

HOPPER: So being actually vocal about “I’m wearing rainbow colors because I’m gay, not just because they make my eyes look so good.” And the fact that Trips had always—has been a place like that, that has been—it’s always so important to be a welcoming place for everyone. That—that’s one of the things that really sold me on having to do more of it.

So I was a Trip leader as well. Then I—yeah, I was assistant director. There were three of us who ran the entire program. We called ourselves “the Dads,” because there were three of us and there was directors and A.D.s.” So the three Dads who—as we built up the program, we were all cisgender white guys. I was queer, and making sure that we were able to build the most diverse group possible of Trip leaders as well as Croolings was a—the conversation never stopped, because it was so important to us.

We knew that if you were a freshman coming in, we wanted you to be able to find at least one person who we had selected who you had something in common with, something where you knew that this was the place for you. And I never once felt pushback about that. That was just so embraced. That is part of mentality of the DOC.

The DOC, I loved being a part of in general because they just want to be outdoors. That's all that really matters, was "We love the outdoors. We want to be out there. And anyone who wants to come and share that experience with us, we want them to enjoy it too because we love it so much."

And it was kind of self-selecting. It tends to be a certain kind of person who goes to DOC organically, based on usually where you grew up. If you—if you were a city person, you really didn't know the outdoors very well. You weren't rushing to get out there. And also it was—actually—it was actually a pretty good split of men/women. They did a great job of that before I got there.

But making sure LGBT folks got there, people of color felt welcome there—that was always a giant concern for us, and the fact that it was a constant conversation of ways to improve ourselves was the exact kind of environment where, like where I wanted to be, where they acknowledged the problem and want to find a solution.

ARJUNE: That's—wow. That's great! I mean, I feel like DOC has continued that tradition over the years, for sure.

HOPPER: Good.

ARJUNE: You mentioned—while saying all of that, you hosted a drag-competition for Winter Carnival.

HOPPER: Yeah.

ARJUNE: I didn't even realize Winter Carnival *had* drag competitions. Could you expand on that a little bit?

HOPPER: Yeah. Oh, yeah. So I believe that this tradition kind of turned into what is now Pride Week. Do you guys still do Pride Week?

ARJUNE: Yes. Yes, we still do Pride Week.

HOPPER: Yeah. So there wasn't Pride Week when I first started college. That was my senior year, it started.

ARJUNE: Okay.

HOPPER: So before that, we had to find a way to create our own queer experiences. We used to have something called Queer Bar Night, which was at a place called the Lone Pine Tavern, which is at the bottom of Collis [Center for Student Involvement]. I don't think that exists anymore, either.

ARJUNE: Nope.

HOPPER: But that would be once a semester—once a term, we would have Queer Bar Night in Lone Pine Tavern, where—I mean, it's still open to everyone, but that's where if you were LGBTQ+ associated, we encouraged you to go there. It was sponsored by the Gay Straight Alliance and the Dartmouth Rainbow Alliance, and we had karaoke, we gave out prizes and raffles that were usually LGBTQ+ themed, and—so that was one event.

And then every Winter Carnival, the Thursday night of Winter Carnival was kicked off by a drag show. It was in Collis Common Ground, that big—does that still exist?

ARJUNE: Yep, that still exists].

HOPPER: Yeah, okay, great. So Collis Common Ground was the place where we had a runway, and we encouraged members of the community, of the greater Dartmouth community, to come in drag and to do a catwalk, do a lip sync, and it was hosted by two students, and at the end we would try to have a drag queen from some city—we had some from Boston, some from New York, who we'd pay to come up and do a performance as well.

So it was a bit of education in terms of, like, here is drag culture, which is a part of the LGBTQ+ culture, and also a chance for people to explore gender fluidity in real life. So, really fun. It did—it tended to really just draw LGBTQ+ people. Our allies would occasionally show up, but the majority of the audience was—was part of the greater queer community.

But it was really fun. That was something I looked forward to every year. I won one year, and I'll never let my friends forget it because I have friends who are much better at drag

than I am, but one of them had meningitis, and I was, like, “Thanks to [unintelligible] because I’m gonna win! [Chuckles.]

ARJUNE: [Laughs.]

HOPPER: So, yeah, I was a queen of Winter Carnival for one year, which was wonderful.

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.] That’s fantastic. Would you have, like, some sort of, like, crown or something you’d wear all throughout Winter Carnival, or was it just that night [cross-talk] you just knew.

HOPPER: Oh, no, no, just for the night.

ARJUNE: Okay. Understood.

HOPPER: Can you imagine walking around campus in the middle of Winter Carnival wearing heels? Like, no, I have thirteen layers of socks and boots on. There’s no place to be—to be in drag in the middle of—

ARJUNE: [Laughs.]

HOPPER: Dartmouth in the winter.

ARJUNE: [Laughs.] That *is* true. That’s why Pride Week generally now is in the spring. And it’s—the show for it is Transform. But, yeah—

HOPPER: Oh, I love that! Great name!

ARJUNE: Yes. Okay.

You mentioned that—okay, so, on campus—I noticed even today, there are numerous LGBTQI+ clubs—like, just Dartmouth organizations, not even Greek life. But you mentioned there was the Dartmouth Rainbow Alliance and the GSA [Gay Students Association]. Could you explain—the Gay Straight Alliance. Could you explain the differences between both of those organizations?

HOPPER: Okay, I’ll do my best here, and here’s an important nuance, is that we had this question while I was there.

ARJUNE: Okay.

HOPPER: So the Dartmouth Rainbow Alliance had predated the GSA at the time, if I can recall my history correctly. The Dartmouth Rainbow Alliance was a queer-centered organization, so it was meant by gay people for gay people. It was a safe place for people to go. We had what we called the Rainbow Room in Robo [Robinson Hall].

ARJUNE: Yep.

HOPPER: And it was the place where we could meet once a week and talk about things that were going on around us. Were we experiencing discrimination? Are there ways that we can better educate our classmates on both the rights that we don't have as well as the art history? So it was a by-LGBTQ-for-LGBTQ group.

The Gay Straight Alliance was the coalition-building group. It was the one that was bringing in straight allies and was bringing in ways to work with the greater community, so getting Webster Hall to have—sorry, getting Webster Avenue to have the rainbow flags. That would be more of a GSA thing.

ARJUNE: Okay.

HOPPER: There was actually a moment—it was a frustration for me because there was a question of whether or not the DRA still needed to exist, because the beautiful thing about progress is that pretty much everyone felt comfortable going to the GSA. That was the place that you went. The DRA was losing its membership because there was already somewhere else, and they didn't feel a need to separate out those two experiences.

And something actually I did fight for while I was there was yes, there are individuals—most of the people who are out feel very comfortable with their straight allies and don't need a queer-only space. But there are many who do. And it's important that we allow this environment where people could come and just be themselves and not worry about whether

or not they're out to other people yet, whether or not they feel comfortable being political yet.

So I always thought that was a different space, was that it was more of a support group at the DRA than the GSA, which is more action oriented.

ARJUNE: Okay.

HOPPER: Now, the GSA did turn into GSX when I was I believe a senior, so it went from the Gay Straight Alliance to the Gender Sexuality XYZ Club. And I don't remember if there was any change in the mission statement. I know there was a change in name, though.

ARJUNE: Okay. That helps a lot, because I was really confused. I was, like, why are there—I mean, we still have multiple organizations on campus, but I was wondering why there were two back then.

HOPPER: Yeah. Yeah.

ARJUNE: Yeah. And then I guess going into organizations over all, I noticed you were in Tabard.

HOPPER: Yes.

ARJUNE: Could you speak to that experience?

HOPPER: Yeah, so—and I'll be honest: I joined late, and I left early, so my Tabard experience is brief. But at the time, there was a lot—I mentioned that Greek houses were first accepting LGBT people as members, which was wonderful. But—hold on one second—while the other houses were accepting members, there was also a pushback. I had already rushed Sig Ep [Sigma Phi Epsilon] twice, and I had rushed Sig Ep because they were—they were called the gay house, because they had a bunch of members who had come out after graduation, so they were—it was a really—that was a place where most people felt very comfortable being openly gay because of the robust number of LGBT—oh, I'm sorry, I guess at that time just gay and bi men, who were brothers.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

HOPPER: That came—it was a double-edged sword. There were a larger amount of gay brothers there, but a lot of the straight brothers were very upset by this.

ARJUNE: I see.

HOPPER: There was a big pushback being, like, “I don’t want to be in a gay house. I didn’t join a gay house. I’m not gay. I don’t like this.” So I was not allowed membership. I also know one of the brothers who very actively dinged me, saying, “If we accept this guy, I’m not going to be a member of the house anymore.” Ironically, we’ve become good friends years later, but that wasn’t until after college that we became friends and he gave a lot of apologies.

But—so because I was shut out from a lot of the other houses, Tabard was a wonderfully safe place and a very openly accepting environment. Like, radical inclusivity would be a word I’d use for Tabard at the time.

So they had many openly-gay, queer, lesbian, trans—truly LGBTQ+ at the Tabard, which was such a wonderful experience to have there. I joined in my sophomore summer. I—and then I realized it wasn’t—it wasn’t an organization I—while I loved going there, that I enjoyed the membership of as much. I loved the people. I didn’t—like when it came time to actually be a member and the rules and responsibilities, it wasn’t quite my thing. So I did leave, but I often visited as a very enthusiastic former member.

So it was great because the co-ed houses had always been much more open to and inclusive of LGBTQ+ people.

ARJUNE: What are your thoughts on the other co-ed houses, the gender-inclusive houses, as they’re called today?

HOPPER: Oh, that’s great. So I love—love that name. Phi Tau and Alpha Theta, I believe were the other two.

ARJUNE: Yep.

- HOPPER: I only have good things to say. I didn't go there very much, so I really can't speak much more to them. I went to Milque and Cookies—
- ARJUNE: [Laughs.]
- HOPPER: —at Phi Tau. Always loved my Milque and Cookies.
- ARJUNE: [Laughs.]
- HOPPER: And Alpha Theta, I played Pong at once, and they used to—okay, this was back when there was liquor on campus. They used to have cocktail night, and they were the only place you could go where you could go where you could, like, actually order whatever kind of cocktail you wanted. So it wasn't just whatever was in the vat. [Chuckles.] It was—oh, no, “Did you want a vodka soda? We have vodka soda.” “Did you want a vodka cranberry? We have that, too.” “Rum and a Coke?” You know, I did enjoy going there occasionally for that. I—I—I—my experience with those houses is not as robust as it was with Tabard.
- ARJUNE: Understood.
- I only laugh because it's Milque and Cookies tomorrow at Phi Tau. It's a Phi Tau—
- HOPPER: Oh! Oh! Have all of them for me. Please eat all the cookies.
- ARJUNE: [unintelligible]
- HOPPER: And milk. Or as I called it, the “milquea,” because the “q” always threw me off.
- ARJUNE: [Laughs.]
- Alright. What about the other—okay. I guess since we're still on the topic of houses, were Panarchy and Amarna prevalent in your day?
- HOPPER: Oh, yes, they were. Panarchy was—that was, I would guess, a very similar feel to Tabard. They were really distinct, but—they were different, but in terms of the overall community,

they were probably among the most similar. Also a really wonderful inclusive place.

We used to have an event—once a term called Cocktails and it was for male-identified individuals who were attracted to male-identified individuals.

ARJUNE: Okay.

HOPPER: I try to use that more inclusive terminology because as long as you were male-identified, it wasn't just cisgendered people. So—yeah, so we used to have a—Cocktails once a term. Panarchy played host to us once. So it was definitely viewed as a very queer-friendly place.

And do they still throw their [*The Great*] *Gatsby* party?

ARJUNE: Panarchy? I believe so, yes.

HOPPER: Yeah. That was always—that was really fun as—in general as a party but also was known, like, if you were queer, that was a great party every time because it was such a wonderfully inclusive place on campus. And that was their one party a term that was, like, the most campus-wide event. So that was always a scene to be seen. And that was a place—

There were a lot of parties where, like you might see a same-sex couple dancing, but—and so, like, you'd see a couple here and there. But at Panarchy on the dance floor, you'd have probably the highest number of people dancing. That, and Tabard's disco party. That was also very gay.

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.] Nice. I know they brought those back pretty recently, too.

HOPPER: Oh, great.

ARJUNE: Yeah. So since we're still talking about housing, I guess, I want to go into—you were a UGA [undergraduate adviser] for a period of time.

HOPPER: I was, yes!

ARJUNE: And you were around for the beginning of gender-neutral housing. Could you expand a bit on that whole debate, debacle?

HOPPER: Yeah. Well, I wouldn't call it a debacle because it worked wonderfully when I was there.

ARJUNE: That's great.

HOPPER: So I was—when I was a junior, I was approached—I was already a UGA.

ARJUNE: Okay.

HOPPER: I was approached by—what's the term for the group that oversees housing? OCH?

ARJUNE: ORL.

HOPPER: ORL, thank you. Yes.

ARJUNE: Office of Residential Life.

HOPPER: Thank you, yes. The acronyms do go over time. So I was approached by ORL, and they said, "Listen, Jon, we're looking to do a gender-neutral pilot program. We want it to be in the ground floor of McLane [Hall]," which was the current McLane. There had been a previous McLane that was torn down, in the River [Cluster]. So this was the one on Tuck Mall.

They said, "We want it—we need this to be a success. We think this is something that is the future of housing, and we would like you to be the UGA to run it." I was, like, in! This incredible. I loved it.

And it had a lot of pushback initially, and one of the concerns that was raised was that, "Well, what if couples are living there? How do we feel about that?" And the response I always had was, "You know, for years you've had same-sex couples living together. You never seemed to care that—why—why are you caring all of a sudden that straight people are living together if you didn't care about gay people living

together?” Which oftentimes was met with silence, which was nice.

And the reality is that the people who ended up living together—it was almost exclusively gay men and women, I guess, those who were mixed gender within the—the rooms. It was usually gay men and women who were living together, so we had not one same-sex couple. I’m sorry, not one heterosexual couple in the entire program.

But what’s also great is that Dartmouth really gave a lot of support, both in terms of resources but also in financing. Every other UGA had a budget they had to hit. I did not.

ARJUNE: Nice.

HOPPER: I was simply told, “Whatever you need to make this work, make it work.” So I would order fancy food and have it delivered to us. I would have guest speakers and professors come in. So—and also we’d do movie nights. And we had everything that was, like, fun, but also we tossed in some educational programs to make it look actually legitimate. Which it was.

And I would say it was one of the easiest UGA experiences I could ever imagine. There was almost no incidents at all. There was one person who had an issue because it was on the ground floor. Somebody, a drunk person outside—we have no idea who it was—tried to get in their window, and I don’t know if that’s because we were locked out or what was going on. But in response, this woman put a *Xena: Warrior Princess* cutout in front of that window, and no one has ever hurt her ever since [chuckles] because Xena will protect all.

And the—actually, we did have one issue where someone came and tore down all the posters, and I don’t remember if they wrote things as well, but it was very clearly an anti-LGBT attack. And my one issue I had—I mean, obviously, that was scary and upsetting. The biggest issue we had was we couldn’t ever identify the individual. Like, there was no cameras that were done.

If—if there was a way to track who used the keypad to get in, then we were not allowed access to find out who that was.

But it was one incident over the year. Otherwise, it was a wonderful place to live. It was given, again, all the support that Dartmouth could have given us. Like, I was never told, “No,” in terms of if I had an idea that I thought would help the program, it was always a “Yes.”

And I think any fears that were given to the program in advance were never held up to be a reality because it was just a living situation. Like, there was nothing scandalous to happen. It was people living together. There was roommate drama, the way every roommate has drama—

ARJUNE: Yeah.

HOPPER: —but actually not that—but not that much roommate drama. So over all, I thought it was a really great program. I hope—actually, I never even followed up. Is there more gender-neutral housing now?

ARJUNE: Yes, there is.

HOPPER: Gender-exclusive? I don’t know the term is. Okay, yeah.

ARJUNE: Yes. I mean, there is Triangle House now, which is a whole, like, a community of—

HOPPER: Great.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

HOPPER: That makes sense.

ARJUNE: Was there also Foley House back then?

HOPPER: There was Foley House. Oh, great, it was so long—I’m going to have to remember. Foley House was the one—the actual house a little bit off campus?

ARJUNE: Yes.

HOPPER: Yeah. Yeah, that did exist. I don’t know. I guess—is that single occupancy or was that—are the rooms shared by individuals?

- ARJUNE: I'm not entirely sure. I know it was—I know when I interviewed someone from the Class of '77, they mentioned how Foley House was very supportive of his identity and coming out at the time.
- HOPPER: That's great. Yeah, that's great. I went to one party at the Foley House.
- ARJUNE: Okay.
- HOPPER: I think that was my only time there in my college experience. And it was definitely an inclusive place. It was just—it was a little bit removed from the beaten path, so I never really went out there.
- ARJUNE: Got it. Okay. Cool!
- So it there anything else that happened I guess specifically within your Dartmouth career that really defined it? I know it was around a period of time where there's, like, the housing bubble, so things economically were going very well. Primaries were starting.
- HOPPER: Yeah.
- ARJUNE: Yeah.
- HOPPER: Yeah. I mean, you just mentioned primaries.
- ARJUNE: Yeah.
- HOPPER: Dartmouth held—the Democratic candidate debates for the 2008 primary—2008 election was held at Dartmouth. I—me and [unintelligible] my classmates formed what we called the Dartmouth Election Network. And we set out to be kind of reporters to cover that event. And I had the opportunity to interview two candidates. One was [William B.] “Bill” Richardson [III], who did not get the nomination. The other one was a junior senator from Illinois named Barack [H.] Obama.
- ARJUNE: [Laughs.]
- HOPPER: And he—he did—he *did* win the election.

ARJUNE: [Laughs.]

HOPPER: So that was incredibly cool, to have the opportunity to speak with the future president, who was probably the most inundated individual there but made the time to, you know, walk and talk with me. I held up a recorder, and honestly, I could not tell you what he said. I—I was so in awe that he was speaking with me and that he was so friendly and welcoming. The man was very—very, very charismatic in person. And so to be able to walk and talk with him and learn—that was—I'll never forget that I met the future president of the United States. That was huge.

ARJUNE: That's really cool!

HOPPER: Yeah.

ARJUNE: Yeah. But how did—I guess how did the real world—for lack of a better word, how did the world outside of Dartmouth impact your time there? I mean, besides—

HOPPER: You know, so I—I graduated before the recession began.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

HOPPER: So a lot of us who had jobs out of college learned quickly that we didn't have jobs anymore, but we still had a lease that we had signed. So—yeah, I—I would say that the actual—well, the joke of the Dartmouth bubble is a real thing. Like, while we were on campus, it was just campus. There wasn't much outside world that interacted with us, which was a really wonderful experience as an undergrad. To have the only concern be what's immediately in front of you is a real gift. And, yeah, I was fortunate enough that we were in a booming economy, so there wasn't really concerns about that, that eventually came to pass. Yeah, it was really a—looking at the world through rose-colored glasses, in a lot of my time there.

ARJUNE: I see.

HOPPER: What was interesting, though, was there were debates around—like, gay rights was one of the first things that—was

a—an increasingly—increasing conversation that was happening when I was there. That was something that was interesting because we got to, as college students, discuss and debate those. And it wasn't—

When did Massachusetts pass same-sex marriage? It may have been right before or right after I graduated. It was somewhere in that range.

ARJUNE: Okay.

HOPPER: So, yeah, “Don't ask, don't tell” was very much still a thing.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

HOPPER: In fact, we had recruiters who would come to campus that I actively fought against, in terms of, like, “I can't believe you would allow this discriminatory organization to come to our campus.”

We also had some things with the [American] Red Cross doing blood drives. They—in terms of—“picketing” is the wrong term. [unintelligible] thing. Like, I—I actively support people giving blood. People should give blood. It's an important thing to do.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

HOPPER: But educating people that—and, by the way, as you're giving blood, know that not all others can and that the information that's used to determine who can and cannot give blood is pretty outdated. So that was another thing, but outside organizations that came onto campus that was controversial. Neither one of those is very—too controversial, but those are things we often dealt with from the outside.

ARJUNE: Okay.

So going back to the real world, then, let's move up a bit to graduation. It's graduation day. How—how do you feel about you know, like, leav—you know, your time at Dartmouth, and how do you feel about leaving Dartmouth?

HOPPER: Oh, I was horrified. I loved Dartmouth. In fact, my first job was running Trips so I could stay on campus.

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.]

HOPPER: And I stayed until my—the September after I graduated. Actually, that was something—the nicest thing was that because I got to stay on campus and I got to be on campus for the sophomore summer of the Class of 2010, I loved my 2010s, but as I was there, like, *Oh, all of my friends are gone. This place isn't my place anymore. It's time to move on and let someone else enjoy what I once had.*

I—Dartmouth will forever be four of the greatest years of my life. I will never forget the friendships I've made and that have persisted. The growth I had as a person, as a leader, academically, my growth. I will never—never forget what that did for me. I've given every year since graduation because—and I give to financial aid. My goal is for whoever comes next to have as good if not better of an experience I did, which often means change, which I know Dartmouth need. Like, Dartmouth is one of the places that I—I will forever love, and I will love knowing that it's not perfect.

Yeah, but so leaving for the real world was at first upsetting but eventually was a bittersweet departure, knowing that *my time here is done. I had a really wonderful time. I got a lot out of it. And I'll come visit, and think of it fondly. But it's time to go and do something new.*

ARJUNE: Yeah. And, well, what did you do exactly after you graduated? I know—you studied psychology, right?

HOPPER: Yeah, psychological and brain sciences was my major, and as we learned with all liberal arts degrees, what do you do with that? So I first started off working in nonprofit. It was important for me to give back. I worked for a chain of middle schools for underserved youth, and I was doing fundraising initiatives for that

So helping these places to keep the schools open. The hardest thing there is that—what I didn't realize—again, there was a financial crash that year, and our biggest donors had all been [The] Goldman Sachs [Group, Inc.] and the

actual—the actual company, as well as donors from Goldman Sachs, people who had been giving very generously, who no longer could afford to do so. So that was a fun opportunity, really a wonderful program. The schools make a huge difference, and I'm a huge fan of them.

But I did eventually leave there, and I switched into the for-profit world. I do—I did sales and account management for digital publishers, so a bunch of websites. I now still work at a digital publisher. I'm currently the VP of [unintelligible] development and innovation, which is—essentially, I help find new revenue and growth opportunities for my company.

And actually, I'm graduating next week from Columbia Business School with an MBA [master of business administration].

ARJUNE: Wow.

HOPPER: So—yeah, I did that while working full time, always a blast. And it's interesting. Like, Columbia being a school that I had once thought I'd be transferring to, to being a student now. And I am—I think Columbia is a wonderful place. I am so grateful I stayed at Dartmouth. That was—that was the right call for me.

ARJUNE: That is good to hear.

How—I mean, how has your identity as a gay, cis male impacted your time post-grad?

HOPPER: Yeah. So, that's a great question. I—the biggest mistake I made was that at my first job, I wasn't sure if I could be out, and I didn't know how to balance professional and personal. I had put together such a wall between “I'm here to work, and you'll know nothing about me personally”—it really did impact my performance. I didn't feel comfortable there, and I did start to come out at future jobs, which was very needed.

It's never been an issue. I had one company where I heard someone say the word “gay” once—a couple of times, and not describe homosexuality. He mentioned that as, like, “Oh, that's so gay.” And I brought it up to a PC, and they were, like, “Oh, that's not acceptable here.” And they immediately

stopped it. Never dealt with any of that—any issues ever again.

In terms of—what else can I say about the real world? What was interesting for me was that I was—as a gay man, I was in New York City. There are—I would argue more gay men in New York City than any other city in America. San Fran has a lot—a very dense population but a smaller overall population, so I think we [unintelligible] in vast numbers.

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.]

HOPPER: And—so it's been an incredibly LGBT-friendly place. I mean, I can go anywhere, holding hands with a man, and not have any issue. There are more gay bars than I can count and more popups. When I'm done, counting there's a new one.

So it's been a wonderful place. What's interesting is that from my first five years out of Dartmouth, my only gay friends in New York were my Dartmouth friends.

ARJUNE: I see.

HOPPER: And there were enough of us that I could—I could have that. One friend, a bisexual woman from Dartmouth—she and I would go out. Like, my first couple of months in the city, we would be going out every night together, hitting up the bars. But, you know, five years later, when I'm going, *I should have made more friends by now*, that was a wake-up moment for me. I—I made myself a little plan, as a good Dartmouth student would: If I have a problem, what is the solution? How do I tackle this?

And I—I ended up joining an—LGBTQ sports leagues. I joined two of them, and then two and a half—I played some football along the way as well. And then I got a share in Fire Island Pines, which is a well-known gay vacation spot outside New York, and I now have a pretty robust gay network in New York City. So—[Chuckles.] And, of course, many of them include my Dartmouth friends as well.

ARJUNE: Nice. I mean, I guess going on that track, do you still—do you do anything like activist related these days? Or—

- HOPPER: I should do more. I'll be honest. I—I—I'm a VP in Cluster Q, which is Columbia Business School's LGBTQ+ organization, so I've been doing that. I will attend fundraisers. Unfortunately, the past couple of years, doing school full time and doing—and having a full-time job has left me with not much time. Occasionally—I have a boyfriend I've been with for over five years, and he's—
- ARJUNE: That's great.
- HOPPER: —like, "I don't get to see you." So—it's wonderful. I love this man to death. So, I mean, all of my free time is trying to be a good boyfriend now. [Chuckles.]
- ARJUNE: Understandable.
- HOPPER: It's a radical, political thing to do. Just being gay is political.
- ARJUNE: [Chuckles.] Actually, could you expand on that a bit? Like, how do you feel it's still—I guess in today's society it's still political.
- HOPPER: Yeah. It's less political in New York than it is elsewhere.
- ARJUNE: Yeah.
- HOPPER: But I think the mere act of being yourself is a statement of "This is a reality. This is my reality, and it's something that—it's just as valid as anyone else's." It's strangely a political statement to be making. And as we travel—we travel often—we—we always straddle the idea of "How much are we ourselves and how much do we balance that with our safety?" There are countries that we go to, where we are not a couple openly, countries that we go to and we very much are a couple, states that we have concerns.
- We were at a bachelor party in Savannah, Georgia, recently, and Savannah is actually, in general, a pretty open place, but we were kind of outside the city, and we were at a bar, and, you know, there were stares we got. And, I mean, fortunately somebody—the bachelor party was for a Dartmouth guy, a straight friend of mine. And bless them. I don't know if they saw what was happening or they just intuited it or if it was a lucky coincidence, but I was dancing

with my boyfriend, and as we were getting these looks, the whole group of guys started to join us. All of sudden, there was a line of guys grinding, only the two in the middle being gay. In fact, all the straight guys had their shirts off.

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.]

HOPPER: So it is amazing how alliances are built and sometimes without even realizing it, just people knowing you and loving you as a person. “We’ll be there to defend you.”

ARJUNE: That’s such a great story! [Chuckles.]

HOPPER: Thank you. Yeah. But, you know, I haven’t even told the guys who were doing this how I interpreted the event. I don’t know if they agree with me or if they are—yeah, I have no idea.

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.]

Let’s tie this back into, I guess, your past a bit. So you mentioned you have two siblings, —

HOPPER: Yeah.

ARJUNE: —and you mentioned you didn’t come out to your family before you came to college. Are you out to them now? Are you still connected with your family at all?

HOPPER: I am out. I am lovingly accepted by my family. I told my—I told the elder of my two sisters first when they were on campus to visit. I had —we had these gay [unintelligible] space stickers that we would put on places on campus, including on your dorm door, would be a way to indicate that you were an ally, or LGBTQ+ yourself.

And we had one on our dorm door, because both me being gay identified, and my roommate being a wonderful ally, we thought that’d be a great thing to do. And then my father saw the sticker and freaked out. Like, “What’s going on? What’s going on?” And my sister, as quick as she is, went, “Oh, no, that’s not for Jon, it’s for David,” my roommate. [Both chuckle.] He’s, like, “Oh, that makes sense. Okay. All right. Now I feel better.”

I did eventually have to come out to them, and it was an awkward conversation. It wasn't good. You know, there's actually a wonderful resource I knew about when I came out. Because one of the things we worry about when you are telling your parents and you are concerned about their reaction is: What are you going to do financially? What do you do if you're cut off from your family and you wanted to continue going to Dartmouth?

And DGALA has a program where they actually have a scholarship for that very purpose, so that if you are cut off from your family, there is a financial scholarship available to help you stay at Dartmouth, despite losing your parent's connections. And that—I can't tell you what a wonderful resource that it. I truly think that's one of the best things that DGALA can and does do, is provide that safe outlet for students, because that is an unfortunate reality that many of us deal with.

So that was—that was huge for me. My parents did not cut me off. My father and I had a strained relationship for a bit, but he has essentially come around. And over all, my entire family—it's not just loving and supportive, but, like, they treat my boyfriend Dominic [Pepper] as if he's a member of the family. There are pictures of him all around the house. I am very, very grateful for not just their response but—but the fervent allies they have become.

My mother loves to fight for me, whether it be a perceived slight against our family because I'm gay or because she's sees I've been wronged. Like, she's been a wonderful, wonderful ally for me.

And my sister is—other sisters are great. The first one I came out to, the one in the middle, the one who had made the wonderful comment about not being me who was gay but David, was—actually joined her Gay Straight Alliance in our high school. So I've been very lucky to have such a loving and supportive family.

ARJUNE:

That's—that's great to hear. I'm glad things have changed over the years.

HOPPER: Yeah.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

HOPPER: But also, like—still, like, I think [unintelligible] there is DGALA as a resource. I—I—I wouldn't have had the strength to talk to my family without that.

ARJUNE: Are you still involved in DGALA today?

HOPPER: I'm not a member—I would say I'm a member; I'm not on the executive board.

ARJUNE: Yep.

HOPPER: But they do events whenever I—also, the great thing about the DGALA community is that we're also at every other Dartmouth events, too. So we see each other a lot, which is wonderful.

ARJUNE: Nice.

I guess, then, going back to that, then, how are your—I mean, it sounds like you have some really strong alumni ties.

HOPPER: Yeah.

ARJUNE: So, like, to other—like, other classmates. What are your ties, I think,—what are your—what are your views, actually, over all, on Dartmouth today?

HOPPER: You know, I—I don't know. I don't go there.

ARJUNE: Okay.

HOPPER: So I don't know well enough the experience of undergraduates. I—I hear things in the news, and I do my best as an alumnus to not have a knee-jerk reaction of "Why are we changing things?"

ARJUNE: Yeah.

HOPPER: What has stayed true—that I believe strongly in Dartmouth students. I believe that Dartmouth students are chosen

because they are bright, because they are leaders, and that ideally the community that I—that I love and the culture of Dartmouth is one of love, of a place where people should feel welcome, even if—I know that it falls short of that constantly.

But if Dartmouth continues to grow with the leadership of the students that it has, I can only assume that the students will take it in the right directions. And unfortunately, change takes a bit of time, which is never a nice thing to hear. But I truly believe that.

What I've loved about Dartmouth, even when I was there, was that the students were never satisfied with what we currently had. We always knew there was something better, and we were going to fight to make it better. We didn't always win. We didn't even always know—we didn't make the right choices to get there, but the intent was always to make Dartmouth a better place.

And I—you know, I marched on Parkhurst [Hall] at times. I did rallies on the Green, and that was the Dartmouth I loved, was that it was a place that knew it could improve. I—I was actively involved in sexual assault prevention and response programs at Dartmouth. That was a very big, passionate point for me, was to both prevent sexual assault and to help those who had been assaulted.

And so for Dartmouth—Dartmouth, in terms of assault rating as a college campus, was not anywhere near the top. Other colleges had a higher rate of it. Other colleges had more of it in volume. But we knew that the only acceptable number at Dartmouth was zero. And that was—I loved that passion. It wasn't a "Well we're not the worst so we're going to worry about it"; it was a "We need to be the best, and we're *gonna* worry about it."

And I—I can only hope that, as I hear about student activists on campus, that they are taking the same approach, is that "We are the best place to be, and we're going to fight to make sure that we actually *are* the best place to be."

I don't know. You are there. Tell me how *is* it going? I don't—

ARJUNE: I would say that there's progress. There's still plenty more progress to be had, as you've said.

HOPPER: Yeah.

ARJUNE: But, I mean, there continues to be fights. There continues to be groups for this, lots of discussions. I mean, Greek life has changed dramatically—

HOPPER: Yeah.

ARJUNE: —over the past couple of years, as I'm sure you've heard.

HOPPER: Yeah. Many of the Greek houses don't exist anymore.

ARJUNE: Exactly. Like Sig Ep. Sig Ep no longer exists.

HOPPER: Yeah. Yep.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

HOPPER: Sig Ep, and SAE [Sigma Alpha Epsilon] is gone, AD is gone.

ARJUNE: SAE is still around.

HOPPER: It is? I thought it was taken off campus.

ARJUNE: It's complicated. [Chuckles.]

HOPPER: Okay, fair. It always is.

ARJUNE: Yeah. They—they have enough money to survive. But that's neither here nor there.

HOPPER: Okay, yup.

ARJUNE: But I guess, going back—I guess, if there's one thing you could change about your time at Dartmouth—

HOPPER: [Sighs.]

ARJUNE: —one thing you could do all over again, you can say, *Okay, if I had done this thing differently*, what's the biggest thing—

and anybody will have those regrets—what is that one thing for you?

HOPPER: You know, this is a copout, but I—I really don't—I try not to approach life that way. I—I loved my experience, and I—I messed up along the way, but I grew and I learned from those mistakes. And there were times I had issues with Dartmouth, with my classmates, but it made me who I am, and it made me stronger, and every time something bad happened, I had a community around me that was supporting me. And knowing I had that community, knowing how they built me up, that's what made the Dartmouth experience so impactful for me. So I wouldn't change a thing.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

HOPPER: It doesn't mean it was perfect, but I wouldn't change a thing.

ARJUNE: Understood.

HOPPER: Yeah.

ARJUNE: What are your views on where we are, I think,—this is a very general question—as a—I guess, this is—what are your views on, like, where we are as a society in terms of, I guess, LGBTQI, in terms of social issues, like? And how you feel about the progress we've made thus far, I guess, even in the years since you've been alive, and where do you feel we still need to go?

HOPPER: Yeah. I mean, the progress since I've come out alone—so we've got eighteen years. That's been a—for more than I could have imagined. If people had told me that same-sex marriage would be legal across the country, I—I wouldn't have believed you. We clearly have so much farther to go. We need to be—I mean, where do we start?

HIV [human immunodeficiency virus] needs to be cured yesterday. And—and the stigma that's currently given to people who are living with HIV, which especially impacts the LGBTQ+ community, needs to be discussed more openly, and the stigma needs to be gone.

Gender identity, which is so clearly interwoven with sexual orientation—we need to be better allies to our trans community. We need to give them better visibility. We need to be discussing the violence that's seen against our trans, our brothers and sisters, especially trans members who are people of color.

LGBTQ homelessness is the highest rate of any group because of—I—I talked about this idea of financial independence and families disowning their children. I don't know how we address that besides making sure people know that their child is as wonderful as they always have been and hopefully changing the stigma around being gay, which is quite strong, still.

ARJUNE: Yeah

HOPPER: It's broken down and normalized, but also, like, I was at a fundraiser for the Hetrick-Martin Institute, as well as I actually raised money for the Ali Forney Center, which do great work for LGBTQ youth, especially those who are homeless.

So I guess I am still involved. [Chuckles.] Politically, aren't I? I forget these things sometimes. It is just comes naturally.

Discrimination in the workplace is still allowed in way too many places. We are unquestionably going to have a challenge to Obergefell [v. Hodges] in the courts, and I don't know where that's going to fall. The idea that discrimination-based off religious freedom is going to be another [discussion we need to have.

We've made incredible strides, and I could not be more proud of that, but we also need to make sure that—remember that we're not done, discrimination is very strong, especially for those who have intersexual identities, that, yes, things are really great right now from the gay, white, cis gender, “can pass”, gay man could pass for straight gay man, who—with a good job. Most of my concerns are done, but we've got a whole lot more to go.

I [unintelligible]. I'm living in New York City. That's another huge privilege that I have.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

HOPPER: So what I'm worried about is just because I'm happy and I'm content does not mean that others are, and I cannot be content with just my own happiness. And I think that just in general the LGBTQ+—and we should remember that this is not just white people. This is not just men. This is not just cisgendered individuals, that we are a community of multiple people, and our fight isn't done until we're all [unintelligible].

ARJUNE: Yeah. Thank you. That—yeah.

Is there anything else you would wish to add to this interview that I maybe haven't touched upon?

HOPPER: Well, that's a great question. I do want to say thank you for doing this. Thank you for doing it yourself. Thank DGALA and the leaders—I believe Brendan [M. Connell Jr., Class of 1987] is the one leading the charge on this. This is a wonderful project. I—I think that Dartmouth has such a robust history that it's often not acknowledged because of its reputation.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

HOPPER: Dartmouth is perceived, still to this day, as—as the conservative Ivy [League school]. And to know that LGBTQ+ folks in our community are being recognized for our history there and an invaluable part of the Dartmouth history—I'm glad this is being captured for future generations to hear, and for anyone in the future listening, I hope that you have not a single issue I've mentioned, and I hope that you have an even happier experience than I had.

ARJUNE: That's great.

Oh, I do have another question for you, then. So you mentioned you spoke to a bunch of alumni from the fifties up to—

HOPPER: Yeah.

ARJUNE: —recen- —until—up to '08, your year, your freshman year.

HOPPER: Yeah.

ARJUNE: How much do you know about the history of the LGBTQIA+ community at Dartmouth before your time, like in the seventies? Did you hear about—so the Tri Kap [Kappa Kappa Kappa] incidents or *The Dartmouth Review* incidences?

HOPPER: So *The Review* incident, I'll never forget about that. That is infamous. I don't know about the Tri-Kap one, to my knowledge. Do you mind telling me that story?

ARJUNE: Yeah, sure. So it's essentially a bunch of Tri-Kaps. They outed brothers. They discriminated—they threw parties that were, like, anti-LGBTQIA+. Yeah. Yeah. No, it was pretty bad. They were very, very homophobic in the seventies.

HOPPER: Oh, jeez. I mean, I—it was just the way you say that in interesting, too, because I would say in general the seventies were very homophobic, so when you're [unintelligible] for being the most homophobic, you're really trying hard.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

HOPPER: And this is the era of disco. I mean, what's going on? [Both chuckle.] This is when Studio 54 was taking over New York City. And just after the Summer of Love. Like, where are the hippies?

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.] Yeah!

HOPPER: So that's—I did not know about that. That is horrifying. I do know that even while I was there, certain frats had initiation rituals which were intentionally done to demean anyone who might be gay. And I'll give you—I'm in the elevator right now. I'll can give you that story in a second. [Loud noise; 1:28:44].

So [unintelligible] [Background voices.] I mean the—*The Review* incident is something was almost like a warning for us. It made us all paranoid, even when I was there. The listservs were all blind. The—I would bcc people for events, just to make sure no one could do that to anyone else.

There was—I mentioned that we had cocktails at the party.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

HOPPER: The e-mail list was always: “recipient list undisclosed,” because I didn’t want anyone to be outed to anyone else.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

HOPPER: And that’s also—that’s one of the things: When I was there, I knew a lot of people who were closeted, some who knew I knew and others who didn’t know I knew, and I would—I would include them on all these e-mails: and be like “Listen, if you ever want to come, you’re always welcome.” But it’s interesting that they—[No sound from his end.]

ARJUNE: Hello?

HOPPER: [unintelligible].

ARJUNE: Hello?

HOPPER: Are you there? Can you hear me?

ARJUNE: Yeah, yeah, I can hear you now.

HOPPER: Sorry, I must have [unintelligible]. So—so I was talking about the homophobic ritual that some of these houses were doing.

ARJUNE: Yes.

HOPPER: So, you know, some of these are urban legends; others, I have actual confirmation, but a common ritual done for a pledge class was often around—around homoerotic situations, with the intent to allow anyone who was showing too much physical arousal—that they would be shamed.

One incidence—one was called the doughnut challenge, where they would put on gay porn for their pledges, who were all to be sitting there naked. The first one to get an erection put a doughnut around their—their erection, and the second person had to eat it off.

There was the elephant walk, where you would place your thumb into the rectum of a brother—oh! There would be a row of this. I forget the exact details of it, like where your other hand went.

The—I don't know if this is actually—yeah, there would be these—these rituals. I think homoeroticism is not an uncommon idea for frat hazing, some of which was patently done to demean and shame anyone who showed any physical response to it. And they would argue that's not—at the time, they would argue, "Listen, it's not about being gay. They're not gay." Well, actually, some of them are, and they are never going to tell you about it because of the way you reacted.

So these were things that had existed before. One of the wonderful things about having openly-gay brothers was that by the time they were in a place to be running the show, those were taken out, because they knew the impact it would have on the incoming students. They were, like, "No, just because somebody did it to me does not mean that it should be done." So—so I always applaud those—those leaders who were strong enough to not only come out to their brotherhood after these incidences but also to ensure that it was not a tradition that would be passed on to future generations.

ARJUNE: Okay.

Do you mind sharing where this happened? I mean, you don't have to. Like, I understand if you didn't—you choose not to.

HOPPER: So I'm going to choose not to, mainly because while I know some, others are more speculation, and I really don't want to accuse anyone of something I don't have firm evidence of.

ARJUNE: Understood. No, I completely understand.

HOPPER: Yeah, but there are a couple of houses that I definitely know for sure, and—I'm going to give you a counter-example:

ARJUNE: Okay.

HOPPER: One of the things that a brother at Sig Ep did to make sure that—to fight—not even his own house’s previous traditions but just, like, the overall perception of frats having these things, that during initiation—he had a gay history room, so he would come in—people would come in, and he would lecture them on—on the history of LGBT folks. I never experienced the room myself, but I’ve heard it was wonderful. [Both chuckle.]

Like, initiation, of course, has other traditions that make it more fun, but the—his goal was to make it a—to use his position of power to—rather than a history of, in general, frats demeaning LGBT folks, mainly gay men, he wanted to make sure that initiation had a tradition of putting them up. So I really loved that response.

ARJUNE: That’s good to hear.

HOPPER: Again, and I [unintelligible], this is why I love Dartmouth, is that.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

HOPPER: The people are leaders. People are smart, and they are accomplished, and they will take—they’re not afraid to stand up for what’s right. And I think that examples of these brothers who saw determination in front of them and decided that they were going to make a change is exactly what makes a Dartmouth person a Dartmouth person.

ARJUNE: Yeah, I definitely see that, even today. Yeah.

So I guess—once again, if there’s anything else, anything pressing—

HOPPER: I—I don’t think so. If something comes up, am I able to—to reach out via e-mail?

ARJUNE: Yeah, you could, for sure. If you ever want to do a follow-up interview or anything, that could probably happen.

HOPPER: Okay.

ARJUNE: Yeah. But I think that's everything I have.

HOPPER: That's good. Same. [Chuckles.]

ARJUNE: Okay.

HOPPER: I think I've told my life story and it's been two hours.

ARJUNE: [Laughs.] Wow! I mean, you've got plenty of life to live still.
And your life has been great so far.

HOPPER: Great.

[End of interview.]