David S. Cordero '16
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
SpeakOut
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Transcribed by Mim Eisenberg/WordCraft

[THOMAS R.]
BOSWORTH: My name is Thomas Bosworth. I'm interviewing David [S.] Cordero, Class of 2016, from Rauner [Special Collections] Library in Hanover, New Hampshire, on Monday, November 11th, 2019.

                David, would you mind stating for the record where you're calling from?

CORDERO: Yeah. I'm currently in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where I'm currently living, and I'm in my apartment.

BOSWORTH: Fantastic. Let's go all the way to the beginning. Where were you born?

CORDERO: Yeah. I was born in Mexico City [Mexico] twenty-five years ago.

BOSWORTH: When was that?

CORDERO: May 21st, 1994.

BOSWORTH: Fantastic. Did you stay there for long?

CORDERO: I stayed there till I was about six. Is that correct? Yeah, I was about to turn seven. We moved in 2001. So then we moved to California, which is where I grew up, practically.

BOSWORTH: Great. What was your early childhood like?

CORDERO: My early childhood. Well, let's see, growing up in a pretty urban environment, a lot of my memories are of our apartment building and my apartment—well, my parents' apartment, I guess. So I have a lot of memories of that. And since my mom was then a stay-at-home mom, I have a lot of memories of spending time with her and running errands with her, going to the market, going to the grocers and stuff like that.

And, I mean, I was six when I—when we moved to the States, and so I only had about two formal years of schooling before that. I went to a bilingual school, so I remember learning English but also learning math, basic math. And I remember doing a lot of the same things that my brother did, growing up, [unintelligible] a child—like, my brother swam, so I swam. My brother did chess, so I did chess. But it makes sense because him being older, my parents definitely tried to bundle us to—to do things so as to not—not inconvenience them. That's not a good word, but to make it easier on them, essentially.

So that's what I can recall off the top of my head without more specific questions about what you might be interested in. Yeah, that's a bit of my early childhood.

BOSWORTH: Sure. How old—how much older is your brother?

CORDERO: He is three and a half years older. He's currently twenty-eight, going to turn twenty-nine at the end of the year.

BOSWORTH: Great. What was the transition from Mexico City, moving to the U.S. like?

CORDERO: Yeah. it was surprisingly easy and quick, so my parents one days told us, like, "Hey, we have exciting news for you. Like, we've made plans to move to California, and here's kind of like what the timeline is like." And being six, I thought California was just, like, a few places or, like, a few hours, minutes away. Not minutes but, you know, like one, two hours away. By flight, it's about six. But I didn't really understand the concept then because I was six.

But that said, I vividly recall kind of like the transition from Mexico to California, at least the—like, the immediate one, that being the moving day. I think a quick one but also being, like, distinctly different but also having it all be a blur.

The transition itself—like, the long-term one was presumably an arduous one because I had to adjust to a new language, even if I had basic skills in—in English and could count and say basic words. But first grade, thankfully, however, is the time in which kids are—are perfecting and or in some cases

picking up for the first time their written language and spoken language skills.

So being a precocious six-year-old, I very much picked up the language with speed. By—by second grade, I was reading and writing pretty well with some spelling and grammatical mistakes. But that was relatively easy. I mean, thankfully, when you're six also, everyone wants to be friends, and so I didn't really have a lot of difficulty making friends from the get-go.

I think it would have been a much harder transition, like my brother had, being—he started the fourth grade, if I understand—remember correctly. And so—and by that point, you're kind of expected to have very solid writing and speaking skills, and so that definitely was challenging for him, I imagine.

So for me, it was an easier transition, for sure, because I started school right off the bat with—with a lot of the structural support. It was, like, learning how to pronounce words, how to spell words. And I do vividly recall being at that point math be one of my favorite subjects because math is a universal language, right? A plus sign will always be a plus sign, and a four will always be a four. And so being—being comforted by numbers at that age.

BOSWORTH: Where was this in California that you had moved to?

CORDERO: So it's a city—well, yeah, it's a city technically, called Sunnyvale, which is right next to Cupertino and Santa Clara, in the southern Bay Area of—the San Francisco Bay Area.

BOSWORTH: What did—what did your father do for work at this time?

CORDERO: Yeah. So he worked in tech specifically for Acer [America Corporation].

BOSWORTH: Great. So what—what age, around, did you begin to explore your identity?

CORDERO: Well, there are many identities that one can explore. Are we talking specifically my sexual identity or my, like, Hispanic identity—I guess, like, Mexican identity? My immigrant

identity? Which one are you interested in? Or all of the above.

BOSWORTH: [Chuckles.] All of the above. That's a great point. Let's start with your sexual identity.

CORDERO: Yeah. So I would say that, like, I first had thoughts of being attracted to the same gender probably around the age of ten, maybe eleven? About fifth, sixth grade. Yeah. And specifically being attracted to the same gender in, like, a sexual way, because up to that point, it's more just, like, *Oh, I think you're fun. I think you're cute.* Like—in, like, a pretty platonic way. That's how crushes were, at least then for me, conceptualized.

So it wasn't until fifth, sixth grade, in which I was, like, *Wow! I—there's some form of attraction to—to—to men.* Boys, at that point. But I definitely realized, but I couldn't pinpoint it then.

So before I continue there—so that was around 2006, 2005. That started then. I recall—and I've spoken to this before somewhere, in, like, a Dartmouth interview, that, like, as a child—not as a child, as a young preteen, I had access to the internet because I had a computer in my bedroom, and I—I vividly recall just, like, searching—or coming across just, like, pornographic images but not specifically porn. Essentially just, like, pictures of men in—that were either shirtless and stuff like that on, like, news articles.

I was, like, *Wow! That's interesting.* And—and feeling aroused by them, and obviously I didn't—at that point, I didn't have the language to be, like, *Oh, I'm aroused* or, like, *Wow, I'm—I'm attracted to this.*

So anyway, this happened—this continued for about two-ish years. Two thousand eight is a pivotal-ish year in California history, in which the—not the Supreme Court [of the United States], the state legislature passed a same-sex marriage— what's it called?—a same-sex marriage bill that allowed for same-sex couples to get married.

And very quickly, a group of conservative-led activists signed a petition to put up to vote a referendum called Prop 8 [2008

California Proposition 8] in California that would essentially make same-sex marriage illegal, or not legal, for lack of a better phrase. It passed. That's the end of that story.

But during that time, there was a lot of conversation about, like, same-sex marriage in the television but also in the community that I grew up in, specifically the community that my parents chose to participate in that being their church. And so that's really when I conceptualized, like, *Oh, the feelings that I have are called being homosexual or being gay and stuff like that.*

So prior to that, I didn't really think a lot about my identity. I was, like, *Oh, I'm attracted to men. Therefore I may be gay if not bisexual,* blah-blah-blah. It was—it was around seven, eight when I really first started conceptualizing that, like, *Oh, this is what this means.*

But at the same time, given that a lot of the debate was really, like, about how right this is, how moral is it, is it good for society, is it bad for society, it quickly became a moralized conversation within myself as well. There was a lot of shame. There was a lot of guilt. And—and that's really when I first started conceptualizing that, like, *Hey, I'm attracted to men.*

But unfortunately, also it was concomitant with *I'm attracted to men, and this is not something that—that some people see as normal or okay, or even right or moral.* So that's when I first started conceptualizing, forming my identity of my sexuality. Is that a good place to stop or pause, or would you like to learn about how it further developed?

BOSWORTH: Yeah. That was great. What was your parents' perception? You touched on this a little bit, but what was your parents' perception of the marriage bill and then Prop 8?

CORDERO: Yeah. My parents were very much a proponent of Prop 8, so Prop 8 would make sex—same-sex marriage illegal. I—I vividly recall my parents having a lawn sign that says, like, "Keep Families Together." I don't think that's the actual phrasing. I can look it up right now.

But anyway, the point is the little lawn sign was, like, yellow, and it had a little drawing of a family, like, holding hands. And, yeah, I remember, like, looking at it all the time when I would go home, and so that—that kind of, to some extent, solidified this belief that, like, my parents were—what's the word I'm looking for?—were against same-sex marriage, and therefore against, like, same-sex relationships. The sign says, "Yes on 8", it has a little family holding hands, and it says, "ProtectMarriage.com."

BOSWORTH: Did your brother feel similarly, or—

CORDERO: I don't actually know. We—I mean, he was—cause I was, it was 2008—I would have been thirteen, fourteen, maybe fifteen. My brother would have been seventeen, which at that point I guess you have your own ideas. But he never talked about his—his, like, sense of, like, what was important or not important then.

BOSWORTH: Sure. Do you think this perception, these values held by your family made exploration on the internet more appealing?

CORDERO: Oh, certainly, yeah. And I think my introduction to my senior fellowship talked about this: how the internet gave me a window to a world that I didn't feel like I had access to, which is weird because—well, not weird—which is unfortunate, given the fact that like—I grew up so close to San Francisco. Like, a forty-minute drive, maybe thirty-five.

And so it wasn't removed that, like, you know, there was a vibrant gay community and that, like, as a whole, the San Francisco Bay area has always been pretty liberal, continues to be. And I just didn't—I never saw people—like, people in same-sex relationships or—or obviously not marriage at that point, although lots of people got married in that short window that it was allowed.

Anyway, the point being that I didn't have physical or, like, real-life, tangible role models. And so I did take to the internet, and I, like, searched, "What does it mean to be gay?" Like, homosexual? Right? I mean, when I was then a teenager, that's when I, like, took to pornographic sites, right? Because you hear about them from friends, blah-blah. And—and that's really where I—I just allowed myself to be a

more honest self, for lack of a phrase, but just to allow—I allowed myself to experience and—and be okay with—with those desires.

And the reason—and I obviously write in a more poetic form in my fellowship introduction that, like, one of the reasons why the internet was so good for me to do that was that it gave me the sense that there was this [unintelligible] part of—of—my- —myself that I could just, like, close that portion of myself. Like a browser window and carry on with my life and be, like, *Oh, yeah, no worries.* Like, that portion of my life purely exists in the digital realm and that every day I can pretend to be a good heterosexual male.

So, yeah, the internet did give me a sense of comfort, safety, et cetera, to explore myself, for sure.

BOSWORTH: Did that sort of compartmentalization—and I don't mean that in any sort of moralizing way—continue into middle school and high school?

CORDERO: Oh, certainly, yeah. No, not at all moralizing. I think it's a pretty objective observation that I did end up compartmentalizing that, that part of myself. And it wasn't until—I mean, the first person I came out to was my high school best friend, and it was, like, in his green Volvo. And I was, like, "Hey, I just wanna let you know this is how I feel." And he was, like, "Oh, that's fine. Like, I still love you no matter what," et cetera.

But, I mean, even until I went to college, I was just, like, *You know what? This is not something that, like, I want to share publicly with people.* I mean, sentiments around, like, same-sex marriage, marriage quality, homosexuality in general—I mean, in California, the Bay Area, pretty liberal places, it was, like, overall, like, very positive. We had a great [unitelligible] alliance in high school.

So there was definitely, like, visibility, but I never felt the ability to be, like, *Oh, yeah, I'm going to take ownership of this and, like, let that part of my life blossom and be a part of—of my identity, my politics, et cetera.* Up until I left—or up until I arrived at college—because I did feel the need to compartmentalize, because I was worried about what that

meant for me in terms of, like, my relationship with my family and to some extent also what that meant for, like, my—my sense of self in the world, for sure.

BOSWORTH: So the way I understand it, you did not come out to your parents before—before college?

CORDERO: No, no, no. I—I did not come out to my parents before college. I mean, I came out to my mother first very late, and there were—I mean, her—how do I put it?—there were a few instances in my life in which, like, my parents approached me.

So, like, for example, one time my father found porn on my computer, and he was, like, "Okay, this is clearly gay porn. What's going on here?" And at that point, I was, like, "I don't know. I just stumbled on it. Like, don't—don't, like, judge it / I'm not gay." And then my parents just like moved on. I don't know if they were, like, "My child is gay, but we're gonna ignore it." Or, like, "Pray to god that he, like, becomes not gay."

And then, when the senior fellowship was completed, Dartmouth [College] published a piece, and that, like, rehashed conversations about that, because I very explicitly say like, "I am a gay man." I grew up in a conservative home—really Christian home, whatever.

And my parents, were like, very weird toward me during that period. I was, like, "Okay cool, let's just have conversation, essentially." So my parents—I mean, my dad especially. Like, I don't—he to date, he—he, like, skirts around the conversation. He, like, implies that he wants me to marry a woman still—and so obviously that's [unintelligible] the point, is that, like, my—my parents—

Well, my mom is, like, okay with it, for the most part. Now she, like, asks about my current partner, on occasion. She doesn't ask about just like, "What's going on?" but, like, the coming-out process was fraught with denial and—for my parents, for sure—in the instances in which it could happen had.

The reason why it took so long for me to come out was, like, *I don't want to rock the boat. I don't want to risk the relationship with my parents that I have.* So, yeah, I didn't come out in high school. This was the short answer to that question.

BOSWORTH: Yeah, sure. Let's go ahead and talk about your senior fellowship. What was it like completing that research?

CORDERO: Yeah. So I guess to properly talk about my senior fellowship, I'll talk about my research in general at Dartmouth and how I stumbled into doing research, what—why—why I researched what I researched.

So I—at Dartmouth, I started at Dartmouth thinking that I wanted to study econ and computer science, which is a very classic Dartmouth thing, at least the econ part. But I ended up studying English and computer science. The English portion of things came about when I was realizing that I needed to select a course, or select a major, which happens sophomore year, at least it did for me. I don't know if its the other case in the college.

And I was, like, *Oh, my gosh, I'm panicking. What do I—like, what do I want to do? Who am I? Like, do I really want to do econ, even though I've not taken an econ class?* And it became really clear that, like, English was a place where I was comfortable. The English classes that I took were—I mean, I had taken an English course every semester—quarter, excuse me—since I arrived at Dartmouth. And I was, like, *Oh, maybe I should study English.*

In my sophomore year, around that same time, or a bit before I had to declare a major. I took a course in new media studies with Aden Evens, who ended up being one of my advisers. For that, I was taking a class in critical theory, and I was like, *Wow! All of this helps me understand the world in a new way. How amazing is this?*

At the same time, I applied to be a Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellow. If you're not familiar with the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship, as a whole it is program sponsored by the [Andrew W.] Mellon Foundation across universities across the country, that is intended to support

the preparation and journey of traditionally underrepresented groups in academia.

So the way that the then adviser, Michelle Warren, described it was like, it's diversifying the academy. And so I applied for it, having been impassioned by what I was learning in my critical theory class my sophomore fall, sophomore winter. I learned that I was a Mellon Mays Fellow.

And so that actually set me up to do a lot of research, or at least be research interested and inclined during my time at Dartmouth. So that sophomore year was—laid the foundation for me to do research.

My junior fall, I was fortunate enough to do research in London [England] around physical digital [sic] spaces and—and write briefly about how they compared to gay digital spaces. This was obviously a conversation that was started following my new media class and—which obviously gave me the tools to critically compare the digital world to the physical world, et cetera, and so Mellon Mays sponsored that research for me to go to London for I believe it was ten days, for me to get a sense of—

Well, okay, London was one of them. Then I went to SoHo in New York City and The Castro in San Francisco, and so I—I saw what made these physical gay spaces unique and how they compared to digital gay spaces, specifically online dating sites. So Grindr, SCRUFF, et cetera.

And I wrote about that, and I was, like, *Wow! I got paid to do this, essentially. I get to do this. This is awesome.* So that set me up to think about gay community, gay identity, to a certain extent, physically how—what physical spaces do as a place to explore one's sexuality, one's sexual orientation, desire, et cetera.

And around my junior spring—well, my junior winter and spring, I took some sociology courses with Janice [M.] McCabe, who ended up being my secondary adviser around my senior fellowship. I started thinking a lot about measuring social patterns and social phenomena and being able to write about them. And that felt like a—a natural slash next step to taking this, like, highly theoretical work that—that,

like, obviously is important, right?—but also, like, *Here is how I see this—this phenomena manifest itself in everyday life.*

So I took "Youth in Society" which made me think a lot about just like youth identity development, and I took research methods with Janice. And then also my sophomore winter and/or spring—I can't remember now; I should look at my transcript—anyway, I took a—a class on child development in the education department, with Sean [H.K.] Kang. And that just made me think a lot about just how people form their identity. And it made *me* think a lot about how *I* formed my own identity.

During the research methods course—at that point, I had already decided that I wanted to apply to a senior fellowship. The reason why I stumbled across the senior fellowship was because [unintelligible] Mellon Mays fellows in the past and during my time as Mellon Mays fellow had been senior fellows. What better way to—to culminate all the research experience and the desires that one has than a year-long research project?

And so I was, like, *I'm gonna apply to senior fellowship. Before I do that, I need more theoretical—or more practical tools*. That's why I took the research methods course. And my original project was actually positioned as learning how the internet is important to develop one's sexual identity. Wow! Surprise! That ended up being a question about myself, obviously.

But I wanted to see that other people were doing it because in my research methods course, I had—I got the opportunity to do interviews. I also did some surveys. And I—I was obviously inclined to study gay identifying men at that point, or gay, bisexual and questioning identifying men at that point.

And some of my questions, like, centered around that. And organically, I actually came out that a few people also use the internet to—to find, explore the sexual desire for—for the same gender. I was, like, *Oh! I'm not the only one.*

And so that's kind of what I positioned my senior fellowship project around, at least my proposal my junior spring. I was fortunate enough to be selected as a senior fellow, and I prepared sort of over the summer to—to collect data and recruit people, did some advertising or design, blah-blah-blah.

My senior fall, I got two people who wanted to participate in the study, which you can't really conduct a focus group with two people. And that's when I had to do a hard pivot and be, like, *Okay, what am I—how can I make something meaningful of my time?*—blah-blah-blah.

And that's when I positioned or pivoted to researching the way that these gay, bisexual—or, sorry, now LGBTQ+ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, plus], news and entertainment websites represented LGBTQ+ people but specifically gay men. And also a theme that came up about it. With doing that, I no longer focused on the individual experience but more about the content.

In the communication world, which is where I am now, we—we believe that content says a lot about a) who's producing it, b) who's consuming it and c) what it can do. So content analysis, a research method developed by communications scholars, really sets you up to—to explore that. And I was, like, *I'm gonna use a content analysis to—to analyze how these websites represent gayness, as a concept*.

And then at that point, I would extrapolate how I think it could assess sexual identity development, since obviously I was not able to interview anyone through focus groups, et cetera. So I positioned more to the content rather than the subject.

And so I did that in the following, I guess, five, six-ish months. And—and what I did was to what's called a systematic content analysis of three popular news and entertainment websites, *Queerty*, *Out* and *The Gaily Grind*, and popular being measured by traffic to them and visitors, annually as well as monthly.

And systematic content analysis means that I systematically chose a sample of the content, that being the blog posts and the news posts, whatever, that get posted, and then I did a

visual analysis as well as a semantic analysis. A visual analysis being, like, all the images were coded for who was represented, what did they look like and what—what they were doing. So that was the images. And then the [unintelligible] content was what themes came up, so coded those words—or the words of the headline specifically, to—to qualify what kind of topics came up, [unintelligible] about that.

The final project actually only analyzed the data of the visuals because I just ran out of time to analyze the written portion or, like, the semantic analysis. I still have all that data, but—and I ended up quickly analyzing it for a poster—a digital poster session for HASTAC [pronounced hay stack], which is Humanities, Arts, Science, Technology and something Collective or Consortium [sic; Humanities, Arts, Science and Technology Alliance and Collaboratory].

But anyway, the point is my senior fellowship analyzed how gay men were visually represented. And it was a fantastic experience. Obviously, it taught me a lot about what these websites do. I mean, they're—they're emblematic of kind of like what I call the hegemony of—of visual orientation, of—of what it means to be gay visually.

And I then thought about, like, *What does this actually mean for me?* That was kind of like just an aside. So that was my senior fellowship in a nutshell. Obviously, that—that's [unintelligible] conversation. I'm happy to talk more about it if there—there are questions about the methodology, other parts about it. I—I didn't touch about kind of like the historical portion that I wrote about, kind of like how we—how—how the gay man, quote unquote, presently has come to be conceptualized.

I—I spent the first portion of my senior fellowship project paper writing about that and defining, like, gayness as an ideology, for lack of a better phrase. So that was my senior fellowship, in a long-winded, rant-y way.

BOSWORTH: No, that's perfect. How did you find—maybe that's presumptuous—even *if* it did—your research explain your own experience?

CORDERO: I'm sorry, could you rephrase that question? I didn't really get it.

BOSWORTH: Yeah, absolutely. So doing that research, did you find that a lot of your findings explained your own experience?

CORDERO: Oh. I don't think so, because, I mean, my research—I mean, I extrapolated based on my experience and based on what I heard through—through the stuff on on my research methods course. How I anticipated such contents to shape one's identity and inform it.

So what I end up finding is that the way that men specifically were represented—and I say men specifically because very few women were represented in these LGBTQs news and entertainment websites, even though they were—individually, with the exception of *The Gaily Grind,*—well, I'll get to that in a moment. They were explicitly positioning themselves to be all-encompassing for, like, LGBTQ+, so lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, plus people. So everyone under the non-heterosexual gamut.

And yet men were—were predominantly represented. Like, very few women, very few trans folks were represented. And so what I ended up finding was, like, a) men were visually represented, which is in line with the way that people conceptualized the term,—or, like, queerness. For example, when we say, like, gay rights, right?—we often pool gay and lesbians, right? So, like, men who are into men, women who are into women, and also we implicitly pool trans folks and queer folks and bisexual folks, right?

So gay men, right?—males who happen to be into other men are the standard bearer for—for what it means to be queer. And that is in line with how—how that's been spoken about. And so I was not surprised by that, certainly.

Anyway, men were visually represented more frequently in terms of images. And of those men, they tended to be predominantly white. They tended to be predominantly young. They tended to be predominantly muscular or fit or, like, mildly athletic.

And so I thought a lot about, like, *Oh, that's not me. I'm not white. I'm not white-passing. And I'm—I'm—*I mean, kind of at that point—and I'm—to a certain extent, I *am* still young, right? But, like, I'm by no means, like, muscular or, like, super athletic or, like—yeah, I—I—I'm fine in terms of, like, my physicality, right? But that's not me.

And I thought, like, *What does that actually do to people?* I obviously did not answer that in my senior fellowship in—in full extent, but I was, like, *What are the implications of this?* So that made me think a lot about that. And it made me think about, like, when we—when people think of a gay—gay—right? Like, when you hear the word "gay," like, what comes to mind, right?

At one point, like, the—the historical context suggests that, like, people thought of, like, what's called "the dandy," which is a stereotype of—of a well-educated white man, predominantly, who is slightly flamboyant. The literature uses the word—the term "limp wrists"—"limped wrist." And is educated, loves the arts, performances, et cetera, has a refined palate.

But over time, with—with the—the modern, quote unquote, "gay liberation movement," it's become also a white man but who happens to be straight passing and who is muscular, virile, like, young, fit, et cetera. And that's still not me. That's not a majority of—of the other letters in the LGBTQ+ acronym, right?

It's one section of it, but, like, we prioritize those bodies, and that identity and that experience of our other. And I personally think, obviously, that's problematic, not only for me but for so many other people.

And so it made me think about that, certainly. But it definitely didn't answer the question, like, how I developed my—my identity on the internet. But it made me think about, like, well, I did develop my identity on the internet, and what I did take to the internet to, like find homosexuality, gayness—it must have been white—white-passing meant more into men.

And it was like—and—and—and that, for sure, has—has colored the people that I, like, tended to be attracted to. For

a long time, I would only, like, be interested in white, white-passing men. And, I mean, that makes sense because that's like also what is visually represented in media in terms of, like, actors, blah-blah-blah. But, yeah, that's what I found attractive for a really long time.

And it wasn't until I was, like, *Why is that? Oh, it's because all the time you're seeing gayness be represented as a white man who's young, muscular, whatever.* And so I thought a lot about that after my senior fellowship, for sure, and, like, toward the end of it.

BOSWORTH: Yeah, wow. I imagine the research took up a lot of your time on campus, but what else—what else were you involved in organization wise?

CORDERO: Yeah. What else was I involved in. Let's see. Obviously, I was a Mellon Mays Undergraduate Research Fellow. That meant every other Tuesday, if I remember correctly,—so that took a chunk of my time.

I worked a few jobs on campus. My senior year, I worked at Collis [Center for Student Involvement] as a—as a, quote unquote, "building manager"—so the people that sit at the front desk at Collis when you walk in. So I did that for my senior year.

Before that, I was the photog- —my junior year, I was the photography editor of *The Aegis*, which is Dartmouth's yearbook. I did that because I—when I first arrived at Dartmouth, I was, like, *Wow! I want to continue practicing photography.* Like, in high school I did a lot of photography. And I just, like, took a lot of photos, and I became the editor. That was technically a paid position, so, I got paid to do that. But also I—I was fortunate enough to—to be the editor, so I did that.

What else did I do? I was—in my senior year I was a mentor for FYSEP, First Generation—no, First Year Student Enrichment Program, which is a program designed to help first-generation students transition into college, a mentorship as well as community. So I did that my senior year.

I—oh, obviously I'm forgetting riding with the Dartmouth equestrian team, so I did that my junior and senior year, starting to ride horses my sophomore fall—excuse me, my sophomore summer, excuse me. So I did that my last years, and that obviously took up a lot of my time. We practiced, like, around—or we—we spent about twenty-seven hours of the week, which turns out to be, like, three to—three hours, like, three times a week in, like, horse shows and horse prep or horse show prep. Anyway, did that my senior year.

And what else did I do? Before that, I was involved with Collis Governing Board, like, my sophomore and freshman years. I sat in on the Council for [sic; on] Computing, which is just the people at the college that make decisions about — technology decisions at a very high level.

And that's all that comes to mind, which is terrible because I know I did a few more things.

Oh, obviously, I was a part of the Hill Winds Society, which connects you to alumni. Liked—loved that. I made me—or it introduced me to a bunch of other students as well as alumni of the college. And it gave me sense of place to—to a larger community at the college.

But anyway, that's what I can remember off the top of my head. I'm sure I'm forgetting something, and I feel awful because many of the things that I did at the college were important, pertinent parts of—of developing my sense of self as a young adult. But anyway, that's what I can remember.

BOSWORTH: Did you find—how did the climate of Dartmouth compare to the climate at home in regards to being tolerant, acceptive of queer identities?

CORDERO: Yeah. I mean—so I think globally, Dartmouth, being part of a bastion of liberalism and specifically part—being part of the ivory tower—like, it's left leaning. I don't think there's a question about that. That said, I don't think it's as left leaning, progressive and/or rad- —not radical; that's a terrible term. Ignore that. Like, leftist as other—as peer institutions: Columbia [University] Penn [University of Pennsylvania], Harvard [University] maybe, even. So it's a little bit more conservative in some ways.

I would say it has to do a lot with the student demographics, but anyway, the point is that I would say it's left leaning, and it's a lot like the San Francisco Bay Area. That said, I think what makes my ability to come out, explore my sexuality, also do, like, this—this gender sexuality study stuff possible is the fact that, like, I was not bounded by who I was expected to be.

When I left home for college, I was very fortunate to be doing so 3,000—like, 3,000 miles away from home, and so that gave me the space to, be like—*Nobody knows me here.* I mean, there was one person who had went to high school with who—who was there, but, like, honestly, it was, like, one person out of all these other people that I could have known. *Like, this could be worse. I'm—I can do what I want. I can—if I want to tomorrow to say I'm—I'm gay or, like, something else, no one is expecting me to not be gay, right?*

Like, for all intents and purposes, people just, like, see that's—that's how it is. And I found that to be incredibly liberating. I would say that for the most part, like, Dartmouth students' attitudes toward gayness, queerness, LGBTQ+ identity, identifying people—like, relatively left-leaning liberal, somewhat accepting.

I would say that from the experiences that I know trans folks and specifically trans folks of color—they had a—a harder time adjusting. It's not an experience *I* can speak to, because it's not mine, and so I obviously recognize that, like, the privileges that I have as a cis man and—and who—you know, is—for all intents and purposes not—not coded as different when I walk into the room.

And it's not until I talk about my sexuality that like, "Oh, you're gay," right? And so I benefited a lot from that. And ultimately it—it was only through my friends that I was, like, "Oh, yeah, I'm gay" or, like*,* "Oh, I—I slept with this person" or "I did that." And obviously, the people that I select- —self-selected into were going to be relatively accepting.

It also helped that the people that supported my research were—were supportive of these conversations, these—this—this identity work that I was doing.

And so ultimately, I found Dartmouth to be pretty supportive of my identity and my work. That isn't to say that in my time at Dartmouth there weren't times in which there was—there was tension between my identity, other identity, specifically around being a man of color, for being Hispanic or Latinx, Mexican, and being an immigrant, to a certain extent, identifying as an immigrant. And so I would say that once those identities intersected, there—there was definitely a conversation, of like, *Wow! Do I belong at Dartmouth?*

So I would say that there are many areas of growth for the college, and it's—when I was a student; maybe it's still the case—for student population, for—for work around being, like, more racially conscious, racially aware, racially progressive.

And so it was then that my experience as a queer man, gay man became difficult, whenever those identities intersected. But if—if we were to talk about my identity as, like,—or sorry, if we were to just, like, compartmentalize and be, like, your gay man identity experience, I would say it was pretty—pretty—smooth sailing, which, again, goes to—to talk about the fact that, like, as a society, gay men—or gay men's experience are prioritized over others'.

BOSWORTH: Yeah, I want to talk about that intersexua- — intersectionality—and I'm gonna jump back to your research. What was it like being inundated with the image and trope of, like, the—the gay white man as a person of color and as an immigrant?

CORDERO: So—well, I mean, I've spoken to—to—to what I think it did to me growing up. I spoke about this with a friend recently, how, like, dating as a—a gay man of color is hard. And I think, for example,—like, I look back to when I first started, like, dating people. People would like often not be interested, and obviously, like, that's within people's prerogative.

But it wasn't until, like, I—I turned to online dating—and I tried it at Dartmouth, you know, being on Grindr LOL—that people were, like, very explicit—like, "Oh, white only," like, online, and like, there's a body of research that talks—that

talks about the—the phrase, like, "no blacks, no femmes, no fats" or whatever.

And traditionally, like, if—or anyway, not traditionally—and I experienced that myself on—one the online dating scene, and I was, like, *Wow these are the people that, like, I—I go to school with*, and so—so long as I was racialized as—as a brown man and I—I was suddenly less desirable. And that really sucked, obviously.

And to a certain extent, it sucked to date because, like, it definitely informs my sense of, like,—my sense of—of, like, desirability. I mean, I was fortunate enough that, like, I—I found someone who I really cared about, loved, and got into a relationship, like, my—early on in my time at Dartmouth and after that did not go well. I found someone else not too far afterward, like, six, seven months later.

But, like, dating and trying to experience hookup culture as a man of color who happens to be gay was difficult because I was, like, *Wow, I feel less desirable because I don't fit this hegemonic white, male, fit—like, look, identity*. And that definitely, as I said already, informed my sense of desirability and—and sense of self. So that was kind of sucky, shitty, for lack of a better phrase.

Yeah, I would say only in a dating realm. But, like, otherwise, I—I don't think other white gay males or any other males on campus or—or—or queer folks on campus, like, treated me any different in terms of, like, my—my politics, my—the ability to be friends. Because, again, gayness is—is seen as—as the standard, right?

It was only when it became dating-centric, romantic that it was, like, "Oh, you know, I'm actually not interested, sorry." And I'm not saying that it was purely because of my race. You know, again, people have their preferences, but, like, I'm inclined to believe that it did play a—a significant role into it.

BOSWORTH: Sure. What did you do immediately after Dartmouth?

CORDERO: So immediately after Dartmouth, I left for Boston [Massachusetts]. I moved to Boston to start working for IBM

[International Business Machines Corporation], the tech corporation. And I chose Boston because my then-current partner would be teaching at his alma mater, and so it convenient for me to be in Boston. Even though I could have been anywhere in the country, I chose Boston.

Also, it helped that, like, one of my best friends/one of my college roommates was—is—or, sorry, was going to be in Boston as well, doing health consulting before she went to medical school. And so that's how I ended up in Boston.

BOSWORTH: Did you find that was a large change from your life at Dartmouth?

CORDERO: Huh! That's a—that's a loaded, tough question.

BOSWORTH: [Chuckles.]

CORDERO: Yes, there is—there is no doubt that it would be different, right? I was no longer in a college environment. All of my friends were dispersed, for the better part. And, yeah, I would say transitioning into adulthood is tough. And that's true for everyone, but it was especially true for me, being a Californian and, like, continuing to be in New England. Like, bluntly, I'm—I'm not—like, anyone who knows me well just knows that I hated my time in New England, for a variety of reasons.

Specifically, its neoliberalism and it's—it's valuing of, like, established institutions and blah-blah-blah. Anyway, the point being that, like, Boston was really rough. And it was rough for a few reasons.

But transitioning into adulthood was tough because you're on—at least I was on my own. Like, my parents were out west, my brother was out west, I didn't have family out east. The only real, like, quote unquote, "support network" that was as close to family is, has been my partner. And thankfully his family lives in the Boston metro, and so like I could rely on them to a certain extent.

But I never felt comfortable enough to be like, "Hey, can y'all help me out?" or, like, "This is what's going on in my life." And so I had to really, like, bear for myself in a lot of things:

moving. I remember it was, like, moving into my apartment. I just did it by myself. And, like, that sucked. It's just, like, took—for lack of a better phrase, broke me. It was, like, *Wow, this really is shitty.*

And then, of course, learning to, like, manage my money and also balance the—the things of, like, my responsibilities and—and also wanting to, like, see my family out west, the traveling to them and traveling for work. It was difficult, for sure.

It came with its perks in terms of, like, I was—I was the agent of my own time. I could do what I wanted. Work, for the most part, not all the time, like, was happening from nine to five, and then I could close my computer and, like, go do other things, which is a big departure from—from college, where work technically never ends. You're always reading, you're always writing, you're always doing a problem set, even on weekends, right?

The—the line between life and school—like, personal life and school doesn't exist, right? Your personal life *is* school. And so I found that to be incredibly liberating to me. *Like, I'm just going to stop working now,* because it gave me the ability to just do things outside of just, like, work.

That said, obviously I love—I love school. I'm in school again now, and so I would say that—that the blurring of the line has been blurred again slightly. But I found that to be really nice. For the most part, transitioning into adulthood, especially my first year, was really tough.

But I'm happy to talk about, like, what made it tough. I could've losed some of it. I'm happy to talk more about, like, the positive things of it. But over all, Boston, New England was just not the right fit for me. I'm surprised I made it through three years there. But to be blunt, I am glad I'm out of there.

BOSWORTH: Yeah. What was your experience working at IBM?

CORDERO: Let's—let me think about that.

BOSWORTH: I can make the question more specific if that helps.

CORDERO: No. No, no, no, no. I mean, I have an answer. I just—I'm just trying to, like,—so the—the answer is overall positive. Like, I would rate it a seven and a half, maybe eight. And the reason why it's not, like, a ten—the most wonderful time of my life; I want to stay there—is twofold:

One, I ended up working in tech, because I had a job offer, like, August of my senior year, that being before my senior year started, which is not a common, like, life situation people are in, and they have to do the job hunt. And, like, it was non-contract binding, obviously, so I could have, but, like, I was, like, *Eh, I'm all set. I'm not gonna worry about this.*

And also because my sophomore year, my critical theory professor to whom I told that I wanted to go to graduate school, he's like, "Unsolicited advice: You should take time off between school—like current school, undergraduate and graduate school if that's what you want to do. Go do something else for—for some time. Prove to yourself essentially that you're not going into graduate school because it just makes sense as the natural next step, because you've been a good student all of your life. Don't just do it because you've been a good student and you know how to, like, make the student role work. Do it because it's what you want to do, because otherwise you're going to face, like, a lot of difficulty around being motivated. Do it because you want to it." And I was, like, "Okay, sure."

So I intentionally scaffolded my—my gap year. It was gonna be a year essentially; it turned out to be two more—to be working at IBM. And so that definitely influenced my perception of how happy or unhappy I was going to be at—what's the word I'm looking for?—how happy I was going to be at IBM from the beginning.

So my first three months into IBM—I was very unhappy—for the primary reason that I was in a team of about—at that point, it was, like, seventeen, and we were all over the world. I was the only person in Massachusetts and specifically Boston. And that made it really difficult because all of my friends, who had just started—not college—their job, were in these cohorts, were going out with friends and workmates for

happy hour. They had very structured social lives and—and integrated into the community.

Meanwhile, I was like, *Well, I'm here by myself, and there's no one outside of, like, my immediate friends who I know here that I can blossom into, like, getting to know, be friends with and have a sense of belonging community* [sic]. And so I—I looked for other jobs in my first three months. I applied to a few companies. I got some offers. I realized then that the grass wasn't always greener on the other side. It's something that I actually realized in my time at Dartmouth. I also wanted to transfer out of Dartmouth my sophomore year.

And it was realizing that, like, a lot of these difficulties were growing pains that I was going to face anywhere, and so I just—I never—I didn't leave IBM. I got into a group pretty quickly. I started as what's called a concept marketer, so the people who design marketing messaging, essentially, for lots of various media: digital, physical, et cetera, for a branch of IBM called IBM Garage, it was then called IBM Cloud Garage, not the point. So essentially a consultancy within IBM.

And I left, leading worldwide events for IBM Garage and so I gained a lot of responsibility. I gained a lot of trust. I led really amazing projects. I learned a lot. I learned to navigate big corporate structures, how to ask for things that I needed, how to get things done on my own, because, again, I didn't have anyone to, like, sit next to me to whom I felt like I had to perform for.

So, yeah, ultimately, I was—I made the best of it, of what I could. I learned a lot. I got lots of stuff done. But it was tough. It's not something I wanted to do long, long term. And so that's why I ended up at grad school.

BOSWORTH: Yeah. How did you find yourself at University of Pennsylvania?

CORDERO: So knowing that I wanted to go to grad school and knowing that I—I had already set, like, the central plan to go, I was originally going to apply the fall following my senior year, so fall of 2016, to start fall of 2017. I didn't because a) primarily

I don't want to take the GRE [Graduate Record Examinations]. I was, like, *I'm done with school for the time being. I don't want to think about school. I don't want to do studying,* blah-blah-blah.

And so I didn't take the GRE that year. It also coincided with just being, like, in the middle of lots of transitions, and I was just, like, *I don't want to transition into it, so I guess I'll stay another year in Boston, at IBM.*

And in 2017, I took the GRE, and I—I essentially applied to graduate school after having conversations with professors, my term professors—or, sorry, my former professors at Dartmouth, my adviser of the Mellon May Undergraduate Fellowship. I was, like, *Okay, I'm going to apply to graduate school. Let's make it happen.*

I applied to several places. I got into a few places, one of them being the University of Pennsylvania, the Annenberg School of [sic; for] Communication now. I applied predominantly communication programs. Why? Because communication people study everything that makes me and what the effects or what's happening, which is literally everything: how you dress, how you speak, the medium, media, excuse me, through which you—you communicate, et cetera.

And so I was, like, *Yeah, that sounds great.* And it's a very interdisciplinary field. My work in the past had been interdisciplinary, doing English and computer science and sociological work. And I—what's the word I'm looking for?—I—I ended up at Annenberg for a few reasons. One, they're a leading program. They have fantastic faculty. Two, it's close to New England, which I then thought it was important for my partner to be close to his family because otherwise I would move to San Diego [California].

And also the financials, the security that moving to Philadelphia and the stipend that is provided to—to Annenberg students would be pretty comfortable. And so that's how I ended up here.

When I applied to graduate school, I applied under the guise of being interested in studying radicalization of white men

online, and in some areas—in some places, I was, like, *Yeah, I would like to continue my research around LGBTQ commu-* —oh, sorry—*LGBTBQ folks online*. But, I mean, today I'm not—that's not my primary driving force of, like, my interest. It's an area that, like, I do dabble in occasionally, and, like, I'll catch up on what the literature says.

But, yeah, for the most part, I'm here. I just started my first year about—what is it?—November, three months ago. It's week twelve for me out of the fourteen-week semester. The semester ends in roughly three weeks. And it's going great. I don't miss corporate America at all. I wake up, and I never am, like, *Uch, I have to go do this.* I don't drag my feet. I feel very fortunate.

The professor called it an extended vacation that you're paid to do, and that's exactly how I feel. I feel like I'm on PTO [Paid Time Off] from work, and I'm being paid to just read and research and learn and occasionally teach and work with students, and it's just great. I cannot recommend graduate school enough.

BOSWORTH: Great. Do you feel you're having a more positive experience in Philadelphia rather than Boston?

CORDERO: Oh, 100 percent. Like, twenty-fold, if that were a number. Yeah, I mean, I knew I was going to be happy leaving Boston for anywhere that wasn't further north. Yeah. So I would be happier, I am happier. The reason why I'm happier is because a) I'm in a place doing something that I want to do and, like, I—like, in Boston—I didn't want to be in Boston outside of being like near my partner, right? Which, don't get me wrong, my partner is great.

But at the same time, there wasn't anything individually for me there. And so that definitely plays a huge role into being happy in Philadelphia. Like, I am doing something, pursuing something for myself, a). b) It's far more racially diverse, socioeconomically diverse. Obviously, it has its issues, but Boston is pretty white. And obviously, the spaces that I navigate, as being college educated, not working class, high income individual—like, I lived in Beacon Hill. I spent a lot of time in Back Bay. I—I lived and trafficked very affluent spaces, and they were very white.

And here, like, even affluent spaces have people of color, and I'm, like, *Wow! I'm here for it.* There's Hispanic food, there's this vibrant Hispanic community, which is great because it gives me access to—to comforts of home. There is a very vibrant gay scene—like, LGBTQ community here. I can't stress that enough. At Boston—in Boston, there's literally only one gay club, only one. There used to be two. There's only one.

Here, there's a whole Gayborhood. There's a whole bunch of gay clubs, a vibrant community. It's far more grungy, to a certain extent, in terms of, like, people are willing to be different here in ways that people cannot be in—in Boston. And it's very liberating. And it's super affordable. Also can't recommend that enough. So, yeah, Boston is not missed at all.

BOSWORTH: How has your relationship with your parents changed since publishing your research as a senior fellow until now?

CORDERO: So I alluded to this earlier, that, like, my father still, like, lives in somewhat denial. He occasionally is, like, "Oh,"—like, "Praying that you'll a female spouse." He doesn't think say "female spouse" but, like, a wife. I'm like, "Oh, cool, yeah, sure. Keep doing that Dad."

My mom is—is overall—is very supportive. I mean, I would say that my—my—my mom—or the only parent with whom I speak about my relationship with my current partner is—how do I put it?—not as vibrant my brother and hers, in the sense of, like, my mom will—I mean, obviously, he's married, but, like, my mom has always been, like, "Oh, say hi to Kelly" (my brother's spouse's name, right?). Like, "Say hi to Kelly. Hope she's well. Hope you're spending time together." It's only on occasion in which she'll—she'll mention my partner, and—and that is a very, like, jarring difference.

So ultimately, I would say that there's—there's room for growth, but, like, it's better than I anticipated it at one point. So, yeah, that—that's how that is. I'm hoping that the next five years of my life while I'm here I have the space and stability to, like, work on that more intentionally, for sure.

BOSWORTH: You might have mentioned this earlier, but when did you meet your current partner?

CORDERO: So we actually met my sophomore summer. Well, that's not true. We started dating sophomore summer, the end of sophomore summer. But we met the fall of 2013, so it was sophomore fall, at a Macklemore concert. Not, like, we were at the concert together. He was there with one of my mutual friends, and obviously his mutual friend. And we just, like, shook hands. "Hi. How's it goin'?"

              Then he was off to teach English abroad his sophomore winter, so we didn't see each other. At that time, I was dealing with, like, ending of a relationship and just, like, working on myself. And then he returned senior—sorry, sophomore spring, and, like, we crossed paths again, and we just, like, occasionally, like, chatted and stuff like that, but nothing—nothing serious.

              And then we had a [William] Shakespeare class together. He is also—*was* also an English major at Dartmouth. So we took Shakespeare together. And that's when we started to hang out. And we—we started dating end of sophomore summer, like August of sophomore summer. So, yeah. And we've been dating since.

BOSWORTH: Fantastic.

              Is there anything else you wanted to talk about or anything you want to return to?

CORDERO: Let's see. Yeah, I think—I think something that I'd like to touch on slash be kept on the record is that, like, a lot of—so I alluded to this earlier, that, like, at one point I wanted to transfer out of Dartmouth. And that had to do a lot with the realization that, like, Dartmouth isn't meant for everyone.

              Obviously, to a certain extent, by, like, some metrics, I like thrived at Dartmouth, and I did really well. I found a community in the end, but that community wasn't, like, immediately there for me. My freshman year at Dartmouth, I was pretty happy, in part because I was just enamored by the—the newness of college: the dancing that you get, like, roped into as soon as you hit Robo lawn [Robinson Hall

lawn], the fact that everybody says "Welcome home." Like, you're new, so everyone is, like, so excited. They ask you how things are going, right?

But sophomore year, it really hit me that, like, wow, I was no longer in California. And—and I was a student, and that was—that was—that's really when—when the—the change became apparent for me, and I realized that for—for all that it was worth, Dartmouth wasn't a place that I—I immediately, like, saw myself thriving in, like, long term.

Part of it had to do with the culture, certainly, and I alluded to this that, like, New England in general is a place that I don't vibe with. And—and Dartmouth is an embodiment of that. It—it's a place that I learned to thrive in, but Dartmouth, like, New England, as an institution that's been around 250 years, likes—likes its—its norms. It likes tradition. It likes knowing that it's been around for that long. It likes being—how do I put it?—supporting people who—who—what's the word I'm looking for?—people who fit a certain type of box, who are well educated, who are going to work jobs that are in consulting, health care, law, finance.

And if you don't fit that, you're kind of shit out of luck. You're seen as an outsider and as a—as a—maybe even a freak at times. They're, like, "Why would you not do it? This is great?" Right?

It places a lot of value on status: where you vacation, where —what your parents do, what you do. I mean, every time I met someone in New England generally people are like, "What do *you* do?" And this was afterward. Or, as a student they would be like, "What do *your* parents do?" And, like, "Why do you care?"

And—and so New England and therefore Dartmouth did not create a—a—an all-too-welcoming vibe for—for me. I would say that that was separate from my sexuality, again because I'm a—I'm a gay man. But my other intersectional identities were—were not ones that I felt were welcomed fully.

And so I was very unhappy at Dartmouth my sophomore year: sophomore fall, sophomore winter. That's when I, like, returned to being depressed for a bit. I had suffered

depression earlier in my life, and I—I coped with it, obviously. And I realized that in order to be happy at Dartmouth, escaping it wasn't going to make a difference for me, because I was going to find a lot of those similar growing pains, especially if I was going to go to another institution. Of course, I would have left the New England vibe and gone to, like, a more liberal place, right? But—or not liberal but, like, a more less rigid place.

And I was like, *Okay, in order to be happy, I need to make this place work for me.* And—and that required me to find my own community, find my sense of self there, create—make Dartmouth my home, truly, because, like, I feel like first year students are like told "This is your new home", and it's like, *Okay, this is the place where I live.*

And I saw Dartmouth a lot for a really long time as that. It was a place where I spent chunks of ten weeks away from California. And—and once I—I intentionally worked on making Dartmouth the place where I was happy in and that I felt comfortable in and found a community in—once I did that, I—I was a lot happier. And—and that's what made the difference for me.

That said, I—I—I'm fortunate enough that I—I found that through—through shopping around. But some people don't have that opportunity. And some people don't have the opportunity to—or the desire, rather, to blend in—in certain spaces and to integrate themselves—

And I don't say that as, like, oh, they're intentionally, like putting themselves against the norms, but, like, it's—you have to make some sacrifices to do that, and some people choose not to or cannot, because sacrificing their—their trans-ness or their black-ness or anything is—it's not something that is—is fair to them. And I don't think we should. And I think Dartmouth has a long way to—to—go to make Dartmouth inclusive and welcoming to students of color, immigrant students, poor students or low-income students, as Dartmouth likes to call them, first-generation students.

Yeah, it has a long way to go, and it's not an easy place to fit in if—if you aren't willing to—to be, like, *Okay, I'm gonna*

pretend I'm not first gen or *I'm gonna to pretend that I'm not wealthy*—I'm sorry, *I'm gonna pretend that I'm wealthy and*—*and do all these things and forego pivotal parts of one's identity in order to thrive, certainly.*

So, yeah, Dartmouth was—was tough, for sure. It wasn't all—all great. I came to make it work. I—I believe in the college admission today. I'm a volunteer. I fund raise for it. But I am—I am pretty critical of it, and I—I think I have to be because—not I have to be, like, I'm forced to, but, like, I have to be because I got something out of it and I want other people to get something out of it. And they will only get something out of it if, like, Dartmouth fixes a lot of its areas of growth.

BOSWORTH: What—this might seem like a out-of-the-blue question, but what—what was your relationship with the Greek spaces on campus?

CORDERO: So I—I mean, I had one. I didn't have one like a majority of Dartmouth students do. I mean, when I was a student, sixty-three percent of students were affiliated. I don't know of that's still the norm at Dartmouth or—the—the number. So I was not part of sixty-three percent of students who were Greek.

That said, I did try to be Greek for a hot second. So when I arrived at Dartmouth, I was, like, *Oh, my God! Like, Greek life? No. Thank you. Not for me.* But my sophomore fall, when everyone was rushing, my then partner was thinking about rushing. I was, like, *You know what? I'd rather give it a shot because I'm a firm believer that I'd always rather try something, know it's not for me, then forever wonder what if.*

And so I rushed. I ended up in a house, and I was, like, *This seems fine.* And, like, four weeks into it, I was, like, *Honestly, this is*—*this is boring. Like, I don't*—*not boring in, like, a "I don't have anything to do" but just, like, it's not fit for me.* I was, like, *Okay, I'm being asked to drink to socialize. I'm being asked to pay to drink to socialize. Honestly, this is the dumbest use of my time and money. I have more important things to do.*

It's not to say that socializing and finding a community isn't important, but *that* way of socializing and finding community was not something I prioritized. And so at that point, I left that house, and I was not Greek for the remainder of my time at Dartmouth.

My best friend and a few other close friends were in Greek houses themselves, and so I—I had regular access if I wanted to, to a house, to a basement, to play Pong, whatever. And, I mean, I had sufficient friends who were Greek, and so, like, formals, semi-formals, tails, whatever were things that I would—would go to on occasion.

And so I had a relationship with the Greek scene, certainly. But, again, it's—it's one of those instances in which I was willing to be, like, *You know what? Not for me, but I—I can still briefly compartmentalize for the sake of this social benefit.* And that's something *I* was willing to do, I could do. And—and I did. And that's why *I* was able to have a positive-ish relationship with the Greek scene.

And also because I wasn't affiliated, I was able to be, like, *Well, yeah, I'm participating in it brief- —like, by attending these events, by—by going into these spaces,* but I felt like I was being more selective about it, right? I didn't feel like I was supporting the institution as a whole, which obviously is a way of, like, doing mental gymnastics to justify my behavior. Not to say that, like, going out or socializing is bad, right?

But, like, as a whole, the Greek system at Dartmouth is fraught with issues. There's a lot more room for improvement there than—than at a big-picture Dartmouth bubble. And so, yeah, that's—that's how I justified, like, being in the spaces and being like *Yeah I'm going to a party and—and hang out with my friends at XY fraternity that like is mildly problematic.* I mean, yeah, I did quote unquote protest vote by not standing in certain spaces. I'd be, like, *There's no way in hell I'm going there.*

But, yeah, I would say that I had a relationship with the Greek scene at Dartmouth. I didn't have, like, a relationship, like, sixty-three percent of students at—at Dartmouth had. But, yeah, I did Greek things, but not in that sense.

BOSWORTH: Great. What was the deciding factor at—at staying—the deciding factor to stay at Dartmouth?

CORDERO: I think, bluntly, it—like,—and this is me just downplaying things, but I—I was going to say—I was going to say "laziness," and that's me downplaying it. But, like, certainly it's not willing to be, like, *I'm going to finish these applications,* played some into it. But ultimately I was, like, realizing, like, through talking to other friends who had transferred—was realizing that, like, the grass isn't always greener on the other side. And that was one part of it: The grass isn't always greener on the other side.

And, two, was the fact that I—I—through therapy, I—oh, what's the word I'm looking for?—I realized that, like, there was some—some work I could do on myself rather than to just push it all on Dartmouth for me to be happier in general, that being, for example, like, trying to find a sense of community. It's just not something I prioritized because obviously I thought it was going to be handed to me, which in a sense is problematic because a student shouldn't have to think, like, *Oh, where do I belong for me to be happy here?* Right? But I knew that, like, there were larger issues at hand, of like me wanting to—to work on—that I wanted to work on myself and that, like, I could work through that at Dartmouth.

So, yeah, those are the two reasons. And obviously I'm going to downplay—I'd be, like, it was my laziness to not finish those applications. But also I would say that the fact that, like, things started turning around and, like, I started hanging out with new people and—and finding a sense of sense and community, that—that I—what's the word I'm looking for?—that I ended up staying.

BOSWORTH: What was it like navigating Dartmouth with—with depression at times?

CORDERO: It was tough, certainly. So—so my depression was compounded by seasonal affective disorder, which I had before coming to Dartmouth, but it was only magnified at Dartmouth, where winters happen—or, sorry, where winters are dark. Very dark. You leave your two A, which for me was a four back then, and it's dark. And it's literal night time,

right? And that screwed up my Circadian cycle and also my—my—my ability to just, like, reenergize and get energy and—and therefore joy. So that was tough, obviously. Like, that compounded things.

The cold really made me miserable. Growing up in California, I have very low tolerance for—for cold winds. So I was very unhappy because of those factors, but those are things I could not change, right?

And so I—I'm fortunately very proactive when it comes to—to seeking out help: specifically mental, physical help, where it's, like, *Wow, this is going on. You gotta address it now.* And so I—I'm fortunate also enough that circumstantially my best friend's parents growing up are therapists, and so, like, "Hey, here's what's going on. Can you help me find a therapist back home?"

I did, and then I continued therapy at Dartmouth. And I just did the things that I needed to take care of myself. And so I did. And so that's what made coping with depression easier. I can imagine it not being easy if I weren't proactive but also didn't have the structural support of, like, my best friend's parents and also the ability to, like, prioritize therapy because I didn't have to work a job. I can recognize how—how it can be addition- —yeah, additionally tough for people. But for me, I—I turned out fine obviously. And by that I mean I survived, right? I made it out of Dartmouth. I—I—and again, by some metrics I thrived.

But it *is* a tough place to navigate with any mental illness at Dartmouth. I think—I think Dartmouth, to a certain extent, at least its professors are very accommodating. Or my professors. I can't speak for all its professors. My professors were very accommodating, and my professors were, like, "Yeah, you need to—to do this." Or, like, they—almost all my professors had a statement that talked about just, like, care and being, like, "Now I understand that you're students, blah-blah-blah. Like, "You need to obviously advocate for yourself, but, like, don't be afraid to come to me," whereas, like, the professors that I see here at Penn, like, don't do that as much.

And so I think professors—my professors at Dartmouth those that I was exposed to, like, were very good about being, like, "Hey, mental health: Prioritize it." Or just like, "Your health in general: Prioritize it. Work with me if something arises." And that obviously helped, for sure.

BOSWORTH: What do you see for yourself after graduate school?

CORDERO: So ideally I want to return to either the tech industry or some relevant space and do research that make schools more equitable, because that was, like, the original intent. To some extent, it's what I do dream of.

But increasingly, I'm entering the health space, so within communication there's a sub-field called health communication, and—so heath communication, which thinks about the—the communication method and environments that make people successful in—in dealing with illness or learning about illness or their health, and ultimately making people make better choices about their health.

And that's a really important space to me, obliviously because I think of health very broadly, including—and that goes into identity work. And obviously, as someone who has dealt with depression and anxiety, I think it's important that people have access to—to make better decisions about their health.

And so that's the space that I'm increasingly interested in. I'm hoping that it'll be one of the two. Ultimately what I want to do is—is have real impact on real people's lives, and that's something that I didn't get at IBM, another reason why I left. And so having—using my skill set as a research will hopefully allow me to do that.

And so whether it be I work at—in the tech industry, I work for a company that helps healthcare—or healthcare spaces or the health and wellness industry become better about promoting health—healthy choices for people, I don't know. If I can be completely blunt, I would love to work for a firm like IDEO, which is a design firm that works with companies to help them innovate, and they're big players in the healthcare space.

But to be determined, I don't know yet. I am five years out, so we'll see.

BOSWORTH: Great. Well, thanks so much for sitting down with me for this interview this morning.

CORDERO: Yeah. Sure thing.

[End of interview.]