

Sharang Biswas '12, Th'13
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
SpeakOut
May 17, 2019
Transcribed by Mim Eisenberg/WordCraft

ARJUNE: I'm Leanna Arjune, Class of '19. I am speaking from the Bryant Room at Rauner [Special Collections] Library in Hanover, New Hampshire. Today is May 17th, 2019, otherwise known as Green Key Friday 2019. And today I am interviewing Sharang Biswas [pronounced SHAH-rah-n BISS-wahs], Class of 2012, Thayer Class of 2013. And, Sharang, where are you currently located?

BISWAS: I am currently in my apartment in Manhattan, New York.

ARJUNE: Fantastic! All right! So we're going to talk about a lot of things today, Sharang, and the first thing I want to talk about is—we're going to go way back in time to your childhood. Like, let's—what was your childhood like? Like, I mean, again, this interview is about you, so you can talk about as little or as much as you want. What was growing up like, especially with your identity as, you know, a gay male? Where are you from? What was your relationship with your parents like? That kind of thing.

BISWAS: Okay. So I was born in New Delhi, India, where I—I stayed there for a few years when I was, like, you know, infant. And my dad kept getting work in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates, so there was a few—I forget exactly, but there was instances of back-and-forth traveling. So he would—when he got the job, he went there for a year, leaving us in India with my parents and grandparents. And then at one point he brought us over, and I remember doing, like, really early pre-school in India but then also doing, like, kindergarten in—in Abu Dhabi. But then I remember being back in India for a bit, for, like, a couple of years and then back in Abu Dhabi, so there's a period of, like, back-and-forth motion.

I remember I went to kindergarten in—in—in Abu Dhabi, where as India, I distinctly remember doing upper kindergarten. In India, there's the often lower KG and upper KG, so I remember doing upper KG in India and first grade in

India. And those were at a slightly posh private school, where I had to wear, like, a blazer and a tie and things like that—like, even at that age.

I remember—I remember my parents couldn't decided which school to send me to. Yeah, this was just like—

What is this insect on the ground right now? That is kind of scary.

Yeah, so I remember that.

One sec. What am I going to do with this insect?

ARJUNE: Oh, no! [Chuckles.]

BISWAS: I'm going to just leave it because it's a spider, and spiders are good. It's not an insect; it's a spider. Spiders are helpful. They kill bugs.

Yeah. So—and then I remember being back in Abu Dhabi when I was, like, five-ish, six-ish? I forget. I went to a—I went to a Catholic school for a year and a half, and half because in India the semester begins in March, while in, like, America the semester begins in September. So I went there for a year and a half. I hated it. It was this, like, terrible to me school. It was this, like, Indian-Catholic school run by nuns. It was, like, awful. I hated it.

But then I quickly moved to this other posh private school. My parents were very—so we were not wealthy, and my parents really, really cared about education, so what—we were, like,—we weren't poor, but we had a decent income, but most of that went into our education, my sister and myself.

So my parents, like, spent a lot just to get us to good schools, so I went to this, like, posh private school in Abu Dhabi as well, an international school. And that was something that was really important to them, because I started in this Indian-Catholic school for a few y- —a year and a half because all the people had recommended it. My parents were assessing, like, what kind of education is good for you? And they're, like, "Well, we're in an international sort

of area. Abu Dhabi is known to be a very cosmopolitan sort of area, we should take advantage of that and put you in international school so you can get that worldly sort of knowledge,” right?

So in the school I went to—like, it’s a Lebanese school. It was founded in Lebanon but is an international school. In fact, the curriculum is international. It—it hybridized, like, British, American and other curricula. And it—and had people from all over the world. So that was important. So that was, I would say, the—when I start, like, remembering a lot, because, you know, that was, like, third grade and up. And I was there from third grade to—to—until I came to Dartmouth, actually, in that school.

And so my Abu Dhabi childhood was interesting because Abu Dhabi is, you know, a strange sort of place. It’s—it’s very cosmopolitan, but unlike, New York, I feel, where a lot of different kind of people mix, in Abu Dhabi, the various ethnic and national groups, like, do not really mix with each other. It’s very, like,—it’s very, like, segregated, like, oh, the Indian community and the German commu- —you know, that kind of thing.

Also, the UAE is very [unintelligible] racist, as in there’s this like, almost like social hierarchy based on where you’re from. So if you’re, like, I don’t know, Filipino or Sri Lankan or whatever, you’re the lower echelons of society, [unintelligible]. That was—that contributed to all of that. Even in my school—I mean, there was a little bit less of that when we were younger, but you could see more of that happening as you grow older. So that was that.

But the thing was, I was also in a city that was very, like, crime—low crime and safe. So that was something that was cool because, you know, we would, like, I’d go out and whatever, and it would be fine. You didn’t have to worry about it.

But a lot of my childhood, I was very focused on, like, academia. I was—so my school did a thing where they—they ranked you every single year, in the whole grade, and they—saying that sounds awful. They actually did it for a good reason because what they used to do is they would

distribute, in the different sections, so—you know, if you're in fourth grade, there are, like, seven sections of fourth grade, right? And they would distribute, based on academic rank, because what the—this school had a very robust system of peer tutoring, so they had this organized system of, like, if you got good grades, you would work with students who didn't get good grades to, like, help them.

And so high-ranked people—they would be, like, the number one rank would be in Section A; two would be in Section B; three would be in Section E. And then they'd distribute—and then the lower-ranked people they'd distribute evenly, so that there would always be people who were sitting next to you who could help you. So that was kind of interesting.

But because of that, I knew, even though it wasn't always publicly published, that I was, like, valedictorian every single year, from third grade to twelfth grade. And so my childhood was very consumed on that. And my school hours were very long as well, right? Like, it was, like, eight to four once I hit, I think, fifth grade, when that time started. And then I would take extra classes after school as well. So I would take, like, Computer Science AP [advanced placement] after school. So that would end at, like, five. And so, yeah, I was very academia focused, a lot.

But I would say my childhood was, like, relatively happy go lucky, because—so I was popular in school. I got good grades. And at that age, that's what matters to you as a—as a kid. Like, I was only—I was only in, like,—because the UAE doesn't have a lot of freedom of speech stuff, I wasn't really—and I wasn't engaged, like, politically or anything. My school even also didn't—we didn't deal with that academically. We didn't talk about social studies in that way.

I was, like,—I just paid attention—I was, like, *Oh, academia and, like, friends*. That's, like, literally all I cared about. It was only, like, later I was, like, *Hmm, there are other things in the world*.

And I think the queerness thing started—so UAE is a Muslim country and has somewhat, like, old and archaic laws about, like, queerness, right? Like, it's illegal. It's not like some

other country, where you'll be, like, stoned to death or whatever. But it's illegal.

So I remember—I remember—

Was that too much background detail or—

ARJUNE: No, no, no, no. Keep going. That's—that's—please expand on this.

BISWAS: Okay. So that was the background about me. So I remember in the third-ish grade, I used to watch the *Batman and Robin* [*Batman*] sixties TV show with my, like, dad or my sister or whatever, right?

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: I remember watching that, and I remember—it was very funny. I remember really enjoying—because they have this particular format where it's always a two-part—there's always a part one and part two, part one and part two of the episodes, half an hour and then “to be continued” kind of thing.

And I remember—the format was, like, usually in the first episode of the two parts, the heroes, Batman and Robin, or one of them, would be, like, always trapped in some, like, device, and then the villain would go, “Aha! I have you trapped.” And “Aha”—you know, kind of thing. And then there was, like, “What would happen to them? Oh no! Tune in next week,” right?

I remember [chuckles] being, like, super into those themes. I was, like, *Oh, wow! That's so fun! like, the hero's trapped. Aha!* And I was reflected on that, on that, like, literally, like, two years ago, or last year, and I'm, like, *Oh, my God! Was that nascent S&M [sodomasochism] interests in Sharang?*

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.]

BISWAS: So that was really interesting. I only realized that— because that was a young age. I remember when I was in third and fourth grade enjoying this. And I'm, like, *Wait a minute, I'm into BDSM [Bondage & Discipline / Dominance &*

Submission / Sadism & Masochism] *now. Interesting* [drawing out each syllable]. So anyway, that was a—that was an early thing.

And then I remember my sister was very vocal in the family about, like, “Oh my God, that guy is so cute” or, like, whatever, right?

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: And I remember at one point I’d be, like, *Yeah! She’s right. He is really cute*, right?

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.]

BISWAS: And this about, like, sixth grade or fifth grade—sixth grade, something like that. And at that point, I didn’t really, like,—no, it wasn’t fifth grade; it was before that. It was, like, fourth grade and stuff. And it was just, like, *Yeah, that guy is cute. You know, like, That’s a good-looking dude.*

And I remember not really thinking about that too much. I was, like, *Yeah, my sister thinks that person is attractive. Yeah, he is.* Especially since I just did everything my sister said and did. You know, like, idolized her alot when I was a kid. So that was interesting.

And then—okay, and then it was sixth grade, right? And I wrote about this in my college application essay, actually. My college application essay was a collection of themes that I put together, and this theme—I wrote about it. I remember—so there was this guy in my grade. His name was Jamie, Jamie Daniels [spelling unconfirmed], actually. I remember his name. And he was on the swim team. I mean, we had—we had, like,—even at a young age, we had, like, swim team and football team and things like that. And football, I mean soccer, not American football.

ARJUNE: Yeah

BISWAS: And I remember he was on the swim team. I remember we had PE [physical education] together, so I remember he had these bright blue, tiny Speedos.

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.]

BISWAS: But I remember, like, feeling, like, really, like, weirdly attracted to him. And I was, like, *This is strange*. And at that point,—now it was sixth grade, so I was older, so it was more it—it had come to the forefront more, like, *Huh!* Like. Because before that, I'm like, *Okay, that man's attractive, whatever. It doesn't really matter*. I was too young. But at the sixth grade, I was, like, *Hmm, this is strange*.

And I remember trying, like, avoid him, because I remember being, like, *This is a weird feeling. I don't like it. Something is w- —up, and I don't like it*, which is sad because, like, even at that young age I had, like, homophobia internalized and stuff.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: And so that—so then, he was, like, was in my class, and he, like, sat near me, and I—I—I would get really flustered. And I remember distinctly. I remember that being, like, *Oh, I think I'm into Jamie, but I'm uncomfortable about being into him*. And so that was a thing.

And then I remember in the eighth grade, I remember I was lying in bed, and at this point—so when I was very young, my sister and I shared a room, but I think fourth, fifth grade we moved to an apartment where I had my own room. I remember I was lying in bed, and I was just, like,—I was, like, *I think I'm into dudes, and I think that's just me*. I remember thinking not maybe in those words but, like, basically those thoughts, like, *I think I'm into guys*. And I don't think I used the word “guys”—I can't remember the thought—

So the weird thing about me: Sometimes I have a very clear recollection of the wording my thoughts took, or I can recollect the—like, the feeling of being in a place. Like, I was at Dartmouth [College] last week, and I remembered the feeling of walking into Morton [Hall] the first time.

But for this particular instant, it's more blurry, and I can't remember the words, whatever, but I remember just being, like, *I think I'm into guys, and I think I have to just, like, deal*

with it. And so I decided, *Yup, okay.* And it was only—it was—I came out in a strange way, because my school was not really safe for me to come out, but I did because I'm an idiot.

I was very popular, like I said, so I had a lot of social connections with all the different—all the cliques, if you will. And I remember who I came out to first was weird. So I had a friend, Lace [spelling unconfirmed]. He became much better friends later, but initially I was just like kind of friends with him. And I—so because I was, you know, valedictorian all the time, I would—a lot of—not only socially, but I would, like, study with people a lot—like, study dates kind of thing, right? “Oh, let's study together and finish homework together and stuff like that. That, I would actually do more with my not-close-friends circle. I would do that more with my, like, more distant friends circle.

I think honestly a way how I made relationships with people, with social relationships with people who were not my close friends, who we had bonds already, but with others in my grade—that way—that's how I became popular, kind of. It's weird.

So I remember I was studying with my friend Lace and his friend, Mazz [spelling unconfirmed] I mean, I didn't like Mazz at that time that much, but, like, we were teenagers, so I don't want to be, like, *he's a horrible person.* We were all snotty teenagers, right? But he was very close with Lace, and we were studying together, and of course, we're like teen boys. We were talking about stuff, and if something comes up, and I just decided—I remember having this cold, like, dread sort of feeling, which I have, because it's like stomach pit twisty feeling I actually, truly physically get.

And they were asking about girlfriends or something, and I think I just said, “I don't think I'm into girls.” And then I'm, like, “Yeah, I think I'm gay.” And they went like, “Okay.” They were, like, kind of like, “Okay.”

And then I remember I started literally dropping that, like, with my friends. We were actually at a movie. I think I dropped that at one point, and people were, like, “Huh?” I think a lot of people didn't believe it, at first. I remember my

friend Garduv [spelling confirmed], who I actually met up with early this year. It was really lovely. He had been in Australia for years, and I hadn't seen him in, like, a decade, but I saw him. He came back, and we were chatting. And he told me he was, like, "Yeah, when you first said you're gay, it thought you were just doing it to get attention." Because I was very attention seeking as a kid. That's true.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: Like, I thought very highly of myself, and—compared to now, where I'm, like, *Oh, no, I suck at everything!* But at that point, I'm, like, *Oh my God, I'm the best at everything*, like, No one doubted me.

So I remember he thought that, and I remember one of my—my—one of my good friends at the time—he was a family friend. He—he was older than me by a year, and I looked up to him and stuff. But he had started hearing that people were saying I'm gay, and he thought people were, like, spreading vicious rumors about me, and he would, like, try and, like, quote, "defend me," end quote, you know?

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: So that was really funny, and if I came up to him later, like, later, he was a little hurt. He was like, "You should have told me." And I'm, like, "Sorry, you didn't—I didn't know how to tell you. I thought you'd be angry at me because we've been friends since, like, childhood." He was, like, "No, you should have told me." So I was sad.

But—yeah, so that happened. And I remember—and then it started becoming the known thing in school. And, like, I was into a bunch of guys, and they knew, and there were no other queer people. There was one other guy who came out. This was senior year. His name was Zack [spelling unconfirmed]. He was half American and half Lebanese. And he told me he was gay, and then I remember we—decided to study math together. The A-level was coming up, so we were like "Let's practice math A-level stuff together," both of us knowing, *"Oh, this is going to be our first actual foray exploration, actually."*

Yeah, so I went over to his place. I went to his place, and no one was home. It was just us. So we started doing math, but then we started doing this thing about, like, “Oh, if you—if you get this question wrong, you like have to do this,” you know, sort of. Like, Truth or Dare-y kind of thing. And we ended up making out, and we ended up playing around with chocolate syrup, which, for the record is very hard to lick off someone. It is, like, very hard. Like, Hershey’s chocolate syrup. It was, like, it got everywhere.

And, yeah, so that was my first, like, sexual exploration with a dude. I was, like, *Oh, okay*. We never did that again. It was also senior year, right, so, you know, it was last year.

That other guy, who was a friend—my friend Sammy [spelling unconfirmed]—he was—he was great. He was a year older than me, but he, like, failed a year, so he was in our grade. He was just a goofy, lovable guy. And I’d, like, work with him sometimes, and he was fun. And he—so, there were, like, two or three people who’d failed a year and been in our grade, and they were always shrouded in like, this aura of, like, mystery and ooh, right? So Sammy was one of them.

But he was kind of goofy and stuff if you got to know him. But he had a friend in the British school, who was gay, and he was, like, “You should meet my gay friend.” And, you know, because, like, it’s the UAE. People don’t come out. There are not queer people openly there, at least our age, right?

So I’m, like, “Yeah, I’ll meet your friend.” So I went over to his friend’s house one day. I told my parents I was studying, and I did, but then I left early and went to this guy’s house. And he was my year but in another school, and, like, we were going to do—we were going to—the idea was that we were going to be, like, saucy, but we weren’t. It didn’t—it just didn’t—we didn’t feel it. We just hung out and watched—he illegally downloaded TV shows with queer content in it, and we just watched that, which is—we watched *Skins*, if I remember. Which is when I started watching *Skins*, actually. I’m, like, *Oh, wow! This is a good show.*

And then there was this guy—so at one point, my friend Hisham [spelling unconfirmed] signed me up for a science fair without telling me, and then he's, like, "You're in the science fair with me." And I'm, like, "What are you talking about?" Like, he was, like, "You're smart. I want you to be in the science fair with you." And I'm, like, "That's so unethical." But I did it anyway. It was, like, summer or something.

And so I [unintelligible]. And there was other—there was—there was—there was a stall that was, like, one of the Indian schools and this guy who I started, like, flirting with, and he was flirting back, and I wasn't sure we were flirting because I'm a snotty-nosed teenager. And then we stayed in touch over e-mail, and then the e-mails became increasingly saucier, and then, whatever, we never saw each other again.

And then a couple of years ago, he was visiting in New York—because we were on Facebook—and he was in New York, and I'm, like, wild! So I met up with him, and then we hooked up. So that was strange because it was, like, you know, "I met you at a science fair and crushed on you then, and then you come here, and then we hook up. So that was funny.

So, yeah, my childhood in the UAE was very, like,—in terms of queerness, was very, like, strange, right? Because I couldn't be fully out, but I was out with my friends just to a degree, and—you know.

And with my family—this was weird. So I didn't want to tell them, and I remember—because I remember watching *Friends* with my dad, the TV show *Friends*.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: And there was, like, this lesbian wedding, and my dad made some comment, "Uch, this is so, like, weird. Why does this happen?"—blah, blah, blah, blah. And I got really upset by that, right?

But I wanted to write—so my college application essay was, like, six sections or something, each, like, a different glimpse of my life sort of thing, is what I did.

ARJUNE: Nice.

BISWAS: I remember I started talking about Pointillism in the beginning, not really knowing what Pointillism was, actually. I was, like, *It's, like dots that come together and not, like—* now I know more because I actually studied art history.

But anyway, so I wrote about—one of the themes was about Jamie, and that was my self-acceptance kind of thing. And I had written that, and I told my parents not to read by college application essay, because my parents were helping me very—my mom especially was helping me in a lot with the college application process. Like, it wasn't just I was doing it on my own alone. She was helping me a lot, right?

So it would have been— She—but I told her, “Don't read the essay. I'm not ready to—I want to finish it and whatever first.” I had no idea where I was going to go with that, if I was going to show it to her or not, but whatever, at that point, I said, “Don't read it.”

Okay, so I had a printout I was working on. It was in my room. And I remember I came home one day, and my mom was being very *silent* to everyone, and she does it—when she's, like, upset about something she would do that. She'd, like, just stop talking to everyone at home.

And I remember my dad and I were going somewhere, and he's, like, “Do you know what's up with your mom? Did you make her angry?” I'm, like, “No, I though *you* made her angry or something.” And he's, like, “I don't know what's wrong with her.” And so it was strange. So that happened for two days. She was just silent for two days. It was weird. But I was at school, so—

And then I come home from school. It was la- —I think I came—I remember—I think it was later than normal because I had after-school stuff. I came home, and my parents said, “We should talk.” We're sitting in the kitchen. I'm, like, *Oh, it's an ominous thing.* And, of course, the first thing was, like, *Oh my God, it's about being gay.* Because I remember trying to tell them a few times but, like, not really succeeding. There was a b- —I remember where my—there was a huge

row, right? My mom and my sister were fighting really loudly, and it was a huge fight.

And I remember, I'm, like, *Oh, I need to defuse the tension*, and so I just, like, blurted out, "I'm gay" to, like, take their attention away from—I remember it was a strange motivation. But that did defuse the tension, and my mom didn't, like, believe me. She thought I was saying that to—literally do what I was doing: defuse tension; it was just a joke, you know? Because she came up—she was, like, "Oh, are you gay? Do you want me to buy you makeup?" You know, the miscon- —like, you know, silly ideas about what queerness means. But I remember being upset about that as well.

So I was trying to tell her. I was thinking about good ways to tell them, but I never came up to it, so I came home this day. I was in the kitchen, and they're like, "We need to talk." I'm like, "Oh, okay." And so they put me at the table, and they—it turns out my mom had been cleaning my room, and she found my essay, and she read it, and she read the paragraph about Jamie, and she got very upset.

And they're both upset. And I was—I was lucky, right?—in that my parents—they were upset, but it wasn't, like, "We hate you. Leave." It was, like, "This is a bad and dangerous thing. We want you to not be gay, and we—you know, but for your sake." So it wasn't, like, the most ideal reaction, but not like, "You are evil," kicked out of the house, you know?

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: Like, my dad was, like, "Do you want me to take you to a psychiatrist?" And I'm, like, "Errr." And then—then they're like, "It isn't natural." And like, "It *is* natural." Like, "No, it's not." And then at one point my dad was like, "Oh, it's because of your sister, because she talks about boys all the time. It influenced you." And, like, all these things. It was—it was very, like,—and then my mom was, like, "You'll meet a lot of nice girls in college. At this age, you have confusing feelings. That's why it's happening."

And then I remember that my mom was, like, "Don't put this in—you shouldn't put this in your app because schools will—

schools will not want you. They'll be, like, 'Oh, no, not another one.'" Those are the words she used. "Like, no school will want gay students" or something.

And I counted, because applying to Yale [University], I remember, as one of my choices, I remember saying—because at that time, Yale had this moniker of 'the gay Ivy' [League school]. I don't know why. Because I remember at IvyQ the Brown [University] kids were, like, "Mm-hm, yeah, mmm-kay."

But I remember I'm, like, "No. Yale is the gay Ivy" or something. I said, like, "Universities are fine with it." And then, so, she promised me, like, the next day or whatever, made me—she told me to *not* apply to Yale and apply somewhere else instead. I think it was Harvard [University]. I always knew I'm supposed to be at Ivy League schools. It was Dartmouth, Penn [University of Penn] and it was Yale initially, but she was, like, "No, apply to Harvard." I'm like, "Okay."

Yeah, she was really worried about that. And then my dad was, like, "Have you told any of your friends [unintelligible]?" And I lied and I'm like, "No, I've only told, like Luke [spelling unconfirmed]." He said, "You talk to him and tell him you're not gay. Has your teacher seen this? You should tell him." It was weird.

I remember after the talk, I was very upset, and I remember I went—I, like, went to my friend Luke's house. Luke lived, like, not, like ten-minute walk from me. So I went over, and I, like, cried on his bed, and he was, like, "There, there." I think—I think—it might have been a different day, but it might have been the same day, where he, like, illegally downloaded *Brokeback Mountain*, because it wasn't going to be released in the UAE. They were not going to release it. But he's, like, "Let's watch this! It'll make you happier." Neither of us had seen the movie, right?

So we watch it. Of course, it *didn't* make me happier. It's a depressing movie. And I'm, like, "What the hell did we just watch, Luke?" He was like, "I'm so sorry!" [Both chuckle.]

It was, like, the only, like, mainstream queer movie that we knew about. Like, of course, there were other queer movies. We didn't know about them, right? We were in the UAE. Like, [unintelligible]. "Oh, that's a gay movie. Let's watch— [unintelligible] should watch it with me."

And I remember that. But also complicating that was in the twelfth grade, Luke was one of my best friends in high school. It was Luke and Tayjuh [spelling unconfirmed]. Tayjuh, I still stay in touch with. He comes to visit me. He went to Rice [University], and he's still in the States.

Luke—he came to my graduation and everything at Dartmouth, but then he, like, vanished. And all of us in the friends circle are kind of upset. We're, like, "Where's Luke? He, like, vanished. He doesn't talk to anyone." He, like, messages me once—and he's, like, "Sharang, I haven't talked to you in a while, bye. And I'm, like, "Luke, where are you?" Ahh! But like, so sad. He was, like, my best friend.

But I remember in the twelfth grade I started having a crush on Luke, and I remember being very upset about that. I'm, like, *No, I shouldn't have a crush*. And Luke is straight and everything. Or at that time he was. I think he still is, but, you know. I was, like, *Oh, my God!* And I remember for, like, a day or two, I was, like,—I was, like, avoiding him. And I remember even in French class—we were in AP French together, because he's French-Canadian, so he's fluent in French. There were, like, eight of us in AP French.

I remember sitting—I sat next to him, right? I was his best friend. But I remember that day, I, like, [unintelligible] looking at him. I was, like, *Mmm*, you know?

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.]

BISWAS: I remember he got really upset, understandably. And he—he called me, he— "Like, Sharang, what the hell's up?" And I'm, like, "Oh, I think I have a crush on you." And he's, like, "Aw, that's okay." It was really nice.

ARJUNE: Okay.

BISWAS:

So that—yeah, my—my best friend is a really awesome person. But, yeah, that was complicating that. But anyway, so I was—I was, like, sad, and I, like, turned to Luke for, like comfort. That was really nice, that I had, you know, friends who supported that. And so I just—then I just, like, pretended that that was, like, a phase.

I remember when I went to Dartmouth, I was super excited because I'm, like, *I'm gonna be in a country where it's not illegal to be gay*. I remember being super excited about that. Before Dartmouth, I did this leadership training summer camp thing in [Washington] D.C. and New York—like, literally right before Dartmouth—like, a few weeks preceding [Dartmouth Outing Club First-Year] Trips and stuff.

And I remember, like, trying to test the water. Like, my roommates there—I told them I was bi[sexual]. And they're, like, "Oh, that's cool." And I was, like, *Oh, yes, it's not a terrible thing to, like, be into dudes*. And when I finally came to Dartmouth, I'm, like, *Whatever. No one knows me here. Like, you know, I'm gonna carve my own niche or whatever*. And I was, like, "I'm gay."

So I went to all the queer students events and things. But I remember the first year—I think that was the point, after this thing with my parents, that I started becoming a lot less close with my parents. I used to be very close with them. Now I'm just slightly close with them, you know? Because that, like, felt like, you know—I don't know. It just felt—whatever.

And so I stopped telling them as much about my social activities and things, and I would call them every week at Dartmouth, right? Like, every Sunday I'd chat with my parents. But I didn't tell them anything about dudes or—or romance or anything. And they assumed—like, I remember my mom told someone—I don't remember how I know this, but I heard her or someone commented—I don't know what, but my mom told someone that I'm just so academically minded that I'm not paying attention—I'm not—I'm too focused on that. Like, it's just that I'm serious about it; I'm not wasting time dating, or whatever. And I'm, like, *Okay, whatever. You believe what you want to believe*. I was sleeping around a lot in college.

And I remember the first winter break back home, I remember both my parents separately, on different—like, I was out with my mom and then out my dad, were like—*Okay, don't—don't tell your mom this or Don't tell your dad this.* But, “Are you still gay or something?” And I just said no. Whatever. It was easy to say that. And they're like—*Okay, good.* Like, *oh good, good. That's nice* and whatever. And I was, like, rolling my eyes.

So—so that was a thing there. Yeah. That's my childhood, I guess.

Oh, and I remember—I remember this fun thing. Like,—so I remember—I don't know if you know this, but a lot of gay porn sites—not sites—like, networks—like, companies—on YouTube—they have, like, tame promotional videos, right?—of, like, the dudes, like, making out and stuff, right? Like, the hot dudes, like, making out before, like, the sex scene starts or whatever.

And I remember—so in the UAE, the telecom network blocks a lot of sites that are against the moral codes of the UAE, right?

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: So you can't watch porn or—or—or read certain political material or read about atheism, right?—online. In fact, I remember my high school textbooks—not high school, middle school—one of our socials studies books was about, like, maps and how to do mapmaking blah blah something like that, how to read maps, how to read graphs, charts, things like that. And there was a chapter, which was about a certain kind of graph, and it was—the example they used was populations in Israel, and the school—they confiscated everyone's copy of the textbook, glued those two pages together and then returned it because they didn't want you to see Israel.

ARJUNE: Wow.

BISWAS: And, like, parts of the—there were other maps of the world in the book. They blacked out the word “Israel” on the map, things like that.

ARJUNE: Wow.

BISWAS: Right? So, like,—so, like, the UAE had interesting things like that.

So I remember talking to my friends Lace and Rameh [spelling unconfirmed], as it was, and I remember talking to them about, like, porn and stuff, and they’re, like, “Sharang, you should watch some straight porn.” No, I don’t know, the funny this was that Rameh was, like,—he was trying to be, like, “Yeah, we’ll watch porn, and you’ll turn straight.” He was, like, “Sharang, spend the night with me and Lace, and we’ll turn you straight.” I’m, like, “Rameh, I think spending a night with you and Lace is going to have the opposite effect.”

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.]

BISWAS: Because I was into Rameh at that time. And he knew I was into him. He, like, turned beetroot red—

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.]

BISWAS: —because, you know, I twisted his words or whatever. But he, like, went beet red. He’s, like, “No, that’s not what I mean.” I’m, like, “Mm-hm.” He’s, like, “No, no, no, no. I didn’t mean that.” It was so funny. But he—so him and Lace—we had, like, this plan that they’re going to—because they used all the legal downloading things. I did not. I was a goody two-shoes, right?

He was—they’re, like, “We’re gonna give you some straight porn, and watch it, and see what you think,” right? And I’m, like, “Okay.” And so I remember—I remember Lace sat pretty close to me, not next to me but pretty close to me. And the next morning, he was, like, sauntering into class before class starts, and he, like, casually drops this, like, unmarked CD on my bag. He was, like, “Doo, doo, doo” you know. I’m, like, “Oh, thanks, Lace,” you know?

And I remember watching it. I don't remember the circumstance. I think I picked a day when no one was at home, and I tried watching it, and it was, like, straight porn, and it was pretty mediocre straight porn. But, like, I'm a horny teenager. Of course I'm, like, *Whoa!* And this is the thing: I hadn't—I had not masturbated until I was seventeen. Ever. People think that's really weird because I'm, like, really open and talk about sexuality, and, you know, I have a grant to make games about sex right now, things like that. People think that's weird about me. And I was a Sexpert [Sexual Health Peer Educators] at Dartmouth when that was still an existing organization.

But, yeah, I didn't masturbate until seventeen—it started with this thing. Like, this, like, CD sort of thing. I didn't masturbate to it, but I was, like, *Whoa!* That was—yeah, I was, like, *Whoa! Interesting.* And I remember talking to my friends about it and being, like, “Yeah, it was fun, but I don't think I'm straight. I just was horny”—because of, you know, this. I remember that. That was a—that was an interesting, queer sort of experience that I had. Yeah.

And I had, like, one or two pockets of, like, messing around with other guys while we were, like, studying and things together. Like, that happened a few times—one time at school, which was—*Uh-oh!* [Chuckles.] But—yeah. Yeah. All over senior year.

So that was—yeah, that's childhood.

ARJUNE: Wow.

I want to go back to a couple of things. So you mentioned in D.C. you told your roommates that you were bi.

BISWAS: Yeah.

ARJUNE: This is something—I'm starting to notice a pattern. Like, is that just a crutch for saying you're gay, so you say you're bi?

BISWAS: Yeah. So I don't want to necessarily say that outright because some people say they're bi and they're bi, but people assume that it's a crutch that they're using to say they're gay, which is a very terrible thing. Like, bi people

exist, and it's sad to erase them. But I certainly did that, because—because my roommates were talking about girls or something, and then they were asking me stuff, and I—for some reason, I'm, like, "Oh, yeah, I'm into guys as well." I think I said, "I go both ways" or "I swing both ways" or something, was the wording I used.

But, yeah, it literally was that, because I was in a new country. I was, like, *I'm testing the waters. I'm, like, I've not—it's, like, it's America, so it's supposed to be okay* here. And now, of course, I know a lot more about America.

But anyway, so, yeah, it was a me like, testing the waters, because I'm, like, *they—they—they accept me that I like girls, but maybe if I add this, they won't hate me as much*. I don't know. It was just—yeah. That literally was it, yes.

ARJUNE: Okay.

Also, your sister. Did she know at all about your—did she know you were gay?

BISWAS: No. No. So I told my sister—my sister—I was visiting home once—I don't remember, sophomore year, junior year, something like that. And this was before I came out to my parents finally and properly, right? So, like, now my parents are totally, like— They like my husband a lot.

But I remember before coming out to my parents fully I—I—I was—I was back in Abu Dhabi, and I was talking to my sister, and she was really upset. She was, like, "You don't tell me anything anymore. Like, you don't, like, talk to me, and I know nothing." And I just told her, "I'm gay." And she was, like, "What?" I'm, like, "Yeah." She's, like, "Really?" I'm, like, "Yeah." And she was, like, okay with it.

Because it's funny because during that conversation with my parents way back when, that one where, like, they read my thing and stuff, they told me, like, "Don't tell your sister. She'll be very upset, and she'll be very angry" or something. And so I took that to heart. But when I told my sister finally, and was, like, "Oh, yeah, whatever." So that was nice.

ARJUNE: Nice.

BISWAS: She wasn't, like, "Whatever," but she was, like, supportive, so—

ARJUNE: That's good to hear.

Okay, I have one more question. So you mentioned how there wasn't a lot of media available in Abu Dhabi. This is kind of like random curiosity: Were there—were there Bollywood movies available, by any chance, or did you watch any of those?

BISWAS: Yeah, yeah. Oh, yeah. So first, I forgot to finish my train of thought, which was those YouTube things.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: After I watched that straight porn, I found on YouTube some of those things that were not blocked.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: Like, the censors hadn't found them—like, —like, —of, like, dudes making out. And I remember, like, watching them a lot, being really into it. But they were very tame and small and tiny. And I remember what I'd do is I'd search for that and watch it, and then I'd quickly search for, like, ten other random things, like, *Harry Potter* and things, so that my YouTube history would, like—that would bury that in the YouTube history, because I shared a family computer.

So, yeah. But Bollywood was huge in Ind- —in—in the UAE, right? So they had a very South Asian population in the UAE. In fact, like, if you—for example, taxi drivers are all, like, South Asian.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: So if you speak Hindi you're perfect with the taxi drivers. And so, yeah, there were cinemas that were just for Bollywood movies, and, yeah, they were huge.

ARJUNE: I was just wondering, because I know the movie *Dostana* came out in 2008, and that's about two guys who, like,—

BISWAS: Yeah, yeah.

ARJUNE: —they pretend to be gay.

BISWAS: I watched *Dostana*. It came out in 2008. I don't—I remember watching it. I think I did actually watch it in the UAE. I also think perhaps the non-English movies were censored slightly less heavily.

ARJUNE: Okay.

BISWAS: Because the ministry people—they didn't know Hindi, or whatever, I guess.

ARJUNE: Yeah. Yeah.

BISWAS: But I remember I did watch *Dostana*, and I think it was in—not at Dartmouth; I think it was there, so—yeah, I remember.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: But I remember, in *Dostana* they're not really gay. You know, it's not actually about queerness at all.

ARJUNE: Yeah, no, it wasn't, but I mean, it was, like, at least something—it wasn't blocked, which I found, like, really interesting.

BISWAS: Yeah. I mean, I loved—I loved the main actor. What's his name? I think he's super hot. Arjun Rampal, I think?

ARJUNE: Oh, yeah.

BISWAS: That was, like,—oh, yeah.

ARJUNE: No, I thought John Abrams [sic; Abraham]—anyway, neither here nor there. [Chuckles.]

Yeah, so moving forward into Dartmouth stuff. So what was it like—you said getting on campus, you were glad to finally, you know, like, be yourself and join queer communities,—

BISWAS: Yeah.

ARJUNE: —all of that.

BISWAS: Yeah. And, like, at Dartmouth—like, so I had a ve- —I had— so I recognized that not everyone has the stellar experience at Dartmouth, but I had a amazing Dartmouth experience, right? And I—yeah, I came in. Only myself. I gave up martial arts. Like I used to do karate in high school because, you know, I was in high school, you just do activities, right?—

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: —to fill up your time kind of thing. [Chuckles.] But I—like, my parents said, “Find a martial arts thing.” And I’m, like, “[Makes sounds of disinterest.]” It didn’t really interest me really. At Dartmouth, I was, like, *I wanna do what I wanna do*, especially because academically I was doing engineering because I thought I wanted to do that, and only after I finished both my engineering degrees, did I realized I didn’t want to do engineering.

But, yeah, I was, like, *I’m gonna be*— so I joined—I remember going to GSX [Gender Sexuality XYZ], which at that time was the queer group on campus. It used to be called the GSA [Gay-Straight Alliance] before my time, but I think when I arrived, they approved that they were going to call it GSX, because they were like, “We don’t want to call it Gay-Straight Alliance because that’s, like, gay and straight—that’s, like,—you know, it’s about queerness.” So they just changed A to X, so gay, straight and everything else kind of thing was the thing.

I remember going to meetings, and they weren’t always—they weren’t always the most fun; they were kind of boring sometimes. But it was a—sometimes they were great. It was also a discussion group. We’d, like, have a topic of discussion. We’d chat about it and stuff.

And I remember it was great because I met other queer people, and I remember when I started at Dartmouth, there weren’t a lot of out people who were just, like, out, right? It grew. So I remember my first two years, there weren’t—that you’d know—and you could count on your fingers the gay people, right?

And I remember—I don't know if this still happens—you might have heard of it, but there was a—there were also these, like, parties, so there was a men's party called Cocktails, and there was a women's party called XX, where upperclassmen, like, organized these parties. They had—there were, like, lists of, like, gay people that—that they had and, like, that was like passed down to the, once they graduate to another upperclassman, a senior, usually.

And they'd invite to a party, and there would be, like, tails. Usually it's like Casque and Gauntlet or, like, one of the houses or something. I remember the first one I went to was Casque and Gauntlet. So I met [Michael] "Mike" Lefkowitz [Class of 2006], the Phi Tau alum, who—who then encouraged me to check out the house, so that was—that was funny.

And the first time I went to Cocktails, I remember, like, *Wait, there are more gay people here, people who didn't go to GSX.* And I remember that was interesting. I was, like, *Oh, wow!* I'm, like, *Oh, wow! Some of them are hot.*

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.]

BISWAS: So that was—that used to be a tradition, like, these two parties that happened all the way up till I left, I think. I don't know if they still—still happen. But things—halfway through, a big change happened, is that [Pamela S.] "Pam" Misener, the LGBT dean, managed to get a change in effect where in the Dartmouth application—that was, like, for incoming students—you could check a box thing: Like, "I'm interested in exploring LGBTQIA [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual], like, life at Dartmouth. Not necessarily saying "I am gay," but, like, "I'm interested in these issues" kind of thing.

And that was a huge change, I feel, because that signaled to people that you could be queer at Dartmouth. There was queer stuff happening at Dartmouth. And so I remember, like, my—when the '14s arrived, there were a lot more queer out people. I'm, like, *Whoa!* Like, it kind of—I don't know what it meant and what it was. Maybe all it was, was

generationally people were, like, more comfortable with queerness, all kinds of things, right?

But I remember half—literally halfway through the queer [unintelligible] changing. And there were more queer people. There were a lot more queer people who we knew were out and stuff but weren't coming to the meetings. I didn't know everyone, because at one point I knew all the queer people, you know, and so. I then, I remember when I was—sophomore year, I was, like, *Should I join a house?* I was very anti-Greek for a while.

And then—and then I remember—I'm like *Well I won't joining sophomore fall, anyway*, because I was doing ENGS [Engineering Sciences] 21 and in my head I was like “ENGS 21 is all-consuming—*Uhhh!* I like, I, like, decided not to do anything sophomore fall because I was like ENGS 21—I remember Andrew [spelling unconfirmed] was, like, “Sharang you're putting it on a pedestal.” And I was, I think. But Andrew was also a very gifted engineer and is now at Stanford [University] getting a Ph.D., so—you know? [Chuckles.] And I'm not.

So—but—so I remember—I remember the Sig[ma] Nu was heavily recruiting in the international students because one of their board or one of the leadership of Sig Nu was an international student. His name was Kevin [spelling unconfirmed]. And so he invited me to, like, check out the house, and I remember one of the other, like, pledge-master, whatever, whatever was gay. And I remember being, like, *Oh! That's cool.* I remember being—but then I end up doing Tau, right?

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: So Sig Nu even gave me a bid, and I'm, like, *Yeah, I'm not gonna join a male frat.* At one point briefly what I started, like, freshman fall, I, like, I entertained the idea, *Ooh, joining a male frat would be really fun, being in a house full of all these sexy dudes.* But, you know, whatever.

Yeah. And so that—yeah, that was an interesting change that happened at Dartmouth. I remember by my end, like, by my fifth year, where I was a lot less involved in campus

organizations, like, the GSX had, like, desolved. There were two other groups now, and it was a fractured. So on one hand, I'm, like, *I'm glad there's so many queer people*, but on the other hand, I'm, like, *Oh, the queer community seems to be, like, not a community as much*. And I remember thinking that and talking to people about that, which was interesting. Yeah.

Sorry, you have to ask more questions. I'm sure there's more to say, but I can't remember everything.

ARJUNE: No worries.

So you mentioned GSX and GSX dissolving. I also interviewed another alum recently, who was an '08, and back then, there was the [Dartmouth] Rainbow Alliance. Was that a thing while you were there?

BISWAS: Yeah.

ARJUNE: Okay.

BISWAS: Okay. I remember the name. I think the Rainbow Alliance—if I remember well, it changed into the GS- —no, no, no. The Rainbow Alliance was there, but I'm surprised an '8 said it because I think the Rainbow Alliance was one of the splinter or whatever organizations that started around my senior year and my fifth year, when GSX had started dissolving. It was formed as another group or something.

ARJUNE: Okay. Maybe it was—

BISWAS: I remember that existed.

ARJUNE: Okay. Maybe it was [cross-talk] restarted.

BISWAS: Unless it was a different Rainbow Alliance for the '08 as well. That could also be a thing.

Oh! I'd be remiss if I don't talk about IvyQ.

ARJUNE: Yes.

BISWAS:

So IvyQ was a huge deal for me, okay? So this was sophomore year. This thing, like, had happened. The president of GSX was, like, “Guys. There’s going to be this inter-Ivy conference about queer people!” And remember this is still sophomore year. This is before the large influx of queer people at Dartmouth—out queer people at Dartmouth.

So I was, like, *Wow!* And it was—I was—I remember being really [unintelligible] for it because a) I love visiting other universities—like, seeing my friends. Like, I went to MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] and visited my friend. I went to, like, different universities. It was really—I still—I mean, I want to go into academia right now. I like universities. I think there’s something cool about them, right?

So I remember going—and being really excited about IvyQ and, like, also, *Oh, yeah, a huge queer thing. Like, that’s so exciting!* I was so happy for that. And it was going to be at Penn [University of Pennsylvania], and my childhood friend, Farijah [spelling unconfirmed], the one who was, like, defending me and the one who was, like, “You should have told me. We’ve been friends so long.” He went to Penn, so I was, like, “I’m gonna come see you.” In fact, I stayed with him at IvyQ.

So I remember the first IvyQ was so exciting. I went to Penn. I loved it. I had such a good time. And it was interesting. Like, like, so—I—this criticism was—I later joined the board of IvyQ. I’ll get to that. But I remember later there was a criticism leveraged. People were, like, “Uch! IvyQ Is just a place to go have sex,” right? And I remember thinking, *IvyQ is a place where a lot of queer people have a lot of sex, and that’s wonderful.*

I remember saying that, because in the daytime at IvyQ there was a lot of fabulous programming, right? The leaders—each—each time,—and, yes, I was a leader of one of them, so I guess I’m self-calling a bit. But I think each time the leaders put a lot of effort into having very interesting, educational, diverse programming. And I’ll talk about that in a bit.

And that was amazing, but in the evening, it was, like, party, right? We were, like, “Let’s hang out and hook up and stuff.”

And that was amazing! And I remember talking to Michael [A.] Bronski, professor, about it. He is a professor at Harvard [University] now, but he used to be a professor at Dartmouth. And he was, like,—I remember he was talking about Triangle House, and he was saying, “It’s really good for there to be a space on campus where queer people feel comfortable to have sex.” That was a thing he said.

He was, like, “Even if”—because there was an argument at that time—should it happen, it should not happen—he was, like, “Aside from every other argument, it is a great—it’s a great—for people to have a space where they can have sex. Like, to have your own room in a—in a—in a dorm that has other queer people in it that you won’t feel judged if you bring home someone. It’s really powerful.”

And I remember thinking about that, about IvyQ. I’m, like,—I’m, like, IvyQ is a lot of things that is a lot of really great academic and stuff, programming in the morning. And yes, it is a place where a lot of people have sex. And that’s good and valuable because queer people need a place that they can feel safe and have sex and meet other queer people, right? Especially at Dartmouth. It’s very small compared to, like, I don’t know, Cornell [University], which has like a gajillion students, right?

And so I remember being very, like, weird about the argument. So, yes, yes, it’s a place where people have sex, and—and what, you know? Because there’s a lot of amazing programming.

But I remember being at Penn. I remember enjoying it a lot. I remember telling my—childhood friend, you know, Farijah, “Oh my god, this so fun.” And I remember his mom called and said, “Oh, Sharang’s here. That’s wonderful. Can I talk to him?” And, yeah, I spoke to him. And I’m, like, “What did you tell her?” And she was, like,—he was, like, “I just told her you’re here for a conference. She didn’t ask any more questions after that.” I’m, like, “Great.” Here I wasn’t out to my parents at that time. And so certainly not his parents.

So I remember IvyQ was amazing. And on the second—the following year it was Columbia [University] was hosting, and I was not on the organizing team still. I still wasn’t—I joined

the following year. But, yeah, I went to Columbia, and that's where I met Nick [Tyson], the dude I married, because he—he was my host.

It's funny, because the housing coordinator, the student at Columbia called J.T. [spelling unconfirmed, who I'd met at Penn because he'd come to Penn IvyQ, and J.T. was the housing coordinator and he, you know, set up me and Nick, and so J.T. is a good friend now. Like, I see him in the city. And he's—he's really close with Nick. Nick and him have always been close. But he always says, "I take credit for introducing Sharang to Nick, because I put them in the same room together." [Both chuckle.]

And so I remember—and I was staying in Nick's room, and I remember the instant I saw—as I was chatting with Nick, I was, like, *This is a really interesting guy!* And, like, we chatted a lot that first night, which didn't have a lot of programming because the people were arriving, right? The program started the next morning. And we hooked up that night, and I was, like, *Who is this awesome guy?* And so you know, that was cool.

And, yeah, so—and then—and then—but that IvyQ I remember a lot about because it's intertwined with memories of Nick.

And then the following year, I joined the IvyQ planning, like, committee, and, like, was, like, helping organize it. And IvyQ was like—I remember there's a quote of me in *The [Dartmouth] D*, after the first IvyQ? Maybe the second IvyQ. Of me being, being like, I—like, I look around the auditorium, and there's a keynote speech, and there are, like, 400 people in this room, and I know for a fact that every single one of them is queer. And that was really powerful, because you don't see that much—like, straight people have that feeling all the time.

So I remember that being—in addition to all the, like, cool programming and activities and workshops and things that we had—even aside from all that, even aside from, like, "Oh, and you get to, like, hook up with queer people in the evenings and stuff," it was very powerful just being around so many queer people. That was really epic.

And IvyQ is I think—it was fun organizing. Maybe it wouldn't have been fun had it been at Dartmouth. It was at Dartmouth the year after I left, so I didn't get the brunt of that work, because organizing things was hard, but since I was on the planning committee from a non-host school, our organizing duties were less strenuous. But it was—I remember really enjoying it. I remember really bonding with the other organizers. We had this, like, clique almost, all the organizing teams. It was—it was fun trying to get the programming.

I remember at Dartmouth we did this thing where students would give presentations, and we picked one to submit of the official student presentation at IvyQ from the Dartmouth end. And I remember organizing that. And it was super fun, listening to all of them and deciding, like, which ones—and then—

So one of my friends was on the organizing team with me. it was just—IvyQ was—every time—I remember every time I—on the bus back from IvyQ, I remember having this weird, like, surreal, like, *Oh, I'm leaving this, like, surreal, queer bubble. Like, oh no! Oh!* And I kind of had this, like,—

There's a thing in—in gaming that people call LARP [live action role-playing] drop or Con [Convention] drop,—

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: —which is you have this—you have this weekend of intense emotional experiences because role-playing games andLARPs use emotions as currency. Like, that's the point of the game. And then you come on back in the real world, and it's, like, people call it, like, Con Drop. Oh no, now you're back in the mundane world, and you feel sad.

So it was, like, kind of like that, I felt, after IvyQ each time. *Oh, I'm no longer gonna be in this, like, queer utopia.* So that was really—yeah. I remember—yeah, I loved IvyQ.

ARJUNE: Nice. Well, you answered all the questions I had about IvyQ. [Chuckles.]

So—nice.

Oh, you mentioned—okay, let's go—let's go a little bit into that side of you. Like, you mentioned LARPing, live action role-playing, Cons, that sort of thing.

BISWAS: Mm-hm.

ARJUNE: And what—how did your I guess identity as a gay male, like, contribute to that—those hobbies, and did those hobbies develop here at Dartmouth, or did they develop beforehand?

BISWAS: So I was into video games as a kid. I didn't have that many because we weren't that wealthy, right? I told you my parents spent all their money on my education.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: Like, we didn't have a car, which was weird for Abu Dhabi. I wanted a car. We did not have a car, for example. I had a few video games. Not a lot. I never bought a video game console. I was weird—I was, like, *Oh, that seems like a waste*. Even my myself, I'm like, *No, I can play the games on my computer. Then we can use the computer for other things. It seems like a waste to have just a PlayStation or whatever, or a Game Boy*.

So I played with my friends a lot. My friends had a lot of video games. We played together a lot. And I was gaming there. I remember getting into *Neverwinter Nights*, which I don't know if you know is a video game from the 2000s, based on *Dungeons & Dragons*. I remember that is what piqued my interest in *Dungeons & Dragons*. I mean, you couldn't really get *Dungeons & Dragons* in the UAE; it was, like, not there. I don't know if it was, like, illegal or what, but it didn't exist there, right?

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: It might have been something about the whole, like, "Oh, it's—it's about witchcraft and things," and—I don't know, right? Because the UAE banned a lot of things for those kinds of reasons.

So I was into it. I, like, someone had given me the, like, first edition books on CD that he had or something, whatever. But I really started getting into that at Dartmouth. Like, I remember getting into board games more at Dartmouth—like, because I was friends with a lot of Alpha Theta people, and they do a lot of board games stuff. The Board Game Co-Op didn't exist till, like, later in my career at Dartmouth, but freshman year it didn't.

And then freshman spring I took Mary Flanagan's game-design class with my friends Max [J. Seidman, Class of 2012] and Luke. Max is now—is a—is now Mary Flanagan's senior game designer at Tiltfactor and Resonym.

And that's when I started doing board games. I started doing roll-playing games part way through, like, after that, at Dartmouth. I had, like, Alpha Theta, Phi Tau friends. Like, there were a couple of Taus, including Stephanie [A. Pignatiello, Class of 12]. Stephanie was in this—in this roll-playing group, by the way, which is why—I remember, we were playing this campaign that—that our DM [Dungeon master] Chris had—

ARJUNE: Chris Budden [spelling unconfirmed]?

BISWAS: No, Christian Guterra [spelling unconfirmed].

ARJUNE: Oh, okay.

BISWAS: Chris Budden was in the group, but he was not the DM. So—so there was a Christian and a Chris, both in the group. But Christian was running this campaign—Christian and Chris at this time are both dating Stephanie. And so we—you know, we were playing the thing—and then Stephanie died, we, like, stopped playing for a few weeks, and when we started again, we said, "We're playing a different game completely. I'm not playing—we're not continuing this game, because it will be weird not having Stephanie there. That would be, like, a weird hole," you know?

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: But, yeah, so I started doing that. Would it seem, like, queerness had much to do with the gaming? I don't actually

think so. None of my queer friends really—in quote marks, “queer friends”—friends who were queer—like, people who I did queer stuff with, like GSX and stuff—were gamers, really, really. So it was, like, Taus and stuff who I played with. And, yeah, the Taus are—like, there are a lot of queer people, but I think most people in my group were not, except for, like, Stephanie. Like, me and Stephanie were the queer people in the group.

But, yeah, I don’t think so, although in New Y- —like, once I—like, after undergrad, I went to grad school. I went to New York, right? And there’s a lot of gaming going on, and that’s when I also starting LARPing. I discovered that I—I did—in a theater festival that I had an interactive theater piece in, [Nicholas] “Nick” Fortugno—he’s a famous game designer. He, like, made *Diner Dash*, for example.

But he had a—he had a LARP there, and I played it, and that was my first LARP. I was like *Oh, wow!* It was a intense LARP—about, like,—about, like, guilt and forgiveness and stuff. It was cool. It’s called *Ghost Engines in the Sky*.

But in New York, I started making, like,—like, throughout my life, I had—most of my close friends were straight dudes. But now most of my friends are queer dudes because I live in a city with a lot of queer people. And I started meeting more queer gamers and stuff here, and then—you know, and then they’re also—now I know more about the game world because I’m immersed in it a lot, and I know games about queerness.

So I just [on March 27, 2019] published an article in *First Person Scholar*, an essay about—it was called “Possibilities for Queer Community-Building through LARP” and talks about, like, LARP’s specifically about queerness and—and how they can help community-building and stuff.

So now it’s become more of a thing, and talk about being queer and a game designer and, like, intersections of those two, and—but, like, I don’t think—I don’t think it started with, like,—I don’t think it initially contributed to—they were, like, just two different things about me. You know, like, I was a gamer, and I’m a queer person.

ARJUNE: Gotcha.

BISWAS: Though I do remember when Adam and Nick, my boyfriends from Columbia, were—would come up, they never managed to come up at the same time, unfortunately, because of schedules, but when they would come up, I would—they would stay with me, of course. And I would take them gaming.

Like, I remember Nick once came during DartCON, at—when Alpha Theta used to host DartCON. And I remember we went and played a lot of games there. And now Nick has decided he isn't really into role-playing games. But, yeah, it was this thing I brought him into. He—It's really sad, because Nick is really fun to role play with. Like, he's super fun at the table. But he doesn't really like it that much, so that was, like, *Uhh!*

ARJUNE: I see. I mean, did you only do *Dungeons & Dragons* for—like, while you were in college, or did you go to other RPGs [role-playing games]?

BISWAS: So in college, when I started with Christian and all that, we started with *Pathfinder*,—

ARJUNE: Oh, okay.

BISWAS: —which is, you know, very similar to *D&D*.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: But that's our main campaign. And then at one point, we took a break from our campaign, I started running a *D&D 4E* campaign, and then we kind of stopped that, and then we— and then we started *Pathfinder* again, a different campaign that I was really excited about, and then Stephanie died we stopped that. We tried things: *Vampire: The Masquerade* for a bit. That was fun. We played, like, a number of sessions—like, six, seven, eight sessions. Maybe a bit less. But then we—we stopped that for some reason. Oh, I think because our DM, Justin, Justin Norshack [spelling unconfirmed] he's a Tau. We—he, like, was off or something that term. We started doing another *Pathfinder*—there was a lot of *Pathfinder* in college.

And then in New York, I started *D&D* because I would—I remember when I visited New York to visit Adam and Nick, I would go this game store. I found—I Googled and found a game store where they ran official *D&D* events, in Brooklyn. The Twenty Sided Store. I still go there sometimes.

And so I went there with them and played *D&D* there, and when I moved to New York, I kept going there and doing more *D&D*, but as I was in the store—and—and found some more game people and things, I started discovering other kind of role-playing games. And now I still like *D&D*, but now I—I mean, I was a game designer, and one thing I do is I—I just try a lot of different games. Like, each time I try and run a different game, a different game, a different game to experiment with different systems and different things. But—yeah.

ARJUNE: Awesome. I'll have to have a separate conversation with you about RPGs at some point. [Chuckles.]

BISWAS: Hee-hee-hee.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

So I guess going back to your experiences at Dartmouth. You've mentioned a lot about it already, about Phi Tau and about Alpha Theta, Greek life in general. You mentioned not wanting to rush Greek life, like, but then you ended up in Phi Tau. What ultimately led you to rushing—rushing, I guess?

BISWAS: So I, when I came to Dartmouth, had the impression of frat life that you have from popular media, right?

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: Like, *Oh, it's like—Ahhh! Ragers and destruction* and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And even at Dartmouth, which is pretty frat-y, it's not *really* like that, right? I mean, people also say that Dartmouth has nothing compared to, like, the big southern schools, where Greek life is super huge, right? So I don't—I don't have that experience, so I don't—I can't comment really on that. But I had this perception that Greek life was, like, evil, sort of.

I remember orientation, Tau had a Milque and Cookies night or something during orientation, like a special M&C for orientation. And I remember going into the house, and not a lot of people were there. There were people downstairs. And I remember stepping in and then just losing my nerve and, like, *No, I don't want to go in*, and I left. I remember that. That was Tau, right? That was funny.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: But then I started—I—at Cocktails I met Mike Lefkowitz, who is a '9 or a '10—I think a '10. And I met him at Cocktails, and I remember thinking, *He's really hot*. But he was—he was—he was telling me about Tau. And so I went—I remember—he said, “You should come by”, and so I remember going to Tau, but it was some night where all the brothers had left the house. The only person in the house was Lisa Chou [spelling unconfirmed], who was a grad student, you know, brother and stuff. So that was awkward. She was, like, “No one's here.”

And so I decided to chat with her a bit, and we played some, like board game together. I think it was *Space Pirate Amazon Ninja Catgirl* that we played together. And we were laughing about it. And then I started getting hives because I'd eaten shrimp, and she got freaked out. [Chuckles.]

ARJUNE: Oh, no!

BISWAS: And so anyway, I remember that. But that's what made me more comfortable: *Oh, Phi Tau has, you know, interesting people*. And slightly different than the other Greek houses. And so I went—I went—I had Thanksgiving dinner? I might be messing up the order of things. But anyway,—but I remember that's when I started, like, kind of going to the house. I started making friends with people in the house. I became what's known as a “house pet” because I hang out at the house when I'm not a member. I remember storing my stuff there, one of the breaks, and speaking out about not having anywhere to store things. And then I stored it at Tau, so that was nice.

And so I started enjoying Tau. And then I was—I still had this idea, *But, no, I will not join a Greek house*. So I remember Ashley [E.] Morishige [Class of 2011]. We were in Thayer. She was talking to me, and she was like, “Well, if—if you like Tau, it’s a good idea to join because if everyone liked Tau but didn’t join, then Tau wouldn’t exist as a space.” And I remember thinking about that, really, and I went, *Ohhhh! That’s a good point. You have to support things you care about.* [Both chuckle.]

And so I rushed—I rushed Sig Nu because they were taking me to hibachi dinner and things, and I’m, like, *Sure, I’ll rush Sig Nu*. I rushed Alpha Theta, and I rushed Tau, and I got bids from all three. And that was in fall. But I knew I wasn’t going to join in fall because—you know, because of ENGS 21, I’m like, *No*.

But I knew I was going to join Tau in the winter. So I joined Tau in the winter. My [unintelligible], like, failed, but, you know.

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.]

BISWAS: Yeah. I had an epic [unintelligible] planned, but it didn’t work, so that was that.

ARJUNE: That’s okay.

You mentioned something to me before we had this interview, something about your house name, the story behind your house name.

BISWAS: Yeah.

ARJUNE: Would you mind expanding into it and, like, your house name in general? I think it’s really interesting.

BISWAS: Yeah. So—so Needa [spelling unconfirmed] was a big gamer, right?

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: And so I was in the house. This was before I joined, right? I was in the house, and Needa was, like, playing *World of*

Warcraft or one of the MMOs [Massively Multiplayer Online, short for Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games]. I don't know which one it was. And she was like, "I hate making names—I need a new name," and so my aim was *I'm going to make a ridiculous, silly name and just blurted out*. She'd picked that name.

So I picked—I'm, like, Needa, you should name your character Astrolingus Pustulation." And she's, like, "What?" She was, like, laughing. "What the hell's that?" And I'm, like,—you know, it was just a silly joke I was making, right? And that was really funny.

And then—it was very funny. [Chuckles.] I was thinking that was funny because Jack and Andrew and a bunch of them—a different Andrew from the one I was talking about before, the Tau Andrew this time—were all singing in the [Dartmouth] Glee Club, and so all the '12s who were going to join Tau could be able to become friends or were friends already—went to that.

And that was ending after Think Night was going to start. But we told some of the brothers, like, "Hey, we are going to be at this concert to support the other '12s singing. We're gonna—" It was—it was—I think it was [Wolfgang Amadeus] Mozart's *Requiem [in D minor]* concert or something.

And I remember the brothers got really w- —that message didn't get around or something super well because the brothers got really worried that none of the '12s were actually going to Think, because none of them showed up on time. [Chuckles.]

But—oh not Think, go to, not Think, but go to Pledge Night or whatever it's called—Think Night, Think Night—yeah—that we'd all decided not go to Think Night. And they were, like, "Oh, no, what's happening?" But we were all late because of concert.

But we finally showed up, and, you know, all the secret stuff and all that was happening, Think Night—you know, at the time when they announced your house names, they were, like, "And Sharang, your house name is"—and then I think it was—no, it wasn't—but I think it was Ken Lai [Class of 2012]

who said, “Your house name is Astrolingus,” and I burst out laughing, because I had come up, weeks before, with that name, with this random name for Needa, for her MMO character.

And—but Laura had been in the room, and Laura was a ling[ui]stics major. I remember I turned to Laura, and she, like, grinned at me because, you know, we’d come up with—she—I’d come up with the name, and I knew she was in the room there, so she must have suggested that. But, yeah, so Astrolingus was my house name. I still use that name on, like, online forums and things now. And that was really fun, yeah.

ARJUNE: Awesome.

BISWAS: Yeah. Also a big part of my Dartmouth life, I should—I probably should mention—is that I dated a Phi Tau brother for three years. Like, Shaun [Y. Akhtar, Class of 2012] and I dated for three years at Dartmouth.

ARJUNE: Oh, wow! I didn’t know that.

BISWAS: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. And he’s my closest Dartmouth friend now. I see—every time I come to Hanover for whatever reason, I always, like, stay with him a night and—at least a night, and we hang out. I—I literally talk to Shaun every week, not—there’s rarely a week where either one of us doesn’t call the other. So yeah, a good—good friendship that lasted.

ARJUNE: Just to clarify, Shaun Akhtar, just for the interview’s sake.

BISWAS: Yeah.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: Yes.

ARJUNE: Class of ’12. So—

BISWAS: Yeah, he works at the library now, so—

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: Yeah.

ARJUNE: Oh, I want to mention: There's this one thing that happened while you were at Dartmouth. It was the Dimensions [of Dartmouth] protest and the cancellation of classes. That happened while you were on campus, right?

BISWAS: Yes. I actually don't—the Dimensions—I don't remember—I remember Dimensions protest. I remember the cancellation of classes. It was—it was when the president—it was after Jim [Yong] Kim—I forget her name, was the president. She was the acting president. I always forget her name, because I didn't know her that well and stuff.

But, yeah, when she was president, there was a thing about, like, Title IX stuff and all that stuff, and so there was a cancellation of classes for a whole day, and there was a speech that she gave in front of Dartmouth Hall that I remember going because it was, like, important. I don't remember that much about it, honestly.

ARJUNE: Okay. Yeah. I remember, like, there was this thing in the—article in *The D* about it, and you mentioned how, like, there was all this programming and hopefully it helps with the—with awareness of everything because—

BISWAS: I mean, Dartmouth—okay, so Dartmouth—there was programming and stuff,—

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: —but it wasn't, like,—it—it was—like, there was still, like,—there was still, like,—like, it was still small community, and so there was still, like, issues that were happening.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: Like, there were still, like, people getting called bad things like that, so—I think it was good that we had this shutdown. It wasn't necessarily just about queer issues, but—yeah. And I remember—I remember there was a thing where some—one of the ranking sites or whatever, *U.S. News [& World Report]* or one of those, said Dartmouth is, like, number one

in queerness or queer campuses or something. And I remember us being, like, “Huh! Interesting. Are we? Really?”

And I remember Bronski, Professor Bronski, released a statement about, like, “I’m very glad with the grade. This does not mean that we shouldn’t move forward, and there’s always room to improve,” like, a diplomatic way.

But I remember there used to be the sentiment that Dartmouth wasn’t a great bastion of queerness. That’s maybe one reason why IvyQ was so great. I mean, again, I didn’t have—I didn’t have really a negative experience at Dartmouth, but I know some people didn’t have a positive experience.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: So yeah.

ARJUNE: Got it. Hmm.

Oh, yeah. While you were at Dartmouth, you also act in a sort of—you act in this play called *Nymphosomnia*. It was, like, a *Wired!* play. Do you remember anything about that?

BISWAS: I—I remember enjoying *Wired!* a lot. It was super fun. That ti—do you know what that one was about? I don’t remember being in a play called *Nymphosomnia*. I might be wrong.,

ARJUNE: Not exactly. There wasn’t much information on the play, itself. I just—I thought of the name, and how it—and I was, like, *Oh, this sounds like something Sharang would do.*

BISWAS: Yeah. I don’t—if that was a *Wired!* play, I don’t think I was in it. I remember being in a lot of *Wired!*—I loved *Wired!* Does *Wired!* still happen?

ARJUNE: I believe so, yeah.

BISWAS: *Wired!* was always amazingly fun. I loved *Wired!* *Wired!* is how I tried to sink my bid at Phi Tau, actually.

ARJUNE: Okay.

BISWAS So what I did is one of the ushers at Wired! was my friend Myuka [Kowaguchi, Class of 2011], and I told her—she knew the Taus because she recognized them, because she was friends with me. I’m, like, “Here is my bid, Myuka. If any other Taus come in, slip the bid into their program and then hand them the program. They don’t really know you. It’ll be great.” And she was, like, “Awesome!”

And I told everyone, “Hey, everyone, come to my show. Really come to my show.” But it was M&C Night,—

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: —and none of them came. I was like [unintelligible]. I’m like, *At least one person come to my show.* None of them came, so no one got the bid, and so I was sad.

So after Wired!, I remember I went to Tau, and I was hanging out in the library with Elise Spalda [spelling unconfirmed] and [unintelligible] for going on. And I handed her the program with the bid in it. I’m, like, “Oh, I brought you a program, Elise.” She was like, “Oh, thanks. Sorry I couldn’t come.” “That’s okay.” And then I left.

And then, like, two minutes later, the Think bell started ringing.

ARJUNE: [Laughs.]

BISWAS: And she just realized, “What?”

But I remember Wired! Was super fun—I remember once thing that was really funny. I was—I was into theater, right? As a kid, my school didn’t have any theater stuff. The Indian community social center did, like, theater stuff, and I was part of that a bit, and I was really into it. (I’m still into it. I make interactive theater.)

But I remember joining the theater scene at Dartmouth, and I remember being disappointed in the freshman year that there weren’t any queer boys. Like, all the dudes in the theater scene were straight, apart from me. And it was so frustrating to me. I’m, like, *What? Isn’t theater where there’s supposed to be a lot of gay boys?* It was very funny.

But, yeah, I really lived Wired! It was super fun. I remember the first Wired! play I was in was written by two Dog Day [Dog Day Players] members. It was called *Give Me Back My Goat-Boy: The Nancy Hernandez-Vanderbilt Story*. So fun. I mean, yes, I'm romanticizing it because it was the first Wired! play I did. It was probably the best Wired! Play I did, because—it was written by these two hilarious Dog Day people. They were so funny.

Oh, one of them—I think it was Tabatha [spelling unconfirmed] who became a famous playwright later. But anyway, it was really funny. The last minute of the play, we also added a—a scene which was, like, previously on—duh, duh. And it was, like,—oh, and I remember that's how I became friends with Charlene Rhea [spelling unconfirmed], who I've cast in some of my shows—who I should text; I haven't spoken to her in a bit. But, yeah, so—yeah.

ARJUNE: Nice.

It's weird think that there weren't any, like, queer men back in the day in, like, theater. Exactly, you'd think.

BISWAS: Yep, I remember being super disappointed. Like, *where are all the gay dudes? Why are they not in theater?* I mean, I remember that was when there were not a lot of out dudes at Dartmouth in general.

ARJUNE: Ah. Yeah.

BISWAS: So it was—but I remember being, like, very disappointed. I'm, like, *I wanna meet more gay dudes. Why are there none in theater?* But I also liked theater, so I just kept in theater, obviously, but—yeah.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: So I was one of the few—like, there was always a handful of people who were in the theater scene who weren't majors or minors, and I was one of them.

ARJUNE: Okay.

BISWAS: I did a lot.

ARJUNE: Gotcha.

BISWAS: And auditioned a lot of stuff, so—

ARJUNE: Nice.

So you said you're also a Sexpert [Sexual Health Peer Educator]. How did you get into that?

BISWAS: Yeah. So Sexpert was this organization at that time run through Dick's House [Dick Hall's House]. It was sexual health and pleasure peer advisers. It was run by Kari Jo Grant, who now works in student employment. At that time, worked in this advising capacity. She was in charge of the mental health group and this group and a couple of other things. And she was great. Like, I'm friends with—like, whenever I come to Dartmouth, I visit her as well. So, for example, right before—the day before I saw you, Leanna, I had lunch with Kari Jo, right?

And I remember not knowing as much—like, freshman year, I remember I missed the training. Like, I just didn't know it was happening. I didn't have time to sign up for it. But I'm, like, *Oh, wow! What is this? It's awesome!—duh, duh.*

And then someone on my friend's floor in McCulloch [Hall] was training, and she told me it was great, and—but I was, like, “Oh, wow, that's so interesting.” I was into, like, sexuality stuff all the time. And so I decided, *Sophomore fall I'm going to apply for this.* So freshman spring, I, like, applied or whatever. And I got in. And then I made my friend Andrew apply. This is the same engineer Andrew who was my best friend at Dartmouth back then. We've obviously—he's in California now, so we don't talk as much, but, you know, we're still close, I'd like to think. You know, he stayed over for New Year's Eve. That was nice. But we were very close then.

And I'm, like, “Andrew, let's do it together.” Andrew is this, like, straight, like, frat bro, wrestler, engineer. Yeah, it was great. He was—we were like, “Let's do it together.” So we did the training together, and that's where I met Myuka as

well, and Myuka and I were very close. Like, she started walking home with us because she also lived in East Wheelock [Cluster], and we [unintelligible] walk together, and that's how we became good friends

But Sexpert training. I remember being very into it. It was fun. I loved being a Sexpert. I actually had—like, it's actually a thing that people—that peer advisers. One thing was not a lot of peer advisers get a lot of peers asking them for advice. Like, that's actually a thing. Like, that wasn't—that was—they were trained for that a little bit, but that didn't actually happen that much.

And part of it was that—well, it's good that they're there, but I actually had, like, two, three people come up to me and actually ask me for Sexpert advice, and I thought, like, *Whoa!* Like, one of my friends was Muslim, and she came up to me and said, "I want to talk to you about what it means to have sex and be Muslim and stuff." And I wasn't Muslim, but I also grew up in a Muslim country, so maybe that's why she felt comfortable talking to me and stuff.

And, you know, I'm—I'm good at talking to people. That's a skill I have. I remember so people did come to me for—which was nice. But mainly I did—I—we organized programming.

I don't know if the Sex Fest still happens, it was this, like, little fest- —like, prog- —like day, where all these booths get set up about different sex things. Used to happen every year. Does it still happen, do you know?

ARJUNE: We had Consent Day a couple of years ago, but we haven't had a Sex Fest in ages.

BISWAS: Oh! Yeah, I think it was Sex Fest, then it—it probably morphed into Consent Day. Like, it used to be about consent and stuff as well.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: Yeah, I think that's what it was called. Yeah. I remember going to the one at Brown [University] or something at one point. Anyway, but—and then—I really liked that, and then

I—and then all of us did—like, Andrew and I, like,—well, mainly me—did—organize a lot of programming.

And then Myuka organized the whole Orchid Campaign, which was really cool, where every—every person who identifies as a woman at Dartmouth got sent a hand mirror, a purple compact mirror, and the idea was to look at your, like, genitals—like, look at them?

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: Because the idea was, like, a lot of women are ashamed of—of—if they have a vulva of their like vulva stuff. And so Myuka organized this huge campaign. It was really interesting. It generated a lot of discussion and controversy and stuff.

And then I remember my senior year,—was it junior year?—I don't know. My junior or senior year, I decided to apply to be a Sexpert intern. There are always two interns, who are, like, paid and everything. So I applied. I got it. For the whole year—because I was there the whole year. And that was really fun.

I decided immediately I'm, like, "I want to revamp the training curriculum. Kari Jo, we're gonna do this." And she's, like, "Okay." And so once a week I met up with her, and then together we worked on the changes we were going to make to the curriculum for the training, that we then implemented the following training. And that was really exciting for me. I really liked doing that. It was really fun. It also felt like, *I'm—I'm really into education stuff*, so that was very good.

And then I also organized a series of events called Sex Talks, which were different, like, discussion topics. And they were not as much discussion; they were actually more about informational. So, like, there was one talk we gave, like, different kinds of condoms. And so Kari Jo and I went and bought different kinds of condoms and, like, talked about them.

And there was one talk about abstinence. Only one person showed up to that one [chuckles], I remember. And, like, what does it mean to not have sex?

I don't remember all of them, but I remember—oh, there was one that Rebecca Schneider [spelling unconfirmed] and I did, about, like, oral sex. And I remember [chuckles]. I, like, drew a vulva on the blackboard—

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.]

BISWAS: And Rebecca, was like, “Um, let me correct that.” [Both chuckle.] I was, like, “Oops.” So yeah, I remember it was—it was—it was, like,—it was really fun. I really enjoyed being a Sexpert. I think I did a lot of—I think I did—like, I brought to campus, while an intern and also—not intern. I brought— [unintelligible] official speakers, I remember, so sophomore summer, before I was Sexpert intern but I was still a Sexpert, I brought Barbara Carrellas to campus. I was funded by the frats, actually. I got GBX, Alpha Phi, all the co-eds, and something else. Oh, and then COSO [Council on Student Organizations]. Not COSO. Yeah, Collis [Center for Student Involvement], whatever. Yeah, COSO. Yeah, COSO, to fund this lady.

She did this workshop. She, like, a *Tantra* practitioner. And she did this workshop called “The Gender Neutral Orgasm.” I remember we had a room in the Hanover Inn, like, this big ballroom or whatever, where we all did these exercises. It wasn't, like, a sexual experience; it was, like, breathing and stuff, but it was—you know.

I remember that was fun because my freshman year, I had gone to a bondage workshop at Panarchy—

ARJUNE: Nice.

BISWAS: —and learned a lot, and that's really formative, actually, because now I do bondage stuff. I remember that, and I loved that, and that was what inspired me.

So I brought Barbara Carrellas to campus, and then one year, for [Dartmouth] Pride, I brought, Oh Megan—Megan Andelloux, who at that time was the head of the Center of Sexual Health and Pleasure in Rhode Island. I had seen her speak at IvyQ. No, not IvyQ. I had seen her speak at another queer conference that we got funding to go to.

That was another thing: Every year, Pam Misener would fund a small group of queer students to go to a queer conference somewhere, like we went to Transcending Boundaries in Worcester, Massachusetts. We went to Transforming something [Translating Identity Conference], which was at University of Vermont. We went to a number of nearby ones.

And with the Sexperts I went to this reproductive justice conference at Hampshire [College]. That was really—with Myuka. That was really fun.

That was one thing: I got a lot of—I went to a lot of interesting conferences while at Dartmouth and got student funding for that. So that was great.

Anyway,—but—so I remember bringing—so I brought Megan Andelloux to—to give this talk, and she—she’s an amazing speaker, and she was very informed, and she, like, gives out freebies and things. I got my first paddle through her. She gave it to me.

ARJUNE: Wow!

BISWAS: Yeah. And then I remember my—I don’t remember which year it was, but I—so there is a famous porn star named Brent Corrigan [stage name of Sean Paul Lockhart], a famous gay porn star, and he had a lot of controversy, because he actually entered porn when he was under age and lied about his age. But then—so there was a whole thing about him. But then he was really getting involved in, like, safe sex activism. Like, anti-HIV stuff and, like, using condoms and things. He was working for an organization called D.C. Fuck It [The D.C. Center for the LGBT Community FUK!T Condom Distribution Program] which was about using condoms and stuff.

And so I was, like, *It’ll be great to bring him to campus*. I was inspired because Yale had tried to bring him, and they were denied. Like, they were about to bring him, and then some organization at Yale cancelled it. So I’m, like, *We’re gonna nab him*.

So I remember I wrangled to get him. I talked to the Sexperts, so they funded us. The SAPAs [Sexual Assault Peer Alliance] funded us. And then I got sociology and gender studies both to fund us. And he was great. He didn't ask for honorarium; he just asked to have his stuff covered—like, flights and food and stuff.

ARJUNE: Nice.

BISWAS: So he—and lodgings and things. So he—I brought him to campus. He stayed at the [unintelligible] at Tau. I remember going to lunch with him. And I was, like, *Well, he's here. We're gonna use it well.* So I organized a talk with him and a lunch with queer leaders on campus with him. I liked to use him fully. So that was really nice. I hung out with him, like, at the restaurant for a bit. He was a nice dude.

But I remember that was really fun because he spoke in Kemeny [Hall]. I think it was either 007 or 008. I don't know which one, but one of those two rooms. And the room was paaaacked! Like, it was so full. People were sitting on the stairs. It was, like, a fire code violation. Like, everyone was super interested in hearing this, like, porn star talk!

And I remember at one point he got really nervous. I felt bad cause he got super nervous, and he, like,—he lost his train of thought and just stood there silently for, like, thirty seconds. I'm, like, *Oh, no!* But he started again. It was great. Because he doesn't normally give lectures. [Both chuckle.] He's a porn star.

And then—then—but in the talk, like, I'd gone for a walk with him and we're chatting, and he was—he was a really interesting person. He's really intelligent. And so in the lunch—for the dinner with the students, he was a lot less nervous. You know, he was, like, more casual. And he had a lot of great ideas and thoughts, and he was really interesting.

I remember that was—I really liked that I did that. I'm, like, *I'm glad that I was one of the people who brought a porn star to an Ivy League campus to give a lecture.* I felt really good. It's a good thing to de-stigmatize sex work and things like that.

And I remember after he left—like, the next day or something,—he had gone back to California. I remember I was in the line at the Hop[kins Center for the Arts] for food, and the—the—the person working the line, who was serving food, was, like, “Oh”—because I—when he gave a lecture, I opened it. I’m, like, “We’re welcoming blah, blah. I’d like to thank the departments” and blah, blah, blah. But I remember the guy who served me food said, “Oh, you’re the guy who brought Brent Corrigan! That was so fun! Thanks for doing that.” And I thought, like, really proud. [Both chuckle.] I was, like, *Eee! Yay!*

So, yeah, I did a lot of work—like, I was very active in the queer life and the Sexperts life at Dartmouth, right? Like, I brought all these events in, and I was on the Pride planning committee a few times. I was on the IvyQ planning committee the few times. I don’t think I was ever president of GSX. I didn’t want to be. I was, like, “No. No.”

But I did a lot of, like, organizing of events and—and then after Dartmouth, I was involved—I was in DGALA [Dartmouth Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Alumni/ae Association], the DGALA Board [of Directors] for three years. I just ended my tenure end of last year, because I decided not to re-run because my life was getting a bit crazy. I do want to later in the future because I really appreciate DGALA.

And I remember getting into DGALA as an undergrad because alums would come, and we would have lunch with them and stuff. The first time I went, I’m, like, *Yay! Free lunch*. But I’m, like, *Oh, this is actually cool. They’re, like, really cool, like, gay alums*. So yeah.

ARJUNE: Wow.

BISWAS: I talk a lot.

ARJUNE: Yeah? You—no, no, no, it’s great.

You mentioned the—the Pride, yes. How was—

BISWAS: Yeah.

- ARJUNE: How was organizing Pride? That must have been a lot.
- BISWAS: I was—okay, I was never the head organizer of Pride. I don't think I wanted to be.
- ARJUNE: Okay.
- BISWAS: But—so I always did the small—like, I also, like,—like, I think the way it worked, like, there was a Pride head—and then we would also, like, “I'll do this,” and I was, like, “I'll run this event,” and so there were, like,—I, like,—when I brought in, Oh Megan and when I brought in Brent Corrigan,—I don't think I was involved in bringing in Barbara—bringing in the bisexuality speaker; she was really great. I think I was involved in bringing in IvyQ. But, yeah,—but—yeah, I remember having a lot—I mean, you can tell, I liked organizing events and things.
- ARJUNE: Yeah.
- BISWAS: I really enjoyed that. So I was the vice president of the Coed Council. At that time, it was called the Coed Council, which was the organization that was, like, connecting Amarna, Phi Tau, Alpha Theta, [the] Tabard and Panarchy. You know, Panarchy, like, never showed up, and Amarna, we had to, like, fight to give them actual recognition because they technically weren't a Greek organization or whatever.
- ARJUNE: Still do.
- BISWAS: But they were way more involved than Tabard was a lot of the time. But I remember even with them as VP of Coed Council I would—I had funding to, like, make events, and I really tried to make events because the co-eds were bad at recruiting.
- And so I remember being, like, “We're gonna have an event that Coed Council is gonna fund, Casual Thursday [Improv Comedy at Dartmouth] performing at Phi Tau. Coed Council is gonna fund the Sing Dynasty [Dartmouth Sings A Capella] I think, to perform at Phi Tau,” especially—because I also really wanted Tau to host more of the events because all the other frats hosted— Tabard performances, right?

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: I remember seeing in different— in the male frats and the sororities. I remember seeing, like, the performances. I'm, like, "Tau never does that. We should do that. It would get more people into Tau and interested in us, right?" And I think after I was no longer on the Coed Council, that inclination stopped again. Like, Tau I don't think had events afterwards. I'm, like, "Guuuys, I tried to do this." Because we had people who became interested in the house after we did that.

But I was always interested in running campus events and things, in all different capacities. And so—same thing with Pride. I—I was, like, "I will help with getting this event off the ground and stuff," so—yeah.

ARJUNE: Nice.

BISWAS: That's why—I didn't do the major—major—I was never interested, I think, being the head of the thing, you know.

ARJUNE: Yeah. You were also social assistant at Phi Tau as well, so, I mean, this ties into all the event planning you did.

BISWAS: Yeah. I was—I was the social assistant at Phi Tau one quarter, because—because [unintelligible] the social chair was off campus, so I became the social chair for that quarter. Same thing. I would, like, organize things. Yeah, I was always into running—running stuff.

ARJUNE: Nice.

Oh, yeah, I wanted to mention—you mentioned living in East Wheelock [Cluster]. Is that the only place you lived in on campus, or did you live in other places?

BISWAS: Okay, freshman year I lived in Morton [Hall], East Wheelock. Sophomore year I lived in the International Affinity House [sic; International Affinity Program], which was in McCulloch in East Wheelock. Then I lived in the—in the sum- —oh, no, then the following year, I lived in the French Language Affinity House [sic; French and Italian Affinity Housing], which was in—what's that building? It's after the—after the—

after North Mass[achusetts Hall], the building right after that. If you're walking on Mass Ave., if you're going north—

ARJUNE: Hitchcock [Hall]?

BISWAS: Hitchcock. Yeah, it was in Hitchcock. Fancy rooms. It was really nice. And I remember I liked it a lot. I was one of the few people who actually spoke French properly there, not, like, speaking—I mean, who kept up the language a bit, because we were all supposed to speak only in French. We didn't do that, but the French grad student or exchange student, the one who comes from France, was on the floor, and Taymor [spelling unconfirmed] and I spoke exclusively in French.

ARJUNE: Nice.

BISWAS: I made— I tried to only speak to him in French. That was really nice. I lived in Hitchcock, and then—I mean, sophomore summer—I think freshman summer I lived in Hitchcock as well, when I was on campus doing research stuff—research stuff. But then senior year I lived in Tau.

ARJUNE: Nice.

BISWAS: And then fifth year I lived off campus. You have to live off campus fifth year, but I lived near the—near the high school, actually, fifth year.

ARJUNE: Gotcha.

BISWAS: Yeah, one of the summers, I lived in the house as well, I think. Because I was in Dartmouth for many of the summers. But I was in one summer lived in the house as well, at least a part of it. But, yeah, senior year I lived at the house, yeah.

ARJUNE: This is just me being curious: Where in Phi Tau did you live? Do you remember?

BISWAS: Yes, I lived on the top—it wasn't one of the fancy, named rooms.

ARJUNE: Okay.

BISWAS: I don't remember the number. I could point it to you. It's on the top floor. It's, like, I think the second room from the left.

ARJUNE: Okay. Gotcha.

BISWAS: If you take the south stairs, you go up, top floor, I think, yeah.

ARJUNE: Gotcha.

BISWAS: Because—yeah, I didn't live, like, the Peacock Room or the Sunshine Room or any of those cool rooms.

ARJUNE: Yeah. Gotcha.

BISWAS: And, of course, what—senior year,—no—yeah, senior—it must have been senior year, yeah. I, like, stayed at Shaun's room a lot. He was also in Tau. We, like, stayed in each other's rooms a lot.

ARJUNE: Okay. I was just wondering because I was wondering if I lived in your room. [Chuckles.]

BISWAS: Ha-hah! LOL [Laugh out loud].

ARJUNE: Yeah! [Laughs.]

BISWAS: LOL LOL LOL.

ARJUNE: Anyway, yeah, so—

BISWAS: I remember—even when I didn't live at Tau, though, I slept over a lot because I was, like, "I want to sleep on the couch here. It's late" or whatever.

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.]

BISWAS: That happened a lot, so—

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.] Yeah, that's a—that's a thing. [Chuckles.]

BISWAS: It's a thing. Yeah, it's a thing. It's also super comfy.

ARJUNE: It's so comfy! [Chuckles.] Yeah.

Let's see. So—oh, yeah, what do you think of the new Morton since you've been back, you've visited?

BISWAS: I haven't been inside. I didn't go inside.

ARJUNE: Okay.

BISWAS: But I remember being, like, *Oh no, Morton burn*—I texted Aryay [spelling unconfirmed]. "Aryay our dorm just burnt down." And she's, like, "Whaat?" And then I went back last week. I was—I was taking a walk. The weather lovely. I was taking a nostalgia walk, and I was, like, looking at Morton, the outside. And I remember I was, like, I—I remembered the emotion, the feeling I was having when I walked in and was exploring my dorm and, like, *Oooh!* It was—it was, like, empty because I arrived before Trips?

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: Because I was an international student, I was allowed to move in slightly earlier, because they do that, which is nice. You just go to S&L—S&L! You just go to S&S [Safety and Security], and, you're like "Hey!", And then they're like, "Sure. Whatever."

And I remember moving in a day or two before—my—my, like, whole [unintelligible] came to, like, help me, right? Like, my mom, dad and aunt and uncle came to help me move into Dartmouth.

ARJUNE: Oh wow.

BISWAS: Yeah. So, like, it was—it was cool. But I remember that they left, and then I remember being super excited, and I was walking around, and I remember meeting Aparna my floor mate, like, in only my towel, and being, like, "Oh, my God! Hi! You're my floor mate" or something. And—yeah, and then Aryay arrived later. We were texting, and—oh, my God! I can re-feel that feeling. It's, like, *Oh, my God!* [Chuckles.]

ARJUNE: Nostalgia.

BISWAS: What was that?

ARJUNE: Is it nostalgic?

BISWAS: Yeah, it is, though. I had a wonderful time at Dartmouth.

ARJUNE: Nice.

BISWAS: So, yeah, it definitely is.

ARJUNE: Nice.

What was it like being a fifth year? Like, was that experience any different from being, say, an undergrad?

BISWAS: Yeah, you definitely feel a bit less connected to campus. I managed to finagle taking a non-Thayer [School of Engineering] course my fifth year, so that was a little different. But I remember I was a trip leader every year, right?

ARJUNE: Okay.

BISWAS: I remember—at DOC [Dartmouth Outing Club], I mean, the first year DOC. I remember something like, “What year are you?” And, “Oh, I’m a fifth year.” “Are you a master’s?” I’m, like, “No.” “Are you a Ph.D.?” Like, “No.” They’re like, “What *are* you?” I’m like, “I’m a fifth year. It’s a thing at Dartmouth.”

It was definitely different. People were, like,—it’s a bit weird. It was—and I lived off campus, and I was less involved in campus activities, but you’re supposed to be more involved in Thayer stuff. It was definite- —definitely a bit strange, but not completely, you know?

ARJUNE: Okay.

You also mentioned being a Trip leader. I didn’t know you were a Trip leader. What was—what was that like? Was your identify, like, very open to your—your Trippies?

BISWAS: Yes, yes, definitely. That’s one thing I tried to do, right? I’m, like, you know,—because your Trip leader are some of the first upperclassmen you meet, that you, like, trust, right?

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: So I'm, like, "Yeah, I'm gay." Like, I made sure people knew that because then, you know, that would make them more comfortable in case *they* were coming out or gay or whatever, right? To show that there's queer life at Dartmouth. I was definitely very, like, open.

I loved being a Trip leader. It was super fun. I was Trip leader every year. I'm bad at outdoors-y stuff, so it was only for, like, easy hiking. I remember I did organic farming mainly, and then one year they put me on easy hiking, and I got really worried. I'm, like, *Oh, my God! What?* And Sarah [J.] Bourne [Class of 2012], my colleague, was, like, "Sharang, don't worry. Easy hiking is actually easy. We're going to be walking through fields of flowers." I'm, like, "But I've never hiked before. Ahhhh!"

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.]

BISWAS: And she, was, like, "Sharang, you'll be fine." I'm, like, "Okay." I did organic farming. Avery Yen [Class of 2013] was my Trippie, by the way.

ARJUNE: Oh, nice.

BISWAS: Yeah. So I had organic farming, organic farming, easy hiking and then cabin camping,—

ARJUNE: Nice.

BISWAS: —I think was how—were the Trips I led. So it was fun to lead the '16s because I was a fifth year. [Chuckles.]

Can you give me a sec? I have this annoying hangnail. Can you give me one sec?

ARJUNE: Yeah, that's fine. [Silence from 1:39:30 to 1:39:38].

BISWAS: Oh, hangnails are the worst.

ARJUNE: Yeah, those are—those are super annoying.

BISWAS: They're so—it's—it's, like,—it's, like,—it—it shouldn't be the worst, but it's, like, just so irritating. *Oh, my God, this stupid—gahh!* Anyway. Yeah.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

All right. You're back?

BISWAS: Yes.

ARJUNE: Okay, awesome.

Yeah, so we were talking about Trips. Has the DOC always felt very—okay, in general, has the college always felt very welcoming and inclusive towards you and just towards, I guess,—how—how have you felt the college has treated people who are queer?

BISWAS: It's like I said. So, okay, so—so one thing—Nick Nazick [spelling unconfirmed] once told me—ahh, I don't know, junior year or something—is, like, "Sharang, you bulldozed your way through awkwardness," right?

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: So, like, I tend to do that. So, maybe I'm not the best sample, but I—I mean, again, I always felt great, but, remember, I did—there was a tension in that queer people—there were fewer of them, and, like, was there enough resources for them? I'm not sure. I made use of all the resources that *were* there. Like, I got funding to do all these things, and I got funding to go to different conferences and stuff. But I know a lot of people didn't feel as great.

And, of course, there wasn't as much visibility, at least the first few years, and there was a lot of heteronormative talk going on all the time because we had—I mean, we have this gendered construct of, like, the frat and the sororities, right?

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: And so there was a lot of, like, heteronormative thing—I remember, though, Trips for the '13s, my first year Trip leading, H Croo [Hanover Croo]. H Croo does their song as

a practice, in front of the Trip leaders, to be, like, “What do you think?” And I was the first group, I think, so I saw them. And one of them was the song about “Don’t hook up with— on Trips.” Like, don’t have sex on Trips, right?

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: That’s not the time and place for it. And the sketch that they did was very heteronormative, I remember, and so someone commented, like, “Hey, maybe you want to change that up.” And they were really great. They were like, “Oh, yeah, that’s a really good point.” Because apparently I think all the people on crew that year were straight people, and so they just overlooked that, and so—

And that was really cool to just hear them say, like, “You were right. That is a good point that we missed.” And then when I saw the actual H Croo safety talk, we—they, like, changed that up. It was really great. And I remember that being great.

I remember that—Pam Misener, I remember being—it was great to be, like, she—I liked her a lot, is what I mean. She tried to provide us with resources and things. I wouldn’t say it was, like, queer utopia, but I—I never felt bad, though I know other people did, and so I don’t want to invalidate their experiences.

ARJUNE: Gotcha.

BISWAS: Like, I know people who had, like, people scream things at them and stuff.

ARJUNE: Oh, wow.

BISWAS: Yeah. And, like, that was in my—I’m not—I’m not just saying I know like alum. I know people who are my year and stuff who had people scream things at them, so—

ARJUNE: Wow. Like, was this just from other Dartmouth students screaming things at them for their identity?

BISWAS: Yeah.

ARJUNE: Wow.

BISWAS: Yeah. And there was a thing at one point, where the gender-neutral house which used to be in the basement of—of that fancy dorm opposite the Gold Coast.

ARJUNE: McLane or Fahey? [Fahey/McLane Halls]

BISWAS: Fahey/McLane, yeah. I think Fahey/McLane gender-neutral housing [unintelligible] gender-neutral floor, which I didn't get into ever. I tried to. On the basement, someone once wrote, like, a slur on the—on one of the doors or something at one point. I really don't know what happened there. So, yeah, but it was weird.

ARJUNE: Wow.

So you mentioned all of this. The only thing you haven't really touched on much is—you—you studied at Thayer, and I know, like, a lot of Thayer students sort of they study there. They practically, like, live at Thayer. Did that have any impact at all on your—how much of an impact *did* it have on your experiences?

BISWAS: So I—another hangnail. Give me one sec. Sorry. It's the same one; it just grew again. One sec. [Both chuckle.] [No conversation from 1:43:53 to 1:44:01]. Yeah, so I actively tried to not do that. So I wasn't one of the engineers who, like, hung out only in Thayer. Like, I—every quarter, I tried—*I'm gonna take a class that I like that's not science*, right?

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: I, like, actively and strongly did that because engineering is the biggest major at Dartmouth. Like, it's—on paper, it's the same size or it's slightly bigger, but in practice there are, like, ten prerequisite classes to do the major, right?

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: You have to do math—if you didn't have a [unintelligible] math study, which I luckily did, you had to do Math 3, Math 8, Physics 13 and 14, Chem 5, ENGS 20 (which is a prereq, not a major class), and then, like, something else. So there

were, like, seven prereq classes, which is, like, you know, a lot of classes. So the major was the largest major.

So I—I wanted to do—the reason I picked Dartmouth out of all the schools I got into was its an interdisciplinary engineering major, and I was, like, *I wanna do this*. And so I made sure to take class outside—I made sure that—

I also, like—I mean, engineering was never my thing. I'm not an engineer now. So I wasn't really interested in the engineering clubs, right? Like, the formula racing, the—the—the engineering humanity, the—those ones, Engineers Without Borders, or whatever. I really wasn't into that. I wanted to do other things apart from engineering.

I didn't—I was a tour guide for Thayer, but that's because a) it paid super well, b) I was friendly with the staff, c) I'm good at tour guiding, right? And I'm good at talking.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: But I, like, you know, did more stuff with my fraternity. I did more stuff within theater. You know, I did a lot of other stuff. I didn't dare try—I tried not to like,—a lot of engineers have, like, a strong engineering social circle. I did not, actually. I wasn't actually close friends—no, that's not true. That's not true. But the close friends who were engineers of mine were also the other—who weren't, like, super—like, Luke [G.] Sanford-Long [Class of 2012], an Alpha Thetian [Alpha Theta Fraternity member] and Max Seidman, Alpha Thetian and Andrew—was a bit more engineering-y but, like,—yeah, all other '12 engineers? I was friends with them, but I wasn't, like, super, like, tight with that group.

And, I mean, my fifth year, I was even less enchanted doing my big cap term project. I was, like, *Oh, my God*. So—yeah. Like, I liked—I liked—I don't know, it wasn't I hated engineering, it was just I wanted to do other stuff.

And I remember when I was deciding, I was, like, *I think I like studying engineering more than I like practicing engineering*, which is why I decided to not be an engineer. But, yeah, so, like, I liked Thayer, but I—I didn't—that wasn't my main thing, which I think is positive, so—

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: It shaped my, like, trajectory now, so—

ARJUNE: I guess—

BISWAS: I *do* like Thayer. I go down and visit, but—yeah.

ARJUNE: Nice. I guess shaping—then, like, coming out of college, even,—did you ever work for Tiltfactor while you at Dartmouth, by the way?

BISWAS: Yeah. So I studied under Mary [Flanagan].

One sec, Leanna?

ARJUNE: Okay.

BISWAS: [He speaks to someone else away from the microphone from 1:47:05 to 1:47:09]. Sorry. So while—my freshman year, I took Mary's class, and then I interned for—for the lab, and, like, *Buffalo* and *Awkward Moment*—I'm, like, credited in, because I was an intern there—*Buffalo* especially. And then I was a TA [teaching assistant] for Mary for a class once. And then—yeah, so I was pretty heavily involved with Tiltfactor, yeah.

ARJUNE: Okay. Cool.

Yeah, so then that leads into, I guess, you know, it's graduation day, and you're looking at—oh, I guess it's graduation day after your fifth year. What did you do next?

BISWAS: So I was start applying in my fifth year to grad school. I remember talking with my parents, being, like, "I don't want to do engineering. I'm gonna apply for a related discipline." So I applied to four very different programs—or five, was it? I applied to ITP, which is the Interactive Telecommunications Program at Tisch School of the Arts at NYU [New York University], which is a hybrid technology-art-design weird program, where I ultimately ended up going.

I applied to Cornell School of Psychology [sic; Cornell University Department of Psychology], to a Ph.D. in human factors design. I applied to Tufts Scholl of Mechanical Engineering [sic; Tufts University Department of Engineering] for a master's in human factors engineering. I applied to MIT's [Massachusetts Institute of Technology's] Media Lab, and I applied to MIT's Comparative Media Department [sic; Comparative Media/Studies].

ARJUNE: Gotcha.

BISWAS: So they're all very different. But I remember being, like, *I want something that's, like, maybe techy, that has technology in it but is not engineering.* So I applied to all these things. And then—all, like, design—so the human factors design thing comes in.

And I decided that fifth year—because after my—after my—my—summer after senior year, before my fifth year, I did the engineering internship, FSP thing in Germany. I didn't like it. I mean, I liked Germany a lot, but I didn't like the work. I was, like, *Mm-mm. Not my thing.* I wasn't curious about it. I wasn't—like, they were saying how the last intern had tried all these new projects and done all these cool things. I'm, like, *Ha-ha-ha, I don't care—you know?*

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.]

BISWAS: I didn't want—I wasn't curious enough to keep going with that. And I'm, like, *Am I doing the wrong thing?* I mean, I don't know, right? Like, maybe it was just that project which was bad for me. Had I continued doing bioengineering, maybe if I had done a different project, I would have loved—been in love with it, been an amazing biotechnology person. But, you know, that didn't happen. So no point in dwelling, right?

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: And I'm not even saying that a value judgment, like, that would have been great. I really like what I'm doing now, so it's fine. I remember one person even told me, "It would be a shame if you become an engineer." And I'm, like, "Oh. Okay." But—but—but, but, but—so fifth year, I decided that

finally I—you know, I finished my fifth year, and I—and so I got into Tisch. I got into art school. So I went to art school. I went to—I went to NYU in this cool, weird program, after which I was—I'm like, *Yeah, grad school will give me more direction in life.* It did not, because the program I went to was similarly interdisciplinary and, like, whee! And wild. And take all these weird—weird, artsy courses. It wasn't very focused.

And so I came out being, like, *Great. I'm still—mmuh.* So I tried freelancing. I did all these small freelance jobs, but I—but I was determined to only apply for jobs that I would like. It took me two years. I just did a lot of freelancing and survived off of that and then took this job with the Medici Group, doing corporate consulting stuff, but I was the experienced designer because I had a lot of game design experience.

And I just, like, two weeks ago left that job because I realized, like, *You know what? The work I'm doing for them is slightly vanishing as well. We're not doing that kind of corporate training as much. In fact, I'm doing other work, which I don't enjoy as much, and I want—and my arts career is kind of blossoming, and I want to do more of that.* So, yeah, it was just—yeah. So now I'm freelancing again, so—

ARJUNE: Nice.

BISWAS: Freelance game designer, artist and writer. Lovely.

ARJUNE: Wow. That's—that's quite a journey.

You mentioned you were abroad in Germany, like, for the ENGS internship.

BISWAS: Yeah.

ARJUNE: Was that in Hamburg?

BISWAS: Yeah. So I did—was that what?

ARJUNE: Was that in Hamburg?

BISWAS: Yeah. So I did two foreign studies at Dartmouth. I did Toulouse. I did the French LSA+ [Advanced Language Study Abroad]—

ARJUNE: Nice.

BISWAS: —my sophomore spring. Everyone said, “Go in spring not winter. It’s lovelier,” and it was actually very lovely. And that was really cool because freshman fall I was a French drill instructor,—

ARJUNE: Ah!

BISWAS: —because I had a pretty high level of French at that time. And I decided to go into the LSA+ because I’m, like, *Well, I want to do a study abroad program and I have literally— don’t have to do any of requirements*, because I had all the requirements for the LSA+, which was French 3. And I tested out of French 3 by being—you know, by being drill instructor and all that stuff. And I have the AP French, right? So I—I could go—that was the only FSP I could do without any requirements.

ARJUNE: Wow.

BISWAS: So, like, that is what I am doing. So I went to LSA+ in Toulouse. It was super fun. And then end of fourth year, I went to the—I did, like, spring breaks in the Cheyenne River Sioux reservation and stuff, but those weren’t abroad; those were in America. And then I did—yeah, so I did the internship in—so you could do it as internship or as FSP, but as FSP it’s, like, really advanced, and a lot of the classes are in German, so it’s hard to find classes and stuff. And I’m, like, *I don’t want to do that*. They also didn’t have a lot of bio stuff, and I was a bioengineer, so I just did it as an internship and did a material science sort of internship. It was me—it was Aravind Viswanathan [‘12] and it was [Bernard T.] “Bernie” Roesler [‘12, Th ‘13], who were all ’12s, who went together.

ARJUNE: Nice.

BISWAS: Yeah.

ARJUNE: What are your thoughts, I guess, on, I guess, your—I mean, I feel like in general, Europe is a lot more, you know, liberating towards, I guess, queer identities. What were your thoughts on, I guess, your identity in Toulouse and in Hamburg?

BISWAS: I mean, that's what I thought, but, you know, apparently, like, France has a lot of big Catholic population and stuff, right? I mean, we went to gay clubs a lot in France, because there was one close to me that was, like, very low or no cover charge, and so I went a lot with—with the women. It was—it was two guys and, like, six women in my LSA+. It was, like, very funny.

ARJUNE: Gotcha.

BISWAS: And, like, I gossiped with my host family a lot. I remember we—my host mom—my host family were really great. They wanted me to experience different parts of France and different kinds of food because they know I like food, so my host mom took me to the mountains, to this, like, ancient Roman, like, cathedral because I was taking an architecture class and she wanted me to see it. She took me to Mass. And then she said, "I want you to try [unintelligible]," so we went to this, like, tiny restaurant in the mountains, to this restaurant to have [unintelligible]. It was great.

I remember she was, like, "Sharang, are you enjoying it?" and stuff, and I remember being, like, "Yeah! Also our waiter is so hot!" And she was, like, "Sharang, you're terrible!" But then she bends her neck and then she turns around she's like "But you're right."

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.]

BISWAS: And I had this great relationship with the host mom. At one point—we went to Montpellier for the weekend with the class, and then we came back—oh, for a week—and I came back, and she's, like, "How was it?" I'm, like, "Oh, well, the guys were super cute, and then we had amazing food, and the class was great." And she was, like, "Of course, Sharang, your priorities: dudes, then food, then academics." [Laughs.] But—I did something right. I got a citation in every

class in—In—on my LSA+, so that was—I did something right academically.

ARJUNE: Nice.

BISWAS: So—yeah. So I enjoyed France a lot. I really wanted to go, like, to gay spaces more. I didn't. I was so scared, because it was the first time in a country, like, sort of on my own, you know.

And then in Germany, I—I was—I didn't even speak the language. I was—I'm very fluent—I'm pretty fluent in French. I've lost some of it now, but I'm still pretty fluent in French. But in Germany I wasn't in German, so I was a bit more nervous. I went—I tried to—like, the dudes I was with were great dudes, but they were, like, straight dudes who were nervous about queer stuff, so they were, like nervous. They weren't in gay clubs with me, even though I went to all the, like, straight clubs with them all the time.

And then my friend Toby [spelling unconfirmed], who was a friend—he was a Tuckie [Tuck Business School student] who I'd become friends with my sophomore year, who was German. He was back in Germany, but—so I told him, "Hey, Toby, I'm in Germany." And so he came to Hamburg to visit me, and then he—he's older, so was, like, in his thirties.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: So he was a Tuckie, right? So he was already older when I met him at Dartmouth.

ARJUNE: I see.

BISWAS: He took us clubbing, because a) he's German, b) he's older and knows—you know. So that was really lovely. All four of us went with him, and they were a bit more confident with him as well because he's older and, you know, established. And we went to a gay club together. That was really fun.

So, yeah, I wanted to be more out and queer and do queer things in Germany, but I was just nervous because I was, you know, kind of on my own and—nyah. So I didn't as much.

ARJUNE: Gotcha.

BISWAS: I hooked up with one dude we met, and I was—he was, like, an American who went to Brown. I’m, like, *Really?*

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.] Oh, no!

BISWAS: I’m, like, *Really?* But—yeah.

ARJUNE: [Chuckles.] Hamburg is interesting, for sure, the club scene. I mean, all of it’s in its, like, red light district, so—

BISWAS: Yeah, we went to that district on the Reeperbahn—

ARJUNE: Yeah, the Reeperbahn.

BISWAS: Yeah. But, yeah, I mean, I had fun in Germany, like I said, but not in the internship. And I remember—I remember we took a trip to France. We took an extended weekend trip to France.

ARJUNE: Nice.

BISWAS: That was really nice. I took Aravind. Bernie went somewhere else, but Aravind and I went to France because I was, like, “Aravind, I know Paris a little bit. I speak French. Let’s go.” And he was, like, “Sure.” And it was—it was lovely. I got to speak French again and actually understand what people were saying, which was nice.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: But—yeah.

ARJUNE: Nice.

BISWAS: And in Rome [Italy] we did nothing. So while in Toulouse, we took a trip—a week’s trip to Rome. Had no queer stuff in Rome. Yeah. We did sightseeing stuff a lot, so—

ARJUNE: Nice.

BISWAS: Yeah.

ARJUNE: Wow. I feel like I've gotten so much of your life story [chuckles] in these two hours!

BISWAS: Yeah. Yeah. It's kind of wild, yeah. [Both chuckle.]

ARJUNE: Yeah.

Oh, you mentioned DGALA [pronouncing it with the emphasis on D].

BISWAS: Yeah.

ARJUNE: So when did you involve- —you mentioned before the interview that you had previously done oral history interview relating to DGALA.

BISWAS: Yeah. Because that was—so that was a DGALA thing, right? Just as a senior, the library was taking oral histories of some people, and I just happened to be one of them, so it's actually online. You can, like, read it.

ARJUNE: Nice.

BISWAS: But I think it was Rauner that was doing it. I don't remember. Cally Womick, Callista [R.] Womick, '13, took my oral—oral history [on May 12, 2013]. But—yeah.

And then DGALA—I was—I'm interested, starting early, because a lot of DGALA alums would come back and do activities, and they'd always try and meet undergrads, and then there was the annual breakfast in summer that people sometimes go back to, and I would attend that because they invited students to come. And I met alumni that way. And then I'm, like, *Great. This exists.*

So as soon as I graduated—as soon as I went to NYU, I started getting involved with DGALA, and I joined the board after NYU, I think. And I think the first event I ran was an Indian cooking night.

ARJUNE: Nice.

BISWAS: So I tried to do an event at NYU and Dartmouth together, but the NYU leaders were, like, a mess, so it never happened. Like, they skipped two of the calls we had.

ARJUNE: Oh, wow.

BISWAS: They just didn't show up to the call, and we're, like, "Uh, okay."

But the Princeton GALA did a lot of really active stuff, and I had done some stuff along—but, like, representing Dartmouth for the Princeton GALA. They do tons of activities. I even ran a LARP, like, for alums—like, Dartmouth and Princeton LARP thing.

ARJUNE: Wow! That's wild.

BISWAS: Yeah. Yeah. I'm actually going on Saturday—tomorrow to a Princeton event, so—

ARJUNE: Nice!

BISWAS: Repping Dartmouth, yep.

ARJUNE: Yeah. How often do you come by? I know you come by decently enough.

BISWAS: I come by usually for, like, work. Maybe once in a while I'll come by to visit Shaun and Max, but usually it's, like, I'm guest lecturing or it's a DGALA thing, like—like, it's the annual breakfast, or—or it's—when I was on the board, I would come back for CAGOW [pronounced KAY-gow], which is Class Officers—or Club and Group Officers Weekend. Not class. I'm not a class officer.

And, like, when I was working with the Medici Group, Dartmouth was a client at one point, so I came up for that. So I come up for, like,—I try and—a lot of activities happen at Dartmouth.

ARJUNE: Nice.

BISWAS: And, like, alumni things I'm involved in or, like, game design things. So I hope to do that more. I—I—I—I have, like,—you

know, it depends on, like, costs and stuff, but I want to keep visiting, especially since Shaun and Max, who are my closest friends from Dartmouth are still in the area. Yeah.

ARJUNE: Nice.

I was wondering, with your artwork and your—and your game designs, how much of, I think, your experiences here or your experience as, I guess,—as a gay male have, like, influenced your game design and your artwork?

BISWAS: I mean, so,—I mean, it is inescapable, right? Like, when you make art, like, parts of your identity feed into it that inescapably end up—you cannot get rid of, right?

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: Even if you try. Unconsciously, right? But, like, for example, my liberal arts background comes a lot when I write. Like, when I write a lot, I—I, like, literally draw—like, I was writing an article about—in *Kill Screen* on spatial design in games, and I remember I—I—my intro talks about Aztec monumental architecture. I literally went back to my notebook in [Deborah L.] Nichols' Aztec class and referred to things there and then wrote, right? So that and my Dartmouth experience in general is—

And then I make a lot of games—a lot of, like, queer people and characters and stuff. And, like, this new anthology I'm working on is about sex, and so it's—it's inextricably linked to queer identity.

I remember I was interviewed once by someone about queerness and showing queer representation in games. And I'm, like, "Well, we have to represent queerness in games because if we don't, then who well? Like, straight people aren't going to." And I just—so Shaun got me a birthday present, which is *Video Games Have Always Been Queer*, which is Bonnie Ruberg's new book, and that—I'm excited to read it. It talks—it talks about queerness above just representation of queer characters, so I'm interested in—in delving into that.

Yeah, but a lot of my art has, like, queer themes and stuff in it, so—not all of it, but a lot of it. I mean, I was in a—I was in an exhibition at the Insti- — Interna- — Institute of Contemporary Art in Philly [Philadelphia, PA], which is called *Tag: Proposals on Queer Play [and the Way Forward]*.

ARJUNE: Nice.

BISWAS: So—yeah. Sort of queer art exhibition thing, so—

ARJUNE: Nice.

Wow. I feel—again, like, I feel like this has been—this has been an amazing interview. So—

BISWAS: Thanks.

ARJUNE: Is there anything else you'd want to add to this SpeakOut interview—a topic I might not have touched upon?

BISWAS: Um—um—[in a much higher pitch] um—[back to lower pitch] um.

ARJUNE: [Laughs.]

BISWAS: I don't know. I said opportunities. Yeah. Ehhh. I can't think of anything right now.

ARJUNE: No, it's all good.

BISWAS: I thought of all these random things that I—yeah.

ARJUNE: Yeah. A lot of the alumni sometimes are, like, "Oh, I have this one agenda I need to push." I'm, like, "Okay. Here—here's your space."

BISWAS: No, lol. yeah.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: I don't know. I mean, yeah, I mean, yeah, I—I find Dartmouth to be very formative to my experience. I find Phi Tau to be very formative to my experience. Yeah, I find my queer involvement was very positive for me at Dartmouth. I was

super involved. In fact, I was—I was so—one of my friends—he was a grad student. He was telling me how he was, like,—hooking up with this, like, frat president. I’m, like, “What? Which frat president?” And he’s, like, “Oh, there’s this whole, like, underground gay scene at Dartmouth, where these closeted frat guys are, like, hooking up with each other, but they—like, no one can know.” And I’m, like, “I don’t know this!” And he’s, like, “Of course you don’t. You’re, like, super out and you’re in the queer leadership. They will never come near you to even speak to you socially in case suspicions and whatever comes that they’re gay.” I’m, like, “Oh, my God!”

ARJUNE: Wow.

BISWAS: So that was interesting.

I knew a guy at Dartmouth who if his parents found out he was gay, he would be disowned. So there was—that was always a thing. Like, DGALA maintains the Bourne Fund, which is a fund that we have activated while I was on the board, to help students at Dartmouth who are disowned by their family.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: Like, we activate the funding and give them funding—like, the school gives them scholarships and stuff; but we give them funding for, like, necessities, like clothes and, like, you know, like, things in life that you need money for.

ARJUNE: Yeah.

BISWAS: And we’ve had to do that, so still a reality. It’s very sad, but—you know.

ARJUNE: And it’s great that Dartmouth at least offers that fund, though. Or DGALA does, specifically.

BISWAS: DGALA offers the fund. Yeah, DGALA collects for it separately from Dartmouth, yeah. Remember, DGALA is its own 501(c)(3), so—

ARJUNE: Nice. Okay.

BISWAS: Yup.

ARJUNE: Wow. Again, thank you so much for everything. I think that's all I have.

[End of interview.]