

Gabrielle Damian Oral History LGBTQIA+ Interview

Interviewer: Cordelia Franda

December 17, 2020

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START

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CF: Alright, for the interview recording or for the recording's sake, I'm just going to introduce myself. I'm Cordelia Franda, and I'm conducting this interview. And could I ask you to introduce yourself first?

GD: Yeah, I'm Gabriella Damian. My pronouns are she/her, and I'm a senior.

CF: Alright, thank you so much. So, well I guess, I did-probably should like say right off the bat for the interview's sake- could I ask you- like- so I'm interviewing you- I wanted to interview you because you said you worked- with- at the Qube previously?

GD: [nods] Mhm.

CF: So, I just wanted to get that out of the way.

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CF: So I guess the first question I wanted to ask you is how would you describe your experience as someone who is involved in the LGBTQIA- the queer community at Stout?

GD: Yeah, I think when I first came my freshman year, it felt very strange cause I was on the Out@Stout floor, and I had never been surrounded by that many queer people. Because you know I was at a small town in Wisconsin. [laughter]

CF: [laughs and nods] Yes.

GF: But I think it made me feel, like a lot more confident in myself and my identity. And I started- I don't I- I can't- because I was also in the Art program, I was just like in this bubble of like a lot of queer people that I've never been before. So, I think it's just- that just really helped me.

CF: Okay. Yeah, that-that makes sense.

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CF: Yeah I- I do want to say that, yes, some of these questions may overlap a bit with like some of your answers, but that's like ok. They're supposed- to supposed to be open ended and just

hear about your experience. So, next thing I wanted to ask was how do you think that UW-Stout could do better at supporting the queer community here?

GD: For me, like personally like administration wise and staff wise, they've been pretty- pretty helpful. I think. Like, they'll come to our events, and we have the Qube and the Out@Stout floor. And the Out@Stout floor has only been growing, getting bigger. I think as long as they kind of listen to what people want, it will continue to be okay. It kind of goes into one of the other questions, but I think the only- I've been hearing about is maybe like- a like- a Sex Ed class, like specifically for the queer community. That's about what all I can think of for that.

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CF: Okay, thank you! So yeah! I guess the next question is sort of related to that. Do you feel that the available curriculum currently handles like career related education well? And do you have any ideas on how that would be improved?

GD: Yeah. I know there is a class related to the queer community. I personally did not take it. I know freshman year I was enrolled in it because I live on the Out@Stout floor, and then I had somehow ended up also being in that class. [laughs] I don't know how that happened. I kind- I kind of just like dropped out of it after the first day. Because I was- I felt like- kind of like exposed in that classroom setting with other people that weren't in that community. It's not like I was being asked to do anything or exposed myself, but it just kind of like felt that way like on the inside, you know.

CF: [nods]

GD: So I'm not sure what is all taught in that class. But like I said, what I've heard from other people is like the sex ed health education stuff.

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CF: Okay, thank you, so you said you were at the Out@Stout community- or part of it.

GD: [nods] Yes.

CF: Okay, so how was your experience with campus housing or related? Like how was your experience with that? And were any accommodations made for you and everything with that?

GD: Mhm. [nods] Well I'm cis, so I haven't had that many problems. I know the Out@Stout floor has helped a lot of people. I know like two or three years ago, one of my friends decided to not live on the Out@Stout floor, and then he ended up on a girl's floor north campus. And he felt pretty uncomfortable in the bathroom to shower on that floor as well as using one of the other bathrooms on a male floor. So, he would go across the street to another building.

CF: Oh my-

GD: And a friend would let him in because there was a gender-neutral bathroom. He would use that to shower.

CF: [nods]

GD: Like I said, I'm not sure what has changed since then because that was like my sophomore year. But I do remember that happening and being very troublesome for him.

CF: Yeah, that does- that doesn't sound great. But- [sigh]

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CF: Okay, as someone who is involved in the community, do you feel like the administration here at Stout values you and like how so and why or why not?

GD: Yeah. Like I said when we have our events at the Qube, they will- they will come to them, and they'll help us have those things. And the fact that we even have the Qube now, and it's become like this great place. Like it used to be a very tiny place in the Commons like my freshman year. Like you could like miss walking past it. And now it's like this huge, beautiful space. At least compared to what it used to be.

CF: Yeah, [laughs] and then it's like up in the front instead of being shoved in the back.

GD: Yeah.

CF: I guess the renovations are probably very good for that, huh?

GD: Mhm.

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CF: Alright so when you worked at the Qube, did you have, like meaningful interactions with the community and are there any changes or improvements you would like to see with the Qube to make that better?

GD: Yeah, so I think when I worked at the Qube- well, first of all, I met a lot more people because I'm pretty like introverted and stuff. So, even on the Out@Stout floor I just kind of like stayed in my room [laughs] and didn't talk to that many people. I know this past semester I had to start doing my own events before I just kind of worked as a resource coordinator. So, I wasn't in charge of like holding events and stuff like that. But with a reduced staff we all kind of like did everything.

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GD: So, I had to have- or I chose to- I had to have a Q-Talk is what I chose to do for my event. And it was on asexuality, and I was able to kind of present my knowledge on that. And then talk to all these other people afterwards. And they all seemed- I was very nervous for that. But they all seemed very grateful towards it, and I guess it helped them a bit. And I guess that wasn't something I was expecting myself to do. But I don't know- [laughs] [unclear] -help so many people. And then, the other thing I can think of that was very memorable for me was the transgender remembrance (Transgender Day of Remembrance) this year. It was really powerful. It was basically- we all took turns reading off these names of all of the people that were- that were murdered like this past year, and it took like over an hour just to say all these names. And I know I had to leave the room so many times because I just kept getting so overwhelmed and like- wanting to just- emotional. And like I don't know, that's something I could- I could never forget. As far as changes and improvements, I think more online resources, which is something that we've been working on. And [pause] I always wanted to try to find a way that could help like involve more of the introvert queer people. Because I know my first two years at Stout, before I joined the Qube like I would always look at it, and I'd be always kind of like afraid to go in there. You're like, *oh, that's- that's where they are. I don't know if I should go in there.* So yeah.

CF: I totally get that! I've admittedly been same thing.

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CF: Oh, and I guess I didn't like write this down. But I was curious if there's like anything else you wanted to share about your experience working at- there, and, also just like how has COVID affected things? Or if you're still working there? I'm not- I guess I don't really know.

GD: Yeah. I-I would have been working there, during COVID, but after Thanksgiving break, I decided to stay home and not go back to Stout. So, that's kind of where my job ended. I mean it was still- it was still there ready for me, but I decided not to go back to school so-

CF: [nods] Gotcha.

GD: But, as far as it was different- like more- like people weren't really come into the Qube as much as, you know, except to get pronoun pins and things like that. Which, you know- which is fine. It's just different than last year, which is when people would just kind of come into the Qube to like eat and hang out and things like that. Cause you know obviously we couldn't eat there anymore.

CF: Yeah. [nods]

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GD: And then events were different. I personally kind of like these online events. [laughs]

CF: [laughs]

GD: -go to thing. But, I know for some other people on my staff, it was- it felt different for them. They didn't really like it as much.

CF: It makes sense. [nods]

GD: Mhm.

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CF: Okay. So, my next question is how is Stout's queer community and Stout's organizations handling of queer issues impacted your experience here? I know we sort of touched on it, but just [shrug] open ended question.

GD: Yeah, so at Stout, I think that was kind of like the first time I've ever like, started doing like protests and going to marches and things like that. So, I think going to those made me more passionate about things. And- like going to those and like hearing people give like their own speeches and things like that- well, it's always like, enlightening to know like how much things meant to like different people at things like that. And simply just knowing more people in different identities that I would have never met or not like knowing I've met here, where I live right now, has really changed my perception about people and how I think- like perceptions I didn't even realize I had, you know.

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CF: Thank you, and- last like question I had like written down previously. So, do you feel like your identity is respected at Stout and not just like in the queer community, but just like in general, do you feel like respected here?

GD: Yeah, so, it's kind of mixed. I know that I'm- like I've said, I've kind of always felt like I'm in this bubble cause I'm on the Out@Stout floor. And then I'm also an art major. And then I work at the Qube, so I usually feel pretty safe. But there are these like, moments where I'm kind of like reminded, you know, that like not everyone wants us there. Because I know there have been instances where our posters get taken down or the posters from GSA get taken down. And I know like even just this past- this past year- I don't remember which poster it was. I think it was the like Trans Visibility Panel or something- But I would just put the posters up yesterday, and then like I was putting up more posters up then, they were gone in the- in the art building, I think it was. And I was shocked by that, but I still found them like on the top of the trash can, and I just put them back up.

CF: [laughs]

GD: But that always bothered me when that happened because it would happen a lot in res halls [Resident Halls], you know. And there's not much I can do about that, you know?

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GD: The other time I would be surprised would be at kind of like preview days and Stout Saturdays, you know, when like perspective students would come in and look at Stout with their parents and things like that. And we're kind of there like as a service, you know. So, the other like booths there are like housing and like the campus card system and laptops and things like that. So, it's not like other things that seem more like clubs, I guess. And without fail, like pretty much every time, no one like, comes to our booth, especially, you know, since the parents are there. And it was less awkward, you know, with COVID cause less people are there. But you know it was very obvious like last year that no one wanted to come to our booth. And like people would like go out of their way to like look like if they weren't passing us like- They would go back to like the center of the room, and then go to the next one. So, instead of like walking past us-

CF: [unclear]

GD: -and I was kind of awkward. I remember Blaze the Blue Devil would kind of- would be like, *hey you should come over here*. And [unclear]- So it was kind of awkward.

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CF: [nods] Yeah, I get that. I remember thinking of like when I was going through the experience being on the other end being with my parents there is no way I would've- I tried to- I would've avoided even looking at it. Cause yeah. [laughs] And I guess like I don't have any more like written down questions, but is there like anything else you want to share about your experience here at Stout as a queer person, or any thoughts you have?

GD: [pause] I mean- I guess overall, I have enjoyed it. I've made friends. And I think that's the biggest impact for me.

CF: Alright, thank you so much for your time, and thank you for your answers and your honesty and everything. I really, really appreciate it.

GD: Yeah, thank you.

CF: Alright. Well, I think that's all I have to ask you so then have a good day. [waves]

GD: Bye you too.

CF: Thank you.

END

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