

Doctor Rickie-Ann Legleitner Oral History LGBTQIA+ Interview

Interviewers: Emily McNett, Nathan Reesman, Allison Letcher, & Katie Ferguson

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00:00:00.000-00:27:57.860

START

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Allison Letcher: -and then Emily and Katie will be the two people asking your interview questions, just so you know, 'cause Nathan and I are going to keep an eye on the transcript and the- the video just to make sure that everything goes smoothly with that- with that.

Emily McNett: and then where you gonna spotlight?

Rickie-Ann Legleitner: Good call for your first interview, I would say.

Nathan Reesman: Okay, there's that.

EM: Sweet.

[pause]

AL: Okay, whenever you guys are ready.

00:01:03.080

EM: Do you want to just give like a standard introduction so, like name, pronouns, and then affiliation to Stout?

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RAL: Sure. So, my name is Doctor Rickie Ann Legleitner, she/her pronouns, I am an associate professor in English and philosophy and communication studies. I am the advisor for women's gender and sexuality studies, and I am the inclusive Excellence Action Plan Coordinator on campus, and I clearly have way too many titles.

00:01:32.750

EM: [laughs] It's never enough. So, we're members of the queer studies class and we are doing an oral history report on controversies around campus pertaining to the queer community. Will you be willing to share any examples of campus controversies when it comes to the LGBTQIA+ community?

RAL: Absolutely. So, I'll say the first controversy that was really notable when I joined Stout was when conversion therapy was advertised in the MSC (Memorial Student Center). And this was something that happened accidentally, supposedly, it just hadn't gone through a careful check process, but it was really detrimental to a lot of students on campus, particularly students who have unfortunately experienced conversion therapy so it- it had a really negative impact on the LGBTQIA+ community. And the Qube responded right away, there are a lot of faculty who are very supportive of students, but unfortunately at the time the administration on campus did

not offer any official support or statement against what had happened. Which that is actually the event that prompted me to come out to my students because I wanted them to understand why I felt so passionately about why that event was so wrong and why we needed to come out very strongly against it. And my visibility seemed to be really important with that, and I haven't really stopped being visible sense so. [nods]

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Katie Ferguson: Nice. another question is why was this conversation important to you and like why did you want this conversation to continue?

RAL: So, I think, unfortunately, if you're not part of the LGBTQIA+ community, sometimes you don't understand why things cause harm or why they have such a negative impact because we don't talk about queer issues and K through 12 education typically. So, unless you're part of the community, unless you're having those conversations because you've been personally impacted, you would have no idea that people are being hurt. So, I think those wider conversations are really necessary so people can go *oh okay, that's why this is really terrible, that's why should- we shouldn't do this, or why we- why we shouldn't engage with this* and why, and some cases we need to do some restorative justice because we want all of our students to feel included and ideally safe on campus. Plus, I don't think I've ever felt completely safe anywhere I've lived or worked or studied, but that is definitely something to aspire towards it. But at the very least, we need to have those larger conversations, so people aren't accidentally continuing to do harm.

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EM: And then, when talking about how, like other people need to hear about these issues and other people need to express like emotions towards them, how did you hear about the controversy yourself?

RAL: So, I happen to be one of those professors who like students like to tell things, which I appreciate that I kind of have that that position where people are comfortable talking to me about things. So, I was teaching a introductions to women and gender studies course, and before class a few of my students were like, *hey, did you hear about this thing that happened?* I was like I had no idea that happened. And once I heard about it, I started asking more and more people *okay, what exactly happened?* And then I contacted Julie Miller who was running the Qube at the time to get more information from her and then I kind of got pulled into everything and I think that is one of the frustrating things on our campus that if you don't hear about it from somebody like immediately, you might not find out that something happened for like weeks, especially when no official statement is offered from the university itself. So, I- I was really fortunate that students looped me in and that I was able to get involved in those conversations. And I will say, after that- at the time I was teaching a comp one class, a critical writing class, and an introduction to women and gender studies course and I took all three of those classes and spent full class periods talking about why that event was so harmful. I think my WGS students were like *yeah, of course we're talking about this*, and I think my comp students were like *okay, this is interesting*. But I think they appreciated having this space for one, to know what had happened; two, to understand what had happened and three, to be able to process what they felt about it 'cause you don't have

to be in a women and gender studies course to have queer students in a classroom right? Or to care about queer issues, so I think they need to be brought up everywhere, especially when it's impacting our small community here. A lot of [?] other professors aren't necessarily willing to have those open discussions and dialogues and I think it's 100% necessary. You shouldn't avoid issues just because they're tough.

00:06:56.650

KF: Yeah. And then, just as our topic as a whole like with campus controversies, do you find a connection with these and like relate to this topic? Like in- I guess in other ways other than that, but in general?

RAL: Yeah, I will say, as a member of the queer community, I am also impacted by the things that happen on campus. So, to speak to- Gosh, there have been so many controversies this semester, but a few weeks ago when that Christian extremist was on campus and was- I mean insulting pretty much anyone and everyone who did not present like they did, right? So insulting students who identify as women insulting people in the queer community, insulting people who participate before fornication like you're alienating pretty much all of campus at this point. But like that was disturbing in itself, but when we had students come out to ridicule people who were count- counter protesting and to watch students yelling homophobic slurs at their peers and to actually witness that like even just talking about it right now, I'm having a visceral response to that, like it was- It was so negatively impactful to know that there were this group of students on campus who for one, would engage in that language in a public space but two, who would think it would be entertaining to go out and make their peers feel bad about their own- their identities, and who they are. I do want to give those students that benefit the doubt, I don't think they realize the impact they were having. I do think this is part of the reason we need wider education, to have these conversations so people understand that those words are harmful. It's more impactful than we realize, but it- honestly as a faculty member I'm still- I don't feel safe in all of my classroom spaces 'cause those students have been in my classes. I have gotten homophobic comments on student evals before, so I'm not protected from that by any means, so it's deeply, deeply personal. But I also really fortunate that like I built up a pretty thick skin and going through this lived experience, as long as I have, and when it comes down to it, I am- I'm here to support students through that because it's a lot harder, especially if this is the first space that you've ever been out in and this is what you are met with. I just- it's not okay, it's absolutely not okay.

00:09:52.350

EM: And what's the importance of getting this [out]- Not just for the students affected but really like the greater community?

RAL: So, I think. For one, we do have to center the students who were directly impacted. I think that's the most important group. I really appreciate that, like Dominique Vargas came out right away and she was like, *okay, let's have like a debrief. Let's let people have a space where they can share their feelings, ask questions.* I thought that was really productive, and even though in the moment it was just a lot of rage and frustration, it needed to come out somewhere people

needed to have that space, and I really appreciate it that the Qube, the next day it was like *okay, we're open whole day, we're gonna extend our hours* like over 100 students came through the Qube the following day. Faculty and staff like brought baked goods, sent messages of support, there was a lot of re- rallying around the students who were directly impacted. But I do think we need a wider campus conversations about. *okay, let's talk about intent versus impact, right?*

That's a really important conversation. Let's talk about okay, yes, we have free speech, but what is the impact of that free speech? What are the ethics involved in that free speech? 'Cause I think people don't necessarily consider that and I am really fortunate in my role in the EDI (equity, diversity and inclusion) office is that I action plan coordinator like this spring I am already in planning professional development and workshop sessions around intent versus impact, so I'm like *let's have these conversations*. I'm sorry we couldn't pull that together like immediately after it happened, but those things take time to plan, and you need money. But I- I think everyone needs to have these conversations because you're really- the most important people to have in the room for those kinds of workshops are the people doing the harm because they need to recognize what they did. And while I will always be a supporter of free speech, you have to understand the impact that that has and that your language has.

00:12:14.280

KF: Yeah, and you kind of touched on this, but, like if it were to happen it today, which it has recently, how would you react?

RAL: I think- so, the immediate conversations I had with Domonique Vargas, Mike Who [?], Fred Brown, a couple of other people who kind of work with more historically excluded students is- our plan was if someone hateful like just one individual shows up on campus again we're like, alright, human circle around that person, let's go around that person so at the very least, students don't have to engage with that. Faculty and staff cannot be a political on campus, so it's like in our contracts, we can't make political statements, but I'm like making a circle around someone that's not political. That's just a wall of protection. So that that was something we had discussed because that person had threatened to return the next day, right? So, we had that initial plan in place. I think to prepare for something like that happening in the future, I think it's important to talk about how we respond to trolls and bullies, right? 'Cause I do think as proud as I was of all those students who stood up to that guy and made their voices heard and let them know that he wasn't welcome and that he was being ridiculous and just all the ways that students out shined that really negative person, they fed the troll, right? Like he thrived off of all that attention he was getting, and I think sometimes if we can just ignore that it goes away faster, and I think we have to kind of weigh like what is the best way to handle those situations, because on larger campuses if he goes somewhere like Madison or Milwaukee, unfortunately people like this make appearances like once a week, right? There are a lot more prevalent and students kind of just get used to- honestly, I want to be like a little vulgar here- They just walked by go like this [gestures with middle finger] and ignore the person, right? It's not such a big deal but I think in our small community and like we're fortunate that we don't have to deal with that very often but when it happens, it's a lot more impactful. So, I think having larger conversations about how do we respond, what is the intent behind our response right? Is it to make our voices heard as it to shut

down that person? What exactly do we want that impact to be of our response? And then honestly, when it comes to the layer of like students harming other students, I really think that just calls for larger conversations, especially when it's different political groups on campus of how to ethically, responsibly, maturely disagree with people without personally attacking them. I- I think there was a lack of maturity that was shown that day unfortunately, and I- I think we need to have those conversations about how do you engage in civil disagreement, especially when it comes to politics and how do you divide out political disagreements versus like attacking someone for who they are because I think sometimes people don't see those differences, so it really just takes a lot more education, a lot more work. Yeah, I- I lost the question somewhere in there, but hopefully that worked [laughs]

EM: Mm. So that was- a lot.

RAL: Yeah.

00:16:03.750

EM: You've talked a lot about how you felt underappreciated at Stout, but just how have you felt appreciated or connected at Stout?

RAL: So, I will say my work with students has always been the most validating work that I've done. I appreciate that students feel comfortable talking to me about things that happen on campus, things that happen in their personal lives. I've had so many students come out to me and like in my office and they're not out to anyone else and like that's such a powerful moment for someone to share something like that, and to know that like they're comfortable enough with you to kind of take that first step in their journey. I will say- oh, this is going to be so cheesy, but I have them right here because they make me so happy- like my Qubie awards, I got faculty ally of the year that made me very, very happy. I got a middle sexuality advocate of the year that made me really happy. I think those- those awards mean more than anything else to me. I was given the UW system PB Poormon award this fall for my advocacy for LGBTQIA+ students, faculty and staff and while it was incredibly validating to have like the Chancellor and the system recognize my work, students still matter more to me, so- and I- I will be really, really honest as much as I appreciate that validation from higher up, it can also feel little tokenistic and I'll be really, really honest, the ceremony where they gave out the PB Portman awards they also gave out the outstanding women of color awards and I just looked around the room and I'm like look at all these badass women who are here and people from the LGBTQIA+ community and it was just like *oh my gosh, y'all are using this as a photo op for the system* like that's not fantastic, right? And I feel like students experience that even on our campus, right? Where like if you look at some of the advertising it's like, *y'all are just making people under tokens* and that's not okay. So, I think, for me again, I appreciate that award I- I do really deeply appreciate it, but at the end of the day I'm here to help people figure out who they are and how to navigate the world and hopefully learn how to give back to their community. So, yeah, I think that's kind of it.

00:18:46.810

KF: And then, going back to the conversion therapy controversy. How did that affect you at long term?

RAL: So, I think with that again it prompted me to come out in a way I've never been out in a workplace before. So to give my history, I- I was never out in high school because I went to a Catholic High School, and it was not a safe space to be out. I did have a girlfriend my senior year of high school, but we very much just for like we're best friends and then I made the mistake of going to a Catholic undergrad because I got a really good scholarship because I went to the Catholic High School and that also didn't feel like a safe space to be out, then I went to a Catholic master's program, like there's a trend here. I'm not Catholic, I don't know like they just kept giving me money though. But luckily my Catholic University was located in Chicago and that was one of the first places I was like out and proud, there was a huge gay community, I was a bartender at a gay bar like it was just like living my best life. And then I moved to South Dakota and I was in South Dakota for 7-8 years. I did not feel out or feel safe being out in that state. And that- that was it was really hard to have the experience of being out and then having to go back in the closet like that, I don't recommend it for anybody. Honestly, pretty terrible. So, when I moved here, I was coming from like a really, really volatile environment so I was a little more cautious. I wasn't sure if I could be out here. My first semester at Stout. I had another faculty member tell me I shouldn't be out here because it would be dangerous for me, that I would get student pushback specifically so that kind of like made me keep my mouth shut even more. So, when the conversion therapy thing happened, it really pissed me off. But it also gave me that freedom to be like you know what? Screw this, I'm gonna put my voice out there and what happens happens. You all know how if I see I am from class like I- I seriously can't shut up now that I've opened my mouth and I- I think it really- after I did that in those classes- that was when I started having students disclose to me like *I- It really is important to me to have someone in the classroom who has a similar identity to me.* And I think, especially when I was in high school and undergrad and deeply, deeply closeted and scared, it would've been so great to have somebody older that I could look at and be like *look like you're still here, like you're successful, you're thriving, you're okay* and I didn't have that. I- I watched friends get kicked out of their houses, I watched to like just all these tragic things happen around me, I didn't have anything positive to see. So, I think for me it's been a matter of like bad things happen, but I'm in a position of power now to a certain extent and I want to own that. And I want to use my voice in the way that I can. So, I talk about my sexuality, I talk about my anxiety, I talked about my depression, I talk about a lot of the things that make me marginalized in a lot of ways just to normalize those conversations. And I think, especially with something like conversion therapy, if you're made to feel like who you are is a mental illness that can be changed like *no, that is not what that is.* And especially as someone who does actually have mental illness like that is really not what that is. So, I think those conversations again, if we can be really open, it helps other people feel more comfortable in their own skin. And I will say there are really inspiring students on this campus as well who totally own their own identities and I get inspired by them as well. So, I think it's- there's a lot of reciprocal things that are happening. Which is kind of amazing.

So, the conversion therapy strangely enough, I think that had a positive impact on me overall just because it really encouraged me to put myself out there and push back.

00:23:28.750

EM: That's great, that's amazing. Do you have any final thoughts you'd like to share?

RAL: I will say I- I've really appreciated my journey at Stout as frustrated as I get with the things that happen. Unfortunately, these things happen across the country, right? Like we're kind of in this moment where we're feeling a lot of pushback, especially in the LGBTQIA+ community like we just talked about those banned books and all these controversies, especially in terms of transgender identity. So, I like to like keep myself in perspective, like it's not just here, it's a really pervasive problem, but at least here we have a lot more power to do something about it, and I really appreciate that we have a course like queer studies where we can have these conversations and can really meaningfully think about *okay, how do we push back about the things that are going on around us* and we're going to have that conversation tomorrow about what happened on Monday, so that's coming up. But yeah, I think that's- that's it.

00:24:46.620

KF: Yeah, then our last question. It's not necessarily about the interview, but it's more like do you have any recommendations for alumni or like Stout employees we should interview or think about interviewing?

00:25:00.060 --> 00:25:05.050

RAL: Oh goodness, so in terms of controversies on campus, I'm trying to think who would be good. So, a student who took this course last year, who visited our course one day, Jacob Ried, he is a member of the queer community, he is engaged to an alumni from the community at Stout, and they are both fabulous humans. So, I always recommend talking to them. They have some longer knowledge of things that have happened at Stout. I- I think it would be really interesting to interview Devin, the head of SSA (Stout Student Association) right now, especially in his role with bringing in Prevea healthcare to campus, I think he would be a really interesting student to talk to. He was at the- the information session yesterday and I would just be really curious what he would have to say? Devin is someone who means well, and I respect a lot of the things he does, but I- I think there are some things missing from conversations about Prevea before we sign that contract. I think Sandi Scott, our Dean of students, would be a really interesting person to talk to. She is someone who has to respond to a lot of the things that happen and someone who has to think about the impact on students. So, I'd be curious to see what she has to say about a lot of things. And Dominique Vargas, love her, she is one of the biggest advocates for students on campus, and I think she would be a fabulous person to talk to as well.

KF: Great, thank you.

RAL: Yeah.

AL: And we'll try and get contact information for those people but like if we can't, is it okay to just ask- Like shoot you an email just-

RAL: Oh yeah, absolutely.

AL: 'Cause the Dean of students, and that SSA person should be pretty easy to find the contact information for, but I'm not sure about that former student.

RAL: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah I can- I can definitely hook y'all up with that.

AL: Okay, perfect! Perfect.

AL: Okay, well I think that's all we need from you then Dr. Rickie. Thank you so much for meeting with us tonight, I know it is a little late.

00:27:36.860 --> 00:27:38.090

NR: Yes, thank you so much.

00:27:38.230

EM: Thank you.

RAL: Oh, no! This was great. This was, again, I would rather spend my time doing this than other things so y'all are great.

AL: Awesome. Thank you so much! You can go ahead and leave the meeting whenever you're ready.

RAL: All right. Have a good night y'all. [waves]

NR: You, too. [waves]

AL: Thank you. You, too.

KF: Thank you.

EM: Bye.

[RAL exits interview]

NR: Okay. I stopped doing the transcript now.

AL: Okay. I'm-

NR: [unclear]

KF: [shaking hand] My hand's tired! [laughs]

AL: I'm going to stop the-

KF: I wrote lots!

END

00:27:57.860