Amy Brainer

Interviewed by Rose Wellman on June 9, 2025
Institutional Memory Project, University of Michigan-Dearborn

[Segment 1: Pathway to Director Role]

Rose Wellman: I'm Rose Wellman, associate professor of Anthropology at the University of Michigan-Dearborn.

Amy Brainer: And I'm Amy Brainer, associate professor of Women's and Gender Studies and coordinator of LGBTQ Studies, also at UM-Dearborn. I'm usually in Rose's seat, asking the interview questions. This is a chance for me to experience how my interview feels from the other side.

R.W.: You've been the coordinator of LGBTQ Studies from 2016 to now, and you served as director of Women's and Gender Studies from 2021 to 2024. Does that sound right?

A.B.: Yes. For people listening, we've decided to focus in this interview on LGBTQ Studies, but I will talk about the Women's and Gender Studies directorship too when it feels important to do that.

R.W.: Okay. That makes sense. Can you tell me what you remember about how you became the coordinator of LGBTQ Studies?

A.B.: I was hired in 2014, and part of the purpose of my hire was to create the LGBTQ Studies program. There was already a team of people working on this in Women's and Gender Studies. So while I became the first and so far the only program coordinator, I really was passed a baton. I'm grateful to the people who ran the first leg, or multiple legs for me, because they set me up for success with getting the program across the finish line. I'm going to link this interview to our program proposal so listeners can see who was on that committee and see our vision, which really was a collective one. [See the index for the program proposal.] To my knowledge, I was the only faculty member at the time whose primary research areas were in LGBTQ Studies, so it made sense for me to be coordinator. Some years later, two more scholars were hired who work in this field. They were hired in a different college, and both of them left for other positions within a couple of years.

A.B.: Today, in 2025, I'm still to my knowledge the only faculty member at UM-Dearborn for whom LGBTQ Studies is my primary field. That's an issue, that I really have no one to take over as coordinator if something should happen to me. I teach five of our 13 courses, including the one required course. Actually, we just lost someone who offered two courses for us, so right now I teach 5 of 11 courses. So far, I've done all the independent studies. Because other people have commitments to other disciplines, they can't always prioritize their LGBTQ course offerings. They have other courses they need to teach and other fields

of study they need to keep up with for their scholarship, so it's hard for me to step away, even for something like sabbatical.

A.B.: I do want to say the faculty teaching in the program are wonderful and their courses are so, so good. I'm really thankful for them, especially because they do have other commitments and obligations. In some cases, they've fought to be able to have these courses in their rotations. Personally, I think our LGBTQ Studies curriculum is phenomenal. I think we can really prepare our students well with the suite of courses that we have when they're able to run. Currently I'm on a tri-campus Queer and Trans Task Force. For folks listening, for us tri-campus is the University of Michigan Ann Arbor, Dearborn, and Flint. The task force just submitted our preliminary recommendations, and one of the Dearborn recommendations is to bring another line in LGBTQ studies. But with our budget and the competitiveness for lines, I don't see that happening any time soon. So I'll continue to be the program coordinator until we have another person to share this responsibility. It will need to be someone who is active in LGBTQ Studies as a scholar, immersed in the field. If and when that hire happens, it will be exciting for me and so good for our students.

[Segment 2: A Transnational, Queer, Spiritual Approach]

R.W.: Can you tell me about yourself? What do you specifically bring to this role?

A.B.: Academically, my approach to LGBTQ Studies is global and transnational. My first research area and first love is queer Taiwan studies. My current research is on queer and trans immigration. I also grew up in a transnational family. This is why I think Dearborn felt like home to me immediately. Many of our students have transnational families. We are one-quarter to one-third Arab and Muslim. We have other kinds of racial and cultural diversity on campus as well. I could see that Dearborn was a place where we could work to build an LGBTQ Studies program without a strong U.S. bias. I would be able to teach the types of courses I wanted to teach with a population of students I was truly excited to work with. To this day, I would say there is no other place I would rather be doing this work than at UM-Dearborn.

A.B.: In terms of what I personally bring, I'm queer femme. I'm coming from the butch femme and trans femme communities with a trans partner and now spouse. Those identities have connected me to my students. I'm very out in the classroom and on campus and that has been important for building trust with them. It also means I'm connected to them and responsible for them in more than one way. I'm their teacher and academic mentor in a traditional sense but I'm also their queer auntie. Big sister, now auntie, [laughter] aging in this process. That means I feel responsible for them as family. I help them with things related to school and unrelated to school. I'll talk more about this later in the interview, but for now I'll just say there's a long tradition of this in LGBTQ communities and cultures, where we replicate kinship structures for each other. Being queer myself is what gives me this particular bond with them.

A.B.: Another thing I bring that has been important is my spiritual background. At this point, I don't practice any religion. However, I grew up in what I would describe as deep religion.

Faith was the guiding principle of my family life, and it was the first identity instilled in me. This remains true for some of the people closest to me, whom I love the most. Like my sexuality, this has been a bridge to students because many of them also grew up in deeply religious homes, especially Muslim and Christian homes, but also Hindu, Sikh, other traditions. Many are figuring out how they want to relate to those traditions. This is something I value and respect about them and I welcome them to bring it into their work. I think if we want students to bring their whole selves, if we really want to practice intersectionality in our pedagogy, that has to include their spiritual selves. One of my favorite courses to teach is LGBTQ Religious Experience. When I created the course, some colleagues said to me, "You're really brave to teach a course like that." My sense is that bringing religion into the classroom is uncomfortable for some people, understandably. Religion brings up big feelings and divisions and even trauma. But I feel prepared and able to do this, and I want to do it. My own upbringing definitely contributes to that.

R.W.: As a faculty member who taught Religion and Culture at the same university, I one hundred percent understand what you're saying about this being such an important area that the students really actually appreciate, surprisingly. I remember sitting with you and asking you about this course. It's probably, I think, also one of the coolest courses you teach because of the different subjects it brings up. I'm glad that that's your favorite course too.

[Segment 3: Building a Rigorous Program]

R.W.: What expectations and goals did you have going into this role?

A.B.: I wanted to build a program that is truly rigorous. That to me means a program that is not narrowly focused on North America and what gender and sexuality mean in one place and at one time to one or a few groups of people. A big goal for me then and now is to give students real expertise in the field of LGBTQ studies. If our students walk into an academic conference, they will recognize scholars presenting there. They'll know something about the topics being discussed. If their work is applied, if they're in an organization or a helping profession or a social movement, they'll have tools and knowledge about queer histories and organizing that they can use. Students are a bridge between what we're writing about in queer and transgender studies and what's happening on the ground. We're not doing armchair theorizing over here. This is where the theories get tested and put into practice.

A.B.: With this in mind, I wanted to be careful about what could count as LGBTQ Studies, in terms of adding courses to the curriculum. Ultimately the committee supported me in stipulating that to count for the certificate, a course must include at least 50 percent LGBTQ Studies content. For those listening who work in this area, that of course includes queer studies, trans studies, any of these subfields with their different epistemologies. LGBTQ Studies is a flexible umbrella. I'm not going to gatekeep what is queer. But I didn't want classes with a couple of weeks of LGBTQ content. I didn't want trans 101. I didn't want classes that touch on our community but aren't really rooted in the academic fields of study.

A.B.: I want our students to be equipped for anything they want to do next. A lot of them go to graduate school, PhD programs, MSWs, and seminaries. In their feedback, so far, I hear

from students that they feel prepared to be there and they feel confident in those spaces. That to me is the critical barometer of our success academically because our Dearborn students are going to grad school with people from more elite institutions. Often people who could work less while they were in college, I'm talking about paid work, and who therefore had more hours in their day to read and study and think. It's extremely important to me that our students be competitive with them for opportunities. But also that they know and stand in their own strength and worth as an emerging scholar or practitioner. Related to this, going back to goals. I wanted to create a learning community where students feel valued. By valued I mean I want them to know that their ideas are important, that they are important, and that by being here they add value to the conversation we're having and to LGBTQ studies. I also want students to feel safe asking questions. You know, if we can't ask them here, where can we ask them?

R.W.: This is true.

[Segment 3: Equipping Students for Hard Conversations]

A.B.: We have to be able to be honest with each other about what we really think. I am going to give an example of this. In one of my courses, a heterosexual woman, a mom, asked what I think is a brave question. She said, "Okay, I have gay friends, I support them. But I also have an eight-year-old son, and I feel uncomfortable when TV shows or books for kids have LGBTQ characters because I'm afraid they're pushing my son to be gay. Am I wrong to think that?" Now there were a lot of queer students in the class, including some whose parents never supported them and still do not support them. So the question pressed on a painful place for some of us. But the student brought her question with a learning spirit. She really wanted an answer. When people ask questions like that, I often think, sometimes it's their question, but sometimes it's something someone else in their life is saying to them, and they want to know how to answer it.

A.B.: The conversation we were able to have together modeled multiple things. We walked the mother through her concerns, through the empirical evidence that for a gay child, isolation can make it hard to imagine a future. For a straight child, learning about gay people doesn't make them gay, but it does make them less likely to bully a gay person or harm them in some way, things like this and so on. But the conversation was also for the queer students, showing them that we don't have to be reactive or defensive. We don't have to cancel people in our lives who ask us questions. Actually, we have very strong empirical data, and we have very strong reasoning, intellectual and moral reasoning, backing up our positions. From this position of strength, we can have empathy and we can build bridges to bring people in. And people can change their minds about us. I would say that's a goal, that students leave feeling strong enough to be compassionate and not to crumble under a challenge.

R.W.: It's modeling how to handle these different situations where the urge sometimes is to say well, I can't talk to you if you have these views. The students are learning that, especially if someone comes with this positive spirit, learning spirit, that they can reach toward understanding rather than just shutting it off.

A.B.: Mm-hmm, and they have things they can say [in response]. Thoughtful things and things that are supported with evidence.

R.W.: You've been the director for quite a while now. How have things changed? How have your expectations changed over this time?

A.B.: Yeah. A lot of those things I just listed have remained the same. Over the years I feel like - I feel like we've talked about this a bit - the left has become a harsher place, a more rejecting place. I want to help students think that through. They don't have to come to the same conclusions I do, but I want them to be intentional about how they treat each other online and offline. I definitely want them to feel equipped for any conversation that they need to have, like we just discussed.

[Segment 4: Expectations and Commitments]

A.B.: In terms of expectations, I honestly expected more resistance to LGBTQ Studies.

R.W.: You mean at the university, or?

A.B.: Yes. Yes. I was prepared for people to undermine the value of the program, and that has not happened directly. It has happened indirectly, and I'll talk about that later. I'm sure there are people who think this program shouldn't exist. But I have been protected from that largely. I was thinking, why have I been protected? I think it's by my colleagues. Especially my senior colleagues, but also my peers who are very vocal about their support for the program and for me. These have mostly been straight people. I think that's important to say. As a younger queer person coming out in the early 2000s, I would never have imagined that so many straight people would care about this. That's an adjustment of expectations in a really positive direction.

R.W.: The world has really changed since the 2000s.

A.B.: It has, yeah.

R.W.: Tell me about an aspect or aspects of this work that matters a lot to you.

A.B.: I think in a way I already answered this question, so I won't belabor it too much. I'll just summarize what matters to me. The intellectual rigor of the program, preparing students to excel in what they'll do next, giving students a strong sense of self combined with empathy for others. Those are things that matter to me for students. I should also say something about faculty. I've been so student centered in my answers, and I think that's really telling about me. That's where my focus has been. But supporting faculty is important too for any program director. For faculty I would say my benchmark of a strong program is how the minoritized faculty feel about the program, especially faculty of color. Is the program hospitable to them? Does it support them as scholars and as people? Is Women's and Gender Studies a good partner to our sister disciplines, like African American Studies and Arab American Studies? Have we earned their trust? These are the things that matter to me and this is how I would like to be measured as a director.

R.W.: Do you feel like you've earned that trust or?

A.B.: I think - that's not a question for me to answer, right?

R.W.: It's their question to answer.

A.B.: It's their question to answer. Well, you know, later in the interview there will maybe be - I think there's some opportunities for me to describe some of the things we've done. I think, yeah, I would let my colleagues measure me that way.

[Segment 5: Interpersonal Care and Administrative Work]

R.W.: That leads me to my next question, which is, I'm curious if there's an alignment or you feel like there's an alignment between what matters to you and the work you've done and how you spend your time.

A.B.: [Laughter] Okay. So. I wrote these questions. [Laughter]

R.W.: I can tell.

A.B.: For LGBTQ Studies, yes. Interpersonal care takes up the bulk of my time, and I have peace about that. That's what matters to me, that's how I spend my time. For Women's and Gender Studies, which is a bigger program, there are a lot more administrative tasks. Tasks that I would describe as talking or writing about work, rather than actually doing the work. When I became the director, I found out that we have to spend a lot of time articulating who we are and justifying who we are. For example, I've been on many committees tasked with spelling out the value of Women's and Gender Studies at the university and college and arguing for resources or for an institutional home. That sucks up a lot of time that I would like to spend doing other things. Again, the difference I think, I can't say for sure, but my guess is the difference is really just that Women's and Gender Studies is the bigger and more mature program. With LGBTQ Studies so far, I have a lot of independence. I've been able to keep it very focused on the curriculum and students.

R.W.: Has that changed over time, the amount of time you've been able to spend doing these things?

A.B.: The amount of time I've spent on the types of tasks that I'm doing?

R.W.: Yes, exactly.

A.B.: Again, I think LGBTQ Studies has stayed pretty consistent. Women's and Gender Studies, also consistent but there have been some changes as resource depletion happens. Which I think are captured in some other interviews like Lisa's interview, that I can link. The LGBTQ Studies coordinator position meshes with the other things I'm doing, like my own research and teaching. These are complementary. As director of Women's and Gender Studies, for that period, I definitely did less research. I will say it's not that I was so busy as director, compared to some of the people I interviewed for this project. I didn't do nearly as much as them. You know who they are [laughter], these amazing people. But the type of work drained

me quite a bit.

A.B.: I'm not very good at email. It takes way more time than it should. I'm always behind on it. I once told my students that if I could undo any invention, it would be email [laughter], that's how I feel about it. I don't really like administrative work. What I described earlier as writing about work instead of doing work. I'm actually not trying to throw shade at this work. I admire people who are good at it. They have skills to frame things and showcase them for a specific audience. I think that there are people who find meaning in doing that. I'm just trying to describe how it feels for me. Yeah. I do have chronic illnesses that slow me down. If I'm taking on a new role like the director, I have to pull back on other things like research. That might not be the case for everyone, but it was for me.

[Segment 6: Burnout in the Director Role]

R.W.: This is sort of related, but have these professional roles as director and coordinator influenced your life outside of work in any way?

A.B.: These roles are a huge part of who I am. I could even say they define me. It's hard not to take the work home. As you know, I have a non-academic partner who I appreciate so much and who tries to keep me grounded and balanced. My partner is from a working-class background. They are, if anything, a little suspicious toward academia and its elitism, rightly so. They poke fun at it in a lighthearted way. They do little skits about it that make me laugh. And that's great. But it can also be hard. In their mind, when you leave work, life begins. And for me these two things really run together.

A.B.: Also, while I was directing Women's and Gender Studies, I was diagnosed with burnout, specifically in relation to the service part of my job. I wasn't burned out on research or teaching, but on service I was in pretty severe burnout. For those who are familiar with burnout, the clinical diagnosis, it's not just being exhausted. It's also about losing professional efficacy, loss of alignment between your work and values. Then for me this dovetailed with the major depressive disorder I already have. My spouse witnessed this. They blamed my job, and they were angry at my job. If I were in their shoes, I might do the same thing. I do think there was a lot going on. It was 2021, so it was deep -

R.W.: Pandemic.

A.B.: - deep COVID, right. We experienced loss like so many people did during that time. Deaths close to us and all around us. Then there was the social part. All our work was online, and I'm not really an online person. I do not like teaching online at all. With colleagues online, I feel like I spend all my energy, but I get none of the energy back that I would get in person. So you know. Was it really the directorship or the timing of the directorship? I can't say for sure. I don't have the counterfactual. But it definitely made me feel like I needed to stop. For the first time, I did look at other jobs, non-academic jobs. Because I was like, if this is what academia is after tenure, it might not be for me. Before tenure, it was research and teaching. After tenure, I felt like I was just looking at this desert of service, service, service, service. Writing white papers and reports, dealing with politics,

talking about the dwindling budget and enrollments, and turning people, our students and faculty, into metrics, and nothing that fed my spirit. Yeah, you too.

R.W.: I get this so much.

A.B.: [Laughter] You're physically reacting to my list.

R.W.: No, I am with you. Yes. No, because it's, as you said, the administrative roles can be amazing for the right person. Some of us are more drained by that than others for sure.

A.B.: Yes. So to heal this burnout, I chose not to be director of Women's and Gender Studies for a second term. I have to thank Lisa Martin because she stepped in. She did what I could not do, even though I am the only person with a full appointment in Women's and Gender Studies. Even though Lisa had way more on her plate than I did, she did this for me and for the program. And Georgina Hickey is going to do it next year. They are doing it with no course releases, no compensation. It truly is a labor of love. As a result, I feel ready to be the director again in the future when that's needed.

R.W.: Thank you Lisa, and thank you Georgina.

A.B.: Yeah, thank you. Because I was able to take the break when I needed it, you know? That made it sustainable. With LGBTQ Studies, I haven't needed a break in the same way. Again, I think because it's small. Because the focus is on students and curriculum, which I love.

[Segment 7: State Violence and Student Protests]

R.W.: What are some things going on socially, culturally, or politically that have shaped the programs during your time leading them?

A.B.: The occupation of Palestine, the ethnic cleansing in Palestine is front and center. Also, events unfolding elsewhere in the Middle East, Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Yemen. These touch our campus and students and also some of our faculty personally. With the genocide, there's a heavy grief here at all times that people are living and working with and through. Other forms of racial violence touch us too. The movement for Black lives happened while I was directing these programs and the conversations it sparked about police brutality and militarization of the police. Both the first and second Trump administrations happened while I was coordinating LGBTQ Studies. So we're dealing with travel bans, detentions, deportations, threats to international students. We are dealing with a state and a university that have colluded to criminalize student protesters. We're dealing with laws and rhetoric that put trans people in increasing danger. Among other things, right, these are just some of them. Everything I listed is happening not just around us, but to us. I tell my students when we discuss any of these topics in class, we're never talking about "them," right? We're always talking about "us," our learning community.

A.B.: The students themselves are very brave. They're still speaking about these things even as the universities try to silence them. Now I'm talking not just here but around the country. The students are the moral leaders in this struggle. And they're also young, many of them. They

need and deserve mentorship and support. We can't just admire them from afar and talk about how excellent they are. We have to show them that we're with them, that we're standing with them. Our arms are linked. If they go to court, we go to court. If they challenge the regents, we challenge the regents. We can teach them things about social movements and social change, how these have happened in other places and times, to add to their tools. We have a responsibility to them to make the education we offer them relevant to their real lives. That includes relevant to the social, cultural, political issues that affect their lives.

R.W.: That kind of empathy with the students and solidarity with the students I think is what might help us in the future build bridges. They're so brave. So yeah, it's really important that they receive that kind of mentorship.

[Segment 8: Academic Freedom]

R.W.: Moving to a different question that has been in the news a lot and in our hearts and minds a lot. My second question for you, follow-up question, is about academic freedom. I've been hearing a lot about it in the news and how - do we need to change our syllabi to comply with DEI, the erasure of DEI [diversity, equity, and inclusion]. Do we need to take things out? How do we address this? Then at the same time navigating that alongside our concern for the safety of our students and our own just ability to stay on campus and be here, be there for them, which is so important for them too. I feel like there's a lot of things going on that we have to be aware of all the time. I'm wondering how you're navigating that as a director of those programs.

A.B.: Well, I'll give an honest answer and then I'll decide afterwards whether to keep it in the recording. Last week, we had a meeting, a Zoom meeting of WGST directors - and I was there as an LGBTQ coordinator - across Michigan, which was so, so awesome. Thank you to the person who organized that. There were people from a lot of campuses, both public and private. We were talking about things that were going on on our campus[es] and sharing. Some people are actually in a position where their programs are closer to being dismantled. Some, like ours, are just sort of dealing in hypotheticals. Some maybe feel a little more protected than others.

A.B.: We talked about a lot of aspects of what might happen. For example, if the government, the current administration, says Pell Grants are contingent on you doing certain things and getting rid of certain programs. What do we do then? Because I think there was agreement among the people in the chat that our students need Pell Grants period. We don't want to jeopardize their aid. So I think that if it comes down to something like that, we will have to feel our way really carefully at that time to protect students being able to have access to higher ed, who are totally dependent on aid. And offering in some way the knowledge that we know is important to still get out there.

A.B.: It's interesting. I've been listening to these interviews because I've been going over the transcripts. My feelings have changed a lot while doing this project. There is an interview that I did with someone in March where I'm really ready for everything to fall apart. I don't really feel that way at this moment. I feel like if the federal government does say you can't

have this aid unless this, we can tie it up in lawsuits until there's a change in administration. The courts are successfully stopping some stuff or at least slowing it down, whereas I feel like in March and April I did not feel that way. I felt like the courts were useless and everything was just being rolled out. So I can't predict what the university will do in that case.

[Segment 9: Responding to the World Around Us]

R.W.: How have you seen the programs grow and change in response to these things, or not, to these political and social and cultural changes?

A.B.: Yeah. I thought a lot about this. My primary approach has been through the curriculum. The classroom is the space where I see the most transformation occurring. This is also where we can have sustained conversations over weeks and months, not just a one-off. It's important to me to update my LGBTQ and Women's and Gender Studies courses to address the things that are happening. I know many of my colleagues in these programs are doing the same thing, and I know some are not. We do have a wide tent with diversity of thought and pedagogy. Also, the risks are very great, and people have different capacities to take on these risks. As a director and coordinator, I do respect the decisions individual faculty are making. On a programmatic level, the fields themselves have produced knowledge that we can point to. For example, as coordinator of LGBTQ Studies and director of Women's and Gender Studies, I think it's important to express public support for Palestinian freedom. Not as simply a personal opinion but rooted in our fields of study. Both queer studies and women's studies have long histories of research, careful research, thorough research, by experts on Palestine. We can draw from that research, and we can anchor our actions in that knowledge.

A.B.: Now, what do I mean by public support? One, we can make a statement, which we have, but a statement has to be connected to something real, something tangible. [See the index for two such statements.] The purpose of a statement, in my mind, is to let students and faculty who are touched by these issues know that we are with them and will go to bat for them. That includes going to bat for them if they're targeted or censored or harmed in some other way at the university. If and when that happens, we'll be a voice speaking up for them. When students have a protest, I try to go. If they ask me to speak, I speak. I try to build trust with them through my personal relationships with them.

A.B.: Some things we've done as a program are, for example, support the initiative to bring an Afghan visiting scholar to campus. We partnered with Health and Human Services. This culminated with our wonderful colleague Masouma Mohammadi, joining us for a semester. You were close with her, I know, while she was here. Cam [Amin] and Lisa [Martin] were really involved in the effort to bring her here, two Women's and Gender Studies faculty. Which took years. I was struck. I looked back at the annual reports that I did as director to prepare for this interview. It was in every report I wrote as director because it took the whole time to get her visa. [See the index for Amy's annual reports.] That was so worth it, that effort.

A.B.: Other things we did that I think were important. We partnered with Arab American Studies

on a faculty line request. [See the index for this line request.] We're very committed to that line request even as it gets rejected year after year. We'll keep putting it forward until the funding and will is there, just like I understand people did with the LGBTQ Studies line for years. It's really critical that we have an Arab American feminist scholar helping to shape our program. That just cannot be overstated. We also advocated for African American Studies to get a faculty line that is owed to them, really stolen from them, in that we lost a colleague in the program, an historian who died unexpectedly, and that line was just absorbed back into the college and never replaced. [See the index for a statement in support of the AAAS line request submitted to the dean by Sociology, WGST, and others.] And this struggle is also ongoing. This is something I think Women's and Gender Studies should continue to pay attention to. What is happening in our sister disciplines? Are there things we can do to support them? That could be through advocacy. It could be through co-sponsorships or something else.

A.B.: On that note, I didn't do nearly as many events as other people did while I was director. I focused more on co-sponsoring events. That was intentional when I did it. In the first year, we were still social distancing. After that at some point I felt like we had too many good events, and people did not have the bandwidth for them. Which maybe was just me. [Laughter]

R.W.: No, no, it wasn't just you.

A.B.: But I perceived [laughter] - I perceived or projected - that people did not have the bandwidth for them. So I decided to focus on supporting intersectional work that was already arising in other programs. But I don't know if that was the right decision. Doing these interviews, I realize how much people really love and value programming, so I question myself. But there's always the future. There's plenty of time left to host events and bring speakers.

R.W.: Yes.

A.B.: We did do some things. For example, one thing I really loved, we organized a workshop with HEART, a national Muslim reproductive justice organization -

R.W.: I remember seeing that.

A.B.: - that we brought to campus. Yeah. The workshop was open to the community too. We advertised it in both English and Arabic. [See the index for the workshop registration form in English and Arabic.] I think choices like this, for example, about the events we host, how we advertise them, to whom we advertise them, send a signal about our priorities. In this example, when we talk about reproductive justice, who's at the table? Who's leading the discussion? We always want to have these questions in mind.

A.B.: Then finally, in response to everything happening in the world and in our societies, there's the work of just being here. Of having open doors. Of being proactive to reach out when people drift away, to keep our students enrolled. And I will say sometimes to keep our students alive. You know the LGBTQ community is no stranger to suicidal ideation. So many

of us have it or have had it. The literature tells us that one of the protective things we offer one another as a community is the understanding that our lives are worth saving. We do that for each other. That's part of my job.

A.B.: In a climate where trans people are being villainized and disposed of, part of my job is to reflect back to them just how worthy they are of being loved and being alive. That's not a one-time thing. That's not an event. That's not a speaker. That's a connection that needs to be continuously nurtured and a door that needs to be open all the time. Whether it's a physical office door or WhatsApp or - they're on the verge of convincing me to hold extra office hours in Minecraft. Whatever form it takes, they need to know that they can reach me. That I'm interested in their lives and I care about them. That is absolutely fundamental to what I do as coordinator of LGBTQ Studies.

[Segment 10: Respect and Love for the Students]

R.W.: Tell me about these students. What are they like?

A.B.: Yes! Okay. I already said this. I'll say it again. I truly cannot imagine a more rewarding group of students to work with. You can vouch for me that I love our students and talk about them a lot, glowingly. Of course, every cohort and every person is different. I'm not going to be able to sum them up, but I can say some things I appreciate about them. One, they care about learning from each other. The LGBTQ and Women's and Gender Studies students are sincere in this. They come in from wildly different backgrounds, and then in class they listen to each other, they talk to each other. I can see their openness, and I can see their growth.

A.B.: We have many older students returning later in life to complete their degrees. We have students who are still young in their 20s and 30s with full-time jobs, sometimes kids, other commitments. Even our so-called traditional age students are often working. Many are caregiving. So they bring a very pragmatic mind. They want to know how their education can be applied. They're strong in what we in Women's and Gender Studies call praxis, putting theory into action.

A.B.: Then among the queer students, some characteristics. Many are not out to their families and communities. So the ability to be out in a class is precious. Sometimes it's the only space on campus where they're out. It makes the classroom environment even more special. I have a lot of students from smaller, rural communities around the state. I have students from very religious backgrounds I mentioned before. I have students with transnational family ties or recent immigrant histories that intersect with their queer identities. In LGBTQ Studies, like on our campus in general, our Arab population and our Muslim population, which overlap but are not the same, contribute to the program and strengthen it. I do believe the program is more excellent because of them.

A.B.: Another thing I should mention is that significant numbers of the LGBTQ students are also neurodivergent. Definitely neurotypical people are the numerical minority in my classes [laughter]. That changes the culture of the classroom in a way I really like. I guess to sum up in response to this question, I can say confidently that the best part of being the coordinator

of LGBTQ Studies is the students I get to work with, hands down.

[Segment 11: Mentors, Role Models, and Friends]

R.W.: How have you been supported in these roles, and by whom?

A.B.: The mentoring and emotional support I've received has been very strong. I won't be able to name everyone, but I'll give some examples to show what I mean by support. When I came to Dearborn, I learned that we could have a mentor assigned to us in Women's and Gender Studies. I went to Suzanne Bergeron, who was then director of the program, and said, "Can my mentor be Rashmi Luthra?" Because I had such respect for her, and I knew that I wanted her to shape me, based on who she is. And also the questions she asked me about my work, how she engaged my work and pushed my thinking. At the time, I thought of mentor less in terms of promotion and tenure, which is sometimes how it gets interpreted here, and more in terms of growth as a scholar and as a person. And Rashmi poured into me in all of those ways.

A.B.: Suzanne Bergeron and Lisa Martin are the two other faculty with appointments in Women's and Gender Studies. Both chaired my promotion and tenure committee at different times, and Lisa was my advocate for tenure. And to this day, I don't even know all the ways they supported me because they worked so hard for me behind the scenes. I will say that I felt like the expectations for tenure were very clear, and the communication was exactly what I needed to meet the requirements. I hear stories all the time, I'm sure you do too, of people for whom this is not the case. And I know Suzanne and Lisa gave me this gift. You, Rose, and Amny Shuraydi have been my sounding boards. You are the people with whom I share the most about my life outside of work. With both of you, I've been able to be integrated in a way that is a blessing to me. So thank you.

R.W.: Me too.

A.B.: Another friend is Hani Bawardi, in history. Hani is someone I look up to so much, for his mind, for his work, for his intellectual and political commitments. And I'm grateful that I can send students to him to be mentored as well. I remember attending an event hosted by another colleague, Keith Dye, who has since passed. And there were so many revolutionary thinkers there, former members of the Black Panther Party and others, who knew Keith and had worked with him closely. [See the index for a tribute to Keith that describes some of this work.] I share this to say - we have and have had people at UM-Dearborn who are doing transformative work in the communities. Not just in name or on paper. These are not necessarily the people who are the most centered by the institution itself, right? Because their work is not university-facing, it's community-facing. And of course, the university has its own biases about the work it wants to uplift and invest in. But if you want to grow intellectually, if you want to find people with a shared political consciousness, there are people at Dearborn here with a lot to offer. Sometimes I think, "wow, how did we get so lucky to get this person," you know? I still have that thought about some of the new faculty coming in.

A.B.: I have been able to grow as a teacher too. And in part that's because of a unit on campus called the Hub for Teaching and Learning Resources, and the Director of the hub Carla Vecchiola. Whether it's teaching in the pandemic; in the early AI era, all these ethical questions; disability, neurodivergence and teaching – the people at the Hub are in the literature on teaching and learning, and they have welcomed any conversation I want to have about these topics. [See the index for a sample event co-hosted by WGST and the Hub on disability activism and pedagogy.]

A.B.: Cam Amin, who is also an historian and directs the Inclusive History Project-Dearborn, has nurtured me as a junior colleague. He's the one who really encouraged me to do this project. So, he deserves some credit for this archive, existing today in the form that it does. Gabriella Scarlatta was my associate dean, and then my provost, and is now my chancellor. She has supported me on an interpersonal level. I remember one time when she was provost, I emailed her about a student who was planning not to walk in graduation because they were afraid of the wrong name being read. She responded immediately, like within an hour, and she said she would personally read the name and make sure it was right. And I was like, you're the provost of the whole university. You know? This one email, you gave it such care. And that's how she's been. I have always felt like the things I brought to her matter to her, even if there are institutional constraints sometimes around how much she can do.

A.B.: Finally, in the Office of Student Life, two people have been instrumental. Blake Bonkowski, the LGBTQ program manager from 2017-2019. And Rory Chumney, who was hired into that same role in summer 2024. Both are people I've described as co-parents with me of our queer students. Anytime of the day or night, we can text each other and say, this student has a need, how can we help? This student stopped coming to class, have you seen them? We can coordinate care for our students, we can triage when something goes wrong, and I never have to worry about a student alone.

R.W.: That's so valuable.

[Segment 12: Staff Precarity]

A.B.: This is the only staff position on campus that supports LGBTQ students. And actually, Rory has been moved to Student Life and LGBTQ removed from his title this year because of the political attacks on DEI that are happening. He's still doing his work, but it's much harder and less visible. We have had a ton of turnover in this position for so many reasons. That's an interview we could probably do with them and get a lot of reasons. One of the many is that the university does not pay staff a sustainable wage. It's hard to have a family and a life on what they get paid. In this regard, we're acting like staff are more expendable and replaceable, and like their skills matter less than those of faculty and administrators. I disagree with that. We're a team. The person in that role matters. And for LGBTQ students and for my LGBTQ Studies program, continuity in that role matters.

A.B.: That gets me to practical support. I would say staff turnover has been one of the biggest challenges in both positions, coordinator of LGBTQ Studies and director of Women's and

Gender Studies. While I was director of WGST I worked with three or maybe four different staff. Each time there was a change, I had to reintroduce my program, discuss our needs, and build the relationship from scratch. It's important to say also that this is not a dedicated staff person for WGST or LGBTQ Studies. We currently share with Math. Obviously, there's a story. [Laughter]

R.W.: Yeah, why Math?

A.B.: In a nutshell - this was our choice, and Math is lovely. In a nutshell, during the early pandemic years, the staff person serving College Wide Programs, which includes LGBTQ Studies and Women's and Gender Studies, as well as the sister disciplines I've been mentioning, was moved to a different role. Their position was not refilled. So we lost our staff support. We were told to go to the departments and find a department that would share their staff with us.

A.B.: At the time, we chose Math for several reasons. One, we wanted to resist the absorption into a department that could otherwise happen. From a humane point of view for staff, we saw that Math was serving the smallest number of other programs, compared to say Behavioral Sciences, which is huge. The staff were not getting raises for taking us on as extra work. There's no compensation for them for doing this for us. That's how we ended up in Math. The Math staff have been amazing, so kind and responsive for all this work above and beyond what they were hired to do. But again, they're not being paid for that extra work, and the turnover is also happening there. The moving around of staff, the disposability of staff, is a big issue.

[Segment 13: Losing the Include - A Professional Turning Point]

R.W.: That leads me to this question I have - well, actually that you have.

A.B.: We both have this question. [Laughter]

R.W.: Yes. Is there support you feel like you've needed as director that you didn't get?

A.B.: Yes. Yeah. I think I already kind of started talking about that. But actually, there's a specific story I want to tell here. It's about a turning point in my professional life. This experience changed how I understand the university's relationship to my program, my students, and to me. It's the story of losing the space for the LGBTQ students. This happened in 2019. Prior to 2019, from the time I got to Dearborn, we had a physical space called the Include. When I came, I was told, rightly or wrongly, that the Include was a space for queer students, but that we didn't put LGBTQ in the title so that people would not be outed by the name. Great. This space was a second home to them. Some of them practically lived there. They ate there. They slept there. They studied there all day, every day. People left their personal belongings in there. It was where we held Pride meetings and events. It was decorated by the students. Every inch of it was covered with queer stuff. Now mind you, a lot of these students were not out at home or even elsewhere on campus, so the Include was their haven. When I say it was home to them, I mean that in a very tangible sense, not even just a metaphorical sense.

A.B.: Then one day without warning, all of their stuff was removed from the Include. Ostensibly to paint it, but it was never put back. Then we were told the Include was never intended to be for them. It was always for everyone. And furthermore, another office was going to move in there, and we were not going to get a new space of our own.

R.W.: I didn't know this.

A.B.: I really can't explain how devastating this was for the students. I had students crying for months in my office. We did everything we could think of. We held a forum. We wrote a petition. I gathered students' stories about the space and presented them. I got faculty to sign on to a letter asking the provost to restore our space or give us a new one. I need to say this provost was not Gabriella [Scarlatta]. This was while Gabriella was still my associate dean. She supported me. And actually this was the only time I cried at work. I cried to Gabriella about this, and she was very gentle and kind to me about that. The students were asked to perform their grief over and over throughout this process, which was emotionally exhausting for them. The provost at the time [Kate Davy] was totally unmoved. We were characterized as asking for something so unreasonable. There were all kinds of stories about why this was happening. One story was that we were going to be more intersectional by putting everyone [minoritized students] together [in a single, shared space], which is not what intersectionality as a theory is about. I've said ever since then that I want to write a paper titled "Intersectionality as a Cover for Austerity." We'll see if that happens. Maybe someone listening to this can reach out to me, and we can write it together.

A.B.: In any case, my heart was broken by this because the students suffered and I couldn't help them. I used all my tools and none of them worked. Then the pandemic came, and we didn't revive the conversation or get another space for about five years. Now we have a space, which I'm grateful for, because the physical space really is the key to building queer community on campus. This one is much smaller. It fits about 10 people, maybe half or less the size of the Include. It also lacks the privacy of the Include because it's in a more public location. Some students can't come for that reason. Concerns about privacy are not randomly distributed. They intersect with other identities that students hold. So this has contributed to a less diverse Pride space as well.

A.B.: This could be the basis of a whole interview. There's more to say and analyze and write. For this project I'm focusing more narrowly on - you know, the original question was the support I needed but didn't get as coordinator of LGBTQ Studies and as the main faculty member responsible for these LGBTQ students on campus.

A.B.: I will say, I don't want to become bitter and resentful. I see that happen to academics. I do a lot of work on this within myself. Going forward, I know that no matter how strong my evidence or my ask, there will be times when I can't move the university to protect my students. We can't count on the institution, so we're always going to need mutual aid. All of this sounds so obvious, right? I mean, I knew this intellectually before it happened. But when it happened, it did shift something in me. And so I wanted to share that story here.

R.W.: Thank you for sharing that. That physical space is - it's a big takeaway for future directors

of these kinds of programs, the need for it, and the security of that for the students. It's really interesting. Even the little things, like having it be maybe further away from a public area, that can really support those students.

[Segment 14: Queer Kinship]

R.W.: I had a couple questions for you that came up over the course of listening to us talk and hearing what you had to say. A couple things struck me. One was the care that you provide to your students. You talked about it as a kind of kinship that you offer them and that also stems from the history of the queer community itself. I was wondering if you'd talk a little bit more about that because I think this is an underdeveloped part of our role as faculty and as academics. I don't think people hear enough about this kind of work, so I'd love to hear more about it.

A.B.: Yeah. You know, I think that those of us who do it - because I've become aware of people who are doing it. I have in mind people who I've realized are doing it. We actually intentionally don't share sometimes because it's not - how do I want to say this?

R.W.: Is it that it's not valued or?

A.B.: No. It's that people might actually question it. I feel very confident in my choices about what I'm doing because again, my role is multiple. It's just as important to me being their queer adult in their life as it is being their professor. But I know that there are people for whom having very clear boundaries is really important. And not just important, but maybe [they think] what we should all be doing is having more boundaries. I think those people are making the right choice for themselves, and my choices are different. But I'm not super open about all the different dimensions the work can take, in part because - not just that I don't think it'd be valued, but I think it might be questioned.

R.W.: Yeah, I think there's a culture in academia of being very careful about boundaries with students. That's really important in a lot of circumstances. But your unique role is one where as the director of LGBTQ Studies, you're in a kind of different role because the needs of these students are so different from the general population of students. There is a different culture in queer communities and queer studies around this.

A.B.: Yeah, and I think, you know, other minority communities have this too. One thing with LGBTQ students that will change over time, but it's still really true for the majority of our students, is that they don't have queer adults in their life. They are not growing up with someone in their home who has lived in the world as a queer adult. They want to talk to [a queer adult] about how to be a person. How to navigate relationships. How to navigate their own family stuff or things that happened at work. They don't necessarily have an adult to talk to about this, and for the most part they're talking to each other, you know, online. That has been of great value. But I also think it has been a problem that we have very little intergenerational wisdom being shared compared to the amount of peer-to-peer information being shared. They need someone with experience, like any young person does. Some of the things are related to being queer, and some are just related to life in general because

maybe they are not close to adults in their life because of being queer. For example, a student would come and say hey, can you help me do my taxes? Doing taxes isn't a queer thing. But being queer increases the chances that you don't have an adult in your life who can help you do your taxes for the first time. And so you're going to go to the adult you know and trust.

R.W.: Right. I'm guessing there's research that shows this. That shows that queer students are impacted by things similarly to first generation students in many cases or students experiencing socioeconomic adversity and things like this. Is that the case or - ?

A.B.: Yeah. I mean, I think there's things in common and there's also a lot of overlap there too for our students, where all of that is true about them at the same time.

R.W.: Intersectionality, yeah. Okay. I'm a kinship specialist so that's why I asked all of that.

[Segment 15: Leadership and Chronic Illness]

R.W.: What are some things you've learned about yourself as a result of this work?

A.B.: I've learned about my leadership style. I'm not great at programming and event planning. My strengths are in relationships. I described it once in a text to you and Amny. I actually went back and found the text. I was describing what I sensed the students needed by way of mental health support at a particular moment in time. I wrote, "They need someone to sit with them day in and day out in the Pride space and on WhatsApp listening to random conversations and laughing at their jokes. Then one day when they have a problem, you're the safe person." Adding on to that text, you're the safe person, not because of your title or a splashy thing you did, but because you earned their trust little by little over a long period of time. I think that really describes how I approach my job.

A.B.: I've also learned about myself as someone with depression and chronic illness. I knew I had these things and they shape my life. But as coordinator and director, I have to be so aware of how many spoons I have and how to use them. I have to be crystal clear about my priorities because otherwise my energy will be gone before I do what matters to me. So I make choices. For instance, as you know, I decided not to go up for full anytime soon. Because I noticed when I made decisions with promotion in mind, those were the decisions that ended up clashing with my values and ciphering off my energy. I want to spend those hours sitting with students in the Pride room, right, and not be thinking I should be doing something else. If my junior colleague comes to me with a problem they are facing, I want to stop and be there for them. I want to offer them as much time and support as they need. Because my energy is low, that might be my whole day. I won't be able to swing back and forth between multiple tasks as much, so I have to choose. Then I have to be okay with those choices. Sometimes for me that's the hardest part. I feel like a lot of advice is about how to get to the point where you make the choice. But for me, the biggest challenge is usually afterward and being okay with what I did or didn't do.

[Segment 16: Racial Bias Within Women's and Gender Studies]

R.W.: What are some things you've learned about LGBTQ Studies and Women's and Gender Studies as a result of this work?

A.B.: As a result of being the coordinator and the director, I felt like it's important to learn more about these fields, beyond the scope of my own research areas. I've learned about great work that's happening in different spaces, and I've learned about spaces where there are conflicts or even harm happening. I've seen for example, we've both seen, the classic problem of White feminism, where White women's issues and White women themselves are elevated over women of color here at UM-Dearborn. I won't go into detail because these are other people's stories that they don't want to tell publicly yet, so I'll leave it there. But I will say, we can't praise our program and not acknowledge that this still happens. Even after all these years of scholarly critique about this very thing in Women's and Gender Studies. There are so many books and papers and workshops and learning opportunities in this field exposing racial inequity in higher ed and in the discipline. We have no excuse for this to still be happening.

[Segment 17: Where We Fit]

R.W.: Agree. What about the college or the university? What are some things you've learned about those things from this work?

A.B.: I've learned that the college is both proud of Women's and Gender Studies and a bit unsure what to do with us, who we are, and where we fit. For example, I hear people praise interdisciplinary work but then when there's belt tightening, our resources are the first to go. Like the College Wide Programs losing our staff. In my 11 years in Women's and Gender Studies, we have lost our staff person, our student workers, our office, our lounge, the course releases for the director, and the majority of our budget. During the same time, I often hear about how valued Women's and Gender Studies is and what great work we do. There's a disconnect. I don't believe people are lying when they say they value us, but that has not translated into material support for us to keep going. We've had to scale back everything we do, and it seems like that will continue.

A.B.: The current budget model of the university has been really bad for the College of Arts, Sciences, and Letters. In turn the college is operating with an austerity mindset. And programs like ours suffer under austerity. I mean everybody suffers, right? But to give an example, now we're operating with this set of metrics where the size of a program, how many students it draws, or the size of a class is the barometer of its health. This makes programs that serve minority communities and are therefore smaller "unhealthy" in this calculus. I'm using scare quotes around unhealthy. Once again, we're back in a place where we have to assert our right to exist and argue that something small is meaningful because it challenges the status quo. And that's what a rigorous education should do. These are important conversations. But it's exhausting to have them over and over, and they pull us away from our work.

[Segment 18: Cherished Memories of Student Growth]

R.W.: Yeah. What memories of the programs do you cherish?

A.B.: So many. I love seeing the students blossom in confidence. I love seeing the moment when it clicks, when their developing expertise really comes online. The LGBTQ Studies certificate is four courses. I feel like it's usually in the third or fourth course, and of course some of them take more than four. It's like all of the sudden they start referencing past courses and readings, and they can see how research by different scholars is connected, and they can apply it to something current and timely. And you can see that they see it, right? They realize these ideas are just flowing out of them. One time I was tabling at the drag show here at UM-Dearborn, and I had some books from the field. So I had a table where I was telling people about LGBTQ Studies, and I had brought LGBTQ Studies books. One of them was Ghassan Moussawi's book Fractal Orientalism and Queer Strategies in Beirut. A student who had never taken any LGBTQ Studies courses saw it and said, "Sounds complicated." [Laughter]

R.W.: Does sound complicated.

A.B.: And I sort of chuckled because you know, yeah. A few minutes later another student came up who is similar in many ways to the first in their background. I knew them both pretty well, so I knew about these similarities. The second student was about three classes deep in the program. And they picked up the same book, and they said, "Ooh, interesting." And I just felt this swell of joy inside. I was like, that's LGBTQ Studies. It opened this door. Now through this door the possibilities are endless of what someone could do with this, what conversations they now feel able to be a part of it, what connections they're gonna make, what they're gonna create with this new knowledge that they have. So those are the kinds of moments I cherish.

A.B.: I also cherish moments that are about students coming into themselves in their personal identities. There are a lot of ways that happens in LGBTQ Studies classes. One way that's really sweet and continues to happen is with haircuts. So you know that in the LGBTQ community, there are haircuts and there are *haircuts*. Like the first haircut where you really see someone come into themself and their gender. We've had several experiences where someone walked into class with The Haircut, and the whole class was just like, "Daaaamn." You know? And you could just see the person feel so good. You could feel them growing in front of you. How beautiful that they had that space in which to bring that part of themself and be so celebrated for it and loved for it. I cherish moments like that.

[Segment 19: Advice and Hopes for Future Directors]

R.W.: What advice would you give to a director of LGBTQ Studies or Women's and Gender Studies today?

A.B.: My advice is to figure out what kind of leader you want to be, and know that you don't have to be or do everything. That's what this oral history project has taught me so far, among other things. It can be overwhelming when we feel like we have to fill someone else's shoes. But all these directors brought their own shoes, right? We're unique. We're strong in

different ways. And then speaking to future directors: chances are, people are more proud of you than you realize. I was struck interviewing Suzanne [Bergeron] when she said she was afraid of disappointing her mentors. And Lisa [Martin] said she was afraid of letting down Suzanne. And I'm afraid of letting down Lisa and Suzanne. [Laughter] I mean what is this? We don't need to be doing this. I'm saying this to myself because I'm part of it. The program benefits from having different kinds of directors with different kinds of strengths.

R.W.: What do you hope changes, if anything, for future directors?

A.B.: Well, I hope there's more consistent material support. In particular, more consistent staff support and support for staff. And I hope the university stands up against the erosion of academic and intellectual freedoms. In reality, you know, we might end up in a really different world where the state dictates what we can research and teach, and where programs like ours are forced to shut down, like they already have been in some places. [See the index for a list of women's and gender studies program closures as of summer 2026.] If that happens, I hope we can find ways to keep sharing knowledge with our students and with each other outside the university.

R.W.: What do you hope stays the same, if anything, for future directors?

A.B.: I hope the programs continue to run. I hope they're still here when I retire, if I get to be a professor until retirement. That's not something I take for granted working in the fields I do. I hope the programs aren't cut for political reasons or budgetary reasons or a combination of both. If they are, I hope they come back. I think these programs really matter.

R.W.: How do you see the LGBTQ Studies and WGST programs fitting into the larger picture of your career and life?

A.B.: They really are my career and life. So my future is entangled with them. If they go down, I go down, you know, professionally. All my skin is in this game. And I'm a queer woman with a trans partner. I have trans and queer nieces and nephews. Even if I stop working, these fields of study will still matter to me in my life. I think I'm one of the youngest people to be interviewed for this study. I'm 43. So this is a question I need to answer again after more of my career has happened. I'm not really at the memoir writing stage of my life. But I think at every stage it's good to stop and reflect and ask these questions. This interview has been an opportunity to do that, and I'm glad I got to do it. So thank you Rose for interviewing me. I really appreciate you.

R.W.: No, it's an honor to hear your answers to these questions. I've learned a lot just sitting here today, so thank you.

A.B.: And we can stop right there, but if there's anything else you wanted to ask me. It doesn't have to be even - there might not be, but -

[Segment 20: Conclusions: With and Without a Space]

R.W.: Well, I was wondering, just following up on that last one. Do you think that if for some

reason LGBT Studies was cancelled at our university that you would stay?

A.B.: Mmm. Okay. I think it would depend on the way it happened. If it was cancelled because, for example, the [US federal] administration said these courses are illegal, and the university said we want to keep you as a faculty, I probably would stay and I would find other ways.

R.W.: Kind of like what Rory is doing.

A.B.: Yes. Now, if we're in a more extreme situation, it's possible that that option won't be on the table. In that case, I have to find something else. Even the way my mind thinks about this, even in small ways. I'm working on this project, and I have to learn how to use some software in order to edit these interviews. They were like oh, we can train a student to use this software. I was like, train me! [Laughter]

R.W.: I need extra skills just in case.

A.B.: I need transferable skills, yeah. [Laughter] Every opportunity I have to learn and keep some additional skills I will, because I know that there is a little bit, there is this precarity around me. But I'm here for as long as I am able to be.

R.W.: That's kind of comforting that there might be something else to find, but it's hard also because of your relationships with the students.

A.B.: Oh my gosh, yes. It would be devastating.

R.W.: They're still gonna be here. They'll still exist.

A.B.: I mean, I told them when everything started - and by everything, I mean the very direct assault on higher ed by the current [federal] administration. I said if our classes stop, I will hold reading groups for free. We can still talk about these things. And that sounds lovely, and I will do that that. But there's also the bandwidth problem. Students will be overloaded by the courses that they're taking for their degrees. So they won't have the time, right, or they'll have less time. Maybe our priorities will readjust in a situation like that because we'll have this heightened sense of how critical it is and we'll make the time. But I know that it will be a really tough transition if it happens.

R.W.: Maybe if at the very least the space could be kept. That sounds like a first priority somehow too.

A.B.: Yeah, it really is because now I've had an opportunity to see us with and without a space. Without a space, there was not the cohesion, the friendships and things, because we're a commuter campus. So students, they have to build these relationships. It can't just be, oh I saw you at an event. We're all too socially awkward to meet people at events. [Laughter] That's just not how we're going to make a community.

R.W.: Yeah. I'm not going to make friends with the person sitting next to me at a lecture.

A.B.: No. [Laughter] I mean, so often they end up in the Pride space and they're like, oh my

gosh you were in my class all semester. LGBTQ Studies classes are different because we talk about this stuff and then they find out about each other. But in classes where they're not gay class, as they call it, they could be sitting in there with another queer person all semester and never talk.

R.W.: Well, thank you for answering my curiosity on that one.

A.B.: Yeah, absolutely. All right.

[End of Transcript]