

Commentary: Queering the Archives Interview with Gabrielle Cody
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When I originally thought about conducting the interview for our oral history collection, I had it in mind that my narrator would be an alumnus – someone with whom I would be able to find common ground in reminiscences of dorm life, afternoons on the quad, and the intimate bonds forged through working in student clubs and organizations. When, however, it came to be that I would be interviewing current Vassar Drama professor Gabrielle Cody, I realized that the narrative I heard would have a somewhat more divorced take on Vassar. Gabrielle doesn't live in the dorms, and her relationships to students are as much working relationships as they are personal connections. I approached the interview as though speaking to a Vassar "elder": a woman who has seen two decades of cycles in faculty and student attitudes and experiences. I was not disappointed.

Personally, I felt a certain eagerness to get into the story Gabrielle would tell; as a Drama student who has somehow never found myself in one Gabrielle's classes, she was intriguing and slightly mysterious to me. Gabrielle asked before the interview if she could share with me her favorite story of Anne MacKay – a common friend and a respected figure for both of us. I asked her if she would be willing to record it, and hearing the story of Anne's enthusiasm for Vassar as late as even ten years ago was heartwarming. Afterwards, we began with the question, "What is your earliest memory?" and Gabrielle was open and willing to explore each question as they came, never sounding rehearsed or hesitant. Beginning like this also allowed us to form some common ground, because, while we did not have the experience of, say, living in Strong House, beginning with a question like that does not immediately reinforce the professor-student relationship, and allows instead for the conversational, interviewer-interviewee relationship to unfold.

When we spoke of Vassar, Gabrielle gave a lot of insight into the history of queer students and faculty members in earlier years of the college. Not only was Gabrielle able to share firsthand stories of the closeted Vassar professors that we (as students, as a class, etc.) have heard about many times, but she also shared a surprising observation that, while current Vassar students are more open about their sexualities and same-sex relationships, she finds students today to be more conservative than she has seen in the last twenty years. (She also offers interesting speculation as to why she thinks that might be.) From a feminist perspective, I have seen Gabrielle as a strong feminist force on this campus, and it was almost a little jarring to hear her speak of how, when she first began reading feminist texts, the lesbian separatist texts treated the "issue" of the "transsexual."

Gabrielle's narrative represents an important perspective on the generational difference between students my age and our professors – even the fairly young professors – and how we inhabit the spaces of this campus and integrate our "queer" identities with our other interests. That conversation will continue to be had as we build the Queering the Archives collection, but what is so important about collecting these oral histories, and having these memories recorded and transcribed, is precisely what Gabrielle said, "They're people's lives."