

Meg Leddy-Cecere, Class of 2012
Dartmouth College Oral History Project
Dartmouth Community and Dartmouth's World
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DONIN: So today is Tuesday, March 20, 2012. My name is Mary Donin. We're here in Rauner Library with Meg Leddy-Cecere, Dartmouth Class of '12; she's a '12, she's a senior, as they say. They don't say senior anymore, do they? Okay, Meg, I guess we'd first like to start out by finding out from you a little bit about, you know, where did you grow up, what's your family unit look like, how did you end up coming to Dartmouth?

LEDDY-CECERE: Okay. I grew up in Strafford, Vermont, which is about 20 minutes away from Dartmouth. And I grew up with Dartmouth sort of always in my life, but I never really thought of it in the way that I think of it now. It was sort of this place that I associated with Hanover a lot, and Hanover was where we went to go food shopping and where you went to the movies with your friends and sort of, I guess, all of that, the things that you would do. Like a hangout space when you were younger and older, all through my teenage years. And I don't even remember thinking about Dartmouth as a school at all. It was just sort of like an institution. And I didn't really think about why there were so many young people wandering around Hanover. It was just sort of that was the way that Hanover was, and that was where you went to go do things with your family and with your friends.

DONIN: So Strafford, just for those people who won't know Hanover and Strafford, is it more rural than Hanover?

LEDDY-CECERE: Oh, yes, much more rural. So Strafford has South Strafford and Strafford, and there are two sort of downtown areas. And the first downtown area has Colburn's General Store, and it has the tennis court, and it has the school, Newton School, where I went to and where my mom teaches, which is a kindergarten through eight school, very small. And there is a river, and there are soccer fields, and there's Barrett Hall, which is sort of like a place where you congregate to do your school plays and that's it. And then the next downtown area has the church and the green and the townhouse and the post office. And that's it.

So when you want to—there's no restaurants, there's no like entertainment other than what you're doing yourself. So when you want to go down, you know, if you want to, like I say, go to a movie, go shopping, hangout in a place where there are people and cars and things like that, then you go to Hanover or you go to West Lebanon.

DONIN: Where'd you go to high school?

LEDDY-CECERE: In Sharon Academy. So we had the choice—Strafford's too small to have a high school. So you could choose to go to Hanover High, you could choose to go to Thetford Academy, which is sort of our designated school, you could go to the Sharon Academy, which was relatively new when I went, or Hartford. And I think we would pay for—the town pays for up to Thetford's tuition. So that would cover everything but Hanover High. At Hanover you'd have to pay, your family would have to pay more.

Except that it wasn't—I guess it wasn't really.... It was a choice, but it wasn't that much of a choice because you sort of were tracked a little bit. I felt like if you were good at school, you would go to Hanover or you would go to Sharon. And if you were less interested in school, you would go to Thetford, or you would go to Hartford. So there were less choices than it seems like there were.

And Hanover was sort of the track that I always thought I would go to when I was younger. And then as I got older, I sort of—Sharon became more an option; it was a very small school when I was younger, and my brother went to Sharon and really liked it. It was sort of like an alternative place to go. And I was a little scared, I think, of Hanover because it was sort of—everyone knew that the kids who went to Hanover sort of went very fast in terms of growing up and the things that they did. And I was a little bit afraid of that. And I also didn't feel like I would fit in with a lot of money going on in Hanover, as we all know, and a lot of doctors' kids and professors' kids, and that didn't really fit with my family. My mom's a teacher, and she teaches—she was my own kindergarten teacher.

DONIN: [Laughs] That's neat.

LEDDY-CECERE: She's taught kindergarten through—she teaches everything. And my dad—I honestly don't even know. My dad's a software guy. He worked for Tally Systems, which is a company that he was vice

president of, and then he sold to Novell, a bigger software company. And he's worked for Novell ever since. I don't really know what he does. I'm not really sure. And I have an older brother --

DONIN: mysterious computer stuff.

LEDDY-CECERE: Mysterious computer stuff, yes. I think he's tried to explain it to me millions of time and I just don't know [Laughter]. And then so I went to Sharon. My brother went to Sharon. My brother also went to Dartmouth. He's a '10.

DONIN: Oh.

LEDDY-CECERE: And I originally didn't go to Dartmouth. I went to Vassar for my first, my freshman year. And then, you know, I had the usual freshman year sort of transition issues where it was hard, which I think is very normal, and you don't really realize how normal that is until you get past it. And everyone talks about how hard freshman year is. And you're like, why didn't anyone tell me that when I was having such a hard time freshman year.

And then my mom got sick. So I was commuting back and forth from Poughkeepsie, which is where Vassar is, to Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center where she was. And that got really hard. And I thought if I could just go to school closer, things would be so much easier because it got really hard to get my work done on time. And just like all the time spent on the train and stuff like that. It was very difficult. So I sent out applications.

And, you know, I was fine with like UVM or something like that. That would have been like an hour commute, but still much better than the seven or eight hours that I was doing. And I was lucky enough to get into Dartmouth, which was definitely not where I saw myself when I was graduating from high school. But has turned out to be, I think, a good fit. And it made the whole taking care of my family much, much easier when I had to do that.

DONIN: Did your brother's experience influence your comfort level of coming to Dartmouth?

LEDDY-CECERE: Yes. I remember my mom saying, "Don't go to Dartmouth." She really, really didn't want me to go. Tom did really well here, but not in the way that you think of like a traditional Dartmouth person doing really well. He was a linguistics and Arabic double major. And

did really well academically. Had good friends. Got involved in the gospel choir. And he was unaffiliated, though, which was a really big decision and was really hard for him, I think. And it got easier. And Tom always makes everything look easy.

So I'm sure if I had been a nonaffiliated man at Dartmouth, I would have made a big fuss about it, and like let my entire family know how hard it was. But he sort of made it look like it wasn't that big of a deal. And all of his friends were. So he said he just.... "Oh, I'll just go hang out with them at their frats." So I think having that as a role model actually made it easier.

Because in high school, it was really hard for me to be my brother's sister because he was captain of the soccer team and just sort of like really great at everything. And I remember feeling super resentful—not anything that he did—but I guess things that he did. Just feeling sort of like, that I was always being compared to him and that I was fine, but I wasn't as good or just wasn't as on top of it or as likeable or as whatever as he was.

So I was really worried that coming to Dartmouth I would have that same sort of feeling of like I have to live up to something. But the fact that he was unaffiliated was sort of—I remember I'd get angry at him because I felt like he was so socially like just played the game in high school. He did exactly what he was supposed to do, and it always bothered me and made me feel bad. But here he sort of didn't play the game for the first time, and I think that made me feel....

When I came in, I made the decision to not be affiliated as well. And having him do that for me in a way—I think it's much harder for men to be unaffiliated than women. And I think that helped me to make that decision. And he's helped me through my time here in a way that I feel like didn't really happen in high school. So I think that I was worried about—following him again to another school. But actually I'm not sure I would have made it through here as well as I have without him sort of walking this path before me. And being able to look back and help me out and things, I think.

DONIN: And choosing affirmatively to not sort of join the ultimate community here at Dartmouth.

LEDDY-CECERE: Yes.

DONIN: Greek life.

LEDDY-CECERE: Greek life. And I think that he... I think that both of us sort of have this— I know a lot of women, less men, but a lot of women who are unaffiliated who went through rush. And then for whatever reason decided to not join a sorority, or it didn't work out the way they wanted it to and they didn't feel comfortable with whatever was happening.

And I think having Tom, my brother, be unaffiliated sort of gave me the confidence to not even go through that. I didn't ever rush. I didn't ever think I was going to rush. I never like thought about doing that. And I think having him do that before me.... Because everyone says, "Just try it. And if you don't like it, then that's fine." And then you see people just destroyed by their experiences, going through that.

And I just already knew...like there's a dress code that's not something that I, you know, it's like formal wear Tuesdays. And like that's not something that I would ever feel good about, no matter what the outcome was. And so I think having him sort of be a model for me of saying you don't even have to try it if you don't want to was really helpful. Because I think that—I don't think.... I could never see myself in a sorority. But I don't—I think I would have bigger issues with Dartmouth if I had rushed, if I had gone through that experience, even if I had not wound up within the system anyway. So I think just going through that really changes people's relationship to the College. And I think that I'm glad that I didn't have to go through that. I think he helped me.

DONIN: Did you feel—I mean despite the fact that you felt comfortable with the decision because, you know, you'd been able to process it with the help of your brother and his experiences, did you feel, once you got here, did you feel pressure from people to try anyway?

LEDDY-CECERE: I think in some ways being a transfer makes that a little bit easier because you have the fallback of like I just came here, and I don't know anything about the Greek life, and I'm not sure yet where I want to wind up. So I think first term not rushing— Fall term was very easy, and I didn't feel a lot of pressure at all, because it is sort of ridiculous to...I mean I guess it's not ridiculous. Lots of people do it. But I felt like it would be pretty silly to rush sororities that I had no idea what their reputations were, the women in them were or anything like that.

But I did have.... My roommate when I first came in was actually, weirdly enough, was a friend from high school who was also a transfer. And it was very good, and we just fell out of touch. And then saw each other's names on our rooming slip and were like, oh my gosh! And she rushed fall term and was very into it and wound up in KDE. And I guess that made it a little bit hard.

So I didn't feel pressure from people outside being like "why aren't you rushing?" But I think living with someone who was doing it, I think I had a hard time being the kind of friend that you should be when someone's going through something because I felt insecure about it. So like you should be able to be like excited for your friend when this is something that they're doing. But I think it's harder to be supportive and excited about something that you don't believe in. And that you at the same time are sort of fighting not to do. So I didn't feel....

And then I think winter term is when you start to feel the pressure from outside people. But I think that going to Vassar where the idea of a Greek life is pretty laughable.... And I can't imagine any of my friends at Vassar ever being in a Greek system, and no one would talk about that at Vassar like it was a positive. Like everyone would just make fun of it.

So I think that being at a school where it was so ingrained in the culture, anti-Greek life was so ingrained in the culture, and social life was the opposite of that, that it didn't make it—I didn't feel insecure about my decision because I sort of understood that this is not the way the whole world is. That like the whole world doesn't need you to be in a sorority. And that is how some people think, and that's one culture, but it's not the only culture.

And so— And I did realize even at that time that there would be a subculture here, and that it might be harder to find because it's not the dominant space. But it would exist, and that those were the people that I would want to be friends with.

And I don't know. I think that I've always been pretty good in my life about not doing things when I don't believe in them. It's never been hard for me not to do them. It's sort of hard to deal emotionally with the ramifications of not doing them. But I don't think I've ever really struggled with the decision to do it or not to do it, I've always known

what I should or shouldn't do. And then it's just sort of like dealing with the fallout post not doing it or doing it. That is harder for me.

DONIN: How was it for you coming here at the start of your sophomore year where a lot of these friendships had already been developed? I mean you were dropped into the middle of it. I mean you weren't there for the beginning of it.

LEDDY-CECERE: Yes, yes. I think that that's really hard, because I know that all my friends at Vassar came from my Freshman Floor, which was sort of like—and I know Dartmouth has a similar sort of unit -- so that you have your Freshman Floor, and that's who your first friends are, and that's who you go do all these college firsts with.

So that's hard because sort of that.... I mean I know people often move away from their Freshman Floor. But that sort of group of people who saw you going through everything that was hard and were there for you.... Like I still think about my friends at Vassar as those people because they were for me.

And I think it was—they put you on a transfer floor with international students and other people who didn't have the same sort of initial experience with the College. In some ways that's nice because you're meeting other people that want to make friends as much as you do. And, you know, are uncomfortable in the same ways and are dealing with similar things.

But then you sort of get isolated in this sort of transfer/ international student group. And it's funny to see how different people— I think I dealt with it by really embracing it the first maybe even year. And then totally rejecting it the last two years. And I feel bad sometimes. But I think that, when you're trying so hard to fit in, to sort of be like, it's like no I don't even hang out with other transfers anymore. I do fit in. Look at me. Like I've found my place here, and it's not a transfer place. It's not this weird liminal space that I was in before. So I think that different people....

There was not a lot of support for transfers when I came. And that's definitely changing now because a lot of the transfers sort of approached the administration and said, "This was really bad. And there was no support, and we need structures for the people coming in, to help them." And I feel bad about the fact that I haven't engaged in that at all. I think it's maybe like a protective measure to sort of say, Now that I've found my place, I don't want to go back

into that space that was, you know, where I felt like not a real member of the community.

Because I think that —and you see that a lot with transfers: either people really embrace the community and continue to stay really involved in projects to help integrate transfer students; or people break totally with the community and don't like to think of themselves in that way. And I think that's more of where I found myself—where I didn't really want to be associated with transfer students.

DONIN: So this move on the part of transfer students to approach the administration to get more help, so that happened while you were here.

LEDDY-CECERE: Yes, yes. Because our year was really.... What happened is that there are very few transfer students first of all. I know that there are some schools that take a hundred or 50 or something. And then that's very easy to have a pretty big sort of group of people with more power, I think, in a community. When there are 15 of you, it's like how much voice do you really have? Not very much. And there's no guarantee that you're going to get along with everyone who transferred. And so I think that when I was here, what was really missing was older transfer students who would say: We've gone through this, let us help you, we'll go talk about it. These are some issues that we faced. Because there are some really practical issues about credits Like I'm taking a four-class term this term because they wouldn't approve a lot of my credits. So there's a lot of very.... There's a lot of, you know, broader social issues that I wish we had talked about. But there's a lot of very practical issues that it would help to have someone who had had a similar experience to be able to give you some advice. But that was totally nonexistent. I've never met an older transfer.

DONIN: Did you have any kind of mentor or guide?

LEDDY-CECERE: No. There was.... So they put you in two places. I was in— The McLaughlin Cluster. They put some of you in McLaughlin. And they put some of you in Butterfield. And in Butterfield the sort of floor advisor—you know they would have like a floor advisor—he was a transfer, and he was really great to the people on his floor, where he would take them out and show they around and really help them out. So he was....

But that wasn't like he was formally instated as a transfer advisor. He just took that role on. But because we weren't in Butterfield, he was less of a role—I'm sure he would have helped if I had reached out to him, but he was less accessible for me.

I went to my brother with questions a lot of the time. There was no one formally other than, you know, like my dean, like everyone has. There was no sort of peer advisory unit. We mostly helped each other, I think. I was very close to the girls that I lived near who transferred, because you go through a lot, and it's very hard. And I think that—we just relied on each other.

But they are now like, the people in my year, so the people who went through what I went through, have like transfer social events, transfer panels. It's all over blitz all the time. You know like come and have cocktails with us. So they're.... I think people are trying really hard to sort of.... I'm hoping that my year was sort of the bottom, we hit the bottom, of that, and it was really bad. And then now we're sort of in an upward trajectory, so that people who come in have sort of more peer support.

DONIN: But it's interesting that you—I mean you've moved away from all that.

LEDDY-CECERE: Yes.

DONIN: You found a community.

LEDDY-CECERE: Yes. I think.... But that only happened for me because I went abroad. So I went abroad two terms in a row. So my first year here, my sophomore year, I would say most of...all of my friends were transfers. Maybe I had a few that weren't. I don't know. I can't really.... Maybe some peripheral class friends and things through extracurriculars. But no really good friends who weren't transfers.

And then I went to Copenhagen for my fall term junior year, and then I went to India for my winter term. And that's where I found my community. So that's where I made.... And now through them, I've made other friends that weren't there. But through those people.

That was sort of like a really great experience. I was very happy on both of my abroad terms because it was sort of like everyone was on an equal footing. Again. Just sort of the way it is freshman year, where no one really has a set social group, no one really has.... So

I was able to really make my best friends here, that I have right now. And then through them when I came back was able to sort of find a place that was not a transfer place, I guess.

But like I said, I do feel guilty about—you can see why I didn't get support when you see what I'm doing. This is why there was no support for me, because it's a community where transfer is not—you don't want to be a transfer. So it's very easy to see why I had no upperclassman support because I'm not supporting. And I'm sure—I mean if somebody approached me as a transfer and said, Would you, you know, do you want to talk to me? or something like that. But even then, I think, you're so protective. When you have to fight for your space, you're so protective of your space.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

LEDDY-CECERE: And I think that all I can really say to other transfers is that it's really hard. And I don't.... So I feel—you want to say that you made it and that you joined, that you were accepted, and that you didn't have to remain in this sort of....

DONIN: Sort of no-man's-land.

LEDDY-CECERE: It's totally.... It's like you're in, you know, you were accepted in, but you're accepted in a different way. And everyone wonders like, you know, why did you transfer? Like we all—is there a different admissions process? Do you measure up to us? Like if you weren't here, if you weren't in an Ivy in the beginning, do you deserve to be in an Ivy now? And like are you really as smart as we are? Wouldn't you have come here.... didn't you apply here in the beginning? You must have been rejected. And stuff like that.

So I think that there's a lot of.... And I think probably a lot of that you put on yourself. And people aren't even thinking, and you just feel insecure about it. And so you start projecting all those things. So I think that it is like a no-man's-land. And if you are lucky enough to find your way out of it, you don't want to go back there, even in like an advisory capacity, because it's not something that you want to identify with.

DONIN: I should think that all transfers would view that as a transitional time, that you do want to move out of it and become completely, you know, immersed in whatever you view as Dartmouth life. But it's certainly not as a transfer.

LEDDY-CECERE: And that's, I think—yes, I think that's really true. And I think that you see a lot of people pledging sororities and fraternities straight away because they feel like it's an instant community. And I think that there is something to that.

DONIN: It's a great way to be sort of instantly assimilated into—

LEDDY-CECERE: Into something.

DONIN: What people perceive as the real Dartmouth—i.e., Greek life.

LEDDY-CECERE: Greek life. And I think it's sort of.... A lot of people, surprisingly, who come in sort of want this romanticized college experience that they feel like Dartmouth offers. And I think Greek life is again a good—a primary part of this romanticized image of what like my college years should be. Yes.

And so I think that like you said, it's easy assimilation, and it also is something that a lot of people who choose Dartmouth as a second option felt like they were missing in their old schools, and feel like they can get it here. Like if I went to NYU and I didn't feel at all like it was—there's no campus, and there's no parties that everyone's invited to. Then this is sort of a defining feature of Dartmouth that you might choose in your second college option, I guess. So I think that's part of it as well.

DONIN: So how do you describe what your community is here?

LEDDY-CECERE: I think— That's a good question. I think when you're unaffiliated, you either find some sort of extracurricular thing that provides a community. Or your community is just your friends. And I feel like that's—I don't feel I have like a community. I just feel like.... I guess in a way....

I think if I had to pick something as my community, I would say it's the women's and gender studies department. Because India FSP was a women's and gender studies FSP, a lot of people on that trip are majors as well. And I think that a lot of them I had known peripherally before the trip through a lot of classes together. So then that was sort of like, oh, now we can get to be better friends or whatever. And I think that.... So I think that if I was going to like pick a community, it would be those women.

DONIN: But women's and gender studies isn't exclusively women, is it?

LEDDY-CECERE: No, but it is. I mean there -- I can count three. No, there's not even. I think there's been one male major in the past year. People take classes, men take classes. But they take them sometimes as a joke or as—or they might be genuinely interested. But it's very rare to see a man who's a major.

And then I think that—I am in a secret society, and so that's sort of a community as well. Although I think I've been moving further away from that this year as a community. Whereas last year it was, when I first entered, it was an important community for me. It's sort of no longer that.

And I feel like it was sort of—it's sort of like the elitist version of a sorority. It's like a sorority, but more elite. And so if I thought it was hypocritical of myself to join a sorority, then it's just as hypocritical to join a secret society, except that, I think, the exclusivity—they pick you. And so you feel less of like it's your fault. Or at least for me when I think of things like—I don't like joining groups that are selective in terms of those criteria.

And I think that I let myself sort of embrace that community for as long as I did because I felt like I didn't do anything. That all I did was be myself. And then they picked me, so what can I do? Whereas with the sorority, you have to go through all of those things, like you have to prove yourself. With a secret society, they pick you, and you just join. And that's all you have to do. So it was sort of a less—it required less of me initially.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

LEDDY-CECERE: To enter into. And I think that's why I didn't—why I embraced it as a community initially and why I no longer really associate with that as much as I did because I feel like it's...

DONIN: It's not that particular secret society though that you're rejecting. It sounds like it's the parameters of all these secret societies because they're just sort of exclusionary.

LEDDY-CECERE: Yes. And I think it's just like I don't reject a specific—there's no sorority that I have a vendetta against. And I think that's what is.... When I was speaking earlier about people who rushed and then decided not to, they very often have a vendetta against a specific

sorority that excluded them, or something that they wanted and they didn't get. And because I never rushed, I never sort of had this feeling of like, oh, I hate all Kappas or I hate all....

But I think that I don't like the idea of what a sorority is. And in that same way, the people in my society, I like them as people a lot, I really respect them as people. But what I don't respect, like you said, is the structure that requires that, it's basically who you know, that's how you get into one. And so if you don't know anyone, then....

And I guess that maybe digs deeper as a transfer, because I can see how it would have been very easy for me to not have known anyone. And have that not have been my fault. And so I feel like, as someone who transferred, I felt.... I guess it also has to do with—say you get picked by a specific person. And they propose you to the group, and the group decides whether or not to accept you. And the person who picked me told me that when she proposed me to the group, they were like I don't know who that is. We don't—like what does she do on campus? Who is she? Like we don't want her if she's not a known...

And then I guess the person who picked me said, "Like is this really like what.... Like I'm vouching for this person; that should be enough." And then they decided. But I guess ever since I heard that story, it sort of was like, eww, this is really gross. And I don't...and I guess it made me feel like an outsider again in a community where I should feel like accepted and admitted. That to know that like when my name was proposed, it was almost shot down, it sort of like puts you again in this space where it's like you're not quite in. Like you're in, but you're not quite in. And I think that—that's probably another reason why I moved away from that.

But I think you're right, that in general it's not the specifics of the situation. It's the social structure in itself. I think that it does for me something that I always.... I really didn't like when I came here that a lot of people speak out about the Greek system. It's not—I think it's unusual for men, but a lot of women speak out about it all the time, and a lot of the time those women are affiliated. And a lot of time the loudest voices are voices from the sororities that are sort of up there. So KDEs and Kappas are going to be saying like, Oh, yeah, this is so stupid, I don't even know why I do it. And it always bothered me when people...it's like people only feel the freedom to speak out when they've already been shown that they've been

accepted. So like you've got to be accepted into the upper groups, and then you can say, oh, this is stupid. Oh, this is whatever. But if you're not, then people just think it's sour grapes.

And so I think that.... The secret society does for me what joining a sorority does, which... I don't like what it does to my voice. It makes my voice be like, oh, I'm already accepted. So then I can speak out against things. Whereas, I always thought secret societies were dumb. And if you had asked me before I was in one if I would ever join one, I would have laughed at you. But I think that it sort of—it's like a way of.... I think it's sort of...for me, it sort of changes my voice on campus in a way that, I know that I looked at those voices before and sort of wondered why, if you believe these things, are you doing this? And so I think that I thought a lot this year about sort of openly stepping down; making sort of not a scene, but sort of making something of it. And I guess I just decided to stop going to meetings instead.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

LEDDY-CECERE: I don't know why I didn't do it. I guess I just didn't want to make a social fuss, didn't want to have to deal with anything that came of it. And then also sort of thought how much is this going to change anything? Will it change something if I stand up and say, I think this is really hypocritical. And I think that this is an elitist group.

Because I think the society that I'm in prides itself on this idea that they're not Sphinx or something. But they are in their own way. But I'm not— And I think you know, you just really want that cane at graduation, and that's so stupid. But I think there's part of you.... I remember watching my brother's graduation, and seeing all those people canes and being like, Oh, my gosh, that's so.... What does that mean? What did they do? And this is so cool. And then, oh my gosh! she has a cane. And I think that I just really, you just really want to be able to stand up there with your cane at graduation. And that is not something that I feel proud about wanting. But I think that I do want it, you know.

DONIN: Well, and, you know, you don't remain static when you're in an institution like this. I mean the idea is you grow and evolve. And things that were important to you when you came here are not necessarily the same things that are important when you graduate.

LEDDY-CECERE: Yes.

DONIN: And that's not necessarily a bad thing. It's usually a good thing.

LEDDY-CECERE: But sometimes it's a bad thing.

DONIN: Yes, yes.

LEDDY-CECERE: I mean there are a lot of ways that I've changed that I really like. I think academically Dartmouth has been a really great fit. I've been so happy with my professors and with my classes and with the things that I've learned. I always knew socially it wasn't going to be a good fit. But I don't think....

Looking at myself, I do not look at the ways that I've changed socially so that it's a better fit and think about them as positives. I think about it as a concession sort of to what this institution is. So I think that like in terms of my academic development, I've felt really happy about the way that I've changed here. And I think, obviously, in some ways socially. But I think when you're here, you start to think it's the way everyone thinks. And I think I came in not thinking that, and I still don't think that. But I think it's much harder....

The longer you stay, the harder it is to realize that not everyone thinks this way. I think it still makes me nervous. I get really nervous about sororities and hierarchies because I feel like I don't know. Like there's a game that you're supposed to be playing, and I feel like some of the time I know what I'm supposed to be doing. And then some of the time I have no idea what I'm supposed to be doing. And I don't really know who does know. But—

DONIN: does anybody know, do you think?

LEDDY-CECERE: Some people know. But I don't.... When I think about the people that I think know, they're usually, Dartmouth's been in the family for a long time. They're on sports teams. They're wealthy. And I feel like they know something I don't know or something like.... They know how to navigate Dartmouth in a way that I don't know how to. And I think there are people who know how to navigate it less than I do.

But I think most of us walk around a lot of the time feeling like there's some sort of rules that we didn't—or an instruction book we didn't get. And I think we wouldn't feel like that if there weren't people who did have it. I think less people have it than we walk

around thinking have it. But I think that there are people, who, through their upbringing, know.

Sometimes I see it in— I see it most in like internships, and who gets internships, and why they get them, in terms of like summer, off-terms or summer things. Because I think that.... We all know those students where we're like, gosh, that's not a very.... Like, I took classes with you. I know you're not a very great student. And then you see them lined up with the best internship, and you wonder how did you get this? And it's your dad or your mom or these connections that most of us don't have. I mean I think everyone thinks everyone at Dartmouth has these connections. But most of us don't have those connections. But some of us do.

And I think one of my really good friends, our friendship sort of fell apart because she would get so upset that I was working so hard at everything, and spending so much time on my schoolwork, and trying so hard. And she didn't try very hard, and she didn't do very well. But her dad can pick up any sort of slack that, you know, she still wound up with a better internship, she's still going to wind up with a better job right out of school, even though she's a C/B student.

And I think that that's sort of disillusioning, that kind of interaction where you do actually see people who are getting places because of who they know. And I think that I was never, ever raised, in Vermont, in my family, in the high school that I went to, to feel like that would be true in any way. It was if you worked hard enough, you would be fine. And you would wind up okay. And I think that at Dartmouth, sometimes you learn that that's not true. And I think that's a hard lesson coming from where I come from, to learn where it might be less hard for people coming from different backgrounds.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

LEDDY-CECERE: My family is—both my parents grew up in Queens in very hard situations, and were very smart and went to very good schools and sort of rose through their brains. And I think that that's sort of what my family believes: that if you work hard enough and you're smart enough, you can do whatever you want to do. But sometimes I think Dartmouth sort of says that's not true. That you'll reach a certain space, but you won't reach—like you or everyone can get here if they're smart enough and work hard enough, but there's this place and you can only get to this place by who you know.

DONIN: Is that something that Dartmouth affirmatively teaches as an institution, or do you think that's a lesson you've learned from your peer group?

LEDDY-CECERE: That's a really good question. Hmm.

DONIN: I mean the whole networking thing and internships is a lesson from the big, bad world out there. And it's hard to know who's teaching that—

LEDDY-CECERE: To people.

DONIN: To people.

LEDDY-CECERE: I think that's a really good point. I think it probably is less Dartmouth as an institution and more.... I don't think Dartmouth institutionally teaches that, at least not through academic avenues. I don't think any professor is sitting there telling you that you working hard at this is not worth it. Or that I think it's possible that the more social avenues of the institution....

I think fraternities and sororities definitely teach you that. That's what they tell you when you're thinking about whether or not to rush. Everyone says being in a sorority, being in a fraternity, is the best networking opportunity. You'll meet so many people who will help you so much. And you'll see that, you know, there's going to be Kappas who—there's going to be a Kappa in this same position every single year because a Kappa had it before, and a Kappa will have it next, and a Kappa will have it next.

So I think if you consider Greek life part of Dartmouth's institution, then that teaches that. But if we're looking in terms of classes and less socially-charged extracurriculars, then I don't think that that's something that's taught or instilled in you through those things. I think it's the social life that does that.

DONIN: And how do you think the College has done in your three years here in trying to offer alternatives to the Greek life? I mean somebody like you, who's looking for alternatives to Greek life.

LEDDY-CECERE: Yes.

DONIN: How are they doing it?

LEDDY-CECERE: They're not doing it. I mean I still go to the frats. And, you know, that's where people.... It doesn't matter if you're affiliated or not. That's still where you go. I think as you get older, it moves more into house parties. But I know that, I mean I think....

At Vassar there were a lot of college-wide social events that were thrown by the college, like Toga Night or whatever. But it wasn't uncool. Like everyone went to it. It was a big deal, and that I would think would be like an example of something that could happen. Because I think what's appealing about the frats is that you will be—it's not exclusive. So—I mean, it is in certain ways. But in terms of like going out, you will be let into the frat if they're having a party. There's no one who's throwing you out like it would be if there was a house party. You know there's no invite list. There are events where there are invite lists. But every night there's going to be some, at least one party that's going on that's going to be nonexclusive. So I think that people look at that as a huge plus of the Greek system. And I think when you're coming from another school, that is still a plus, you don't have to have been invited personally to have some place to go.

But I know that, you know, at Vassar they would have these big college things that were really fun and that everyone went to. And I know that when we do that at Dartmouth, it's not really fun and no one goes to them. I mean I've never been to one. So I think that—I'm not quite sure why that is. I think they try sometimes. I guess what I think is.... Like Friday Night Rock does concerts. I think that's a fun—that works. And I think people actually want to go to that and do go to that. And that's something that's been working, but that's not really the College. That's students in Friday Night Rock who are sort of opening up a new social space. But the College has to agree to it because they use, you know, the Hop, and stuff like that and Collis.

But I think in terms of like trying to find inclusive social spaces or trying to foster those, clearly they're not doing that well if I don't know any of them. And like you said, as someone who would be looking for that if I... I'm sure that there's some sort, they're trying in some way. But I don't think.... I mean you have the anti-Greek group houses like Panarchy and stuff like that which are—I think they're better. I thought about joining those. Sometimes I wish I had. But I still didn't really understand the whole—it's sort of like Audre Lorde's you can't destroy the master's house with the

master's tools kind of thing. Can you really, if you're whole thing is being anti-Greek, by being a pseudo-Greek house, can you really disrupt the structure that you're trying to disrupt? Or are you just playing into it in a different way? But I think that is a more inclusive.... But then it has its own.... There's a drug culture, you know, at different places, so you have your own sort of thing that narrows your community anyway no matter where you are. There's a certain limit on who's coming in. And I think even more than having inclusive social spaces....

It's funny, when I think about when I first came here, when I went into the frats, I was so shocked at what I was seeing. I was appalled. I couldn't even believe it was real. It's the most uncomfortable space for a woman to be that I've ever experienced. And I still.... And I think it's really sad that I no longer feel that when I walk in. But I think what's really bad about the system is that because sororities aren't really allowed to have parties, there are no women-centered spaces for going out. You are entering into a space that is not about you. Sometimes it's like hostile to you. It's unsafe for you. And I know that my first term here I would go back to my room and just cry sometimes because it just felt like such a.... I think that if you sort of like were able to put Jim Kim in a woman's body and brought him down there, some things would start changing really fast. Because I think it's very easy for a man to say that it's a fun space to be in. But I would be interested in how many senior women you could get to say a similar thing.

Because I think by the time you've hit your senior year, you're pretty much disgusted by it. And I don't think that that's a minority.... I mean I know that I can be pretty radical sometimes in terms of my views. But I don't think that that's something that I don't share with most women on this campus at this time.

DONIN: Now there must be a portion of the male population that also doesn't feel comfortable in those spaces.

LEDDY-CECERE: Oh, I'm sure. I'm sure. I think that it's very hard to be in those spaces if your identity is anything other than a straight male.

DONIN: White male.

LEDDY-CECERE: Yes. I think that anyone who doesn't fit that criteria is going to find themselves pretty uncomfortable. I think that an extraordinary number of men don't come out here until very, very late. I mean I

can't—I haven't done a study or anything. But just in my experience, freshman year's a very common year to come out. You know you leave high school, you leave your home, and it's just like this is a new space and you can be who you want to in this space.

But there's a surprising number of Dartmouth men who don't come out until very late in their time here. I think that's because it's very hard to identify, like I said, as anything other than straight, as anything other than.... I just think that, yes. Like when you're fighting for women's rights, you're not just fighting for women; you're fighting for anyone who's not identifying with this certain structure. And I think Dartmouth is the same.

But I've said to people.... You know I've said to people before, I would never have been a women's and gender studies major if I hadn't come to Dartmouth. Never. At Vassar there's no need for that. Of course there's some need. But I would never have solidified my opinions in the way that I did without coming here. I think it can be sort of empowering to see a space that is so obviously wrong. Whereas a lot of what people are fighting right now in the women's rights movement is sort of more hidden, it's harder to find. I think, that here it's pretty easy to find, and so it's sort of easier to identify against something that is very clearly wrong, than something that has sort of been shrouded by other things.

DONIN: Has that sort of male-dominance impacted your choice of people that you spend time with?

LEDDY-CECERE: Yes. I guess so. I think that.... I mean most of my best friends here are women. And, yes, my best friends here who are not identify as gay. So that's someone else who is identifying outside of common—the norm. I think that male-dominance....

It's such a funny thing because I was talking with some women about this the other day when we were talking about how it's sort of hard to date men because you have this sort of—not like...hatred's too strong a word. But you just sort of.... You're like, you can't win, you can't win this too. And I think that's what Dartmouth makes you feel a lot of times. Where it's like I don't want you to feel like you're winning. Like I don't want you to feel like you're dominating me or that you are in control of this. And I think that makes it especially by the time.... I think a lot of these things are different when you're not a senior.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

LEDDY-CECERE: But I think a lot of the time when you get to be, when you get to your last year here, you sort of have a distrust of men your age. I don't really think—it doesn't really seem to me to generalize above that, I don't feel that way about professors or anything like that. But I think men your age, you sort of have this—you feel very.... It really divides you gender-wise. Like you very strongly identify as a woman. And I think that that is....

You know even though that maybe sounds like a positive, I don't really think it's that much of a positive. I don't think it's very good to so strongly identify with a fabricated gender construct. I don't think that that's necessarily a positive thing, because you're sort of put in this oppositional relationship. And I think that you see women who respond—there are different ways of responding to the pressures of this environment. And I think that often rather than sort of bonding together, we sort of choose to sort of "other" women who don't respond to the pressure in the same way that we do.

So I think that like maybe in terms of community, a community I identify with, there are a lot of strong women here who speak out against things. But I think that we often sort of do that at the expense of the women who don't respond in the same way, even though they are facing the same pressure. So I think that the male-dominant environment—I don't feel it in the classes, I really don't. I never feel like uncomfortable about speaking in class. And I don't really see anyone who I would categorize as... I mean... I guess....

One of my best friends the other day called me, and she was crying because she was in this—she's a theater major, and she's in this theater class, and there was a play, and there were rape jokes, multiple rape jokes in the play. And they were supposed to decide, as a class, whether or not....I guess as a theater major your final term you all put on this play together, all the theater majors. And they were supposed to decide as a class whether or not—which play to do. And there were three women in the room, I guess, and the rest—there was a male professor who's the director. And other men students. And she said that she felt very uncomfortable performing this play. And I guess no one supported her in that. I guess one of the other women supported her. And then the rest of... And rather than sort of saying, you know, we respect that this makes you feel uncomfortable, here are the reasons why should we do this play anyway -- Which I think is a valid point. You know we

do do plays that are uncomfortable. We don't stop doing plays because they're dated in that way. They just sort of attacked why she felt uncomfortable, which I think is sort of indicative maybe a little bit of the environment that Dartmouth promotes. It wasn't like so we respect that as a woman these rape jokes make you feel uncomfortable. It was like, I don't see why these rape jokes are making—I don't see why you feel uncomfortable. It's a play. I don't see why.... And I think—it's a joke. It's a joke.

And I think that that is an example of something that I have not often encountered in the classroom. But I think—I take a lot of my classes within the department. It's not likely within the women's and gender studies department. It's not likely that I'm going to face a lot of that. I think that it does exist here. But I would say that it's predominantly a social...it's in the social realms that you feel like that.

Although there are—my friend in South Mass, on her floor there is a women's bathroom that has one stall and one shower. And the men's room has—so it's like this entire floor of people. And there's one bathroom stall for women, like one toilet. And the men's room has like four toilets, or you know a normal amount for a floor. And my friend has been using the men's room because like someone's always in the ladies' room. And the custodian got so angry at her, and said that if he saw her in the men's room again making the men feel like uncomfortable to be in there, that he was going to report her.

So I think that there are some more institutional.... I mean that's just like stupid, you know, to just that.... And I'm sure if the administration.... Like if that was brought to the administration's attention, they'd have to do something because that's sort of like archaic.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

LEDDY-CECERE: But I think.... So there are institutional examples. But I'm not sure how much further behind everyone else Dartmouth is in that. Whereas I think our social situation is pretty regressive, I'm not sure that the academic environment or the dorm environment is any different than things that you would find widespread sort of issues.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

LEDDY-CECERE: I don't think it's indicative of a Dartmouth character that sets Dartmouth apart from another school. But I do think our social life does set us apart from other communities.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. Do you think that there are.... Are there—this is a stupid question; I should know the answer to this—these secret societies, are they all single gender?

LEDDY-CECERE: No. A lot of them are. Mine is. A lot of prestigious ones are. There are others. The C&G is a senior society, not a secret society, and that's—I think that's different. They're still sort of an exclusive thing where you have to get chosen. But it's open. You're allowed to divulge your identity. Everyone knows where the house is. There are other ones that are mixed. But, you know, like Sphinx is—

DONIN: Is mixed?

LEDDY-CECERE: —male.

DONIN: Oh, it's male.

LEDDY-CECERE: So the ones that sort of have.... I guess the point of a secret society is that you're supposed to have people who are like movers and shakers on campus in different ways. So you're going to have a secret society with all of the sports captains in it. And then you're going to have a secret—like that kind of thing. And I think that those....

I mean the thing is you don't know about these things because you know more about them once you're in. The whole point is like, ooh, we can't talk about it. I don't know, like I.... So I don't really know. I know that there are some. And I've been trying to sort of like talk about my—I mean I can't, I would probably get in trouble if I like outed other people or if I outed what I was in.

But I've been trying to talk about it as more of like a normal thing because I think part of the problem is that no one will say anything. And that when you do talk about it, it's sort of like a hush-hush thing. It's not like your friends don't know. I mean if you're gone every Monday night at this same time when everyone's supposed to meet, it's not like your friends don't know where you're going or what's going on with you. And I think it's important that we start talking about it like any other social organization that we're part of.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

LEDDY-CECERE: Versus this sort of secret thing. So there are, but I don't really know because people don't really talk about it.

DONIN: These barriers that they've erected around them—

LEDDY-CECERE: It's weird.

DONIN: —don't help the flow of sort of social interaction.

LEDDY-CECERE: And the worst part about the secret society, I think, is the very reason why I joined mine, is that there's nothing you can do really to get in one. So people are really fixed on being in one just like they're really fixed on being in a certain sorority or fraternity. And with the sorority or fraternity, you can go there a lot. You can get to know the people, and you can hang out. You can do all these things.

And I think what's really difficult with the senior societies, and secret societies, is there's.... I mean I'm sure you could find out somehow that people were in them and like suck up or something.... But it's not really about—it's not about that. And so it's sort of exclusive on a whole other level because you really have no agency. So it's something that's been sort of—it's supposed to be very important your senior year. And there's not anything you can really do to make it work out the way you want it to work out. And I think there's very little you can do with sororities and fraternities. But you do feel like there are some things that you can do. But with this it's sort of like it either happens for you or it doesn't happen for you.

And I guess what really sent me over was when we started talking about taps, picking people for this year. And that's when I sort of was through. Because I was so appalled at sort of the process of raising names and talking about them when they weren't there in a way. And I couldn't believe that that's what had happened with the people that I was sitting with and with me.

And I think that it's just—it's the trap of any sort of like ladder climbing thing. It's where you reach one thing, and you've got to reach higher. So it's like we're already in these exclusive sororities and fraternities. What can you give for people who are already in those? How can we take this to another level? And I think that's

what I see secret societies as. It's sort of like a level of exclusivity above and beyond what we have already put into the system.

And I think that—I don't know. There's like a coolness factor. And it is, it's cool to be part of like a secret thing. You know it's sort of like all the little kids dream of like clubhouses and like secret tattoos and everything. It's sort of like fits this thing that I think everyone sort of likes, this idea that it's sort of like a secret group that you're a part of. So I think it doesn't—it's not just like a Dartmouth thing. I think there's something about secret groups that everyone really likes.

DONIN: Everybody wants to belong.

LEDDY-CECERE: Everyone wants to belong. And to belong to a secret something is even better than belonging.... And I think to have been picked for something: out of everyone, you were picked. And I think that feels—you didn't even have to try. You didn't have to apply. You didn't have to sit down and interview.

I mean we're all so used to going through the process of getting into things, which is like write an essay, have an interview. Sit down and show your credentials. And I think this is something where it's just you, and you just get picked. And I think that.... It's so funny when I think about it now, because I'm so.... I remember being so excited my junior year. I was so—I thought, I remember thinking like I will just be happy forever because of this. This just made my whole experience here.

DONIN: Well, at that point in your Dartmouth time, certainly the ultimate affirmation.

LEDDY-CECERE: Yes.

DONIN: That you belong.

LEDDY-CECERE: That you belong. And I think coming from where I came from, that was really important to me. And I think that, it was even—I didn't have to compromise anything to get picked. And then I compromised things once I was in. But at the time it was like, look, I belong, and I didn't even have to play the game.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

LEDDY-CECERE: Everyone else has been playing the game, and I said I didn't want to play it, and, look, I still made it, you know. And I think that's what I liked about it was that. They weren't asking me to do anything. It wasn't like we're considering you, please come and.... it was just like we want you if you want us.

And then I felt like it was sort of like a haha to all of the people I transferred in with who worked... I mean because I think that it's really hard. People respond to transfer in really different ways. And I think that a lot of people worked really, really hard socially. And I just felt like what was the point of doing that? And I just—I felt like it wasn't me. And I think that I felt sort of like people had been telling me that I wasn't doing it right or I wasn't doing Dartmouth right. And then it was sort of this way of being like, but I did do it right. And I think that that was what was appealing about it.

But just because something's an ego boost doesn't make it who you are or what you believe in or something that you want to be a part of. But, yes, I think especially as a transfer. But I think, you know, I think it's that way for anyone here. But I think especially as someone who—I didn't feel like I belonged until pretty late in the game. And so it was sort of like the acceptance that you dream about. It's sort of like going to a new school, and instead of you having to work really hard to.... I mean it's exactly like going to a new school and instead of having to work really hard to fit in and like go to all those parties that are really uncomfortable for you and all those things. It's like this cool group is just like, come join our ranks, and we accept you. And that's everyone's dream, you know, is to just walk into a new social situation and not have to work hard at it. And then have this instant acceptance.

DONIN: A free pass.

LEDDY-CECERE: It's like a free pass. It was like a free pass. But I think that—yes. But I think that it.... Like I was supposed to go and get our tattoos because I think almost every secret society has that. And I was supposed to go with the group.

And I woke up the morning when we were supposed to do it. And I drove to the tattoo place by myself at eight in the morning, and I got my own tattoo, a different tattoo. And I think that was the moment when I—it sounds like an uber-symbolic thing, but it wasn't when I was doing it. I was just like, you know what? I don't want to do this with people. I want to do this by myself. If I'm going to get a tattoo,

like it's a big deal. And I want it to be my own thing, and I want it to be myself. And I don't want it to feel like peer pressure. I don't want to feel like I did it because I was with other people.

And then after, that's when I totally sort of stopped going to meetings and stopped doing things was after that because I realized like... that I guess I take relationships very seriously. And as great as it is to say that you get a free pass, it's not really what real friendship is. And like as much as you want to say like these people are my friends, when it comes down to it, if you don't want to go get your tattoo with them and you want to go get it by yourself, they're probably not the friends that you should have. And you can't have friends without working for it.

And as much as you.... And that's what I've always felt about sororities, as much as you want to call each other sister.... Like it doesn't matter how many times you say it, you're sisters with someone, that's not what sisters is.

DONIN: No.

LEDDY-CECERE: Like you might be sisters with your sorority sister, but that probably didn't come from some sort of enforced bonding ritual. And I think that I realized that the people I wanted to be spending my time with my last year here were people that I—that I worked for.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

LEDDY-CECERE: You know. And that I valued and that knew me for real because I.... Sometimes I think it's one of those things where when you're in these things, you sort of think like, did you make a mistake? Like I'm not supposed to be in this. And I think that's sort of how I felt with this. I was like how did I wind up...? This is not. Because I didn't do any of the things I was supposed to do to get there. And I think that you keep thinking like did someone like.... make a huge mistake when they let me in.

And I think that you don't think that about your friends. You don't think, did you make a huge mistake when you decided to be friends with me? And I think that that's.... So for me, I think I decided who do I want to be spending...I have one more year at college with these people. And which people do I want to spend my time with? Don't you think that's— That's part of it because the societies, it's a big time drain. And with all the other stuff people have going on

with, you know work and classes and stuff. You don't have that much time.

And I think that.... It was also one of those things where every Monday I just had something that was more important to do, every single Monday, someone would call and I would rather go do something with them. Or I would have so much work or something. And I think if you constantly have things that are more important, then this probably is not important to me, and it's not worth the time.

But I think, like I said, I think that it's one of those things where it's only when you're accepted that you can really speak out about things because you can prove....you're like, oh, I was cool enough to get in. I just don't want to be in. So I think it's a very similar thing to people who are in KDE or Kappa who speak out against the sorority system. Where once you're in it, it's very easy to....

Although I guess, you know, the whole thing with the hazing that just happened. There are ways that it's too much for whatever organization that you're in when you speak out in a certain way. I think there are ways where they will—that that won't be okay.

DONIN: Right.

LEDDY-CECERE: And I think that's a pretty good example of someone speaking out within an organization and having it be too much for the organization to.... That they had to.... I understand that Lohse's personal life was less than ideal. I also think that people use that very often to discredit anything that he was saying. So it's like he's a cokehead and he was in an insane asylum. We don't have to listen to anything he says. Whereas like some of what he's saying is really important.

And I think that discrediting that sort of going on with him, I think it's everyone's fear about what will happen if they stand up and say something about the Greek life or about any sort of social system here, is that people will attack them personally and drag whatever they've said through the mud.

And I think that this should have been a really positive moment for the campus, but it turned out to be.... It should have disrupted something. But instead it reinforced something. And I think that's a lot—it's the administration's fault in a lot of ways. And I think it's the students' fault in a lot of ways. But I think that it's upsetting to me

that this became an incident rather than something that we could all get behind.

DONIN: Okay. I think we'll stop there. Is that all right?

LEDDY-CECERE: Yes. Definitely.

DONIN: Okay.

[End of Interview]