

Transcript of Interview with Deb Meem by Jessi Spurlock

Interviewee: Deb Meem

Interviewer: Jessi Spurlock

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Transcriber: Kevin McPartland

Summary: Deb Meem was a professor of English and Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies from 1980 to 2018 at the University of Cincinnati. She has authored several books including *Finding Out: An Introduction to LGBTQ Studies*.

Categories: Arts & Sciences, Student Engagement, Civil Rights, Gender

Tags: LGBTQ, interdisciplinary, department chair, sexism, English Department

Jessi Spurlock: Good morning. This is the UC project for Emeriti professors, people who have retired. I want to get their memories, their stories. Would you please introduce yourself?

Deb Meem: Okay, I'm Deb Meem. I was a professor of English writing and Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies for 35 years at UC.

JS: That's great. When did you come to UC and what brought you here?

DM: I came in 1984, specifically because UC was the only University that made an offer to me and to my-then husband, so we came. It was not what we considered the best offer for either of us, but it was the only one where we could try to—keep the family together, which lasted two years after we got here[laughs]those things never work.

JS: Why did they let, why was the only opportunity for you and your husband to work together?

DM: Well it's very hard, two career families are very very difficult in academia. He was in, he's retired also, he was in Physics, I was in English. We were on a big old job search and people were interested in us but not the same people. So he had a nice offer at, I can't remember; Iowa or something and I had a nice offer at Oregon State. But we didn't both have an offer at either of those places and only Cincinnati made an offer to both of us.

JS: Okay. So what was the hiring process like at UC?

DM: Well, it was—I ended up doing a big compromise as women in relationships often do, I took a job at the old University College. So I was hired through their people. I mean they, they invited me in for an interview and I met the faculty and people, I mean I met everybody. It was a normal hiring process I would say. My husband at the time had already, had already gotten an offer at physics so I was highly motivated to agree to whatever they offered. It wasn't a great

offer but it was an offer which was better than zero. So—that was a long time ago. That was 1984.

JS: Do you feel like you were treated differently during the hiring process because you're a woman, like that or no?

I would say no. I do remember—I do remember somebody asking me in the interview, somebody from the search committee. I had answered some question and they said 'well how will your family feel about that?' And I said 'I don't think you're allowed to ask me that question' and they looked so upset. I mean this was a long time ago and people, they were afraid I was gonna sue them if I didn't get over it so I don't know what it was. It's probably why they hired me [laughs] No, I don't know what it. I think it's a but it was I wouldn't say it was a problem, I would say it was something that somebody asked because they were interested and it didn't occur to them that—they couldn't ask that type of question.

JS: Right, so why did she want to teach, not just that UC but just in general?

DM: That's a good question. I—I would say I never did want to teach much. I mean when I was young, I hated school. You can't even imagine. I mean I had my own chair in the principal's office[both laugh] in elementary school and you know she was really a nice lady but I was I was disruptive, I would you know [bangs on desk] hum and bang on the desk and doodle and things like this and the teachers would get the exasperated and send me out. And she was very nice, she let me keep a book there [both laugh] but I didn't, but if I had told anybody at age eight that I would end up teaching they'd have just laughed me out of the room, would have seemed so unlikely. But and I wasn't even—I—I got the job here in—as a professor of English I—I was a music major in college

JS: Really?

DM: And music was my goal and once I learned to my everlasting disappointment that I am simply not cut out for opera singing, [both laugh] no I mean I can sing very nicely although not so nicely now at age 70 as I could you know he's younger but once, once it became clear to me that that was not gonna be my career I wasn't gonna be a Joan Sutherland or you know Kiri Te Kanawa, so I thought well I'll go to graduate school in musicology and, so after my husband finished his PhD at Berkeley we moved across country to New York and the only university within shouting distance was Stony Brook. So I went there I went to the music department and discovered to my disappointment that they didn't have a PhD at all.

JS: Aww

DM: And so and this is really literally true ,when I when I think about this makes me laugh I walked across campus to the humanities building and signed up to take some English courses [laughs] and I ended up getting the PhD in English. It was almost accidental. Funny but true

JS: Right so why English?

DM: Because I had I had a—a minor in English I—I really liked Victorian literature

JS: Yeah

DM: You know that means. What that means of course is that I buy my books by the pound you know, big Victorian novels. My children have always given me a hard time about being a novel nerd, but it's true I mean that's—so it wasn't that I didn't have any background it's that—that wasn't my first choice.

JS: Right

DM: And I just showed up there on the same day they told me they didn't have a PhD in musicology [laughs] so that's where I did my PhD in New York.

JS: Okay but why teach then?

DM: With your degree well if you have a PhD that's what you do.

JS: Okay fair enough.

DM: I mean you—not everybody does, I mean there are opportunities for people to get jobs outside of academia, but if you want to stay in academia and what you do is you—you look for a job at the University. You teach and you do research and that's what I did. So, I mean, I just followed the career path, it's just that my career path was a little—odd. In that I started in University College which was, it's not here anymore, it was the embedded two-year college on UC's main campus.

JS: Okay.

DM: And it was open admission, meaning if you had a high school degree or equivalent you could go. And so you could start your college career at U College and then transfer to A&S or wherever else that you could get into. So because I was there I was with a—I mean it was right here on campus but it had a different set of faculty and it wasn't until University College closed in some year, 2003 maybe, that I moved to the English department in Arts and Sciences and I taught there for a few years. And then I was recruited out of there to be the department head in WGSS: women's gender and sexuality studies. And so I moved over there and I finished my career there.

JS: What made you switch over?

DM: Well I mean this is sort of funny to say, but I really liked my colleagues in University College, They're still some of my closest friends. A&S English can be pretty toxic, I'm just saying

JS: Yeah

DM: If you've ever taken—no no no [Laughs]I mean some of the people are really delightful and I have friends, lifelong friends from that department, but the and the work atmosphere is—well it's not really pleasant and-and there is a huge percentage of that department that I would say is dead wood. They are—they got tenure and they're just not doing anything anymore.

JS: Okay

DM: And I just didn't. I had always worked with what was first when I arrived here it was called the Center for Women's Studies and I started teaching there right away. Teaching women's literature at first and then I started teaching Lesbian and Gay studies, Sexuality Studies and finally it became clear that I was gonna, that was where my interest had morphed to,

JS: Yeah

DM: So I just asked to move over and I moved halfway when we, when the college closed. when U college closed and then I moved the rest of the way when I became department head WGSS I said 'I will do this on the condition that when I stepped down as department head whenever that is I will stay here this will be my tenure on my home.' And so I retired from there that's a long that's how to make a long story longer.

JS: How did you become department head?

DM: Well, how does anybody become a department head? It's a—no how would you know? Like I had always said; I didn't want to go into departmental administration. I certainly didn't want to in University College and I had turned down the opportunity to do it at one point

JS: Why is that?

DM: I think I think it felt like herding cats to me and spending a lot of time doing stuff, administrative stuff rather than the things I felt I was hired for, which is to say teaching and research. So I wasn't interested in that job, even though it pays you something and so forth but a series of events took place that precipitated my accepting the request to become an interim department head in WGSS. And some year, 2008 I guess, the—the previous department head was having some difficulties had gotten not very good reviews as department head it was clear that she might not be reappointed she was having some sort of mental health problems you know crying in department meetings you know 'there's no crying in department meetings,' you know, it's—it was that kind of thing so it was clear she needed to go and if you looked around there was me I was the only one who was the logical person I was senior I was a full professor I was I had been involved with Women's Studies then Women's Gender and Sexuality, the name changed while I was department head yeah and we were not a center anymore we were a department. So I was the one left standing, I was the one there that seemed like if I was ever gonna step up, now was the time, so I agreed to do it and we had plans to hire—I would take an interim for two years, was our agreement and the we were gonna, we had to hire in the second year and we would hire a department head but this was right at the economic downturn and while we found people who were interested in the job,

JS: Yeah

DM: Nobody was actually willing to take it because people were hanging on to what they had at that time. If they had a good job, if they had a reasonable job they were willing to take it rather than move. It seemed too risky to people. So we—our search failed there. I was, and somebody said 'well would you continue as department head?' I said 'not as interim' I said 'if you want me as department head then I need a full five-year term where I'm the head' And there isn't much power that goes with being department head but there is some influence. And I said 'if I'm gonna

be department head, let me actually be department head and the department agreed to that and the Dean did and so I then did a five-year term which ended, 2015 or 2016, I can't remember now.

JS: Okay.

DM: I retired in 2018 so—so you know I had stepped down a couple of years before, so that was the story. It wasn't anything very dramatic, I just then did an actual five-year—slavery as—as its, it—department head has a very hard job okay once you get to like if you get to be the Dean of a college or the President or the vice president, then you actually have some real power. I didn't want those jobs but there is power there. But department head is sort of a thankless position because you're the one everybody drops to and gets grouchy with and they want impossible things that you can't provide and you don't get very much budget to work with so it's a—it's a very difficult task. But it was alright, I mean somebody had to do it and-and it was sort of my turn so I did.

JS: Was there anything you enjoyed about it?

DM: Oh sur. The department head gets like, if you're gonna invite somebody to speak in your department the department head gets to meet them have dinner with them, talk to him, chat with them, you know. So I met all the people and got to know them not just the few that I made a point of doing which you can always put yourself in the way to be there. But if you're department head, everybody automatically goes through you for—for whatever is happening in the department.

JS: That's fun

DM: I also got to be very good friends with the then Dean: Valerie Hardcastle. I liked her a lot and—and I wouldn't have had that opportunity I guess had I not been department head and yelling at her all the time [laughs]. But you know there—there really there are, there are benefits to being department had. You get to influence the direction of your department and-and I think I did that. You can, you sort of decide what you think are the top priorities and then of course you have to persuade the rest of the department to go along. You don't just get to—you're not Donald Trump [laughs] you don't get to write an executive order. You don't just win but, but your ideas carry a lot of weight and you can, you can move the department in a direction you hope to do. And yeah so that's the good part.

JS: That is good. What things did you not like about it other than being thankless?

DM: Oh, it is, it's thankless, and it's an enormous amount of meetings and like not just Department I mean if you—you know have that many of you in a one department meeting per-well maybe two per semester, we were on quarters then when I took over, so one per quarter maybe. So it's not as if there were tons and tons of meetings. But in the department, but there were loads outside then there was a monthly Heads Council and there then there were subcommittees of Heads Council, and you know you got, if you were at all an interesting person you got put on those subcommittees because the Dean wanted to hear your voice. I'm—I'm not good with meetings, don't like them. I had a colleague in University College, who always said he

liked to sit behind me at faculty meetings because my ears would turn red like ten minute—ten seconds before I blew my top and he said that was the advantage of having white friends. He was a dark-skinned black man and he said ‘if my ears turned red nobody would notice but when your ears turned red I can see it and I know and I'm watching I'm going and now let's see the fireworks are about to start’. So I'm not a I'm not a meeting kind of gal.

JS: Okay.

DM: Most of the time, I mean it's so rare to have a really productive, interesting meeting and when I have been at one, I skipped out happily at the end because it's so rare.

JS: You mentioned previously that as department head you get to influence the Department which way you want it to go. What do you think you influenced your department, what priorities had you set?

DM: Well, one of the things that we desperately needed—I mean we were—when I took over, we were in trouble. We had lost some faculty to departure and one thing to another and we had this department head who was melting down and we didn't have enough faculty and we were trying to run both an undergraduate and a graduate program with too few faculties. So it devolved upon me to try to persuade the Dean of the College to grant us some hires so that we could strengthen our department numbers-wise. And so we had two hires in I guess 2012, and then we also had a couple of people transferred to WGSS from other departments in A&S. A person from psychology for instance a person from Africana, you know we had people coming towards—so our department grew and what this meant was that we were able to offer our students what they needed. I think the best thing though, if there was something I did that was that strengthened the department, I led the charge to have our department, plus Africana, plus Judaic Studies admitted as Taft departments. And I don't know how much you know about the Taft Center.

JS: I do not.

DM: But it's—well there's no reason why you would know—but the widow of Charles Phelps Taft established this fund the Taft's are rich. You know, they're rich and they've been around in Cincinnati since God was a girl. So they were, you know—you know I said that in class once and I had a student he was a young man from Iran I think and he almost fell on the floor laughing this was like years ago and I still get emails from him from wherever he is Pakistan or wherever he is he says ‘I just was thinking about your saying that and it made me laugh all over again’ I mean it changed his life, you know 20 years later, guy is forty years old and he's— Anyway, funny. But I wrote all the—I don't know whether you'd call it an application—but all of the paperwork for all three departments. The thing that made those three departments different from the others that were already in Taft, like English and the various foreign language departments, or History, is that we were interdisciplinary departments. We didn't just have literature, or we didn't just have history or you know. WGSS Studies women and gender and sexuality from *all* angles so we have people in our department who come out of literature, as I do, who come out of psychology as Giao Tran does, who come out of social sciences like Ashley Courier. I mean we have—that's what interdisciplinary is you've studied the same topic from all kinds of angles and you don't

restrict yourself to a single disciplinary lens But, those interdisciplinary departments have never been recognized by Taft and the advantage to being in Taft is money.

JS: Yeah.

DM: You get travel money for conferences and things. The department gets money for a speaker each year. There are scholarships of various types for undergraduate and graduate students. It's a really cool deal you want to be, you want your department to be in Taft.

JS: Sounds like it.

DM: And it was quite a production, but, we were admitted I mean we danced in the hall when we found out that the vote had been said I'm I mean I hollered out of mine out of my I was just there and I got this email and that the board had met and we were admitted and people came out of their offices I mean we were literally dancing in the hall it was a big deal, because I was already a Taft scholar because my degree was in English. So I was already a humanities scholar who was eligible for Taft money, but the department wasn't, and political science at the time was not part of it and you know there were certain departments that weren't part of—and so now all of a sudden they were and so that was a that was really that was a big thing and what it did not only did it help us individually and as a department, but it brought WGSS in particular but interdisciplinary studies in general into the center of people's consciousness the other tough departments had no idea of what interdisciplinary meant. They thought it meant quite literally—I remember having to have my ears turn red in the heads council meeting because they thought that what interdisciplinary was—was; let's have a faculty member from English and a faculty member from French co-teach a class on—That's not interdisciplinary. Interdisciplinary means no disciplinary boundaries, you know it's all it's you teach a subject like let's just say our basic course in WGSS, Intro to WGSS. That's the first course you would take. Although many people take something else like, human sexuality, maybe you took that class. That that's a class you could take that's kind of a gateway into WGSS, but the first sort of required class for the major is intro to WGSS and it's not any of the disciplines, it deals with all of them. And so it approaches subject matter differently from day to day, or from hour to hour. You know you could be talking about a literary work but you could also be talking about the history of how people were treated in this sort of thing or the way you know, is it true that women and men think differently and why how do we know that and so therefore, that comes from a different area. That's, you know, all those things become part of the same of course so that trying to teach my department heads from chemistry and things like that how to think that way was—I'm not sure I ever succeeded but I had, you know, a good person follow me in that was good.

JS: That's amazing.

DM: Yeah, yeah it's interesting.

JS: Why don't they let other departments like interdisciplinary, and then also political science under the Taft Center why were they not part of it, you think?

DM: Well way back in the 1920s or 30s when the widow started up this scholarship she specifically directed that it should be for the humanities, because, she said in this writing, 'the

humanities don't have access to the kinds of grants and support that fields like chemistry and physics have.' You know, it's really rare for a humanities person to get a big grant of any kind. And so she wanted to support humanities research so that somebody in sociology or English or even math. Math is there even though it's not exactly a humanities subject there aren't a lot of grants for math right now she wanted to support us in doing our research. She couldn't do it totally like they do you know you couldn't she couldn't be the National Institutes of Health or something like that that gives huge grants, but she could—she could give us a little more of an even playing field she could give us support to go to the conferences we needed to meet colleagues and establish networks and present our work share our work, that kind of thing. So it's a big deal, and she was foresighted enough to see that we were going to need that help, and we still do, in the humanities. Here's the problem though; that because Taft is so generous, you know, they—the college, the college of Arts and Sciences because Taft is an A&S benefit, not engineering or CCM, or anything like that. It's because they are so generous, A&S has simply decided they don't need to worry about us. You know the college has just stepped back they don't support departments, Taft supports departments, which is part of the reason it was so important for us to be in Taft, but the other—I mean on a realistic level, but it's really not right for an outside donor to fund all college travel.

JS: Yeah, it's very interesting.

DM: The college should fund it. The college should be—It should be part of what the college does but it isn't and that's not a good thing and deans of the college, and I, can think of two right off the top of my head, maybe more. Have tried to sneak their way into stealing Taft, making Taft the function of the college, and bringing it—getting the college's greasy hands on Taft money. And it's always been refused. The college should not get Taft money. If anything, Taft should get some college money. College should be doing should be funding travel and speakers and things like that.

JS: Right so if the college doesn't spend its money on what it should be, what does it spend its money on?

DM: Well, the college has its own problems you've probably heard something about this. We labor under this budget model, which—I can almost not talk about it it's so awful. It forces—Well, it's based on the fact that growth is the only thing that gets you brownie points so if you're—Well let's take a macro, if you're a college, you have to grow to get funded, to get good money. If you don't, if you have fewer students, I mean they count by butts and seats.

JS: Right.

DM: Which is not necessarily the best way to do this, but if you don't grow, then your budget is cut and if your budget is cut, that means class size—It, you know, fewer faculty, class sizes grow, there are fewer classes offered. Its—student, the student experience is not as good as budgets go, and A&S is the largest College most students take court even from all the other colleges they take courses in A&S because they need to and they want to. And when those courses get to be giant and there aren't enough faculty—well it's not a good model but it also works on the micro level it works at the department level it that the colleges then become they

surveil the departments and they make sure they want to make sure that your class sizes are big enough and if they aren't they get on your case they want to make sure that you are teaching more students that the average number of students in your classes is sufficiently large or else you lose budget. And I'm not—I'm just not sure that's the best way to measure whether we're having success the result of it has been and I think you probably know this already that UC is larger than it's ever been. We have what, forty-five thousand students now?

JS: A large population.

DM: Should we have that many students? That's a good question. Do we have the resources and do we have enough faculty do we have enough rooms? Do we have enough anything to teach forty-five thousand students? The answer is maybe but that's the only way departments and colleges can get money from central administration is by growing. Well that's just an issue, and if you ask any faculty member they will tell you that this is not working very well.

JS: Right.

DM: I'm really glad to be retired I mean I loved teaching and I loved my scholarship and I loved my all my departments in different ways and but I do not miss worrying that whole departments are going to be shut down or that they're gonna combine these three departments into one, which wouldn't make any sense.

JS: Right.

DM: And I mean, they've already done some very odd things with a view toward always toward saving money, you know, you get people to do unpaid work rather than paying them.

JS: Really, like what?

DM: Okay I'll give you an example. Are we running out of time?

JS: No.

DM: That we have these three departments that entered Taft together: WGSS, and Judaic, and Africana.

JS: Yeah.

DM: And we work pretty closely together and we are all on the third floor of French hall. Right now, we've been we moved there from different places but for the last ten years or so we've been right there together, working together. There was a big push to make us all one department, and the way that would have worked is that one person would have been chosen to be the department head, and that person would have been paid. And then each department would have like a director, and that person would not be paid and so they would save money they would right now there are three department heads and there would be one, and so they'd save a few thousand dollars a year by doing that. That's what I mean by all these things have money implications even when they're quite small in actual dollars. It's—one of the other bad things that this budget system has done. If you tell people that you have to teach more students then you're going to attempt to teach everybody in your department like, 'I want you to take your entire major here I

don't need you to take women's history in the history department because that gives them the money not us. I don't need you to take women's literature in English, I need you to take everything here.' Okay so that's that cuts down the experience for the students, and some colleges did really weird things to try to keep it in there. Engineering for instance, hired a couple of part-time English professors to teach freshman comp to their students.

JS: Just for engineering?

DM: Just the engineers whereas the engineers always used to take it in English. Right? But they don't need more they take it from—and I'm not saying the teaching is bad or there's anything else but they did that specifically to steal those students away from English.

JS: For the money.

DM: For the money. CCM. They didn't like it that their students had a history requirement, so they had to take a course over here in A&S in the history department. I'm doing this [gestures with arms] because here's CCM, and here's, you know I'm doing I'm on a map right here's McMicken here's CCM. So they, they have a course for instance that they call, you're gonna love this, History of the Beatles, and that's just the music, and that's in CCM. Well and that counts for their history credit so the CCM students don't have to hike over here to McMicken to take American history or World History, they can take history of the Beatles. And this is not the way a university is supposed to run. It's not these are silos right, and—so that everybody is in their silo and they never get out of their silo, you know. Here's psychology over here [gestures] and here's you know well I guess psychology is way over there now, they're over in the neuroscience center. But you know, they're—all of this. The budget has, has made that silo tendency worse than ever. So that's, that's my opinion about that and it's why I'm glad to be retired.

JS: Yeah it sounds complicated.

DM: I don't need to worry about it it's not my problem except that, that I, I get phone calls about once a month from the incoming department head in WGSS and says 'ok. I need to talk to you about what's happening here.' ok I don't necessarily know but, but it's—you know—it's—they're still having these problems.

JS: You mentioned you're glad to be retired, has the University take care of your salary correctly and they take care of your needs as a retired member of the university?

DM: Sure, sure. Yeah I—it was hard to retire. I have to say. And I don't mean hard 'oh I'm so emotional about this.'

JS: Yeah.

DM: It wasn't that it was hard that I had to go to this office, in that office, in this office, in that office, and fill out this, and fill out that, and fill out this, and then they give you an insurance. but this insurance only lasts for one month, until this insurance kicks in and, I mean—well—but that was—I retired at the end of spring quarter so I've been retired over a year now and they finally all caught up with me I have all my insurance you know I have what I need it's fine I get paid on time it's it's ok. I mean we're a lot in a lot better shape than a lot of people and so I'm, I'm fine

with it you know. I, I don't have—I'm not active with the emeriti thing. The one thing I hate is that—oh look I'll show you because this is it's easier [pulls out wallet] to do it in a, if you can actually see something. I want—what I'm looking for is my UC ID. Okay so here's my UC ID here, I'll hold it for the camera so the camera can see it [holds up to camera]. Okay you'll notice that it says emeritus.

JS: Yeah

DM: Emeritus is the male form of that word.

JS: Really?

DM: I don't like that.

JS: Yeah.

DM: You might have noticed that on my on my email it says 'Professor Emerita,' and by god that's what I am! [Slaps table, JS laughs]. I'm not a professor emeritus, I did not change my sex when I retired. But—and I even asked over at the retirement over that, you know lock and key and ID office, whatever they call that place over, in whatever that building is. But they couldn't change it on its—they have a standard template and it says emeritus, and I was not pleased.

JS: Do you think they just don't know that there's a difference?

DM: I think they don't know, I think his ignorance so emerit I with an 'I' is the plural of emeritus us meaning boys boy and boys ok emerita is feminine female and a emritae; 'AE' is plural women now the way languages work English doesn't have gender right right but many languages do and all languages that have gender make the plural a merit I male, they include women under men.

JS: I had no idea hmm.

DM: Yeah well now you can fight that at every, every chance you get. I went to a women's college, alright, so I am a member of the Alumni, AE, Association.

JS: Oh wow.

DM: And they would die before they would put the Alumni with an 'i.' Okay [Laughs] They would just croak. So, you know, I'm tuned to it and have been since college. So, so much for Latin sorry that there's an aside but.

JS: That's a good thing I know I had no idea.

DM: Yeah well you know, there are so many things in our language that we don't pay any attention to. Our language is built in sexist. For instance, I'll give you one more for instance now I'll shut up [JS laughs]. I'm giving—you can see I'm switching into professor mode. That, if you study anthropology, what are you studying?

JS: People peoples' past.

DM: People. Yeah okay. Anthropos is Greek it means man. So anthropology is quite literally the study of men.

JS: And they mean it in a masculine way.

DM: But, as you said it's a study of people. But people means man in, in the in the way language is put together, But what's the study of women? If you have anthropology, the study of women is gynecology.

JS: Oh yeah.

DM: Gyno means woman, gynecology means to study a woman in the same way anthropology means to study of man, but think about that. Gynecology is a study of women's reproductive organs, anthropology is a study of people [Gestures broadly]. Bullshit, it's bullshit. Pardon my Swahili, but that's-that's—so our language works and it does it all the time. I've brainwashed generations of students [Both laugh]. It's—so sorry.

JS: Well it's fascinating, I never thought about that before.

DM: That's right why would you?

JS: Right?

DM: Why would we, because those words are common words, except there's meaning behind that. Why were they chosen?

JS: By men.

DM: By men, obviously, sure. Then mankind. 'One small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind.' okay all right I'm done. [Laughs]

JS: Change of topic, why do you think the name was changed from women's studies to women's gender and sexuality, were you there for that change?

DM: I was that change.

JS: You were that change?

DM: I proposed it, and we discussed it with all our stakeholders, all our friends in Women's Studies, our faculty, our students, and in fact, we only had one person oppose the change.

JS: Really?

DM: Yes. An older faculty—history person, who looks it, 'you're making it not about women!' It's still about—but I'll tell you why we made the change. In actual fact, we were teaching, not just Women's Studies. We were teaching sexuality studies, we were teaching about gender, constantly. And those gender and sexuality were as much part of what we what we do as women were. So it seemed like it was it made sense to make our department name describe the work we actually did. And we had quite a bit of discussion about what we were going to call ourselves. Other departments nationwide have made different choices.

JS: Yeah.

DM: We wanted to put the W first because that was where we came from. That was our history.

JS: Right.

DM: And then gender and sexuality made sense. So we had, like I say, a nearly unanimous support for making that change. It's a cumbersome name. Right? It's not like just saying chemistry. I mean, the 'Chemistry Department.' But still, it is descriptive. And that's why we made that change, because we don't just teach about women at all. In fact, after we made that change, and this is anecdotal, I'd have to get our graduate and undergraduate directors to go through the last 10 years of students,

JS: Right.

DM: But, I believe we have had more men in our classes, we have made a point of teaching masculinities You know, this is gender.

JS: Yeah.

DM: Gender studies. We we have had quite a few transmen in our—and, at least to transwomen in our graduate programs, and they change the way we think and the way we teach, and if we just talked about—like, there are departments that call themselves feminist studies.

JS: Yeah.

DM: That's not bad. I mean, anybody can be a feminist. Right? Right. And should be, but, but it advertises that it's all about women.

JS: Right.

DM: And that's what we didn't want to do. And we have had many more men and trans people come into our department and take our classes and be part of our programs and write theses and so forth, since we changed the name.

JS: That's great.

DM: So, you know, I think it, I think it was the right move. And I would have thought it was the right move, even if we, even if we lost a few students, and we lost a little bit on this pbb: performance based budgeting that we labor under, even if we'd was I would have thought it was the right decision. But in fact, I think we gained students and we gained the right kind of students.

JS: That's great. How is faculty changed over time? You've been here quite a while. What have you seen?

DM: Hmm—Well, okay, I'll sort of tell you a story to start, because this will give you an idea of what was going on. When I first came.

JS: Okay.

DM: I arrived in September 1984. And the very first thing that happened was, we were all required to go to this workshop on racism.—Because, I mean, the reason, the reason we were required, I mean, it was a good reason. That the previous spring before I was here, these idiot, white fraternity boys had put a float in the in the Homecoming Parade that had a fake black man on it. They called him Martin Luther Coon.

JS: Oh, my God.

DM: Stupid, that somebody should have just said, 'we're not going to have fraternities and sororities period.' At that—but nobody seems willing to do that. But they're pretty awful, I think. But anyway, that had happened in the spring. So I come in the fall. I don't have this background, but I'm, I'm here. And so we had—I remember this—I don't remember too much about it. It was thirty-what, five years ago. I mean, it's a long time ago. But what I remember was—they would—we were sitting—they would put us at little tables, a table of about six, and then another table with six and six, and sixes. So these were your people that you talked with, and they had one facilitator at each table. And as I recall, the facilitators were white, which would have been good if they were really—woke. But I would say they weren't.

JS: Right.

DM: They were just a faculty member who agreed to do it. So we're here and in my group, I remember somebody saying, 'when you look out at your classroom, do you see race?' And I just remember this guy, and I can't remember what his name was. But I remember him going on about 'I don't see race at all. I just see young minds, yearning to gather knowledge and blah di blah.' He bought me it was at and I heard that again, and again, I don't see I said, and I came to me and I said, 'I see race. I see race all the time. You know, why is it that our open access College has—is about a third African American, where A&S is 3%. Why? Because our students are not considered to be capable of doing what A&S students are doing.' And I said, 'I do see race. I see it as it—I see our College as a political construct that involves bringing, bringing students of color here, because they're not able to do the work over there.' And, you know, everybody's looking at me, like, I just stepped off the bus from Mars. I mean, I was a brand new faculty person, right? The ink was still drying on my PhD. You know, it was—I was pretty new. But, but I remember. But I had also been, I've been an activist in the Civil Rights movement before In fact, I, I'm from Washington, DC, and I went to Martin Luther King's, I Have a Dream

JS: That's amazing.

DM: speech, after being totally forbidden by my parents, although it turned out then my father went [JS laughs], he was somewhere else. I didn't see him. He was with my cousin because he didn't want her to go alone. And so he took her, and I was somewhere over here with my friends. We snuck away and went. So you know, that was, that was that. But I, I had—I had a little different background as a white person, if you're from Washington, you know, you don't get to be a white person who doesn't know any black people. You just don't you don't—you aren't that person. That's not—you can't—you don't have that option. And it's good. I think it strengthens us. But anyway, I came at it from a whole different angle. And—but they were working on this issue, this race issue. I mean, your question was, how has the faculty changed? And this is one way, I think the university was trying to make us have some awareness of the fact that you can be in a racist space, without thinking you're being racist. With, you know—when you think you're really actually being not only racially sensitive, but anti-racist, you can be behaving in racist ways and perpetuating racist systems.

JS: Yeah.

DM: and I'm not sure how many people got that. But my point of starting there, is that that same conversation has played itself out time and time and time and time and time and time and time and time again. And about 10 years ago, or when Nancy Zimpher was the president.

JS: Yeah,

DM: They started this. What did they call it? Diversity Council. Names like, that just gives me a headache [JS laughs]. But anyway, they asked me to be on it, because I had this background, shooting my mouth off, and also of—I had with a small group of people, we had worked very hard to have domestic partners covered on our insurance.

JS: Yeah.

DM: We had work—you know, one contract that would be refused, you know, we would propose it. And then they would trade it for something else in the negotiations. And so it kept getting—So even our allies were trading us away, right. But finally, they get we got it, which—and I think they knew who I was, because I've been involved in that. But I ended up on that Diversity Council, and they were reinventing the damn wheel. They were doing the same racist anti-racist work that we had been doing in 1984. And—anyway, I stayed on the committee for—I guess I was on it for two terms. And then I rotated off. I offered to be they said, 'We want some new blood. Are people willing to rotate off?' And I said, 'ME! Rotate me off!' [Both laugh] So I, I did I paid it off. But I don't know if they're still having that. But they hired a woman. She was, at that time working with—I can't remember his name. That's really a good thing. He was a light skinned black man who was dying to become president of the university and there was no way they were going to make him prison in the university. There was just no way. But he didn't see

that. Right. And he had this graduate assistant or whatever her name is Bleuzette Marshall, do you know Bleuzette? She's still here. She's, I think, maybe even a vice president now. But here's the deal. This guy whose name I've forgotten, tried—was trying to persuade her to get a doctorate. Any kind of doctorate, he didn't care what it was a doctorate in. An easy doctorate, a quick doctorate, so that she had a terminal degree and could then move up in administration. And so she did she got an Ed. D, which is a worthless doctorate. But it does—I mean, she never had any intention of doing research or anything like that. But she—but it's worked for her, she's moving up. Are you running out? Four minutes.

JS: You're good.

DM: And so she's, you know, she's still here, trying to promote diversity, whatever that means. But nothing much has changed. That's the that's the issue. The issue is what hasn't changed,

JS: Right.

DM: rather than what has changed. You know, there's, it's, it's a, it's a pretty much straight white campus. And it has always been a straight white campus. That doesn't mean there aren't plenty of queer people here, doesn't mean there aren't loads of people of color here. It's just that the power structures are straight and white still, after lo, these many years, and they take a person like Bleuzette, and they carefully put her in a human relations or, you know, student, student centered thing,

JS: Yeah.

DM: where she doesn't really make policy. You see if you're really going to be if you're really going to make policy, then you're going to be the in in the provost office or something like that.

JS: Yeah.

DM: But, but she's not. And I think that perfect perpetuates the racist system. Is elevating this gal elevating this black woman. Okay, great. So she's having a successful career. But nothing is changing, because she's not in policy.

JS: Right, no power.

DM: Yeah. So I would say the story is that the university hasn't changed, rather than it has. We started doing that blasted thing in 1984. And—

JS: Still are.

DM: Yeah. Yes.

JS: So, I read that you've published at least a couple books. And you did so with your partner. Did you meet her here?

DM: I did. I was actually on her hiring committee.

JS: Really?

DM: Which is hilarious. People ask me, they say, 'Well, how did you how did you meet?' 'I hired her.' [Both laugh] But yeah, I was on the committee that that hired her. We we have written short pieces, and then we, we've done several books together. The, the most interesting of them is this book called Finding Out which is now the standard text for teaching LGBTQ studies. And it's had three editions so far.

JS: That's amazing.

DM: And we just turned down Sage wanting a fourth edition. We're just not prepared to do it yet. The third one just came out. It's not fair to students,

JS: Right.

DM: I think, to have a new edition so you have to buy a new book rather than having a chance to buy used.

JS: Yeah.

DM: I just don't think that's fair. I don't think we have so much new to add yet. Give us a so I told the gal I wrote her an email, I said, 'we're not doing it.' [JS laughs] You know, we might think about it next year, maybe talk to us in a year. And then give us a couple years after that. And we might have enough to make it different. But right now. No, so but that was that was very interesting. Michelle and I wrote that with our colleague, Jonathan Alexander. And I have to tell you, if you ever get a chance to write with other people, it's, you can't describe it. It's both wonderful and insane at the same time [Both laugh]. Nuts, you know. We would—we would split off into three places and then or I'd go to the library and come back with thirty books and teter the housing, boom, and then you know, we'd—it was All very. It was it was messy. It's a very messy process. But I think that particular book has changed the profession. For the first time—there was never a book. So if you were teaching, Intro to LGBT studies, or LGB, or whatever you want to call it, there was no textbook, you had to do it all by yourself. You had to figure everything out. Here's an article. Here's some literature. [Video dies]

DM: Okay?

JS: Yeah.

DM: Okay. I was just saying that, that I am very interested and have been for, since graduate school days in this Victorian writer named Eliza Lynn Linton, who, who, as I tried to say to you a minute ago, I wrote her autobiography under a male pseudonym, which interested me. And so I've spent some time finding some of her books and editing them and writing introductions and bringing them back.

JS: That's amazing.

DM: So I now have a little shelf for books of hers that are now back in print. [Video jumps]

DM: She clearly—part of it is that she was interested in women.

JS: Yeah.

DM: And she married this man. But it seems probable that the marriage was never consummated.

JS: Right.

DM: And they separate and, well. She supported him. It was very—you know, if you were a Victorian woman, this didn't happen.

JS: Right, its very ahead.

DM: Anyway, she was very interesting. person.

JS: That's really cool [Laughs].

DM: So So for me, I mean, I enjoyed that was just fun. That was fun work.

JS: Yeah.

DM: That's the kind of work you do after you get tenure. When nobody's looking over your shoulder and saying, 'what we really need is somebody to do this.'

JS: Right.

DM: 'Then they say, well, you just do what you want.' 'Okay, I will!' [Both laugh] So.

JS: Alright so yeah, it's so there's nothing else you would like to talk about?

DM: I think not. Do you have any other questions? I mean, if there's anything else, I'll answer them. I'm sorry. I'm windy.

JS: Oh, no, you're good. This has been great. I don't have any other pertinent questions. So

DM Cool. Let's be done.

JS: Thank you so much.

DM: You are welcome. My pleasure. I'm glad to have met you both.