

*Out/Closeted in the Quadrangles:
A History of LGBTQ Life at the University of Chicago*

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

**INTERVIEW #57
ANONYMOUS FEMALE (1984 -) AB 2006**

At U of C: 2002-2006

Interviewed: August 5th, 2013

Interviewer: Molly Liu

Transcript by: Molly Liu

Length: 55:19

Note: Molly's friend, a UChicago student traveling with her in Istanbul, sat in on this interview.

Interview (August 5th, 2013) in Cihangir Coffee, Istanbul, Turkey:

[00:00]

Q: So, first question: How did you first come to the University of Chicago?

A: How did I come here? I was planning on applying to a lot of schools. It was a long time ago. I went on a college tour. Only UChicago I felt like, huh, maybe I can come here. But I was kind of obsessed with another school at the time, which is apparently kind of...would have been a difficult school for me because it was a Quaker mentality, et cetera, but I had a crush on a guy in Philadelphia, so I wanted to be there.

Q: It's a good enough reason!

A: Such a bad reason! Such a bad reason! Then I had a UChicago interview, and the guy who was interviewing me basically said, "No, you don't want to go there, you want to come here." He was running after me with all these pamphlets and info. I was like, "No, I don't want to come here," and he was like, "No, you want to come here." Then I applied early, got accepted. Screamed. It was good. I came there with my cousin. We basically went to the same schools all our lives. But not that likely that we would get accepted to the same place. So that was nice. We went there together.

Q: I don't actually know how things work for Turkish people. Were you only applying to American schools? Which schools—

A: There's a university exam here. They change the system every year, but basically it's a test. You take it, one day. You don't get to choose your major. Your score determines which school you go to and what you study. I didn't enter that exam. Luckily, my parents could financially afford sending me. It's not a cheap education, clearly. So I never thought

about staying in Turkey. It was clear from age 12 that I would go to the States, basically. But that comes with its own problems, because once you move back here, all the friends you've made are all over the world. You end up having language problems as well because you read everything in English. Your academic language is English. So switching back to Turkish took some time, basically.

Q: So you were talking about that guy running after you, telling you reasons why you should want to come to UChicago. What were the reasons that persuaded you?

A: I liked the application process. It was still the Uncommon Application, probably. [Q: Still the crazy essay questions.] But the questions were good. You know? It made me think in a different way. I liked that it was uncommon. My brother had just applied to all these schools in the States, he's going to go to UVA. But all the questions were so standard, you know? They were such boring questions. [Q: "Tell us why you're amazing!"] I remember how different it was to be writing for UChicago. Yeah. I think that prompted me to apply. And then getting accepting in December was nice, I didn't have to bother sending applications anywhere else. That was good. The history, you know, I was familiar with the history of Chicago, and it's a big city. That was very important for me.

Q: Do you think you had any expectations of what UChicago would be like? And when you got there, were those expectations fulfilled?

A: I knew it would be hard. That was definitely fulfilled. [Q: It was hard.] I don't really remember.

Q: I mean, it was a really long time ago.

A: It was a long time ago. I don't know. I thought I would be, by the time of graduation, I thought I would be more prepared for life. And I wasn't. I don't think I am.

Q: Yeah, Chicago doesn't do a great job of that, I guess.

A: I don't know if it's specifically UChicago. We did keep a lot of things in the theoretical realm, in a way, which I like. But I really didn't know what to do with myself when I graduated. Took a while to figure that out, I guess.

Q: I think—I think Jonathan mentioned that both of you were in BJ, right? [Interview #31] What was that like?

A: The first day, I was so terrified. I was in a different country. The toilets were gross. I was like, oh no, how am I going to live here, you know? And then I was in the fire escape smoking, and Jonathan came, and I didn't know him. He said, "You're my next-door neighbor!" and you know, he's a very animated guy.

Q: Yeah, he seemed like it from the interview.

A: So, I was like, “Yeah, okay.” All of a sudden, he said immediately, out loud, that he was gay, and I didn't really have gay friends before. He just immediately made me join into a party. They were going to go out or something, I was like, “Okay, yes, I'll come.” He was smoking, I was smoking. He's the first friend I made, basically. So that first day was kind of traumatic. But yeah, living there was also traumatic, I think. Just being so many people in one place is not such an easy experience, really. But it was good.

[06:43 – 07:16: Q and A talk about the BJ cafeteria]

Q: How long did you stay in BJ?

A: Two years.

Q: Two years.

A: That was enough. Two years, for sure. It was a lot of fun, I think.

Q: Where did you live afterwards?

A: I moved out to...Greenwood. Then I lived in the Dorchester. We had a house right up the corner of Dorchester and 55th. We were five people, so it was a big house. It was amazing. They're all my closest friends now. Four Turks and one Pakistani guy. So that was fun. We were...We didn't study until the last moment, clearly. Parties, too many parties. It was good.

Q: Where did you find your main friends when you were in UChicago?

A: Dorms, I guess. Then—I always thought I wouldn't stick to a Turkish community because I don't really identify as a Turk, or whatever. Kind of disappointed that I was moving towards the Turks more. But, you know, the Turks who ended up being my closest friends here are all extremely special people. We probably would have met anyway some in Turkey, but we met there. We went through a similar experience. We lived together. But, classes, I guess? Sometimes? Jimmy's.

Q: Jimmy's. That's a good place to meet people!

A: We could smoke then in Jimmy's.

Q: Yeah. You said before that you don't feel yourself to be much of a Turk, which was interesting. Could you talk a little bit more about that?

[09:33]

A: I... This is a very nationalist country that has a very painful history, especially with nationalism. Anyone who didn't quite conform to the main Turkish idea, main Turkish republican idea, got left out. Or died. Or—you know. It's a bloody long history. I guess I

didn't know so much about this before I came to Chicago. Basically the education that we get here is very nationalistic, official history, memorization, not so much analysis. I hated history when I was here, when I was in high school. But then I ended up studying history, Near Eastern studies, when I was in Chicago. I did not know anything about my country, or about this area, before I went to Chicago. Which is absurd, I'm from here. But all of a sudden the education system changed, and you became free to question. You were prompted to question everything around you. I was in Chicago when I decided the word "Turk" or "Turkishness" or anything associated with it was...very excluding of other possibilities. It's a very narrow way of thinking, and I'd rather not—I guess I say I'm from Istanbul. I don't say that I'm from Turkey either.

Q: Is Istanbul's character very different from the rest of the country?

A: Yeah. It's a city, it's got a very long history. It's inclusive. We have Armenians, Greeks, non-Muslims in general still living in Istanbul in small numbers. I guess the city describes me more than the country.

Q: Yeah. You mentioned that you studied history?

A: Near Eastern studies.

Q: Near Eastern studies. Yeah, what was your academic experience at UChicago like?

A: Great. It was great. I wish I was a student, still. I worked really—all my classes were small classes, basically, because I was learning Ottoman Turkish, so it was me and my teacher.

Q: Right. A lot of language classes end up like that at the end.

A: Yeah. He was, he's an incredible guy. No longer there. He learned Turkish and all Turkish languages when he was in the Peace Corps in Turkey. A very long time ago. He's an American. And learning Ottoman Turkish, which is now a dead language, from an American seemed really odd to me. But an incredible teacher, he was an incredible teacher. So I was lucky to take his class. Be the only student in it, basically. Yeah. That's—Dankoff is the person I remember, basically.

Q: Are there other classes or professors that you remember as being especially really good?

A: Yeah. I took an Israel-Palestine class. I really would not have been able to look at where Israel or Palestine is from my high school education. So that class was incredible. Palestinian woman, she was a grad student then, and she wore a headscarf. My Turkish background immediately, you know, the headscarf is a very troubled issue here. I carried all those stereotypes onto that class, where I was basically studying with a genius who opened my head in so many ways. I took some other classes from her, Muslim thinkers. That class prompted me to choose NELC as my major. Just the fact that I didn't know anything about the Middle East.

Q: That's really great though.

A: She was a great teacher too.

Q: Right. Were you involved in any kind of student organizations while you were at UChicago.

A: Mm-mm. No.

Q: Which is totally fine.

A: I think we were smoking too much, basically.

Q: That can be your extracurricular. Marijuana.

A: On our couch, yeah! No.

Q: Where did you meet the other Turkish students? If you were in your house—

A: Community parties. [ML: Makes sense.] The quad, basically. In front of Reynolds. We were all smokers then.

Q: Good way to get to meet people.

A: Yeah, basically.

Q: On an off chance, did you take any classes related to gender and sexuality while you were here?

A: No, not at all. [Q: What did you—] If I went back, I would love to.

Q: Yeah. What did you do after graduation?

A: I took a year off. I came here. I didn't do much during that year. Then I went to NYU for grad school, for a masters in Near Eastern studies again. I was there for two years, then I came back here. I constantly had this feeling that I have to choose where I'm going to live immediately. My parents are here, so I—I constantly panicked about “what if something happens to them and I'm in America” kind of thing. So I don't know if I made the right decision because of panicking, but I decided to come back. Now I'm in textiles and it has nothing to do with my education. Yeah.

Q: Yeah, you did mention that it took you a while to find your feet after Chicago, right? What was that process like for you?

A: Painful. I think I'm still in that process. I guess it never ends. [Q: Probably not.] Yeah. It's

the whole “grass is greener” mentality constantly. My job doesn't quite stimulate me intellectually, so I have this love-hate relationship with it. But I've learned over the last year that because it's my own business, basically, I have the luxury to go whenever I want and not go whenever I want. So I can work on other projects, go work for CNN for three days or whatever. [Q: That is nice.] Yeah. So now I'm calmer about it, about my choices.

Q: Did you start your business?

A: It's a family business. Of course, you know, working with my father has its trauma as well. Yeah. But I guess last year I wouldn't have been able to call it my business, but I can now. I've calmed down about it. [Q: You've kind of made it your own.] Yeah. Now it's mine.

Q: What was being in New York like?

A: In the beginning, very difficult for me. I felt like all the buildings were going to collapse on me. The people in my department, I didn't quite get along with them in the beginning. I think the reason was, in Chicago I got a very empirical sense of history. Working on documents, not necessarily—I hadn't taken theory classes, really. When assessing 17th-century Ottoman empire, you didn't hear Foucault. But in NYU, all of a sudden, everyone was saying Foucault, and I was like, who the hell is Foucault?

[18:45 - 19:15: A and Q's friend commiserate about Foucault]

A: Yeah, so all of a sudden, I was like, where am I? Who the hell is Derrida? [Q: Oh no!] So I kind of switched over to the history department next door in NYU because this NELC mentality in NYU didn't fit me at all. First I felt really ignorant and maybe that's why I'm not fitting in. It was a very specific type of people. But then I found two amazing professors who—in Russian history, one of them. Somehow I started working with her and thinking of my topic in a different way. After that it ended up being okay. I started meeting people.

[20:06]

Q: Wait, so you were approaching Near Eastern history under the auspices of a Russian historian? That's interesting!

A: Yeah, it was more, I was thinking more about how empires work, what do words mean, like what does the word “colonialism” mean for the Ottomans, how did this affect their way of administration. And the Ottoman and the Russian empire, there are quite a bit of parallels and differences. My professor was the biggest name in empire, basically. So that was great. [Q: Yeah, that's really cool!] Yeah, it was amazing. I learned a lot. That's what I really miss about academics, just having the opportunity to sit down with a book and discuss. [Q: Yeah, it is nice.] And it's hard to sustain it on your own. Every month we're like, “let's start a book club,” and then we never do.

- Q: I do the same thing with book clubs too. “We're totally gonna read all of Dostoevsky!” And then... [Q's friend: Not working.]
- A: Because you have a lot of stuff to do all at the same time.
- Q: Yeah, it's true. I forgot to ask this when we were talking about Chicago, but did you get to go out into the city much?
- A: Yeah. [Q: That's really nice!] Yes. We went out a lot! We had—we made Turkish fake IDs. In the Reg. We printed those. [Q: You used the Reg to print out fake IDs?] We'd go to Kinko's and be like, “this is my insurance card,” whatever. So they would laminate it. Yeah, we went out to eat a lot, drink a lot. Good social life.
- Q: Do you remember where in the city you guys went?
- A: We would go downtown in the beginning, because we didn't know what happened on the North Side. Later we started going more to Wicker Park, and that was when Wicker Park was—[Q: Not as horrible.] Yeah, now it's overly gentrified. But Double Door was there, so we would go there all the time. Yeah. Or Chinatown, we went to lots. I miss Chinese food.
- Q: Chinatown is great. Yeah. They cut off the Red Line for the summer, so it's really hard to get to Chinatown nowadays. [A: That sucks.] Which is sad. So I guess we haven't really talked at all about your sexuality. And you mentioned that you didn't think that you were bisexual or anything when you were at UChicago. What happened afterwards that made you...
- A: Start thinking about it? [Q: Yeah.] Yeah, I had heterosexual relationships until I was 27. I'm 29 now. And—I mean, I—since high school I've always said, “I think everyone's bisexual,” or, you know, that I was open to it, kind of, but I guess I hadn't met the correct person. So then—yeah. Then I had a relationship, which was a very traumatic relationship for a while, ten months maybe. And then during that time I all of a sudden had to start thinking about it because I was going through—and my girlfriend kept on insisting on it too, that I was heterosexual until now, what does this mean now? Is this about the person, or is it actually something about my sexuality? How does this work in this society, how does it work with my family? It's a very rocky period. [Q: It's a lot to work through.] Yeah. And... I didn't feel too confident in that relationship, I guess. Yeah. It was a—last year was a very difficult year for me. Then we broke up. Then I started dating this other woman. But I was still trying to figure out if this is, if this is something about my orientation, or again if it's about the person, or whatever. And of course I was reading obsessively. Whatever book I could get my hands on, basically. And so that wasn't the right relationship for me either. And for the last ten months, I think I've been...thinking a lot, basically. I go to analytical therapy, so psychotherapy, psychoanalysis. It's like a three times a week couch process. I've basically put my entire energy into that for the last ten months, trying to figure out why I do certain things. I think finally I came to—and this is very recent for me, in the last month, I think I've

relaxed into it.

I don't know if I'm—right now I'm not interested in men at all. I don't even like the idea of it. But I don't know if I can say “lesbian.” Because I've had a history of heterosexual relationships and I don't know how I'm going to feel in a year. And I guess the labels themselves are really limiting. And carry a lot of weight and pressure with it. I'm struggling a lot with what word to call myself. It's the same idea with calling yourself a “Turk” or not. Basically, do I need a label? But labels help. Especially when you're trying to meet people, and—you know. So I'm trying to make sense of it.

In this process, basically, my mother found out that I was with this woman when it first started, so two years ago. And she did not respond positively to this at all. [Q: I'm really sorry.] Yeah. We had always been really close with my mother, but then all of a sudden—and she knew my entire sex life. Everything was open. We were friends. But then she called me and she was like, “Are you doing something I would be upset about?” I said, “Be specific.” She was like, “That girl next to you was a dyke.” I was like, “Interesting choice of words, yes.” The next day I was like, “Yes, I am with this woman.” And she was like, “My family will never accept this, we have a social standing,” blah blah blah. I never had this social standing before then. “My father would kill me, what does this say about our business, blah blah blah, this is not normal, are you trying to hurt me, you've spent your entire life having sex with men, what happened?” [Q: That's so horrible.] Yeah. But I understand her as well. Of course she's scared for her child. That entire time, for months, me and my mom, we would never really talk to each other. I would go to dinner at their house, but I was like... And I was under pressure to hide something, what if my father finds out? So on the street I was uncomfortable. I mean, my father still doesn't know. He doesn't need to know. And I was getting lonelier, and my girlfriend was pretty crazy, so she was drawing me in more.

But something drastic did happen. My mother asked me—sorry, I'm giving very long answers. [Q: No, your answers are great, keep on going.] My mother—before I broke up with this woman, I asked my mother, “Are you going to accept this at all? This is really causing stress in my relationship, and I'd really like to know if you changed your mind.” She's like, “No, I didn't change my mind, and you don't look happy.” I was like, “Okay.” We eventually broke up for other reasons, but months later my mother asked me, in the car, in front of my house, “Did you forgive me?” I asked her, “About what? Like, be specific.” And she said, “About your relationship with this woman.” And I was like, “Well, you know, it's not a matter of forgiving. I just can't accept that you are not educating yourself about this, when there is so much information out there, and I am a source of information. I understand that this is difficult for you, and it's a process, but we have to talk and we have to be open. Right now I'm not with anyone, but I want to be happy, and that can be with either a man or a woman, most likely with a woman right now.” You know, that's—that was a very good conversation for us.

[30:22]

And this Turkish LGBT Families Organization made this amazing movie “My Child.” I

think you can find it online. It was during a film festival. I went by myself and I was dying, crying, because it's all these stories from the family's sides. We don't really see the kids, but there are parents of trans women, trans men, and—yeah, the entire spectrum, basically. I asked my mom to watch it. She called me and she said, “I know one of these parents.” Turns out one of these trans men is my brother's classmate. So age 18. My mom seeing them kind of normalized things, and it's such a powerful movie. And now, so a couple of weeks ago, it was *Pride*, and my mom said, “I know you're going, you're busy today.” I said, “Yes.” She said, “I would have loved to come, but I have a plan.” I said, “You can come next year.” And she said, “Yeah.” [Q: That's really wonderful that that happened!] I think so. I mean, we don't really talk—I no longer tell her who I have sex with, basically. If I'm in love and if I—if it's necessary for me to tell her, I would, but now I have developed a new idea of privacy, I guess. And since all these happened, I have been feeling more out, I guess. Before I had to hide it. Now—I mean, it would suck if my father hears, I guess. But if he does, he does, whatever. I'll figure it out then. So. Difficult. But I also don't have much of a community of LGBT peers, basically. So I—I didn't quite know how other people went through it.

Q: Is there a community in Istanbul?

A: Yeah. Now I am involved. This also happened with the protests, Gezi protests, basically. Last year, after I broke up with my girlfriend, I was like, “Oh my god, what am I going to do? Where am I going to meet people?” I knew all these organizations that were present, but I was terrified to go. I was worried that I would be disappointed, or, I don't know—I don't really believe in not believing, if that's the word, but I don't like the word “activist” either, activist organizations. But after the protests started, the LGBT block was extremely active during the protests. They were incredible. I realized I was getting all the good information from their tweets and from them. The credibility of information is very important for me. Granted, no information is objective. But basically last week, I went to one of the organizations, Lambda Istanbul. They are an LGBT organization, they started in 1993, I think. They faced a trial to be shut down in 2008, because it was immoral. But they're open.

So I had filled out their volunteer form, and they emailed me, “Oh, you should come, we should meet, we should talk.” So I went and I was talking with this woman, I said, “I have this translation project.” I don't think the LGBT...you know, current affairs are not out in the world. We are hearing so much about Russia. We're not really hearing about the three trans murders in Turkey, you know? This is something that I saw in the protests. Every information that I translated—I was translating Tayyip Erdoğan's speeches, all these things. After I translated it, it traveled across the world and people could use it. So I became a credible translator, I guess. So I said, “I want to do this,” and she said, “Great, please do it. You have to head the team.” And then she—I was leaving and she hugged me and she said, “Hoş geldin,” which means “welcome.” That was a very emotional moment for me last week, because I guess I had been waiting to hear that from a gay organization somehow.

We had our first meeting last Saturday, and now we're a group of translators. Today we're

editing a translation of LGBT life in prison, in the Turkish penal system, so we're going to be working on editing it. After that the NGO that wants it will have it, but we'll also be able to publish it online, whatever. We need to buy a domain. It's a brand new project. I went there with a project, and that helped make me feel more comfortable.

Q: And that's such fantastic work, too. Publicizing this stuff.

A: I think so too. When I don't have anything to do, I go crazy in my head, so I need projects. And it's intellectually stimulating. Well, translating is kind of bitch work, but I'm learning too. Hopefully we'll see where—Turkey, this country's discourse, is extremely homophobic, so whatever pressure we can get from the outside world helps. I'll send the link when I get it.

Q: Oh yeah, that would be so awesome! Yeah. I'm sure that our project leaders would love to see something like that.

A: Yeah. It would help for us that it would get forwarded and used as a source.

Q: What actually is the legal status of homosexuality in Turkey? I don't know.

A: It's legal. No marriage, clearly. But I read this yesterday, 93% of—there was a poll. 93% of people wouldn't want their neighbor to be gay. [Q: Oh dear.] So it's legal—[Q: But it's not accepted.] Sex reassignment, gender reassignment, is also legal, but it's difficult. Socially it's not really accepted. As a woman I can hide it when I need to, but many people can't do that. Yeah. It's not so easy, I guess, here. Like when I go to the States, or when I go to any European city, I'm like, wow, people are free. The country's attitude towards homosexuality is not any different than its attitude towards women, or rape. All these issues come to an end—basically as a woman, if I get raped, the government says that I should keep the child, and the country would take care of it. There's a—there's a shifting stance on abortion, which is legal at this moment, but—same with c sections. You shouldn't deliver with a c section, but you should have three children. There's a lot of politics over the body of women, basically.

Q: Seems like a lot of social norms to fight.

A: Yeah. I don't know if it used to be like this before, I'm just more aware of it now. But the government stance did shift over the years. In the beginning before they were elected, the current prime minister said something like, “We know that homosexuals are having a rough time in this country, and I think everyone should have their freedom.” This was basically a claim in 2002, when he made this statement. [ML: But now it's...] But now it's a sickness, of course, that should be treated.

Q: Wow. This goes back to something that you said a lot earlier, but when you were talking about your own sexuality, you mentioned that these labels have—are both constraining, but they can be good things too. And you put on our demographic form “bisexual?”. Can you talk about what that label means to you?

[39:50]

A: That's a good question. The term—okay, I read this book. It was an incredible book. Lisa Diamond's *Sexual Fluidity*. That opened my brain. It was incredible. Basically, one of the arguments was how, (a) how women's sexuality is fluid and (b) labels or whatever can change over time. But having a label also puts you in a group, basically. And when there's a group there's an out-group. So it—so by placing myself in a certain group—but maybe it's not like that, I don't know. I thought that if I definitely decide that I'm lesbian, that I would leave out the entire world. Not just sexually, but all of a sudden, I've never had an identity—I never questioned my identity so much, but I didn't have to question it until now, basically. Like, I don't know, when I think of adjectives or words to describe myself, my sexuality was not one of those words. Now it is, a little, it definitely is, because I'm thinking about this all the time. If I never accepted a label before, why do I so want one now? And I think it's because of a need for community, maybe. And also to find partners, basically, you need a label. It's problematic.

Q: That's true. It's hard to walk into a bar and be like, “I am...? I am who I am!”

A: It's hard to walk into a bar, period. Yeah, it's weird. Now I see that...the word carries as much meaning as I assign to it. It's also in my control. I guess “bisexual” is an in-between state, kind of. It's not an in-between state, of course, but the word itself allows more possibilities so it's more comfortable for me to say it. But I'm not entirely sure if that would be the correct word for me. Basically Lisa Diamond's study showed that a lot of people went from labeled to unlabeled. And went from “gay” to “bisexual” or from “bisexual” to “gay,” it just shifted over time. Great book.

Q: Yeah. That's so funny. When I was trying to figure things out for myself, I also read a lot of Lisa Diamond. Not her book, because I would have had to pay for that, but a lot of her articles.

A: I actually just read her book. Well, first I saw this New York Times article about it. It was a couple of other scientists. But yeah, so, because there's all this literature on empowerment and blah blah blah—I want to read science. I want to read studies, I want to see an argument and follow it through and decide if it's an argument I buy. I don't want—I mean, I also read wishy-washy stuff, of course.

Q: But it's nice to have something more empirical.

A: Yeah, exactly. And in Turkish we definitely don't get those sources. There's a lot of writing happening in Turkish, but it's a lot about the social and legal implications of being LGBT, but it's not science. There is no science. So someone needs to translate Lisa Diamond's book, I think. Yes. Maybe that's me, at some point.

Q: You are a translator.

A: It's a huge book.

Q: Where have you found LGBT community in Turkey?

A: I haven't.

Q: You haven't. Okay. You did mention the political stuff that you're doing.

A: Yeah. So I guess I'll be a part of a community, maybe? I have problems with the community itself as well. So, well...

Q: What are the problems that you see with it? Just wondering.

A: I don't know if I'll feel part of this LGBT community just because I'm doing this work for them. I don't know if I can accept the number and title of an organization. I've never been in an organization. Maybe this is why I was never in an organization in Chicago either. It's—I kind of—I have a big network of friends, very close friends, but kind of antisocial in terms of, you know, organized things.

Q: No, I know what you mean. I also wasn't in any RSOs when I was in Chicago either.

A: Yeah. I don't know. I don't know how people are—it seems really cliquey. Like...I mean, now it's more open. I guess certain places that are more gay-friendly, and you will see more gay people. But yes, I'm antisocial, so. [Q: I'm sure you're not.] It seems really closed, and people look a certain way. When so many people look the same way, it's so freaky!

Q: It can be kind of weird. [A: Oh my god, more short hair!] You walk in and everyone has the same haircut.

A: But I mean, I guess right now short haircuts are very in in Istanbul in general. Doesn't mean that they're gay. Short haircuts really confuse me. For sure. But seems like a stupid thing to say, but it's true. Yeah. I'm not so aware of the community. I have gay girl friends, like friends. It's...like, they're usually, these women are ten years older than me, mostly. And extremely smart outspoken people. Yeah. I've met some friends.

Q: That's great. So did you know a lot of gay people in Chicago? I know Jonathan said that you were really good friends. Have gender-subversive dates or whatever.

A: Jonathan. Yes. I did have gay friends. Not lesbians though. Gay guys. I didn't really know any girls. But before I went to Chicago, I didn't. I didn't really know anymore. I guess I had—I was trying, before this I was trying to think, what did I think of homosexuality when I was 18? What kind of stereotypes did I have in my head? And I couldn't find it. I can't remember.

Q: It's hard to remember those things.

A: Yeah, long time ago. But I remember being amazed at how open Jonathan was. I have another friend, he's Greek. He was coming out then, and he wasn't—he didn't feel—he was scared, basically. And he wouldn't even tell us. It took a long time. Just how broad that spectrum is. I guess until I started going through this I hadn't really understood what it means to be kind of outside this male/female heterosexual box. So yes.

Q: It's a long process, right?

A: I guess so, yes.

[49:44]

Q: But yeah. Do you think that your experience at UChicago was pretty typical?

A: What does that mean?

Q: Like of the college students that came in with you. Or if you can think of other people who started questioning their sexuality after college, as opposed to during college.

A: In terms of sexuality? My experience in Chicago in terms of sexuality, was it typical? I don't know. I had lovely boyfriends. I don't know. I don't know what typical is. Or I guess I don't know if any of this is typical, so you know, I—27 seems like a late age to me to all of a sudden stop being interested in men.

Q: I mean, I think I know someone who came out as lesbian in her 70s or something like that.

A: Which is amazing. I know these examples exist. But most of the people I know had figured it out much earlier. Yeah. So I don't know if anything is typical. I guess in the general scheme of things everything is typical.

Q: Do you think your perception of UChicago has changed over the years?

A: I don't know. I feel so removed from it now. It's not—before, maybe a couple of years ago, the school I went to would be one of the adjectives that I would use. Or that would be the information someone seeks, where did you go to school. But not anymore. As we're growing older, school is so irrelevant. [Q: Which makes sense. It's probably good to not be clinging onto college years and years afterward.] But it's also a way of thinking, that you are clinging on. Being in academia, it's—I chose not to pursue a PhD after NYU because I got disillusioned with academia in general. So I don't know if my perspective changed. I go to some alumni events, but usually it's like, we go late, we drink, we go out with our friends. The year I was here, before I went to NYU, I was interviewing UChicago applicants. Like, wow, that was weird.

Q: How was that?

- A: It's like, I'm asking all these questions, and they're so young.
- Q: You were like that only a few years ago.
- A: Yeah, it's weird to see that. I went back last year. My brother was interviewing at Northwestern, so we went to Jimmy's. The hamburger tasted the same. [Q: One thing that you can rely on.] All the guys who used to work there were still there. The new lighting was weird on the Midway. [Q: Yeah, it is weird.] The Reg looks amazing. I wish I had the Reg in my life. Really, access to books is very difficult here. You actually have to pay for everything. Or, not having access to articles, to JSTOR. All of this is difficult.
- Q: Yeah. My coworker on the project, who was a history major, now no longer has access to JSTOR and she's going through withdrawal as a result.
- A: Freaking out. Yeah, I'm using one of my—she's a UChicago graduate, she's doing genetic research in Leuven in Belgium. So she was just like, “Okay, just use my login.” So now I'm connected.
- Q: Nice! I think that's pretty much all the questions that I can think of. Is there anything else that you want to tell us about your experience? UChicago or otherwise?
- A: I don't know. I mean, I guess, this is part of an oral history project, basically. It's weird to be part of an oral history project, I guess. I think I'm okay.
- Q: It's been very valuable, I think.
- A: I'd like to listen to everyone else.
- Q: You should—our museum exhibit is going up in 2015. So if you're in Chicago at the time, come see it!
- A: We have a funny photo in it, I guess.
- Q: That's true!
- A: Yeah. I did like cross-dressing with Jonathan.
- Q: It's a great photo. Series of photos.
- A: Yeah, okay. Thank you!
- Q: No, thank you!

[55:19]

End of Interview