

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

**ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**INTERVIEW #41  
CHOI, DANIEL (1987 - ) AB 2010**

*At U of C: 2006 - 2010*

*Interviewed: July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2013*

*Interviewer: Molly Liu*

*Transcript by: Molly Liu*

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**Interview (July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2013) by phone:**

[00:00:00]

ML: Let's start off with: What brought you to the University of Chicago?

DC: I guess the biggest thing was the history of Harper—sorry, not Harper, Hutchins. The Hutchins legacy with the Common Core program and the Hutchins education. That was the biggest draw for me personally. I was really drawn to the celebration of the life of the mind. For me, that was the biggest part of my choice in entering Chicago.

ML: What specifically attracted you—what about the Core to you captured the life of the mind?

DC: A lot of my friends in high school, I guess, my colleagues, they were mostly focused on career paths. They were looking at tools in a way that was almost utilitarian. For me, what mattered most was the spirit of inquiry. Having a school that matched that desire for inquiry, for discourse, was much more important to me than necessarily brand-name recognition. That was how I first—when the University of Chicago first provided mailings, I thought, “Oh, it's just another school,” da da da da. But this was during the time of Dean O'Neill—when Ted O'Neill was Dean of Admissions. This was during the Uncommon Application era. The marketing was very successful for me because that's how I thought in terms of—well, I don't care necessarily about quirky, necessarily about the rankings or whatever. What I cared about was, will I have an intellectually fulfilling experience? As I read some of the admissions material, I learned more about the history of the university, the biography of some of the university presidents, and especially with Hutchins, I felt a deep connection with his desire to propagate and continue what he called the great conversation. And that was what drew me to the school.

ML: Do you think that your expectations of the school were met when you came here?

DC: Come again?

ML: Do you think that your expectations of the school were met when you came here?

DC: So it was a mixed bag. But I understood that there was a big cultural shift during my time at the University. Starting from two years above me to two years after me, there was a change of guard in terms of the culture at the University of Chicago. This was, I believe—the year after mine, in my third year, there was the resignation of Dean O'Neill from the admissions office. There was Jim Nondorf, I believe, who became the new dean of the position. I felt like the culture had changed somewhat. There was a bit of anxiety on my part at the shift in the culture of the school, but at the same time, despite all of that, in terms of the coursework and my interactions with the professors and the friendships that I made, that I had experienced what I thought was promised to me by the school.

ML: Can you talk a little bit more about what you saw as a culture shift? What changed in the culture, do you think?

DC: I think a lot of it had to do with the policy and the curriculum that I noticed. I remember that in my day, papers were papers, and there were no necessarily rewrites or things of the sort. Upon hearing, talking to some of my older instructors for Hum and SOSC, I've heard there's a process, there's more of a pipeline process for paper-writing. I could be misinformed obviously. But I've heard from meetings where there were outlines of Hum papers to be handed in first, and then there was an entire revision process and it seems a lot more collected. Another thing was the increased presence of the—I don't know if they still call it CAPS. [ML: Oh yeah, the career services? Yeah, they still call it that.] Career And Planning Services, when I was first there, it was more of a small office, almost an outpost, really. Towards the end of my senior year, I had seen that it had grown massively. Just a lot of the conversations I would overhear on campus—during the first years I was on campus, those were the conversations I would be very comfortable just walking into, whether it was talking about Aristotelian mechanics or Aristotelian physics, or what the latest thing Žižek said about Montenegro. But then it seems to be—it could be my own cynicism with age. But a lot of the conversations seemed to be moving away from it. I felt like there was a shift in the way that students perceived their relationship to the school.

ML: Right. At the ripe old age of 25.

DC: I know. This is kind of conceited for me to say so.

ML: No, no, it's fine! But yeah, you said that you majored in physics, right? [DC: Mhm.] Yeah. Can you talk about the kinds of classes that you took when you were at this school?

DC: Come again? The kinds of classes? [ML: Yeah, the types of classes.] I did the standard physics major. So I took the requisite physics courses, and then I took the requisite mathematics courses. But I have to say, most of my time was spent away from the department. Spent many hours in philosophy, anthropology, sociology. It was more—I

took a smattering of various courses. No real planned program, per se. I believe I had enough coursework to complete majors in some of those fields, but since I didn't really like the notion of having requirements, I just decided to not go through the paperwork for that and instead just take the courses, and get my introduction through that.

ML: Right. Where did you draw your main groups of friends from when you were here?

DC: My main social groups, you asked? [ML: Yes.] Uh, so, it's actually funny. I drew them from a variety of sources, but the closest friends I have, I can think of five very close friends that I still talk to on an almost daily basis. Two of them were in my dormitory. They were in my house. One of my friends—I started out as a chemistry major, and she was a chemistry major, so we took the same courses. Afterwards I broke off and went to physics while she continued on in chemistry. One of them is a year below me and she did, I believe she did biology in, I forget, is it immunology or pathology? And now she's working on a degree in epidemiology and disease propagation. Two of my friends I actually met in my Hum class, my very first class, and they became my closest friends. I met them through class, but we kept a really close relationship throughout my time at Chicago. I still talk to them pretty much every day. One's doing a computer science doctorate, the other's doing an atmospheric physics doctorate, and then I had another very close friend, who I had met through a mutual friend, and she did economics, she was a year below me, and now she's working for the Federal Reserve. But that was a very small circle. I didn't really branch out from there.

ML: But if you still talk to them every day, small but extremely close, right?

DC: Yeah, we're very close. And I think it's because we all still feel a little isolated from our own surroundings.

ML: Which house were you in when you were here?

DC: I was in the Max Palevsky dorms, in the Hoover House.

[00:09:50]

ML: Also, you mentioned feeling a little bit isolated when you were at the university. Could you talk about that?

DC: Oh, not at the university. Isolated from our current surroundings. We kind of cling on to each other. It's like codependence, we just kind of grasp onto each other in face of despair. [laughs]

ML: It sounds like you're really happy where you are now.

DC: I haven't been able to make friends with those around me here in New Jersey. But even then, that type of connection I have with my Chicago friends, I still have not been able to have that deep connection. I'm developing those connections now, now that I'm entering

my fourth year as a graduate student, those same types of connections that I would be able to make now with those friends. But Chicago experience was just very definitive and very unique. There is a lot within that that you can't really get from other people, and it becomes hard to connect when that was so formative. Kind of like a war. You really do become blood brothers, so to speak, with those you fight very closest with.

ML: So it seems like you were taking some pretty demanding classes—I know that physics is pretty demanding. But did you find time for organizations on campus?

DC: Yes. So I was a member of the Triple Helix, which I don't know—I believe it's still going on. It was a journal in science, law, and society. [ML: Yes, it's still going on.] Excellent! I still get their emails from time to time. So that was actually something that I started in my first year and kept throughout. I was very heavily involved with the Triple Helix. I was involved in the international level as well, because our school has a chapter, it's an international undergraduate student organization. But outside of that and various journals, academic journals, I did not do much in terms of other types of extracurricular activities.

ML: Yeah, it seems like you were pretty busy with your classes and so on, especially since it seems like you took such a large range.

DC: Yeah, most of my time was spent either in Crerar or, I actually had lab access to the Gordon Center for Integrated Sciences, so when Crerar would lock up, my friends and I, because I had access to the laboratories, we would just stay in the laboratories. 3 AM, we'd have Domino's pizza pan while we were studying for whatever final, or even homework. We saw finals week as our kind of play week because we were just so busy doing homework all the time.

ML: Did you work in a lab when you were in Chicago?

DC: I worked sporadically throughout in the labs at UChicago. I was chemistry, and I worked in the department of molecular genetics. I also worked under physics, and I've had internships with the Department of Defense.

ML: What drew you to physics eventually?

DC: Physics is a funny story. I actually started thinking that I would do mathematics and philosophy. Upon my first week in my analysis course as a first year, I realized I had no idea what I was doing. And I thought oh, okay, I was taking general chemistry, I believe it was honors, at the time. And I thought, chemistry, that makes a lot more sense, something empirical. And then the next year I was in organic chemistry and I realized that I had no idea what I was doing, but physics made sense, so I just stuck with physics. I basically, I like to say, I failed organic chemistry, which is why I became a physics major.

ML: Yeah. Organic chemistry is pretty hard.

DC: Yeah, organic chemistry is brutal.

ML: Sorry—just experiencing flashbacks to my own time in organic chemistry.

DC: Yeah, organic chemistry causes the most intense PTSD available on campus, I believe.

ML: Yeah. Were you out as gay when you were on campus?

DC: Yes, I was.

ML: Was it—did you find other people to be accepting?

DC: Yeah, generally accepting. There was no—I never had any issues when I was confronted. In fact, I was never confronted. It was like, oh! Okay. It was just a matter of fact as opposed to anything controversial or even of remote interest.

ML: So it seems like you were pretty comfortable. Had you already been out before you came to the university?

DC: Yeah, I was out in high school. So, definitely that was—there weren't a lot of issues that I had with respect to coming out or dealing with my sexuality.

ML: Yeah. That's really great to hear! I forgot to ask you this, but where did you go to high school?

DC: I went to high school in Salt Lake City, Utah. I went to the public school.

ML: Okay. Did you—of the friends that you mention having here, were any of them not straight as well?

DC: No, they were all heterosexual females. It makes sense.

ML: You and a bunch of fruit flies, I guess.

DC: Oh yes, fruit flies is my favorite term. One of my favorite terms. I actually study fruit flies in terms of their behavior, so it's quite apt. That's what my doctoral work is on, actually.

[0:16:30 – 0:20:41: ML and DC talk about fruit flies]

ML: Getting back to gay experience, did you have relationships when you were in college?

DC: Not really relationships, more on and off things with people, both on campus and off campus.

ML: Where did you meet those people?

- DC: Where everyone else meets them: the internet. I did not—I wasn't really integrated into whatever was considered the gay community of the University of Chicago. Because I had my own social circle and, like I said, we were codependent on each other. So I didn't have very many opportunities to meet anyone in terms of romantic relationships, or finding any other LGBT students. At least any LGBT students who were actively looking for partners. Was not really high on my radar.
- ML: Did you feel like that was a lack? Were you aware of the LGBT community but just not in it? Can you talk about your relationship to the community here?
- DC: The only major organization I was aware of, and I don't know if they're still active today is Queers and Associates. [ML: Yeah, Q&A is still around.] So, okay, good. I was active with Q&A for the first year, but I really, I guess I really didn't have much of a connection with the people who were active. After that first year I petered off and there wasn't a lot that I could be aware of. Q&A was the only really visible face of the LGBT community when I was there.
- ML: Did 5710 exist when you were there? The Office of LGBTQ Affairs.
- DC: They opened during the spring of my senior year. Spring of 2010. So they had open houses right as I was about to graduate.
- ML: So at that point, not really much time to enjoy it.
- DC: Like I said, I was at the cusp of the cultural shift at the university.
- ML: Do you think that 5710 was part of that cultural shift?
- DC: I think in some—I can't, I don't know for sure because I wasn't really aware of the mission statement of 5710. The cultural shift I perceived was more attitudes towards the university as opposed to the university community. It was a shift away from seeing the university as a place for old-school, old-fashioned dead white male learning, a shift from that to more of a professional track. On the one hand, I can't necessarily say that it was part of that shift, but the way that I perceived it, the resources that were poured into it, the structure, was much more aligned with the different types of student centers that you see on these, in a lot of these professional schools. So in some ways yes, in some ways no. But I didn't see that overtly as a cultural shift, per se.
- ML: You mentioned meeting, dating a lot of people off-campus as well. Did you spend a lot of time in other parts of Chicago?
- DC: Yes. So I actually have a lot of family in the area. I knew Chicago before I came to Chicago, the city, I mean. I had several friends who were not part of the Chicago system, who were not in Hyde Park. So I would spend an amount of time with them, but not a great amount of time because of the amount of work that I was doing. At the same time, my cohort and I, my comrades and I, to be more precise, we actually did like to escape

Hyde Park to study. So we would study in cafes in Lincoln Park or Lakeview, or we'd go up to Evanston, just for a scenery change.

ML: Did you mostly go to neighborhoods on the North Side then? To escape from—where did you go?

DC: Mostly on the North Side because that's what I knew.

ML: And I'm guessing that the family and friends you had were also on the North Side?

DC: Yes, they were on the North Side. Some of them were actually out in the burbs. Lake Forest, Glenview, and Wilmette. They were out there, like really far north. Beyond the Purple Line.

ML: To backtrack a little bit, it seems like you were really involved in the Triple Helix. I don't know too much about it. Can you tell me about what activities you did as a part of it?

DC: So it started out as a journal, a student-run publication. I wrote actively. I believe I wrote at least one article per school year. I was also active on the editorial board. I was actually associate editor, so I would edit individual articles, I would be assigned a writer. I also was on the executive board as the science policy director, so I was responsible for bringing in a lot of science policy events. Basically anything to do with society, science, study of science on society and vice versa. I was also involved at the international level as Chief Operations Officer. Mostly it was outreach, building various chapters, et cetera et cetera et cetera.

ML: You mention doing stuff with science and society. Do you remember doing any sort of political activism when you were on campus?

DC: Not as much, no. I didn't have, I didn't have many opportunities for political activism. I remember there were a lot of events towards the beginning of my first year. There was the Darfur scandal and the Darfur divestment movement, but I was not involved with that. But I did have friends who were involved in the 2008 Obama campaign. I believe they were the Students For Obama.

ML: Oh, that's very exciting!

DC: It was quite exciting. One of my summer flatmates was actually a registered volunteer for the campaign, so we were able to see more the inner workings of a voting machine. Although I don't know if she was supposed to show us that.

ML: That must have been so exciting though, being in Hyde Park in 2008.

DC: Oh, definitely. It was quite exciting. In fact, it's funny because during the summer of 2008, the Obamas and I, my friend, actually, shared the same street address. I was at 5046 Woodlawn, and he was at 5046 Greenwood.

ML: So did you get blocked off by secret service, or what?

DC: We did see the barricade and we did see glimpses of family. But the barricade didn't extend to Woodlawn at the time, so I didn't see any disturbance. But we did see a heavy security presence. Oh, okay. It's a campaign.

[0:29:43]

ML: When did you and your friends move off-campus?

DC: That was actually just for the summer. I lived all four years during the school year in the Max Palevsky dorms.

ML: Did you spend all your summers in Hyde Park?

DC: I spent two summers in Hyde Park and one summer in Washington, for my internship.

ML: How did you enjoy that?

DC: So, which part? The summers in Hyde Park?

ML: Oh, the internship in DC.

DC: It was actually out in Washington state. [ML: Oh, sorry! I get the two confused all the time.] No, I should have been more specific. I was doing an internship with the Department of Energy and the Department of Defense. It was quite a different experience. I was really interested in doing government work because it was an interesting alternative to the academic structure in doing research. I thought it was really fun, but I reflected on that experience and realized that bureaucracy is going to be the same no matter where you go. So I had a choice at the end of my senior year, whether to continue down the government research path, or to go into academia. Ultimately I chose academia because of the freedom I believed it provided. But you know, in the end, academia has just as much bureaucracy.

ML: Did you start graduate school at Princeton, right? Right after college?

DC: Yep.

ML: What motivated your decision to go to graduate school right away?

DC: To be very honest, I did not know what to do with the rest of my life. I always thought that I would be in academia of some sort, because I wanted to do research and I wanted to teach. It was either that or get a professional degree at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. I was like, well, I know what to expect from a PhD because I come from academic parents. I don't know what to expect from a professional degree. I thought,



might as well continue on in the road far more traveled.

ML: How have you enjoyed your time at Princeton so far?

DC: It's been a very different experience. I had a lot of culture shock, actually. I'm used to the Midwest, and the American West, because that's been my upbringing. The East Coast is a very, very different place to be. A lot of cultural values, the humor especially, is very different out here. That I noticed. And what is appropriate, what's not in Chicago is not necessarily considered appropriate elsewhere. A lot of the history and the tradition that I was immersed in while I was at Chicago in terms of the academic life, the academic mind, life of the mind, I didn't find as prominent in Princeton. You have a lot of people who are extremely intelligent, but in terms of their extracurricular interests, they don't tend to be curricular, so to speak. So I had a very difficult time adjusting for the first two years. It's getting a little better now, but I do miss the exhilaration of discussion at Chicago.

ML: It's funny that—it's really interesting that you talk about the cultural differences between Chicago and Midwest/West vs. the East Coast. Could you talk more specifically about the cultural differences that you see?

DC: A lot of it has to do with the day-to-day conversation. Chicago, especially in Hyde Park, small talk was not necessarily a big part of your everyday conversation. Some might interpret that as a kind of aloofness, but there was a genuine interest in broad application of ideas, and finding common patterns across the field. But here there's a lot more small talk, so it seems like a conversation that everyone else is having that I have no access to. In terms of trying to engage intellectual interest, it's not so broad as it is specialized. People would talk mostly—and of course, this is just graduate students as opposed to everyday people, so this might be a biased statement or biased perception. But what I did notice was that people rarely ventured out of their own intellectual comfort zone.

ML: Right, like you said, their interests don't seem to be as wide as the people as you would find at UChicago.

DC: As wide or as deep. My friends, who are all in the sciences of some sort, we would be instilled with the Core and instilled with these discussion. We'd get really excited by big ideas. We'd take the effort to really engage with something like Leo Strauss. Or be able to mention Kojève. It was really lost on a lot of people who are not in the humanities here. In fact, my first year here I spent more time in the anthropology department with my anthropology friends than with my own colleagues. Also, what I noticed at Chicago, it's an institutional thing, the structure of Chicago is very different than what you would find at other schools. The notion of a department at Chicago is very loose because you have things like committees. Like, committee on social thought, committee on this or that. Committees that combine different disciplines, which means that you have different professors who are cross-pollinating their ideas across disciplines. The notion of disciplinarity is really called into question and you're all engaged in a broader conversation. Whereas here, the way that departments are organized into departments are

very very rigid. And while you do have academic collaboration, there's not a lot of social life across the collaboration. For me, what I experienced this most was trying to talk to professors outside of my department. This might be a graduate-undergraduate difference as well. But when I was at Chicago, it was very easy for me to approach a professor who knows I was a physics major, but we'd spent hours talking about Franz Boas and his theory on sound, and how we perceive sound. Whereas here, I'd have to make a really concerted effort to reach professors across the aisle. There has been one professor I've been really friendly with here, Professor Anthony Grafton, who's in the department of history. He's a very distinguished professor. He's also a Chicago boy through and through. He did his undergraduate there. Lived in Burton-Judson dorms right on the night of Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination. He says that he was on the roof of Burton-Judson and saw the South Side in flames.

ML: That's incredible.

DC: Yeah, that was quite an amazing story to hear from him. And he did his master's and doctorate at the University of Chicago. He does retain a lot of the characteristics of Chicago that I recognize. I run into him quite frequently and sometimes we do make the time to meet up and have conversations over coffee and so on, although of course he's very busy.

ML: And I'm sure you're also very busy as a graduate student too.

[0:39:40]

DC: Or I should be, at least. And I think that he embodies the type of, the type of inquiry and open-mindedness that is real for knowledge that is characteristically Chicago for me. It means—this might be something that you end up recognizing for yourself when you go out into the real world. But the way Chicagoans talk. They have this certain way of talking about things that is very particular. You can spot it from a mile away. A true story was that I was at the Newark International Airport, and I was on my way home to Salt Lake City for a visit. I noticed this old couple. They were arguing profusely over Adorno and John Cage. And—there's something, there's a certain tone to the way they were dealing with each other vehemently, and the way that they presented their arguments, that I couldn't help myself, and I asked them, “I'm sorry, this might be a very presumptuous and very out-of-char—out of the blue question, but did you happen to go to the University of Chicago?” And it turns out they were there in the '60s, and they had both gotten their degrees, and they had married there. They had met each other there and they had married. So.

ML: That's pretty funny. So if not a mile away, than an earshot away.

DC: Within earshot, yeah. My friends have noticed that too. They can pick out Chicago grads. The same way that being from Utah, I can recognize a Mormon family really quickly, it's just that when you're immersed in that culture, you instantly recognize them. And Chicago has been like that for me. Although I'm getting quite rusty. I'm not as articulate

as I once was, and I think my speech has become a little sloppier in terms of the verbal component, although I can't say that I haven't learned anything since I got here, since that would mean that I've wasted three years of my life.

ML: I mean, I don't know what you were like when you were in Chicago, but you still sound pretty eloquent. [DC: Ehh, lost time.] You're in your fourth year of graduate school—do you think you'll keep on pursuing the academic path that you wanted when you went into graduate school?

DC: I'm not very optimistic. Because I think the structure of graduate education and the structure of academia, I don't think it's sustainable. The problem that I see is how we fund education, and how we fund results and research. I think most scientists' projects are founded on a lie. In my grant application, I say, "I want to study this because it has applications for this." You have that—when you don't have that kind of confidence, that kind of intellectual confidence in the ideas that you're proposing. Or you have confidence in the ideas and you just have to twist away to apply that to a specific application. It seems to me that it's not learning for learning's sake. It's not knowledge for knowledge's sake. And the job market for academics being what it is—I don't see myself being able to continue as an academic because I don't have that confidence to be that excelling academic, with the fellowship and prestige after prestige after prestige after prestige.

ML: Yeah. Academia is a hard game.

DC: A very hard game indeed. It's put me in a position of anxiety as to what my future holds after grad school. Because that's one thing I really had to deal with after leaving Chicago. We are given a privilege to spend four years of our most formative lives—the most formative years of our lives, to truly engage with really the fundamental issues. What is the good life? What is the good? What is truth? Is truth good? What is beauty? We realize that these questions aren't concretely answerable. We revel in it, but reality calls, and you realize that you can't just live in that world of ideas and books. There are a few who can, and it's not impossible, but once again, academics, the academic job market is very difficult. For me, the reason why I chose Chicago was because of that kind of "We don't care about those shiny adornments." In fact, in my readings of the university, Hutchins actually gave a speech, or wrote a letter—I think he gave a speech to the board of directors, or trustees—and he stated that the University of Chicago never cared about the ancient art of prestige. It cared about distinction. If Chicago is not to be a leader in education and research, then there is no reason for it to exist at all, because then it was just be another good school. Contrast that with the reality when Hutchins was the leader, the school came into a lot of financial trouble. Idealists can be a little dangerous. But I never said I wasn't a romantic.

ML: You speak of Chicago in very glowing terms. But were there any aspects of the experience that you found problematic at all?

DC: Many. Many. First off, just the simple logistical ones. There wasn't enough study spaces. The fact that I had to barge my way into lab in order to find a place to study, that was,

that was definitely not something I enjoyed. I was really glad I had access to the lab buildings for that reason, so that I could go there and have a space where I could study that wasn't surrounded by the chatter of the A-level. Although the A-level itself was quite a marketplace of ideas. And I feel that a lot of the work at UChicago was extremely demanding, to the point where you're really being broken down, to the point where you're doubting everything that you thought you knew. Obviously now, three years away from it, and you'll be graduating as well, you'll realize that those were the best times of my life, when I was just crying over my SOSC paper.

ML: "I miss those days."

DC: "Did I sign up for this? What did I sign up for?" I remember the first two years, after every interim, I would just dread going back. It was just so much trepidation before starting the next quarter. That I found—for me it was necessary because it was something that allowed me to build up my tolerance for hysteria. But the biggest thing that I've learned coming out of Chicago is that for me personally, the way that I approached it, it goes back to my idealism and realism tension. I realized that that kind of environment, where the notion of practical skills wasn't as highly valued, and where you weren't taught to speak to those who do, that I believe was detrimental to me as a scientist. Obviously I could have done things better, I could have spent a longer time in lab. I could have sought out those professional opportunities myself. But coming into grad school, I did not do science. I did natural philosophy. And for me, just the basics of not being able to program something, because our professors said, "Oh, programming. Well, I'll teach you FORTRAN. I don't want to teach you C. And Java, I don't know Java, so I'll teach you FORTRAN." There was that—there was kind of that clunky, you know. Like trying to build a steam engine in the middle of the electric age. For me, I felt that was a big detriment to my graduate education. Since then I've been able to catch up, and I feel a lot more confident. But in terms of preparing me for graduate school, I don't think that it prepared me enough. In terms of the ideas, in terms of the content, it was beautiful because you could just have a text, and you could read into a text. I remember my advisor told me, "Daniel. You can't read this as if you were trying to deconstruct the text. There is no text to deconstruct. You look at the results, you look at the figures, you see what they're saying, you take whatever you need from the supplemental figures. You do not need to do an entire hermeneutics." That experience, I think, was—focusing only on that, focusing only on that level, was problematic in terms of preparing me for other things.

Also during my time, this was a before a lot of student support. There wasn't a lot of the—you know, the LGBT center, the Center for Gender Studies, the Woodlawn—I forget what it's called. 5710 Woodlawn? [ML: Yes, 5710.] 5710 wasn't there. During my time. So we didn't have a lot of support socially. I was lucky enough to have a very good social order to help me out on a day-to-day basis. I needed to find support outside of the university in terms of emotional support, with my work. I don't know what it would be like if I had gone now, if I were to be at the University of Chicago now. There was this sense that we had, and I don't think I can attribute it to anything as much as it is just all sorts of issues being struck. It's your first time away from home, you pretty much have to reset your social ties. That was just when we started. Facebook was just opening up then,

to Harvard and the other Ivies. So we didn't have that infrastructure and those institutions to help us navigate our way through. I think that was a major detriment.

[0:53:11]

In terms of Hyde Park, it was a food desert. There weren't a lot of good restaurants during my time. So just being able to connect with the community outside the university, that was pretty difficult. You had to really try. That's why my friends and I would leave the university and go into the city. The North Side or the Loop. There used to be a Borders Books & Cafe right across from the Hancock tower downtown. [ML: Yeah, I remember that.] You remember that? Oh, that was still open during your first year, right? [ML: Yeah, I think it closed down after my first year.] Yeah, there was that, and we really had to grasp at straws in terms of emotional support. I guess I think about that from the perspective of what Princeton University has offered its students. A lot more—they support more the student life here, to use a generic term. Luckily enough for us, Princeton really does love its undergraduates so much that we graduates are able to benefit from these services that are offered.

ML: Did you connect with any communities off-campus? Since you mentioned that you weren't really able to find them on campus.

DC: Not a lot. Just more individuals. I didn't—I wouldn't say that there was any particular community that I tapped into. I was mostly with my lonely group of loners. And we—we're still an urban family. A lot of them were Eastern-European, my friends. So we would, even to this day, we would do a Skype session that we would call the Eastern-European Parliament. [ML: Nice name.] Yeah, in terms of finding support, we really only had each other, although I had the benefit of a therapist.

ML: Do you think your perception of your college experience has changed over time? At least in the four years since you've been away?

DC: I think the biggest phase shift was graduation. I don't think it has changed that much over the past three or four years, but I think graduation—just that moment of graduation, graduation day was when it all changed, and I realized that I wasn't part of it anymore. I was part of the community, but I wasn't a student anymore. I remember I came back during the summer of 2011, during Alumni Weekend, and obviously they had a lot of events for alumni, but I still had friends, so instead of going to the Chicago party or all those little, you know, little events they have for alumni, I stuck around with my friends and we visited our old haunts. There's a playground on Woodlawn between 55<sup>th</sup> and 53<sup>rd</sup> that my friends and I used to go to after we'd stuffed ourselves at Harold's. We'd just sit on the swings and go, “God, why did we eat so much?”

ML: I actually have very good memories of the same park. The one that's right across from Kimbark Plaza? [DC: Yeah, exactly.] It's a good place.

DC: Wait, I don't think it was right across from Kimbark. It's on Woodlawn, between some

apartments. [ML: Yeah, between 54<sup>th</sup> and 53<sup>rd</sup>?] Yeah. [ML: Yeah, it's a good playground.] And oh, the side of the Reg. On Max Palevsky, the East side of the Reg, oh my friends would just spend so much time there as we passed the night as we talked our way out of papers or dealt with the emotional relationship of the day—or the emotional relationship issue of the day. I remember when I was on the events, on that—the Thursday I had arrived during Alumni Weekend, I remember just kind of watching all this pass by, and I remember having a little mini-breakdown there, just the fact that the school hasn't felt like it changed. But the campus of Princeton is still fresh on my mind, because I had just arrived there this afternoon, just this colliding of the worlds. All of that was just a bit too much for me at that moment. I had to just sit there for ten minutes to get out of myself. As they say, tears streaming down my face. But since then, I think that first year after I graduated was very difficult, but after that trip, with my friends, we visited all our old haunts, and being able to do that was instrumental in my being able to accept that I had graduated. That was the other change. So it was a three-process change. While I was at the university, right after I graduated, and after I visited for the first time. But well, fond memories. Nostalgia. Whatever happiness.

[00:59:52]

ML: Do you think your experience is typical of the gay students who have passed through in your time?

DC: I wouldn't be comfortable answering that because I don't know many gay students at UChicago, so I wouldn't know what their experience would be like. I had a small social group, so I can't say that my experience was typical. But I think that by the fact that my friend and I are able to recount the same memory in almost the same emotional speech—not just the same reaction, but the rhythm, the breathing that you have or the heartbeats that you feel, the pounding, the excitement, those late-night deadlines, the fact that we're able to have this deep synchronization. I think, even if it's not typical, it's not an experience that I would say is isolated.

ML: A question that we like to ask near the end is: why did you decide to be interviewed for this project?

DC: I think it was two things. First off, for me, my connection with the university is very, very important to me. Very formative, and I do see myself as a child of the alma mater, so to speak. To participate in any sort of repository or record of that is my contribution to the university's legacy. And secondly, I think having that kind of history is very important. To capture throughout the lifeline of the university, and knowing where it's heading, and where it's been. I think those two things were very important for me as to why I decided to partake in this oral history.

ML: And the transcript of this interview will be in the Special Collections of the Reg forever.

DC: Forever! If the Reg can find it, that is. But that's another story.

ML: I think that's all the questions that I can really think of. Is there anything else that you'd like to tell the project?

DC: There's nothing I can think of on my own. But I would definitely be interested in hearing other people's experiences, when the exhibit is slated to open.

ML: Yeah, I think it's slated to open in 2015. So if you come back for another alumni weekend, maybe you can see.

DC: Ah, right after graduation, hopefully! If I'm graduating on time.

ML: Thank you for talking to us.

DC: Yeah, thanks for the project. It's definitely something that I value.

[01:03:20]

***End of Interview***