

Feminist Oral Histories of the University of Washington

Department of Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies, University of Washington

Seattle, WA

Sara Díaz

Interviewed by

Richard Alejandro Parra

April 12th, 2024

Recorded online via Zoom

Narrator

Dr. Sara Díaz, born 1978, is an alumni of the UW Women's Studies department. After receiving her Bachelors in Chemistry and Spanish Language & Literature she worked in the biotechnology field as a researcher. She attended the University of Washington and received her Master of History degree in 2007. Her focus was on the history of science, specifically women of color scientists. Immediately after she started working on her doctorate in the UW Women's Studies department. During her time in the department she was a member of the Women of Color Collective and she helped organize a Women of Color conference where graduate students could share their research projects. Currently, Dr. Díaz is an Associate Professor and the Chair of the Women's and Gender Studies department at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington. Her research and teaching focus on the intersections of science, race, and gender.

Interviewer

Richard Alejandro Parra is a graduate student at the University of Washington's College of Education, in the Culturally Sustaining Education program. He completed this oral history in the Spring of 2024, as part of the 'GWSS 460: Feminist Oral History Research Methodology' course taught by Professor Priti Ramamurthy.

Abstract

Throughout this oral history, Dr. Sara Díaz shared about her family and the influence they had in her decisions about what to study in college. She discussed her educational journey from high school to her graduate studies. She also briefly mentioned her career in the biotechnology field. Dr. Díaz mentions how her interest in the history of science developed and how that led her to the University of Washington. During her time in the UW history department she took a lot of GWSS courses. This helped her solidify her dissertation topic and the decision to pursue a doctorate in the Women Studies department. After obtaining her PhD she joined Gonzaga University (GU) as an Associate Professor in their Women's and Gender Studies department. She discusses how she was nervous at first about teaching Women's Studies at a religious university. However, in her time at GU she has found that the feminist framework and Jesuit framework work well together and they have led to interesting developments in her pedagogy and praxis. The interview ends with Dr. Díaz sharing about her work with the Women of Color Collective during her time in the UW Women's Studies department.

Interview recorded by Richard Alejandro Parra using Zoom Cloud Recording.

Files

Audio: 38_Sara_Diaz.mp3

Transcript – 26 pages

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Transcript has been reviewed and edited by Richard Alejandro Parra

INT: Okay. So thank you again for agreeing to meet with me for the GWSS Oral History Archive project from the University of Washington. Can I get your consent on record to record this interview?

NARRATOR: Yes. You have my consent to record.

INT: Awesome. Thank you so much. It's always a little bit awkward. (Interviewer and Narrator laugh) So my name is Richard Parra. I am the interviewer. I am interviewing ... do you want to say your name?

NARRATOR: Yes, my name is Sara Díaz.

INT: Awesome. Thank you. The date is April 12th, 2024. The time is 2:34 P.M.. And I am recording from Mary Gates Hall on the University of Washington campus. Dr. Díaz, would you like to tell us about where you're joining us from?

NARRATOR: I am at my home in Spokane, Washington.

INT: Awesome. Thank you so much. So obviously we already said our names, right?

But is there anything else that you go by that you call yourself or any other name or any nickname?

NARRATOR: Nope.

INT: Awesome. What pronouns do you go by?

NARRATOR: I use she/her pronouns.

INT: Awesome. Thank you. When were you born?

NARRATOR: In 1978. Or do you need the full day? (narrator chuckles)

INT: Whatever you're comfortable sharing

NARRATOR: We'll just say 1978. (continues chuckling)

INT: Sounds good. Good strong year (chuckles along with the narrator). Could you, if you're feel comfortable, could you share about your family and parents and the kind of work that they did?

NARRATOR: Sure. My mother was a high school language teacher, Spanish language. She taught French and Russian as well. Very talented, multilingual person. And she is, European American, grew up in the United States. My father has done a whole bunch of different jobs. He grew up in Colombia, in South America. And actually he's just about retired, but he did a lot of, I would just say general kind of business and marketing jobs. After working his way up, he kind of started out doing, more, working class work and moved into management over the years. And then, I will say I have two siblings, a full brother and a half brother. My parents did split, when I was young. And I grew up in western Washington.

[02:35]

INT: What area?

NARRATOR: I graduated from Mt. Lake Terrace High School. Moved around a bit in several different suburban areas of the Seattle metro area.

INT: Nice ... so always Washington.

NARRATOR: Yeah. I lived for about four years in Massachusetts after college. But, other than that, that small sort of deviation of the whole rest of my life has been in Washington state. Yep.

INT: Nice. What were you doing in Massachusetts?

NARRATOR: I worked for a biotech company there after I graduated from undergrad, in research.

[03:16]

INT: Awesome. I do have some questions that I wanted to ask about your education, but I think we'll save that for later. What were some of the big social issues during your teenage years that you were aware of?

NARRATOR: Yeah, lots. I think the ones that I cared about as a teenager and was kind of most interested in and paying attention to were, the crime bill, I think that went through ... was that 94 ... gun control, those kinds of things were part of the conversation. And that was before school shootings had become a huge thing. But they were, you know, those issues were, kind of top of mind. And things that I was aware of, but maybe a little less engaged in was some of the conversation about sexual harassment that emerged after the Anita Hill, testimony at Clarence Thomas confirmation hearing. I watched that, and I was maybe a little less tuned in to some of those issues than some of the other questions around crime, but all of those were things I was interested in, and curious about and had been passionate

about as a teenager.

INT: That's interesting... you said you watched the [hearing]... did you watch it in school or ...?

NARRATOR: No, I watched it with my mother. Yeah, we watched them at home. And my mom was very, very concerned about that. That testimony, it for her, it felt like a really huge injustice. And to this day, she will never forgive Joe Biden for the role that he played, as the head of that committee. So, yeah, that was something that the adults around me, I was, I think 12 or 13, the adults around me were talking about. My mother and my stepmother both talked to me extensively during that time about experiences of sexual harassment that they had had, that brought up that testimony, brought up that conversation kind of in my sphere.

[05:23]

INT: Thank you for sharing. So I mentioned that I also wanted to ask about your education. Where and when did you go to college? And what did you study and why did you choose those?

NARRATOR: Yeah. So I actually did the Running Start program here in Washington state. So the last two years of high school, I was going to community college, and I actually graduated from high school with an associate's degree. So college for me started a little, a little early in that way. And I was really interested in the time at the time in studying chemistry, that was something I had, kind of developed, strong interest for in high school. But I also was interested because I thought it would help me get a job that would pay well. Something that I was very concerned about was, you know, being able to support myself. My mother and my stepmother were both self-identified feminists, and they really instilled in me the idea that I needed to be financially independent. And I thought that the sciences might be a path for that. And I also was very interested in, at that time in my life, I actually wanted to move to Colombia and live there. And I thought that maybe having a STEM degree might help me be employable there. So I was very

focused. I almost maybe hyper-focused on, STEM at that time. When I graduated from high school, I went to Whitman College, which is in Walla Walla, Washington, and I pursued chemistry there. I also decided pretty early on that I would be able to do, double major in Spanish Language & Literature. So I also did that. And I don't know if you want me to go beyond undergrad? Or is that? Does that come up later?

[07:27]

INT: Yeah, whatever you're comfortable sharing. But really quick. You said you decided early on that you wanted to study, Spanish Language & Literature, why?

NARRATOR: Yeah. Early in my college career. I think, you know, I had started, I didn't grow up speaking Spanish. And I had started studying it as a community college student. More formally, I mean, I heard Spanish all around me, and I understood quite a bit, but I couldn't. I didn't really have any ability to speak until I started studying it at the college level. And so I wanted to advance in that. I wanted to be able to speak better, and that kind of allied with the goal of wanting to move to Colombia. And then, also, I think that there was something ... I went to a small liberal arts college. They didn't have women's and gender studies, they didn't have ethnic studies. And this was kind of the only place in the curriculum where I had any exposure to something like Latino/Latina studies. So I think that was also a big part of my interest is that it was kind of the place where I could start to maybe see a little bit of myself represented. And it was really exciting to get to read books in Spanish written by Colombian authors. And, so I think that was also a big part of my interest, although it wasn't like the top of my mind. It's in retrospect that I think that's probably why I was drawn to it.

[09:01]

INT: Yeah, that makes sense. So you said you didn't grow up speaking Spanish, right? Did your dad speak Spanish?

NARRATOR: My dad at home, he spoke English. He was a native Spanish speaker. But we spoke English at home, in part because the goal was for my dad to become fluent

in English. My mother speaks Spanish fluently as well. So they could have been a Spanish speaking household and actually, for the time that they were married and I was with them, they did speak a lot of Spanish at home. Although they tried to speak more in English. And so I had a very early exposure to a lot of Spanish language. And then, of course, when I was older, my grandmother would come up fairly regularly. And so she didn't speak any English, so she spoke to me exclusively in Spanish, which is why I could understand a lot, but I couldn't. I couldn't speak very much.

INT: Yeah, I've encountered that a lot with my family as well. And a lot of my cousins as well, with my grandma. Like they can understand her, but they always respond in English.

NARRATOR: Yes. Yeah. And when I got older, that became something that I wanted to change. Right. And I wanted to be able to speak back, and to speak with her. Yeah.

[10:23]

INT: Yeah. So you did your undergrad, right? Where you received your bachelors degree. And then you, I know from preliminary research that you did your doctoral degree at University of Washington. Did you do a masters degree?

NARRATOR: I did, at the history department at UW.

INT: Nice. Do you want to share more about that?

NARRATOR: Yeah. I mean, I took a bit of a break and worked in industry for about six years. I mentioned that time in Boston. I left Boston knowing that I wanted to go to graduate school, and I just felt like the East Coast was such a different (laughs), such a different place that it kind of took up all my mental bandwidth. And I feel like I could focus on grad school unless I came home. And so I came home and worked for another two years for a different biotech company, in Woodinville, and got my act together and managed to apply to grad school. And I was really

interested, I had done this thesis project for my chemistry degree, at Whitman on, the use of a certain type of chemical in Native American basketry for dyeing the basket material. And so the project was to kind of understand the chemical reaction that was being used to do that. And it was really awesome. I got to go and spend some time in California with a few people who knew a little bit about this as part of an NSF grant. And so I had like, I didn't know what to call that, and I wanted more of that. I thought that was really interesting. I think now it is probably something called ethno-chemistry or something like that. But at the time I thought maybe it was called the History of Science. And so I decided I would apply to history of science programs. And I applied at UW, and I applied at Oregon State University. And Oregon State University wisely did not accept me into their program (laughs) because I had no idea what I was talking about or doing. And I still, still do not understand why the University of Washington history program accepted me. To this day, I do not understand. I'm grateful, don't get me wrong, but I don't get why. They looked at my application and said, yes, we'll take this student (laughs). And when they admitted me that fall, both of the historians of science on the faculty at that time were on sabbatical. This is another thing that just blows my mind. I don't know why they accepted a brand new grad student when they didn't have any faculty, available to teach their program in history of science. So I was really desperately looking for classes, trying to figure out what I could take. And I found one of their general requirements in the history department that everybody had to take. So I took that one. And then I was looking for something else, and I went and looked at, Native American Studies because I was still interested in this whole basketry thing and the science and like, thinking maybe I might find something there. And one of the classes that popped up was something about native women. And I clicked on it and it took me to the women's studies department. And I never would have, had it not been by accident, looked at that part of the catalog. Just would not have looked. Wasn't something that was on my radar as a thing that I was interested in. But once I got in there, I noticed that there was a class being offered by Angela Ginorio, called Women in/and Science, and it was a 400 level course, but I could take that as a grad student. And

so I signed up for that. And that was my other course. And that just ruined me for history. (laughs) From that point forward. And I immediately decided that I was, well, maybe it was about six weeks, maybe it wasn't immediate, but about six weeks in, I think I decided I wanted to do a graduate certificate in Women's Studies. And I spent a good, a good amount of my time when I was a history student, working as an RA [research assistant] for Angela and taking classes in the Women's Studies department toward that certificate.

[14:46]

INT: So you said it was like six weeks in, right? When you made that [decision], like, what specifically was it?

NARRATOR: I think, you know, I just had never had really much exposure to feminist studies. It took me years, actually, to remember that we had done a little bit of reading of feminist theory when I was working on my major in Spanish. We had read a few pieces about feminism then, and they were really impactful on me at that time, too, although they were really framed very differently than what I was exposed to in what was called Women's Studies at the time. And I think it was just really exciting because it engaged my interest in science, and also it really spoke to experiences that I had had as a woman working in STEM. Up until that point, I'd been six years working in biotech. And just the idea that all of these experiences that I had had and I knew, you know, all about sexual harassment, I'd had those conversations with, with my parents as a kid. But it didn't occur to me that there were people who studied this who had frameworks for understanding it. So that was just kind of like world altering, right? It just totally opened things up to think differently. Not only about what I wanted to research, but also just my own life.

INT: Yeah. Thank you for sharing that. That really resonates with me. I studied bioengineering at UW as well. And it wasn't until I did a class in the diversity minor where I had that, like, a very similar experience. Like, people are studying this. People have the same experiences as me? Thank you for sharing that. So you were at UW. You were doing your master's. Do you want to share a little bit about

that? Did you do a master's project or a master's thesis?

NARRATOR: Yeah, I worked, I actually wound up because I, you can tell there was a little bit of a chaotic experience. I didn't have great advising at the beginning, and I wound up writing two theses (laughs) because, the first one, I wound up in the thesis writing class, I think it was that first semester I had to take three classes or I don't remember anyway. Maybe it was the second. The second quarter. But I shouldn't have been in the class. It was too early, and so I wound up in the class anyway, and I wrote the first thesis on, science education for girls during the Cold War. And now I'm trying to remember what the second one was. Oh, yeah. The second one was Sor Juana. So then, I was told I had to ... there was a whole language requirement thing. You'll appreciate this. So I'm studying history of science, and, you know, you have to have your second language. They want you to be working on your second language. Well, I had a degree in Spanish, so I figured. I'm good. I've got my second language. I've met that requirement. And so at some point, one of the people in the office, one of the program administrators, said, you know, we need to get your paperwork done for your language. Have you been working on a second language? And I said, well, I actually have a degree in Spanish, so I don't think I need a second language. And she said, well, Spanish isn't appropriate for the history of science. You either need to do French or German for the history of science. And I said, well, why is that? And she said, well, because all of the history of science is in Europe. It's French or German. (laughs) And I said, want to bet? So I had to figure out a way to write another history of science thesis, demonstrating that I could use Spanish to do the work. And so I wrote about, what I remembered, the story from when I was studying Spanish in undergrad. Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, who was a Mexican nun, poet, playwright. But I remembered also in reading about her from back in my undergraduate years that she had a huge library in her cell and including scientific instruments. And so I thought, let me go and read more about that. And so I was able to do, the second thesis on Sor Juana and I kind of looked at her poetry as epistemological work, kind of a lyrical articulation of an epistemology of the natural world. So that was

the second one.

INT: That's awesome. That's amazing.

NARRATOR: That one was the one I became a lot more passionate about and actually wound up as a chapter in my dissertation.

INT: Yeah, I actually read a few, a bit of your dissertation in preparation for this interview. Yeah. First of all, thank you for like, not caving in to them and like, fighting for, like, Spanish research. Like history of science. Yeah. Makes me actually so angry. And I would have done the same thing out of spite. Like, purely out of spite.

NARRATOR: Yes, it was really, truly just out of spite. For sure. And but then it wound up being a really beautiful thing. In the end, like that spite turned into something, I think, really powerful that I'm proud of.

INT: And like you said, right. It ended up being one of the case studies in your dissertation for your doctoral degree. Do we want to talk about ...

NARRATOR: Sure, we can talk about the shift. Because even at that point I was still not quite sure I wanted to do a PhD in Women's Studies. I was a little bit worried about being able to find a job. And I sort of, for a while, kind of stayed attached to the idea of doing my PhD in history because I thought I might have a better shot at employment. And it turns out that that was a really wrong way of thinking. But when I went to, I, you know, I did my exams for my master's degree and I passed, but barely. And I was kind of given a strong talking to that. Maybe this wasn't the right place for me. And that was really kind of disconcerting, even though they did pass me. And then they decided that they would go ahead and promote me to the PhD program. So I was fully promoted into the history PhD program. But with this kind of like reservation on the part of my faculty advisors, and it didn't feel

very comfortable, like it didn't feel like I was very welcome. And of course, as part of the process of that promotion to the PhD, I had to start thinking about my dissertation. And by that point, I'd done enough coursework in women's studies that I was I had a much better understanding of what I wanted to do, and the idea for the dissertation had started to crystallize, and I knew that I wanted to write about women of color in the history of science. And so, I talked to my primary advisor at that point, and his response was, that sounds like a really great project, but I don't think I'm in a very good position to be able to oversee that. I think you should talk to this person. And I wound up doing this chain through 3 or 4 different people, talking to them about what I wanted to do and trying to find a supervisor for the dissertation. And each one of them told me they thought it was an excellent project, but that they couldn't supervise it. And, when I got to the last person, they referred me back to the first person. And at that point I was like, I've gone in a full circle here and no one is willing to supervise this. And so I don't think this is the right place for me to be. And so I went and I was still are in RA for Angela. And so I went talk to her and I told her the whole story. And I said, I think, I think maybe what I need to do is try to apply to the PhD program in Feminist Studies. Or it wasn't feminist studies yet. I think it was still Women's Studies. And she she just got a big smile on her face and she said, I've been waiting. (laughs) And she, you know, she just let me find my way, right? She didn't push me, but once I was, I said, this is what I want to do. She was very, very welcoming. And so it was very like it was fall semester. It was really close to the application deadline, I mean, maybe weeks ahead of time. So I had to pull together a really, really fast application, in order to get that through. And I did because I had a project and I had been, you know, working with faculty in, in the program. I think that gave me everything I needed to make a good, a good case, for being admitted into the program. So, of course, that I was and I started that, I think was it fall of 2008. Officially not as a certificate student, but as a PhD student.

INT:

Wow. Thank you for sharing your pathway. It's interesting. I started the question

with like, oh, there's a very linear path from like master's to Ph.D. and you're like, no, no, no. It was actually ... (laughs)

NARRATOR: No, it was not. (laughs) It was a very roundabout process for me. Yeah.

[24:37]

INT: So, you were in Women's Studies or Feminist Studies. Were there any courses that you took during your time there that were particularly influential for you?

NARRATOR: Well I took, as a certificate student, I had already taken ... this is kind of a weird mirror of my running start years. That I had taken all of these college courses as a high school student, and I took all of these certificate classes as a master's student, so that by the time I entered the PhD, I had already taken almost all of the required classes. So I was able to kind of just jump right into, you know, my directed readings. But while I was a certificate student, I think. You know, each of those core required courses was impactful in its own way. But, I think I had two of them. I don't know, maybe it was just the first one 501 that was with, Dr. Shirley Yee. And that was also really important, because Shirley also became one of my dissertation supervisors and was also on my committee, and I think establishing a relationship with a historian who was located in Women's Studies was very helpful for me in making that shift, because I knew I still wanted the work to be historical. And so she was really the ideal person to help me kind of maintain that historical focus while bringing in all of the other theories and methods that Feminist Studies had to offer the project. So she was wonderful. I mean, it's hard to sort of pick any, any one. Of course, I also took Chicana Feminist Theory. I think that was my first semester, as an elective with Michelle Habell-Pallán. And that was also really transformative, especially for the Sor Juana chapter. Because that gave me some very specific theories to be able to reinterpret the work that I'd done on the thesis, because I didn't have those Chicana Feminist Theories when I was doing the historical work. So it just totally altered the reading. Right? Of her contribution to science. It was actually, I think, a very painful process, reworking Sor Juana, and bringing it more into a Chicana

Feminist lens. It was sort of a shocking process in some ways. I think there was something very personal going on in that shift, to bring a feminist lens to something that I had known and studied for a long time, going all the way back to undergrad and suddenly had this new way of looking at. And I think that at the same time, I was just kind of personally going through a new way of looking at everything. Right? That was a positive shift, but also a little painful too. To sort of pull something apart and put it back together again in a different way.

[27:54]

INT: So, I think I'm starting to see the threads in your journey, in your academic journey, that are starting to lead towards your dissertation topic, right? Gender, race, and science. From your career, women's studies, and then women of color in science. I think throughout our conversation you've been sort of talking about the different pieces, but how did you arrive at the final? Like, this is the topic and these are the three case studies that I'm going [to look at].

NARRATOR: Yeah, I mean, I think I had the topic, right, that had really kind of come together for me toward the end of the master's program. But, which the case studies were going to be. I suppose there's one other piece of this, at least one other piece of this story, and that is, where Roger Arliner Young came from. That actually came from a class that I'd taken while I was a history student with Quintard Taylor, who was at the very beginning of the process of building Blackpast.org. And at that time, he had grad students, who were taking his African-American urban history class and maybe some of his other classes, too. And I was enrolled in that class. He had us have the option. We could write either ten entries for Blackpast.org, or you know, a traditional essay. And so I said, oh, this sounds like a fun project. Let's write these ten entries. And Roger Arliner Young was one ... I did all of them except for, I think, one on black women scientists. And Roger Arliner Young was one of them, and I was just really fascinated by her story. It felt. Sort of tragic in a way, but also really incomplete. Like there was a lot missing from the record. And so it became clear to me that that was an opportunity to do more research on her story. And so I had those two. I had Sor Juana. I knew I wanted

Sor Juana to be one of the cases. I knew that Roger Arliner Young was going to be the other case. But I wasn't sure about how to fill it out, and I'm not exactly sure how I came across Chen Chung Wu, but I know it was in the process of preparing for the dissertation. That was the last one that came to me. And I wish I could remember now exactly how I stumbled across her. It might have been because she was in the Nobel Prize winning women book by Cher McGrane. Not all the women in the book actually won a Nobel Prize, but a lot of them are Nobel Prize adjacent. And so she might have been, I think she might be the only woman of color that is featured in that book. There might be one other I can't remember anymore, but that might have been how I kind of happened upon her. And so then once I had the three, it became clear, okay, I've got enough here for a kind of like survey of a bunch of different experiences across time. You know, Sor Juana is a bit of an outlier in that she's way back in time. But that felt like it was something closer to a complete project.

[31:18]

INT: Thank you for sharing. So you wrote your dissertation. And then you graduated. You obtained your doctorate. How was that transition from graduating to the job market?

NARRATOR: You know, starting out as an assistant professor. Well I'll say because I'll come back just to echo like that worry that I had about being able to find a job. Because the year that I went on the market, there were so many more jobs in Women's Studies than there were in history, and it was really clear that the competition for the history jobs was incredibly tight. And so at that time I felt like, "oh, I really made the right choice." Just from a market perspective, this field is growing, and this is a place that actually I'm going to be able to find employment. And of course I did. I'll also add just because it gives a little bit of flavor to the story, that one of the things I was concerned about at the time, I applied to jobs in the fall of 2011. And I had at that time a domestic partnership with my partner, that was recognized by the state of Washington. But we did not yet have marriage equality even in Washington state, certainly not nationwide. And so we knew that we

really wanted to be able to stay in either Washington or one of the other states that had some kind of recognition of same sex relationships in some way, shape or form. So that was like one of the things I brought on to the market was kind of being careful about the states that I was looking at moving to. My partner also has her own career, and so that was something we knew that she'd be able to keep her job if she stayed in Washington state, even if we left the Seattle area. So that really it was very ideal if we were able to stay at that time in, within Washington and I'd seen, come across our grad student listserv, this job at Gonzaga. I think the chair at the time had said, "hey, we know we're going to be posting this soon. If you have any grad students who are interested, will you please, you know, send them our way." And so it was already on my radar when it finally was posted. And so excited about it. Although nervous about a Catholic institution. (laughs)

INT: (laughing along) Wait, what do you mean by nervous?

NARRATOR: Just like, what does it mean to do women's studies in a Catholic university, right? Like, am I going to be allowed to teach about abortion? You know, and then also at the time, like, you know, being in a same sex relationship and not really knowing anything about this institution, what's that going to be like? It felt like a really weird way to be able to keep my marriage. Right. Coming to this Catholic university, in the end, that's exactly how it worked out, right? It's such a strange thing, but that's it happened, right? I suspect that Sor Juana chapter helped push me up in the pile. I know there were a lot of applicants to the job. I didn't really care much about Sor Juana's catholicism. But I think the fact that I have some knowledge about, you know, a nun and that kind of history of the church is helpful in this place. So when I got the job, the transition was, for me, a lot about transitioning to a private religious institution. I'd gone to a small liberal arts college for undergrad. So the private part wasn't really new for me, but the religious part was. And it was a great surprise in a lot of ways. It's not that this place is without, you know, its own challenges, some of which absolutely have to do with, you know, some of the restrictions that Catholicism exerts over the space.

But the Jesuits in particular, have a really long history of commitment to social justice. And that has turned out to be a really wonderful complement to, you know, feminist pedagogy. There's a way that teaching in this place, you know, I encountered a lot of students at the University of Washington who really expected, like, a neutral education. And that's a challenge when they come into a WGS classroom and we're not, intentionally, not giving them a neutral education. But students at a Catholic university don't expect that. They expect that there will be values in their education, that they are going to be taught about ethics and morality. Those kinds of things are an expected part of the curriculum. And so that normative stance can be, especially when there is a stated commitment to social justice, is something that can be really useful in WGS classroom. So that was kind of a surprise. (dog barks in the background) dog barking, sorry. Give me a second, I'm going to close the window. (moves out of frame to close the window).

INT: Yeah. Of course.

NARRATOR: School let out so the kids are walking by outside. So yeah, that turned out to be kind of a surprise. And we have academic freedom. We don't have any kind of, requirement statement of faith that faculty are required to, to sign in order to be employed. And that became very clear very early that I was not going to be restricted on what I could teach in the classroom and the things that I expected would be obstacles, in the classroom turned out not to be very big obstacles. I was surprised, for example, that it seemed the year I started on campus, that the question of women's ordination in the church was actually a much more hot button topic than same sex marriage. Which was just sort of like it was a total surprise to me. The kinds of things that were controversial were not the things I expected were going to be controversial. And it's not, again, not to say that there aren't historical legacies that we're still dealing with at GU. We do not have a robust LGBTQ studies program, and a lot of that has to do with, very entrenched history of homophobia on our campus. And we were only just this last year,

granted permission to have a student group for reproductive justice. Although a pro-life student group has existed for decades. So there are restrictions. At least what I do in the classroom, though, I have full academic freedom there. And so it's turned out to be a decent place to do this work. And there are some really interesting and fruitful dynamics that happen between the Jesuit frame and feminist frames.

[39:05]

INT: That's interesting. Did you grow up religious? Did you grow up in a religious household?

NARRATOR: I didn't, my dad considers himself to be a fully recovered Catholic. He did go to Catholic school. I mean, at the time. He grew up in Colombia. Everything was. And the country was Catholic. So all school was Catholic school. And he has nothing but negative feelings toward that, and communicated that to us very vocally as we were growing up. So, that was just not a part of, like, how I was raised, my mother's side of the family, actually, my grandmother on that side was raised Catholic. And when she married my grandfather, who was Southern Baptist, they converted, to the Anglican Church, as they thought that might be kind of halfway between Baptist and Catholic, which I think is an interesting take. But I wasn't raised within that church either. I went with them a few times, but it just it wasn't something that was a, a big part of my childhood, which, again, was part of my reservation because I just didn't have much exposure other than like a lot of street preachers when I was in high school, on the college, the community college campus, there was a lot of street preaching happening, during the 90s at that time. So that, like, was my primary kind of engagement with religion. Was these people who just wanted to yell at you on the street. Yeah. And beyond that, I didn't have a lot of exposure, so I really was not sure what it was going to be like coming to a religious university.

INT: Yeah. I really empathize with your father. As a recovering Catholic myself (both narrator and interviewer laugh). That was funny, thank you for sharing that. So

earlier in your answer, you mentioned that Gonzaga doesn't have a robust LGBTQ studies department. Is that work that's being done?

NARRATOR: Yes, we're trying to do that work now. We've been offering, just in the last 2 or 3 years, more standalone LGBTQ studies courses. There was a lecturer in the sociology department who offered, a class that was cross-listed in Women's Studies for maybe eight years. And then when that person left the institution, the class stopped being offered. So it's been very, like uneven. And then it was just the one class. It might have been called 'Intro to LGBTQ studies' or something like that. And so we now have a lecturer, in our department that has been teaching, LGBTQ studies, trans studies, and the classes are just, you know, desperately needed, students, especially the trans studies courses enroll well. But we still only have a lecture, so we're still in the same kind of position of precarity with that. With that part of the curriculum, and our hope is that we can get that established better. We do have, on the student services side, an LGBTQ resource center. So there's at least that and some, I think, fairly good policy that's supportive of our queer students. But from a curricular perspective, in my opinion, we're still lacking a lot, but had they're not been a kind of, administrative suppression of this particular field. We would have much more by this point in time, even as a small institution. So we're behind. We're behind the curve on that for sure.

[43:05]

INT: And is it the sense that, like working to catch up or ...?

NARRATOR: I'm working. (laughs) We're working in this department to catch up. I think, you know, everybody, the administrators I talked to are supportive, but I don't think they are committed to from that perspective of, like, repairing the historical inequality, like which they could do through something like a cluster hire, right, to sort of catch us up. So there's no longer a feeling that you can't do that. You can't say those things here. And I think there hasn't been for quite some time, really, honestly, the entire time I've been at GU, I don't think there's been that kind of

sentiment that we can't have those conversations, that we can't be teaching about this stuff. But there hasn't been anything done to catch it up.

INT: I mean, I did read in an article that I found recently, you helped with the work of transforming the minor into ...

NARRATOR: Into a major. Yeah.

INT: Right. So that seems like a major milestone, a major.

NARRATOR: That's a huge milestone.

INT: And then, there was also the work of, like, renaming the department. Right?

NARRATOR: That's right.

INT: From, like, Women's Studies, to, like, Gender, Women's and Sexuality ...

NARRATOR: That's right.

INT: ... to, like, honor the classes that you mentioned.

NARRATOR: That's exactly right. We really want to sort of make that more visible. And, the hope is that we can start the, the process of backfilling that so that, we have more. I think for me, it's throughout the curriculum. I mean, I've always been teaching about it in all the classes that I teach. So it's not that it's completely absent, but I think what's lacking is the standalone courses that are dedicated just to that topic. Right. We need a lot more of that. And that's not my area of expertise. I can teach the general courses. I feel well prepared to do that. But, you know, we just finished talking about my dissertation, right? It's definitely not a queer studies kind of project. There's some of that, of course, framing that I bring to the lens.

But, you know, the lens of analysis, but it's nowhere near, you know, an area of expertise where I would feel comfortable teaching upper division standalone classes. So we need that expertise in the department.

[45:42]

INT: Is it okay if I go back to another question that I had before in this conversation of your career? Sorry. This is going to seem like a huge shift.

NARRATOR: No, that's okay, that's fine.

INT: I was wondering about ... So you graduated, right? You finished your dissertation. And then you were going into the labor market/job market. Why, professor?

NARRATOR: That. It was a slow process. When I started grad school I wasn't sure that that's what I wanted to do. But I think over time it became clear, like I really was, I was, as a younger person, very much opposed to teaching because my mother was a teacher. This was my own personal rebellion. My mother was a teacher, and her parents were teachers. And so it just felt like the family business. And I was not going to do that. And once I got to grad school, and then I had to teach as part of the funding for my PhD, I was like, oh, I like this. And also I might be a little bit good at it. So dang. (laughs)

INT: You couldn't escape the family business. (laughs along with narrator)

NARRATOR: I could not escape the family business. So, you know, like that's part of it. But also, I think I just like the vision of what that life would be. I kind of had a sense of the rhythms of what a life of teaching looks like. And I also knew that I really wanted to provide students with the kinds of opportunities that I had had in WGS classrooms. Right. Like that was just so transformative for me, and I didn't get to have it until I was in grad school. And I think I would have benefited so much from being able to have these conversations as an undergrad. I think that in many ways, my undergraduate experience was a search for this. Like I said, the doing

the Spanish Lit. that was about trying to find this. I didn't find it there. But I think that it was me reaching for it. And so, you know, wanting to be able to fill that in for somebody else that felt. Like a life worthwhile, right? And of course, I enjoy the research. That part is great too. But I think, you know, there's lots of ways that you could use this particular PhD. But for me, I think the teaching just started to crystallize once I started actually doing it and feeling like, yeah, I think this is where I want to go.

INT: Thank you for sharing that. Yeah, that really resonates with me. Because I had a similar experience where I entered undergrad. I learned about these transformative frameworks, and they were, like, life altering. And then I had the realization, what if I had experienced this in high school?

NARRATOR: Yes! Yeah!

INT: That's what I'm working to do. To get it even earlier. And then, like, maybe that's the direction we're all heading, right? Like, maybe we should be having these conversations earlier and earlier.

NARRATOR: And I think that's why they're trying to regulate this curricula in K through 12 education. Because I don't think you're the only one. I think lots of people are having these transformative experiences in college and saying, why can't we do this in high school or middle school or earlier, even. Right?

INT: Right. Because, like, what if I had been aware that this is something I could study, maybe I would have made a different decision. When you're making the decision of, like, what path are you going to take in your life?

NARRATOR: That's what they're afraid of.

[49:52]

INT: Exactly. Yeah. (both laugh) So I think. The other question I want to ask is how has

your feminist pedagogy and praxis developed?

NARRATOR: Yeah. Over time. Well, I think, I mean, for me, in this place that I'm at, it's developed absolutely in conversation with the Ignatian pedagogical paradigm. Because I'm at a teaching institution, a Jesuit institution. Pedagogy is very important. We are evaluated on pedagogy. And so I've had opportunities to develop in that way. But it's always within this particular Jesuit framework. And there are ways that that is absolutely, like, resonant with or it harmonizes very nicely with the feminist pedagogy and that the Jesuit paradigm really asks us to integrate faith and reason. To be thinking about theory and practice together. To be, you know, that there's what they call - it's problematic framing - but it's valuable to us from a feminist perspective, the preferential option for the poor, which is essentially starting from the margins. Right. All of those sorts of values that come from Jesuit teaching practice are really helpful and informative to my feminist pedagogy. So I can't really separate the two at this point in time. They're they're really deeply intertwined. Although for me, the religious elements are not something I engage with directly in the classroom. I think the paradigm is very valuable nonetheless. So we use a lot of reflection. We do a lot of assignments that are geared toward replicating, kind of real world, practices. So, for example, in my Feminism in Science class, one of the things I have, it's a writing enriched course. So they get some credit for their general education requirements towards the writing requirement. One of the writing assignments that I have them do is to write a fake grant proposal. That would address some kind of justice issue related to science in their home community. And so they have to go through the process of, like, doing research and actually kind of thinking about funding, thinking about who's already doing work that might need to be, collaborator, in that space. So there's that, like, okay, if we're going to write, let's do the kind of writing that people actually do in real life. Lots of people are doing grant writing, right? So it's not a perfect, I'm not, I don't ask them to do budgets. (laughs) They have to do a little bit of looking at money, but like they don't have to put together like really solid budgets. So it's not a perfect replication. But like, can we mimic this in some

way so that there's this kind of practical focus on the skills that you're, that you're getting, in class. And then I've also increasingly, over time, wanted to be teaching about Praxis itself. And so that's something I've incorporated into some of our new courses, as we're building the major curriculum, and teaching a new class just for the first time this semester called Feminism and Intersectionality, and about a third of the classes is focused on feminist praxis. We're reading Abolition feminism now, and really focusing on, like, concrete steps, actions I'm asking the students to be thinking about, you know very concretely what needs to be done. How do we do it and how do we find out who's doing it so that we can resonate and amplify that work? I'm still learning in that direction. But it's really important to me to start incorporating that, because I know our students are going to go out and they're going to be. Organizers and activists and you know, working on the concrete work of solving problems rather than being professors. Now, a few of them might be professors, right? But most of them are going to be working on these problems that we study. And so I want to give them a chance to be thinking, while they're an undergraduate, about the process of like doing that work.

INT: Yeah, that sounds like a really, fun assignment to me. I wish I would have had it. Do you know if any of your students have, like, taken that and actually, tried to get funding from like the grant.

NARRATOR: From one of their, one of their, fake grant proposals. Nobody's done that yet.
(laughs)

INT: It would be cool.

NARRATOR: Maybe one of these days, maybe one of these days, they'll actually do it.

[54:55]

INT: Well, I think you answered, like my question that I had around, like, how have your classes changed over time? And you've mentioned how you've, like, leaned in that direction of, like, concrete action steps? I'm curious. What other courses

have you [taught]?

NARRATOR: You know, we're a small department, so, you know, we're definitely, like, everybody has to teach me everything just about, and as we've gotten a few more people, there's a few classes I haven't taught, but I've taught almost everything. So I've taught our intro course, our previous intro, which is called Gender, Difference, and Power. That's, got a bit more of a kind of transnational focus. I for a lot of years until just this last spring, I taught a course called the '-isms racism, classism, and sexism' that was actually based on, what was 'Women's 300' at the University of Washington. I don't think that class exists anymore. Very structural kind of, analysis of, race, class and gender kind of intersectionality focused, but really focused on structural inequality, and kind of with a little bit of an ethnic studies flair to it as well. In that class, I'm not teaching anymore, in part because we also now have an ethnic studies program, which I was involved in founding at GU. So I don't feel like it's as necessary in the curriculum anymore now that we have that program going, the feminism and science course, I've taught the feminist theory course, our capstone course, I've taught pop culture, although I haven't taught that in about five years since Dr. Rodriguez course joined us, also from the University of Washington. So she's been teaching that for a while. I think that's it. I taught a graduate a couple of graduate courses on feminist research ethics and feminist epistemologies. And I think that's probably about it.

INT: That's a lot!

NARRATOR: Yeah, it's a lot. It's a lot.

[57:01]

INT: I'm curious, which one has been your favorite?

NARRATOR: I think for a long time the -isms was my favorite. It was kind of sad to stop teaching it. I but it was I think classes are for a time right there for a moment. And that class was like, I felt like the moment was over and I didn't want to just keep

recycling it, even though it was kind of my favorite thing to teach. So I'm hoping to find a new favorite. (laughs) Yeah, in our new curriculum.

INT: Well, those are all the questions that I had. But I like to end my interviews by asking, is there anything else you would want to add that we didn't get a chance to discuss? Or anything you want to say?

NARRATOR: There's probably at least one other thing to say. And that was while I was, at UW. I also was, active in the Women of Color Collective. I was not a founding member, but a very early on, participant that a number of other GWSS students were involved in, but it was also across multiple departments, and we held, three consecutive years, a grad student conference on campus. And that was also really just, a transformative experience that was facilitated in great part by the faculty in GWSS, and also the faculty who were a part of WIRED at the time, the, Women Investigating Race. Ethnicity. What is it? I can't remember the acronym, what it stands for, race, ethnicity and diversity or something like that. So that was, yeah, that was really big. (dog barks, narrator laughs) And, I guess, another part of that sort of focus on Praxis. Right. Like, how are we going to do this? How do we make ourselves visible, on this campus? And it also came out of an experience of frustration and marginalization that led us, you know, through sheer spite to figure out how to to make ourselves seen on campus and make our research seen on campus. And that carries me a lot into, you know, into my survival in this space that I find myself in now. I got a lot of good skills at figuring out how to navigate an institution and, push for your own visibility within it. And that was, you know, not it wasn't a owned by GWSS, but it was very much influenced by, by my, you know, by the faculty, who supported us to do that.

[59:48]

INT: Thank you for sharing. Can I ask a clarifying question? When you say frustration. What specifically was the frustration there with the institution at the time?

NARRATOR: Yes. If I recall the details, the founder, or one of the founders of the Women of

Color Collective had gone, I think, to the Simpson Center and asked for a grant to do the conference. Basically a Women of Color conference where we grad students could share their research projects and was told that, Women of Color conference was too, too niche. And so she was frustrated by that and motivated to figure out a way to do it herself anyway, without that funding. And so that was part of what led to the formation of the Women of Color Collective. And we did find funding. We had to piece it together from a whole bunch of different sources. But we pulled off that conference three years in a row, and that was really and I know that it continued after we graduated. Some people, you know, continued it in other forms. I don't know that another conference was done, but I think it took on a kind of different life after those of us who originated it graduated. But, you know, that was really that was significant as an experience for me.

INT: Thank you for sharing. Yeah, I'm right there with you and your frustrations with the institution. And having to do the work just like in community piecing stuff together just because we know it's important and it has to be done.

NARRATOR: Yes. That's right. Right. That's right. And I would hope today the Simpson Center would fund that. I still get the emails from the Simpsons Center, and I think they're doing good work over there. I think maybe today that would happen. It didn't happen then.

INT: Any other thing you wanted to share?

NARRATOR: I think that's probably it.

INT: Well, thank you so much, for meeting with me and for sharing all of your wonderful story. I'm going to stop the recording now.

Note: Dr. Diaz emailed later that evening and said “One thing: I should have named the founder of the Women of Color Collective was Dr. Manoucheke Celeste, she was a GWSS certificate student who graduated with a Comm PhD in 2011.