

Rhys Duffy Oral History LGBTQIA+ Interview

Interviewer: Jacen Heinrich

December 17, 2020

00:00:00.000- 00:26:47.296

START

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00:00:02.200

Jacen Heinrich: Could you please introduce yourself and your relationship to UW-Stout and your relationship to the LGBTQ+ community?

00:00:10.960

Rhys Duffy: Yes! Hi, I'm Rhys, I am a student here at Stout, in my second year and I am trans and bisexual.

00:00:22.030

JH: Awesome. So, in your opinion, what is the relationship between UW-Stout and the LGBTQ+ community?

RD: What is it? It's- it's- it's- There. It's- I think it's pretty good, all things considered. I- I hadn't expected there to be one in the first place when I went off to college but considering UW-Stout has a lot of accommodations like the Out@Stout floor and the- the Qube, I figured it be pretty positive.

00:01:03.710

JH: So, I'm assuming this didn't influence your decision to come to Stout? It was something that was just there once you got here.

00:01:12.400

RD: Yeah, it was just a lucky find. I went to Stout for the animation program and the closeness to my home and while the other stuff came afterwards.

00:01:25.050

JH: So- but you aren't an animation student anymore, right?

00:01:27.681

RD: No, I'm a psychology student now, so I just kind of stuck around for it.

00:01:33.260

JH: Okay. Right, so the next question asked was this viewpoint ever challenged or contradicted- your viewpoint on the relationship between UW-Stout and the LGBTQ+ community?

00:01:45.550

RD: A few- but I- I wouldn't say that's a problem with the school. It was more of a of the students there, situation.

JH: Yeah. And you'll have that.

RD: Hmm?

JH: And you'll have that.

RD: Yeah. Yeah, it- there was a huge issue last year about people taking down posters for certain LGBTQ events. And you know- I- Obviously, there's gender neutral bathrooms and I'm allowed to go in whichever bathroom I- I would prefer, and obviously I would like to go in the men's bathroom, but that doesn't always mean that the people there aren't going to look at me weirdly-

JH: Yeah.

RD: Which is uncomfortable. [laughs]

00:02:34.298

JH: Yeah, an unfortunate byproduct, but at least you know, well, it's allowed.

00:02:41.383

RD: At least it's allowed.

RD and JH: Yeah.

00:02:44.680

JH: So many LGBTQ+ individuals seek a sense of community within the LGBTQ+ spaces that they may not be able to find at home. Do you feel that there is a strong sense of community among the LGBTQ+ students or staff of Stout?

00:03:02.010

RD: Oh, hell yeah! I mean- I- I- Can I swear? I'm sorry!

JH: No, go ahead.

00:03:07.150

RD: Okay! Yeah, I totally think there is. I don't know if that's a- a byproduct of the school or just LGBTQ people in general because, it's- it's- it's a lot like a like a pack group situation where we just kind of lean on each other because it's- it's- it's hard to find people who understand our experiences and, you know, finding people who understand, especially because a lot of us come from the Midwest where there's not a ton of representation. It- it's so thrilling to find people in a strong community where we stick by each other like our whole floor from the first year at Out@Stout is still friends with each other.

JH: Yeah!

RD: We managed to become friends with literally almost every single person on that floor.

JH: That's amazing.

RD: Yeah, and the other queer people at- at Stout, the people at the Qube, we talked to them a lot and we think they're really cool, and we have friends there. It's- it's great.

00:04:07.930

JH: Would you say that this experience has been easier than past experiences finding the community?

00:04:14.810

RD: Yeah, but you know, the bar was pretty low. I went to Catholic school for 12 years so there was none and then there was some and that's better.

00:04:25.230

JH: Definitely sounds better. Catholic School for 12 years?

00:04:27.980

RD: Yeah, you wouldn't believe it would you?

JH: No, I wouldn't. I had no idea actually.

RD: Yeah, no one does they always think I'm a public school kid? Okay, sorry!

00:04:37.270

JH: It's okay! It helps. It builds for the for the interview.

00:04:39.330

RD: Perfect!

00:04:42.090

JH: So, for the next question, it asked LGBTQ+ spaces are sometimes criticized for the lack of inclusion towards minorities, such as people of color or trans or nonbinary people. Do you feel that any discrimination exists within Stout's LGBTQ+ community towards for other members of the community?

00:04:59.880

RD: I think there's always some kind of exclusion, especially because, you know, it's not like queer people are unable to be racist.

JH: Yeah.

RD: I- I know, there's a lot of people who it's- it's fairly inclusive. I feel like our group and the people that we've interacted with, especially on our floor, have been pretty good. There was some people last year who were a little transphobic and- and tended to say some slurs, but they didn't- they didn't really know the intention behind using trans slurs and they didn't- I don't think they saw it as like a bad thing. So, I think once they were educated it became a little better. But- and then you know, there's. I- I don't know. I haven't really experienced any racial issues, but that's because I'm white and very privileged, too. I know our friends who are people of color have always been concerned about this, and I probably should ask them more about it, but from what I know, they haven't had too much of an issue with it, and then obviously, there's you know the- the newer kind of issue with like a-spec (aromantic/asexual spectrum) people. So, I think you were- yes! You were there! I saw that there was people in our Qube who didn't understand anything about ace (asexual) and aro (aromantic) identities. And so, when I explain stuff it just kind of I mean, if you don't receive an education on something you can't understand it and then obviously sometimes people are a little ignorant to stuff. So, I- I out of spite, planned a small presentation- PowerPoint presentation for everyone on my floor on- on mostly aro identities because I felt like no one had heard about it and we were often overlooked, and I was kind of upset at the fact that people acted like it was so estranged from everything else in the LGBTQ community. So I was that- that's about what I remember.

00:07:14.720

JH: And I- I- I did go to your presentation, and I had come from a background where I had no idea what any of that meant. So, I really appreciated that because I was very uneducated on that.

RD: Yeah, it was- I- I was so sad when someone told me like *this sounds exactly like me, I just thought I was like, broken or wrong or something*. And I was like *that- you shouldn't have to feel that way, you're not broken or wrong*.

00:07:45.010

JH: Well, you definitely reached out to a lot of people and helped a lot of people! And that's awesome and I appreciate you putting on that presentation last year.

00:07:54.780

RD: Well, it was our friends, but yes.

JH: Yes. It was- it was a small group, was still a fairly large group of people.

RD: It did something.

JH: Hey and something is better than nothing.

00:08:06.151

RD: Exactly.

JH: All right, for the next question it is: COVID-19 has impacted many communities in unique ways. What effect do you think the pandemic has done on the LGBTQ plus community?

RD: Where to start?

JH: Yeah.

RD: If we're going in order, the beginning of the pandemic, we all had to leave school pretty early and in the middle of our- our freshman year when I was getting most comfortable with a group of people and then having to leave everyone so suddenly was extremely heartbreaking, especially because I had to see a lot of people who I knew didn't have accepting families go back to those unaccepting families. Like, just, it was the worst. I hated that.

JH: It was a long time.

RD: Yeah. And then being stuck in a house where not everyone was- not uninclusive my- my family is pretty inclusive of my trans identity, but they don't always like to address it as easily as a lot of my other LGBTQ peers would. So it- it- it's hard to like concentrate on just focusing and- and- and getting finished with stuff and also worrying about my friends and worrying about my own health and then also adding on top of that the deadnaming and the- and the

wrong pronouns. And then this year, me and another friend actually had a huge issue with this that they had to end up calling- Well, they didn't call someone [?] They filed a report. Of the- the COVID workers, who did the testing would deadname and- and use the wrong pronouns for us intentionally and, it- it wasn't confirmed, but, I think the- the working theory was that it was ridiculous that it had taken so long for my friend's testing to be done and there was no need for it to have taken that long but they- on top of that deadnamed them a lot, used incorrect pronouns, they degraded their style and had them take the test twice and then almost quarantine them even after their results came back negative so, it felt like some pretty blatant transphobia right there. And the people there were- some of them were- were really nice, but some of them you could tell just didn't agree with me and my- my trans friend's- I suppose they would call it a lifestyle.

JH: Yeah.

RD: It- it made it really hard for me to keep going and keep getting tested when I knew that the people there would just make my day bad.

JH: I feel that, yes.

RD: Can't get deadnamed and positive for Corona in one day. That's just too much!

JH: Yeah, but it is not a pleasant experience, especially knowing like even if you sign up with your name, they still often end up deadnaming instead.

00:11:22.920

RD: Yeah, or when they- they marked down your biological sex and don't put down your pronouns or the- the name you go by instead of the one that's legal. That- that sucks.

00:11:35.182

JH: Yeah, and I get it's in the medical system and you need to work with, you know rules and government stuff, but still, it's not too hard just to shout out a different name or write it.

00:11:50.000

RD: Scribble a name on a piece of paper and pronouns or just don't make someone do their test twice and almost quarantine them even after they get a negative diagnosis. It might be a little [pause]

00:12:07.280

JH: Pointed biased, you know.

RD: [laughs] A little bit.

JH: Yeah. Going on, the next question is many of the LGBT- LGBTQ+ community search for representation in historical or famous figures. Are there many LGBTQ+ people in your field of study that you look up to or that inspire you?

RD: In my field of study? Oh god.

00:12:31.270

JH: Which would be psychology now. I mean, you could you were an art student for a while, so it still counts.

00:12:37.794

RD: I was an art student, but I- Art wasn't something I stuck with, and if I'm thinking of like- Because I know for- for art and animation, there's like Rebecca Sugar, who's a- who's nonbinary, I believe and maybe bisexual? I'm not sure. A part of the LGBTQ+ community. But if I'm thinking like psychologists, I have absolutely no idea and yeah, no. I- I have no idea who would be a person of- of interest in that area who is also a LGBTQ. Which is a little disheartening now that I look back on it.

JH: I don't think I know anyone either. I mean, I've heard a bunch of like studies done by people, but no names have stuck in my head.

RD: Well, the problem is that a lot of them- a lot of the studies that I'm looking at now are- are from people who are long dead at this point. And you know, there's always that- that joke that we- we throw around at like you know they were best friends and they lived together and had a cat, but they weren't gay, but they had- they lived together and had no wives and- and owned a dog and had three kids. But they weren't, they weren't gay.

00:14:01.140

JH: Yeah. Spotted holding hands but you know, out of friendship.

00:14:04.306

RD: [laughs] Yeah, out of friendship. So, I guess I can- I can't really confirm anything.

00:14:11.020

JH: Well, and that's just sometimes how it is.

00:14:13.260

RD: That's just how it be.

00:14:15.890

JH: [laughs] For the next question, it asks do you feel that your identity and relationship to the LGBTQ+ community influenced your decision to pursue your chosen career?

00:14:29.500

RD: Probably not. I- I chose psychology not because- not because of LGBTQ issues specifically, but because I guess it's sort of branched off it. Because a lot of- I- I just like helping people I- I'm like the- the father friend of our- of our group and I like making sure everyone is okay and- and I like taking care of people and psychology offers me an insight into helping people better and understanding their mindset and all of that might push towards a better future for other people who may not feel included like I think I mentioned I- I can't remember if it was to you or to someone else, that like people had therapists who did- I want to be a therapist by the way- that was my career goal, people have mentioned that their therapists just didn't understand them at all or were- were transphobic or homophobic to them and just were generally unhelpful. And then the more I heard of them saying *wow, this sucks* the more I grew spiteful, and I was like, *well, I'm just going to help my friends more than a paid person would do it, and I'm going to do it better.* And eventually that spite just grew into, *you know what, let's just get professionally trained in this and just do it all the time.*

00:15:56.730

JH: Sometimes it's just how a career path comes up in life, you know.

00:16:03.280

RD: I just want to help people, dude. It wasn't- it wasn't specifically for LGBTQ people, but it is kind of also for- or, you know, a huge part of it is because of LGBTQ people so.

00:16:16.000

JH: I can attest to your to- your fatherly nature and your- and your, our good emotional support.

RD: Yay!

00:16:25.150

JH: So, for the last main question they have, they have has being at Stout changed your perspective on the LGBTQ issues or on your own identity?

00:16:37.560

RD: Well, I mean- I don't think- it hasn't changed it drastically. If anything, it's just solidified ideas that I already had where, you know, people are people and shouldn't be mean to other people. It- it wasn't that insane, it was- it was more of a- a reaffirmation of things I already



knew and didn't have a- I didn't- I didn't have anyone to bounce those ideas off of- Catholic school- 12 years-

JH: Yeah.

RD: And so, it was just kind of a confirmation of *yeah, like other people think like this, you're not insane, it's not crazy to think that everyone deserves rights.*

JH: Yeah!

00:17:27.670

JH: Yeah, just because this year has been kind of weird with the pandemic, I kind of want to ask a few more of these COVID specific questions just because it's a little bit of a strange time right now, a little capsule of time that people will look back on.

RD: [laughs] You sound like every company on the news, *it's a difficult time.*

JH: I embody the nature of capitalism.

RD: Don't say that!

JH: [laughs]

RD: That's an insult!

JH: Yeah, well- for one of these questions they have do you foresee any long-lasting effects of COVID-19 on the LGBTQ+ community?

00:18:07.350

RD: Oh, hell yeah! There was a- I can't remember the name- but there's someone out there had made a whole theory- it's like James, Betty- Betty James? That since people were in quarantine and- and stuck in their houses, they had spent so much more time with themselves and their own identity that a lot more people are coming out as LGBTQ+, because they've- they've had so much more time to just sit with themselves as a person and deal and rationalize with that. Because prior to this it was all- I mean I'm not going to say that the entire world has gone to a bit of a standstill but we have definitely slowed down the chugging line of production you know?

00:18:53.580

JH: Very true!

00:18:55.176

RD: We're not constantly rapidly heading towards something. We're just kind of inching through, and in that slow pursuit, a lot of people have found time to just explore things like hobbies, and sometimes those hobbies include figuring out you're not straight.

00:19:14.730

JH: [laughs] You're not wrong!

RD: [laughs] So, I- I think we will see a big boom of more people identifying as LGBTQ and maybe introducing more labels or- or maybe making more strides in a LGBTQ+ rights because more people are understanding it or have more time to sit with it, but who knows?

00:19:39.630

JH: It is, yeah, who knows. There is a lot of time for introspection right now

RD: [unclear]

JH: So it makes sense if a lot more people are figuring out who they are on the inside with all this time to think with yourself.

00:19:52.240

RD: Yeah, there's too much time.

JH: Yeah.

RD: I don't want it anymore [laughs]

00:19:56.053

JH: I don't think anyone does anymore. I'd be surprised if even people who spent so much time inside, probably want a little bit more freedom right now than what we got. But that's just how it is.

RD: That's just how it is.

JH: Yeah, do you feel that COVID-19 has made connecting more difficult for members of the LGBTQ community?

00:20:19.260

RD: Yes and no. Yes, because we- we haven't had time to see people in person and it's way easier to like gauge someone's vibe when you're in front of them, but I think like a lot of people

in our generation we have the Internet and- and online stuff. And since we're all stuck inside, we've all kind of flocked to, you know social media websites and the more people are out on there, the more people feel comfortable just coming out as well. So, it- it may feel distant in that you don't have many close personal connections being made with people like in person, but you might still be making connections idly online with people who are also of the same sexuality or gender as you.

00:21:16.810

JH: Yeah, and I don't mean to call the both of us out on the school interview, but for me and I believe for you- from what I've heard- YouTube and streaming has been- that's been a way to meet a lot of people.

00:21:32.740

RD: Oh no!

JH: Right!

RD: You called me out thoroughly.

00:21:35.570

JH: I've been, too! I've been very- I've spent a lot of time on YouTube and Twitch right now talking to people, meeting new people.

00:21:43.010

RD: Right! It has been a very fun experience to see someone in like the live stream chat just say like *trans rights* and then like 40 other people will be like *hey, trans rights* and we all just kind of have a moment of singular brain cell understanding. It's like you're all complete strangers but we have one thing in common we can group up on.

JH: And it feels nice!

00:22:06.760

RD: It does! It- it seems- it's really nice to see that a place and- and- and a content that you enjoy has a lot of people who understand you in it.

00:22:19.200

JH: And I agree with you there, it's been one of the saving graces of all of this isolation and- and time to scour the Internet for entertainment.

RD: Finding a bunch of gay people in a Twitch chat.

00:22:35.730

JH: And making friends and making connections, its just- it's beautiful- a rose in a snowstorm kindness [?]. Yeah, and flowery language right now.

RD: Yeah, oh wow. No, that was beautiful.

00:22:49.050

JH: Well, thank you. To wrap this up, I'd like to ask one more question, that's kind of more related to just Stout and the LGBTQ community.

RD: Right, go ahead!

00:23:01.082

JH: If you could change anything or implement anything into like the campus or the school is in- like as a whole- what would you do to help the LGBTQ community? Through like resources or- or maybe like camps or- or something that you know, would the benefit-

RD: [laughs] Camps-

JH: Not like- not-

RD: Camps might be [unclear]

JH: [laughs]

00:23:23.180

RD: I've already- already seen a few of those. I think I- I would personally enjoy some more, ace and aro representation, but separate from each other. So, a lot of times ace and aro tend to be grouped up with each other because they're both a lack of a certain kind of attraction, but the cultures are wildly different and- and the experiences from both are extremely different and I feel like people would benefit more if they heard more about it, because it's not just one without the other. I mean, you can be one and not the other, and you could have both. You could have neither, you could just be on a wide spectrum of things, but if- if no one ever tells you that, then you could go years was thinking that you're like- like the people in the presentation who just thought they were- I don't know-not- not right, not good enough or something and it's, you know, I- I- I would enjoy something like that being made for aro people. I would like that.

00:24:27.970

JH: I can agree with you there, and there's probably definitely a lot of people who are like me or like- like others who realized from a little speech you did that, you know it identifies with them because there isn't a lot of attention towards the ace and aro spectrum.

00:24:43.980

RD: Which feels strange because it- it when- when you're in it- it feels so much bigger than it is and you're like *oh, there's a lot of people like this*, but you know it in secluded areas we [laughs] aro people tend not to tell other people that they are aro.

00:25:01.390

JH: And there's kind of the- the- like the- the- the dilemma for gay people where you forget that there's people out there who are the complete opposite and are seen as normal

RD: Right?

00:25:13.138

JH: I get that a lot where I'm- I'm going to the bathroom like wait a minute this is not typical, and an outside perspective would think this is weird, but I think it's fine, so-

00:25:26.690

RD: Yeah, it's just you're- you're in a in a bubble of sorts. No, not a bubble. You're comfortable in the space that you've been given for a brief amount of time that you forget it's- you forget there's- there's bigotry and- and people who would see you as a -as unkind words-

JH: Yeah!

00:25:47.508

RD: -outside of your perception. It's like that meme, you know?

JH: [laughs] Yeah.

RD: I was so caught up in gender euphoria, I forgot that transphobia existed.

00:25:58.550

JH: And surprisingly that happens more often than it should.

00:26:02.290

RD: It happens a lot, which is very strange. [laughs]

JH: Yeah!

00:26:08.980

RD: It feels like a natural selection thing. Should probably-

00:26:10.280

JH: [laughs] Watch your back, yeah.

RD: [laughs] Yeah.

JH: Thank you so much for agreeing to do this interview and thank you for giving me your time.

00:26:24.080

RD: Thanks for calling me out on my- my Twitch addiction.

00:26:27.190

JH: Well, I'll call myself out. I've been obsessed with YouTubers to the point where I watched them on Twitch now, too.

RD: Oh, man.

JH: So, it's just- it's what we do in these trying times.

RD: It's what we do. [laughs] I like that.

END

00:26:47.296