Raveena Devjee

WRIT 4342 01

Professor Lewis

21 March, 2024

Q&A

Dr. Alex Barron is an associate professor in the Literature Writing and Rhetoric department at St. Edward’s University in Austin, Texas, and the Freshman seminar program director. She has a PhD in literature, concentrating on women's and gender literature. She grew up on the Upper East Side with a single mum and a bunch of step-siblings, who she feels are more like cousins. I had the privilege of speaking with Dr. Barron and getting to know her story a little better as an openly queer professor in a catholic higher education institution, and her journey of self-discovery.

**So just talk me through how you knew when you were queer or like how you kind of had that like self-discovery.**

*I was late, it’s a little embarrassing. I was maybe 19 or 20. I was at college at UC Santa Cruz and I was taking all of these Women's and Gender Studies classes and I loved them. And I was definitely a feminist and I had all of these queer friends and I started taking all these queer classes. I took a lesbian and gay literature class. And I was like, yeah, I'm just really interested in the literature. And then I started kind of immersing myself more like going to bookstores, hanging out in the gay section with my friends who were queer, and just wondering why I'm so interested in this. I wonder why I'm spending all this time with, these particular groups of friends. And to my friend's credit, nobody pushed me around was very kind and open. Then I ended up working at an all-girls summer camp in Vermont, but one particular summer, as a counselor, I just totally fell for one of my best friends and we just like fell in love. And within the first week, we were dating, and that's the person I moved to Austin with. And she's still one of my best friends.*

**What was your coming out experience like? Did your parents take it well?**

*Well, they took it okay. I was so happy and I was like, oh my God, I'm so in love, with this person. So I just kind of assumed that everybody else would be as excited as I was for me. Because I didn't come from a very religious family. I didn't come from a homophobic family to the best of my knowledge. My parents lived in New York, they had some of that they had some gay friends. I just thought everyone would be like this is amazing. A little foolish. So I told my mom on the phone from Vermont, she was in New York, and she was like, ‘I'm not very happy about this, you know, and I wanted to have grandchildren and why did this happen? Is it because we sent you to an all-girls? Is this because you're taking Women's Studies classes?’ So she had critiques but they weren't horrible. They weren't like ‘I'm not paying for college or I’m throwing you out.’ But then, as she sort of got to know my partner, it was very easy, you know, it became very easy for her. She was like, yeah why wouldn't you date this fabulous person? So lucky in that sense. My dad was like, ‘Well, don't tell your sister it might damage her.’ That's very fucked up to say about me being gay. But then I told my friends and my friends were all really happy for me.*

**What is it like being a queer professor in higher education? Have you experienced any discrimination or struggles?**

*My first answer is it's weird and it's different in different moments. When I got interviewed for the adjunct job, I was interviewing with Mary Wrist. I was like here's my CV and at the end of the interview, she said, ‘Okay, well, do you have any questions for us?’ And I was like, yeah, you know, like, my CV, you can tell like, I'm gay all over that, right? Like, because my dissertation has queer in the title. Is that cool at a Catholic University and she was like, ‘Yes, don't worry. We have other queer people here, it’s totally fine.’ So that said, there have been times that it's not that it's been so uncomfortable to be queer on the campus, but it's been uncomfortable to be queer on the campus and be very out and to want to teach anything about queer subjects, just particularly wanting to be the advisor for pride right away all that stuff. That has put me in the line of some controversy at times.*

*I've just been really proud of everybody lately and the advocacy and the protests that students have done to get the flag back up. It’s been amazing.*

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