

Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project

Smith College Archives
Northampton, MA

Katie McCarthy, Class of 2005

Interviewed by
Maggie Kraus, Class of 2012

May 15, 2010

Abstract

In this oral history, Katie McCarthy discusses her work as a psychology and education double major, and her involvement with SGA and Senate, Healthy Heads (a mental health support group), and Residence Life. She also describes the racial tensions on campus and her experiences while abroad in Australia.

Restrictions

None

Format

Interview recorded on miniDV tapes using a Panasonic DVX-100A camera. One 60-minute tape.

Transcript

Transcribed by Steve Thaw at the Audio Transcription Center in Boston, Massachusetts. Audited for accuracy and edited for clarity by Olivia Mandica-Hart.

Bibliography and Footnote Citation Forms

Video Recording

Bibliography: McCarthy, Katie. Interview by Maggie Kraus. Video recording, May 15, 2010. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Karen Martell, interview by Maggie Kraus, video recording, May 15, 2010, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives, tape 1.

Transcript

Bibliography: McCarthy, Katie. Interview by Maggie Kraus. Transcript of video recording, May 15, 2010. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Katie McCarthy, interview by Maggie Kraus, transcript of video recording, May 15, 2010, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives, p. 3.

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Transcript of interview conducted May 15, 2010, with:

KATIE McCARTHY

by: MAGGIE KRAUS
filmed by: KATE GEIS

KRAUS: And your last name is McCarthy?

McCARTHY: Yeah, I go by Katie, yeah.

KRAUS: OK, great, OK. And you graduated in '05, right?

McCARTHY: Mmhmm.

KRAUS: Cool. So is this the first time you've been back since you graduated, or --

McCARTHY: No, I came back for -- we had a two-year, and then I came back a couple of other times, yeah.

KRAUS: Great.

McCARTHY: But I wasn't back last year, so yeah.

KRAUS: It's great to be back (inaudible).

McCARTHY: Yeah.

KRAUS: OK, so just for the record, I'm going to say, this is Maggie Kraus, and I am conducting an interview with Katie McCarthy on May 15th, 2010 for the Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project. So first of all, thank you so much for coming, and being a part of this, and sharing everything with us. I guess we'll just get started and talk a little bit about how you got to Smith, and what, you know, what that decision was for you to come here.

McCARTHY: Well, I was looking at different colleges, you know, mostly in the New England area. And I went to visit some of my sixth grade teachers, and I was telling them that I was interested in going to a women's college. And I was listing different schools, and they said what about Smith? And I said oh, I've never heard of Smith, I will look it up. And so I looked it up, and you know, I thought it

was beautiful. And so I applied, and you know, I just really felt a connection there. So when I went for Open Campus, I did the tour, and I just fell in love. And I was like, this is where I'm going.

KRAUS: Yeah?

McCARTHY: Yeah.

KRAUS: Had it ever occurred to you that you might be interested in an all-women's college, or was that something, like, totally unexpected?

McCARTHY: Yeah. I have a twin brother, so I grew up kind of, you know, with lots of sets of brothers, with, you know, my brother and his friends, and, you know, and I was just kind of tired of that dynamic. I get along better with female friends. And you know, I just didn't want distractions. You know, and I valued women's education, and so that's kind of why I decided to go. Yeah, so that was what I was looking for, yeah.

KRAUS: Were the older women in your family, or in your life college graduates? Maybe women's college graduates?

McCARTHY: A lot of them were teachers. So my dad's sister, and his side of the family, most of them were teachers, and so I thought maybe I would try that out for a little while. And my mom, you know, wished she could've gone to Smith. And, you know, we joked a lot, oh, you could be an Ada when I'm at Smith. She didn't end up doing that, but yeah, I mean, people were supportive of the decision, and yeah.

KRAUS: So I mean, what were your expectations academically, socially, culturally, coming into Smith for your first year?

McCARTHY: I wasn't sure what to expect. I mean, just being around so many smart women, and everyone was ambitious, and very open-minded. You know, I just -- I didn't feel that it was competitive at all. You know, everyone was very supportive, and you know, followed through with the honor policy for finals and exams. So I just felt that it was really supportive, and I wasn't sure what to expect. But I thought that, you know, everyone followed through, and like held each other accountable, and you know, like really pushed each other to do well.

KRAUS: Cool. So what house did you live in?

McCARTHY: I lived in a few different houses. When I first got to Smith, I lived in Park House. And I loved Park, and the people there. So my

second year, I was in Park Annex, and actually didn't get such a great lottery number for the housing assignment. So one of my good friends who also did this oral history project, [Chel Sing Fang?]. She was like well, there's this great room in Park Annex, do you want to live with me? And I was like yes, of course! So we had this beautiful room on the second floor, right in the front of Park Annex, and that's my favorite house on campus. So it was a great year. And then junior year, I decided to do Residence Life, so I lived in Hubbard, and I was the HCA. And then I went abroad for a semester to Australia, and then I did Res Life again, and I was the HR of Gillett.

KRAUS: Cool.

McCARTHY: Yeah.

KRAUS: So you had a very eclectic.

McCARTHY: Yeah.

KRAUS: (inaudible) that's cool. So, but I mean, you felt like your house kind of was Park?

McCARTHY: Was Park, yeah. I graduated with Park, and most of my friends did too, yeah.

KRAUS: So what was -- what role did the house community at Park play in your time at Smith, and you're adjusting to Smith, you know, continuing to be coming back as a sophomore, what was that like for you to have that?

McCARTHY: Our House President was so friendly, and warm, and (inaudible). I just remember everyone, you know, was just like helping us carry all of our luggage up the stairs, and you know, my parents were surprised at these strong girls. And, you know, so it was just really nice. And yeah, so just I felt like it was another home. And I became really good friends with my roommate, the girls across the hall, the people down the hall. So I felt like I had a strong support network, yeah.

KRAUS: And what did you study, what was your major?

McCARTHY: So I started out thinking well, I'll major in psychology, I'll be a psychologist, and I'll take some education classes, and I'll think about teaching, since that's what a lot of the women in my family have done. And then I fell in love with both. So I was taking psychology classes, and then I took Education in the City with Sam

[Intrader?], and I just loved it. So I decided to double major, and I did both. And my senior year, I student-taught sixth grade at JFK Middle School, and that was so much fun. And I also did a special studies in compulsive hoarding and lying with Randy Frost. So I did both, and then afterwards, because I got certified to teach, I thought let's put this to use, so I taught seventh grade social studies for two years, and then I did clinical research for two years, more in the psychology field, and now I'm going to grad school for psychology.

KRAUS: Great.

McCARTHY: Yeah.

KRAUS: Wow, that's terrific. So you were kind of able to apply (inaudible)?

McCARTHY: Yeah, yeah.

KRAUS: Great. So was there a particular influence, maybe an advisor, or a certain professors that kind of lead you down, you know, towards double majoring, or encouraged you, told you that you could do it. Because I know a lot of people, sometimes their advisors tell them not to double major. So (inaudible) yourself, don't get overwhelmed kind of thing.

McCARTHY: Right.

KRAUS: But I know a lot of others say, you know, if it's what you want to do, you should do it.

McCARTHY: Yeah.

KRAUS: So what was the reaction for that?

McCARTHY: I mean, both fields were pretty supportive. And I was told, you know, maybe instead of doing an honors thesis, you should do a special studies instead. Because you're student teaching your senior year, and let's not overwhelm you. So I guess that's the only thing I might've changed. You know, I basically did an honors thesis, because it was a full special studies project. So maybe I would've made that more official, yeah.

KRAUS: That's great. Did you feel like you were able to get, you know, the liberal arts education, the well-rounded, different departments?

McCARTHY: Yeah.

KRAUS: Did you feel like that was an easy thing to do in double-majoring also?

McCARTHY: Yeah, so two of my good friends, one was a computer science major and an astronomy minor. And then the other was a math major, and she did more like website design and graphic arts. So I took astronomy with them, and my friend who was the astronomy minor was our TA, so that was a lot of fun. And I took tennis, and a few other courses, like art history. Yeah, so I felt like I could here and there take, you know, some classes in other disciplines. And education and psychology overlapped for a few of the courses, so that was nice.

KRAUS: Good.

McCARTHY: Yeah.

KRAUS: Were you involved in any club sports or organizations while you were here?

McCARTHY: Yeah, I started out doing SGA, so I was in the senate. And I'm trying to think, what else did I do? I did some work with Healthy Heads. So we -- it was like a peer support group. And we also tried to work with Counseling Services to get more awareness about mental health issues on campus. And I did a lot with Residence Life. And then my first year, there was a lot going on with different racial issues and tensions, so I did some race and ethnicity dialogues. And I took a psychology course on categorization and intergroup behavior. So that played a big role. I started out (inaudible) the social psychology track, and then I realized I wanted to do more therapy and clinical psychology, so I concentrated on that area.

KRAUS: So what was that like to kind of experience tension, racial tension, social tension? Did you expect that at all? I mean, because Smith is usually seen as a very diverse, very accepting community. What was that like to have to deal with that while you're here?

McCARTHY: It was hard. Because it started out the spring semester of my first year. And one of my friends, Sky Chandler, was taking an education course with me, and she was in Gardiner House, where a lot of the issues were going on. So she would tell me about it, and I would just see how it was affecting here, and you know, her friends, and people in that house. You know, and then as time went on, things were happening other houses. So it was hard to see friends going through that.

And so I wanted to be more aware, so I took courses, you know, on campus. And, you know, we worked through that in the courses. And also in Residence Life, my senior year, I was the HR of Gillett, and there was a lot going on in that house. So I had both sides, you know, telling me their sides of the story. And really what was so helpful was that I had a great area coordinator who, you know, talked to me about it, and then she would meet with them, and it was more Res Life administration was working with them. But it was really hard. You know, being a student and having everyone come to you, and you know, you know what all of the students are like, and yeah.

KRAUS: So do you feel like those experiences maybe gave you a glimpse of maybe the kind of thing you wanted to do after you graduated, or was there any element of that in what you decided to do?

McCARTHY: Yeah.

KRAUS: Outside.

McCARTHY: I mean, I definitely want to do therapy work. So I'm going to school to be a psychologist, so I'll do a lot of that kind of work. And I think it's good to have other outlets, like friends, and you know, talk about it with other people, and you know, just have releases so that you're not focused on everything that's going on, yeah.

KRAUS: And can you recall at all what the overall campus response to these incidents was? Like, you know, were there groups that spoke out? Were there individuals who, you know, said what they had to say about it?

McCARTHY: Yeah.

KRAUS: Was it kind of a group effort to maybe fix or just explore what had happened?

McCARTHY: Yeah, it was. And the administration also played a role. And what I find so interesting about being on Smith campus is, you know, if there's something going on, everyone has something to say about it. You know, so everyone speaks up, and they're active, and they don't just let the administration sit there and let it pass them by. So the administration was part of it, and you know, I think that there are different, you know, takes on how active, you know, different groups should've been. But you know, what's amazing is that, you know, I'll tell different people oh, this happened on Smith campus, and they're so

surprised, or like, It's so liberal, how could something like that happen? And I say, Because people don't let it happen. You know, they stand up for it. And you know, will make sure people know what's going on, and are aware, and that it's not going to keep happening.

KRAUS: Right.

McCARTHY: Yeah.

KRAUS: So switching gears a little bit, you went to Australia?

McCARTHY: Yeah.

KRAUS: And did a semester abroad?

McCARTHY: Mmhmm.

KRAUS: How was that, what made you choose that program, or that place to go?

McCARTHY: Yeah, I had always wanted to go to Australia. So ever since I was in third grade, and we learned about the different continents and animals in the world, I saw kangaroos, and koalas, and they're nowhere else in the world. So yeah, so I wanted to go there. And I studied at the University of Melbourne for one semester. And I actually got to teach abroad there. So I did more of my education major courses. So I took American Politics there, and there was an Australian and an American professor. So it was really interesting to get both sides of what they thought what was going on. And I also took education and natural landscapes, and we did a lot of backpacking, and travelling on the weekends so that was fun. And I taught in an Australian classroom. And so it was just really interesting to see what the kids thought of, you know, what we were doing the United States, and yeah.

KRAUS: And what influenced your decision to go for a semester as opposed to a year?

McCARTHY: I think my family didn't want me to be away for so long. My parents actually went with me for a couple of weeks at the beginning. So they brought me to Sydney, and then we went to Melbourne, and once they saw that I was, you know, with my orientation group, and I was meeting people, you know, then they could go home. [laughter]

- KRAUS: Did you spend -- did you go the spring or in the fall?
- McCARTHY: It was like January to June, so spring semester, yeah.
- KRAUS: Oh, OK. So I mean, what was your experience like, do you think, in comparison to other people? I know there's so many options for people to go abroad, but did you come back and talk about it, did you find that there were common threads about living away from Smith, living out of the United States?
- McCARTHY: Yeah. I mean, it's just wonderful to get another perspective, and to meet people -- and live in another country. I mean, it was still English-speaking, so I didn't have, you know, as much of a culture shock being there. You know, but I really enjoyed it, and I met a lot of different people, mostly American. So I guess that was a little bit different with my program. I was in international housing, but surrounded by mostly Americans, so that kind of shaped, you know, who I hung out with, and what I ended up doing. But I mean, I more or less got culture from, you know, teaching, and the classes I was in. And I did crew for a little while, just kind of a novice crew. [laughter] Yeah.
- KRAUS: Awesome. So a little bit about you doing Res Life. What was your motivation to do that? Did you have Res Life in your house that you kind of looked up to, or that inspired you to try and pursue that?
- McCARTHY: I was interested in house dynamics, and also doing more, I guess, of the programming. I really liked planning events, and I thought I would see a lot of -- it would help with clinical work too, because I wanted to be a psychologist. So I thought, you know, there are always things going on with students on any campus, so this is great way to kind of, you know, get to talk to people one on one, see what they want to make their house better, and you know, if there are any concerns that they're having, to address them with them, and then, you know, help them through that. Yeah.
- KRAUS: So was that -- that was a rewarding experience for you obviously?
- McCARTHY: Yeah, yeah.
- KRAUS: Do you think that it helped you kind of narrow down what you might want to do afterwards? So was it -- did it live up to that in terms of offering insight to the dynamics of, you know, large groups of people living together? Do you feel like it kind of gave you a different perspective on that that maybe other people in the field wouldn't have had?

McCARTHY: I think so. Also just, you know, being at Smith, and a women's college, and you know, the dynamics of house environments, and, you know, we have transgender students as well. So it's just a very different makeup being at Smith compared to like a co-ed school, or even another, you know, women's college environment. So I think, I got to meet a lot of different people, and you know, it's a different setting because it's a women's college, so the issues were, you know, homesickness, and there was like some alcohol and drug abuse, and there was some cutting. I had a couple of suicide attempts. So it was tough, you know, but I felt that like -- those issues kind of exposed me to more things that, you know, I will see once I'm in, you know, therapy practicums, you know, in grad school.

KRAUS: And I mean, your experiences, you spoke a little bit about transgendered students, and I think, in interviewing a lot of alums, I think I've started to realize that, you know, the -- I don't want to say issues, but the discussion transgendered students, what it means to be transgendered at Smith, and how it's kind of a very unique situation because you're at, you know, an all-women's college. What is that like for someone on Res Life? I mean, is there training involved with dealing with, you know, the LGBT community, or is there specific work that goes into dealing with situations that might involve --

McCARTHY: Yeah, I'm trying to remember in the training in the summer before HCA training, or HR training, we talked a lot about, you know, backgrounds, and where people are from, and you know, how people want to be addressed, and I remember when I was at Smith, the SGA constitution changed "she" to "the student" throughout. I don't know if that's still in effect, but --

KRAUS: I think it is.

McCARTHY: Yeah, but that happened while I was here. So there's more like a lot of talk, and awareness, and we played kind of icebreaker games about, you know, identity, and where everyone comes from. Yeah.

KRAUS: So how has your experience with -- how have your experiences at Smith, and you know, your life here, played into kind of how you interact with other people outside of Smith? Whether the other alums, people who have no idea what Smith College is all about? Like what do you feel like you contribute to either your work community, or your social community because you were at Smith?

- McCARTHY: I feel like I'm open-minded about, you know, people's backgrounds, and what's going on with them. And if I see someone is having a bad day, then you know, I'll kind of give them a smile, and ask, and not push if they, you know, don't want to talk about it. And I think the Smith Network is very strong. So when people know that when you went to Smith, a lot of people have that connection. They're like oh, my sister went there, or my mother, someone. So it's like a, you know, fond connection that I think, you know, comes across. And I think that, yeah, just like having an open mind about, you know, what people are doing with their lives. There are so many different options in life, and I feel like I met, you know, all of those people, you know, doing, you know, grad school, or social justice work, or, you know, they're teaching, or they're in the arts, and politics, and they're just all over the country, and all doing wonderful things, yeah.
- KRAUS: And what do you -- did you have any interactions with alums while you were a student? Was there an overwhelming presence of alums either in your department, or both of your departments? Was there a constant feeling like you had, you know, an outside force to kind of lean on or go to?
- McCARTHY: Yeah, Patty [DiBartolo?] in the Psychology Department is an alum from Smith. And she went, you know, to BU for grad school, and then came back, and knew she wanted to be a psychology professor here. So she was, you know, kind of an inspiration for that. And I worked at the CDO, and Janice Snell went to Smith as well. So in different environments, I had those connections, and you know, I don't know if I will come back and, you know, work here. But, you know, it's just such a wonderful environment that that's kind of what I've always thought in the back of my head. Oh, maybe I'll come back to Smith and work here.
- KRAUS: Right.
- McCARTHY: Yeah.
- KRAUS: Do you think -- I mean, I always am surprised to find out who is an alum and who isn't.
- McCARTHY: Yeah.
- KRAUS: Do you think that -- what do you think some of people's reasons for going back to Smith are, or coming back and working after, you know, spending time away, or some people never seem to have left at all. I mean, what do you think the appeal is?

- McCARTHY: I mean, I think it's just, you feel a connection with people here. People are so willing to listen, and you know, when you come on campus, and when I first came on campus, and I didn't know where I was going, people went out of their way to show me around, and say oh, Seeley Hall is this one, and oh, I had, you know, my first year seminar here. And they just are willing to go that extra mile, and help you out. And yeah, and friendly faces.
- KRAUS: Right.
- McCARTHY: Yeah.
- KRAUS: So what does it mean for you to be here this weekend as an alum, coming back, you know, having had a bunch of different experiences, but also feeling like maybe it wasn't so long ago that you were still here. So what has that been like being here?
- McCARTHY: It's great just seeing, you know, I'm staying mostly with good friends that I do see, you know, every couple of months. And they're in New York, or you know, at Yale, or something close by. But then there are friends that I haven't seen since I graduated, and it's so great to catch up with them, and they've been all over the world. So it's just really wonderful to hear what they've been doing, and everything is, you know, it's just so important. People are giving back in so many different ways. And it's beautiful here, we've had a wonderful weekend. It's great to see the alums from '85 until, you know, the seniors graduating tomorrow.
- KRAUS: Right.
- McCARTHY: Yeah.
- KRAUS: That's (inaudible). So I mean, what could you offer to someone who maybe wanted to try to double major, or maybe wanted to go into a field you've been in? I mean, comparing your studies at Smith to how they've panned out in, you know, the real world. (laughter) Would you encourage someone to kind of do it, you know, pursue a double major, and follow whatever they thought they might want to do, or --
- McCARTHY: Yeah. I feel like with education and psychology, you can, you know, get a bachelor's in those disciplines. And I was one of the first classes that did the middle school education model. I really liked that age group in particular. So I really pursued that, you know, thinking I'll work with kids of this age group, and eventually do therapy with them. And I thought it was really

manageable. I was still able to take courses in other disciplines, but those two majors were where I wanted to take most of my courses.

KRAUS: So you didn't feel like you missed out on --

McCARTHY: No.

KRAUS: -- The curriculum or anything?

McCARTHY: Yeah.

KRAUS: So I mean, do you -- would you encourage people to, you know, stray from maybe things outside their comfort level when they're at Smith, or do you think that it's important to pursue what you know you're interested in just so that you can get the most out of it, or --

McCARTHY: I think both. I mean, I took some courses that were kind of out of my comfort zone. But, you know, all in all, I think that having the open curriculum, and you can just take whatever you want, and pursue your major, and you know, if you're a math major, you can take English, and, you know, have fun with that. So I think both is really great.

KRAUS: So, I mean, what has your time at Smith meant to you personally? Like I know a lot of alums have talked about just feeling maybe a sense of accomplishment upon graduating, or just feeling like they're going out into a situation where they know that they can, you know, they're from a reputable place, and that they have this sense of pride from where they come from. Is that something that you have for Smith, and looking back on your time at Smith?

McCARTHY: Yeah, I feel very strongly about that. I feel like going to Smith is one of the best decisions I've made of my life, and I'm 26 right now, so you know, I have a lot of other decisions to make. But just the friendships that I've made, and they're so strong. And we've kept in touch throughout, and yeah, I feel like, you know, I can tell people I went to Smith, and they know where I went, and what that means. That it's a strong school, and you know, a great reputation, and a network of alums.

KRAUS: Great.

McCARTHY: Yeah.

KRAUS: So we have not that much time left, so I think I'll wrap up, but if you have daughters someday, do you think you'll encourage her to come to Smith, or look at Smith, or look at Smith?

McCARTHY: Definitely, yeah.

KRAUS: Yeah?

McCARTHY: Yeah.

KRAUS: Great.

McCARTHY: Yeah.

KRAUS: Wonderful. OK, well that's about it. But thank you so much for sharing.

McCARTHY: Thank you.

KRAUS: And being here, taking time out of your busy schedule.

McCARTHY: Thank you.

KRAUS: Yeah. So do you have class meetings to go to later, and --

McCARTHY: I'm going to go to the psychology reception right after this.

KRAUS: Oh, nice. That's great.

McCARTHY: Yeah.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Steve Thaw, May 27, 2011