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LGBTQ Mid-Level Administrators of Color in Student Affairs: Experiences of Support and Resilience

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LGBTQ Mid-Level Administrators of Color in Student Affairs:

Experiences of Support and Resilience

by

Saby Leimomi Labor

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
St. Cloud State University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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Abstract

Existing literature provides an insufficient understanding of the lived experiences of LGBTQ Student Affairs Mid-Level Administrators and particularly from a strengths-based approach. This study applied a life story interview approach to the exploration of the support and resilience experiences of mid-level Student Affairs administrators who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two spirit and/or queer (LGTBTTQ) and a person of color or indigenous (POCI), using a theoretical framework comprised of the ecological systems approach (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), queer theory (Jagose, 1996; Plummer, 2005; Watson, 2005) and intersectionality (Collins, 1998; Crenshaw, 1991; McCall, 2005). Findings of this study include a wide range of resilience strategies experienced by LGBTQ mid-level administrators of color, and multiple sources and degrees of support supplemented, buffered, and countered experiences within higher education environments. Implications for practice include the following areas: hiring, advancement and promotion opportunities, creating opportunities to share their stories, the role of professional associations, and examining institutional culture as sources of violence or support.
Acknowledgment

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Chapter One: Introduction

The lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people, and particularly those of color are emerging in mediums provided by digital technology, including social media, independent publishing platforms, and an increasing focus on intersectionality in higher education practices. For example, transgender scholar and activist, Dean Spade (2001), promotes the idea of Trickle Up Social Justice, where racial economic justice is at the center of queer and transgender movements, noting that when our Black trans sisters’ conditions improve, the effects will trickle up the social hierarchies. The lived experiences of queer, transgender, indigenous, people of color (QTIPOC) professionals regarding support and retention has implications for staff recruitment and retention, and professional pipelines for advancement to administrative leadership positions at the middle and senior levels of higher education institutions. The scope and population of this study has particular significance to me, and will hopefully also hold significance for the QTIPOC mid-level Student Affairs administrators. As professionals with multiple sexual and racial minority identities, our experiences are not widely known in higher education. It is with this context in mind, that I inquired further into the lived experiences of professionals like myself, and elevated their voices to advance our field, and our collective strength as a community navigating higher education environments.

This study aimed to bring visibility to the lives of professionals positioned in the middle of the Student Affairs organizational structure, simultaneously occupying sexual and racial minority identities. More specifically, this study explored the support and resilience experiences of mid-level Student Affairs administrators who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two spirit and/or queer (LGTBTTQ) and a person of color or indigenous (POCI).
From an ecological systems approach (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), interactions with environment over time are central to understanding development and daily life. The research design and data analysis were informed by queer theory (Plummer, 2005; Watson, 2005) and intersectionality (Collins, 1998; Crenshaw, 1991; McCall, 2005), in order to capture the variety of identity labels individuals used to describe their race, gender, and sexual orientation.

**Purpose and Significance of the Study**

Queer mid-level managers of color in Student Affairs hold numerous intersecting identities and positions simultaneously. Their professional status is within Student Affairs, between frontline service professionals and chief administrators. The social and historical context of their multiple personal identities have implications for their daily interactions in institutional environments and the broader profession. Existing literature provides an insufficient understanding of their lived experiences and particularly a strengths-based approach. This study aspired to raise visibility and share their experiences in celebration of their whole selves.

**Statement of the Problem**

Increasing research is being conducted regarding POCI mid-level administrators in higher education institutions (Rosser, 2000; Masse, Miller, Kerr, & Ortiz, 2007) and additionally, scholarly inquiry is occurring pertaining to the experiences of those identifying as LGB (Croteau & Lark, 2009) and transgender (Tubbs & Beemyn, 2014). This study aimed to examine avenues for personal and professional support, both internal and external to the higher education institution, and resiliency of mid-level Student Affairs administrators centralizing their multiple identities as POCI and LGBTTQ. The intersection of their lived experience concerning these
social and cultural identities has implications for support initiatives within the Student Affairs profession.

**Description and Scope of the Research**

This study applied phenomenological qualitative inquiry using a life story interview approach to elicit the lived experiences of the participants. This method allowed a richer exploration of mid-level administrators in order to understand how they retain and gather support, and cultivate resilience. This allowed for the voices of the informants to emerge. Through the life story approach (Atkinson, 1998), each story stands on its own as a distinct and important narrative of inquiry. Using an intersectionality (Collins, 1998; Crenshaw, 1991; McCall, 2005) and queer theory lens (Plummer, 2005; Watson, 2005), I focused on the social construction of their multiple intersecting minority identities and their corresponding lived experiences of resilience in institutions of higher education. Queer theory allows the voices of individuals who have been historically suppressed to be heard (Gamson, 2000), and challenges the notion of identity as singular or fixed (Watson, 2005). Findings are only generalizable to the individuals participating in this study and point to further areas of inquiry for QTIPOC mid-level administrators. A goal of this study was to centralize and aggregate the lived experiences of QTIPOC mid-level administrators to provide a better understanding of their lived experiences and bring visibility to their stories.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the lived experiences of mid-level Student Affairs administrators who identify as QTIPOC?
2. How do QTIPOC mid-level Student Affairs administrators experience support?

3. How do QTIPOC mid-level Student Affairs administrators develop resilience?

Next, an overview of terminology and definitions will be provided.

**Definition of Terms**

Higher education mid-level administrators serve in support-service or technical-professional roles, reporting to a top-level administrator, dean, or chief officer (Rosser, 2000). The definition of Student Affairs mid-level administrators, for the purpose of this study, will follow the three criteria determined by Fey and Carpenter (1996):

(a) an individual who reports directly to the Chief Student Affairs Administrator (CSAA) or occupies a position one level removed from the CSAA and (b) is responsible for the direction or control of one or more Student Affairs functional areas, and (c) supervises one or more professional staff members (p. 220).

For the purpose of this study, these professionals will be referred to as administrators, encompassing both leadership and management roles, unless otherwise stated in the literature.

Language and terminology used within QTIPOC communities is complex, often politically charged, and historically contextualized. Boykin (2005) describes the political nature and context of language pertaining to people of color and their identification with non-heterosexual identities. According to Poynter and Washington (2005), “Language is one of the major challenges in understanding and engaging multiple identities” (p. 45). Boykin (2005) notes the terms used in African American communities to generate distance from terms associated with white culture (LGBTQ), such as same-gender loving, down low (DL), and men who have sex with men (MSM).
• “Same-gender loving” is used by people of color who have same-sex attractions and feel comfortable with these attractions (Boykin, 2005).

• “DL” refers to men of color, often Latino and African American, who have sex with men as well as women and who do not identify as gay or bisexual (Boykin, 2005). This term was first discussed in public media formats in 2001 in relationship to the AIDS epidemic, adding a layer of stigma to the use of this label.

• “MSM” describes men who engage in sexual behaviors with other men, but do not use gay, bisexual, or queer labels for their sexuality.

It is within this context that queer terminology was used in this study “…in an effort to be inclusive of the wide range of non-heteronormative sexual and gender identities within our communities” (Singh & Sin Chun, 2010, p. 37), while acknowledging the array of labels and definitions in which each person holds when they arrived to the study (Crosby, 2007). It would be detrimental to generations of non-heterosexual individuals who lived through the pre-Stonewall era to use the term Queer without its historical context. Jagose (1996) offers an articulate synopsis of its contemporary use and historical power:

Those who adopt or reject queer as a self-identifying term are often opposed in their conception of its political usefulness. Proponents of the new terminology argue that to redeploy the term queer as a figure of pride is a powerful act of cultural reclamation, and strategically useful in removing the word from that homophobic context in which it formerly flourished…. Opponents of the new terminology, however, point out that merely to change the semantic value of queer is to misrecognize a symptom for the
disease. They argue that even if its resignification were to prove successful, other words or neologisms would take on the cultural work it once did. (p. 104)

I use queer as a category that encompasses countless identities and expressions of gender and sexuality within a framework of cultural reclamation, while noting the reality that other forms of bigotry have taken its historical place in our contemporary language and culture.

- “Transgender” entails individuals, “...whose gender identity (internal sense of gender) is different from their sex assigned at birth…” (Testa, Jimenez and Rankin, 2014, p. 31).

- “Two Spirit,” as described by Cherokee member Qwo-Li Driskill is, “an intertribal term to be used in English as a way to communicate numerous tribal traditions and social categories outside of dominant European binaries,” because it is, “intentionally complex” and “inclusive, ambiguous, and fluid” (Driskill, 2010, p. 72).

- “Lesbian, bisexual, transgender, two spirit, queer, or LGBTTQ” encapsulates a broad spectrum of identities spanning genders and sexualities, but are not limited to these specific identity labels (Green & Peterson, 2004, p.7).

- “Womxn,” as defined by Kalia, a study participant, is:

  Intentionally spelled with a ‘x’ in order to recognize the agency of womxn, individually and collectively, and to challenge the notion that womxn are necessarily defined through their relation to men (i.e. ‘man’ as the universal default, ‘woman’ as a subcategory or afterthought). This spelling is intended to honor anyone who has ever, ever will, or currently identifies as a womxn (in personal communication).

- “People of color,” refers to racial and ethnic minority groups…People of color is, however it is viewed, a political term, but it is also a term that allows for a more complex
set of identity for the individual—a relational one that is in constant flux. (Vidal-Ortiz, 2008, p. 1037-1038)

• “People of color and/or indigenous people, or POCI,” is a term used to acknowledge the exclusionary implications traditionally defined as people of color.

It was the aim of my recruitment language to acknowledge historical context and invite indigenous participants, as well as people of color to this study. For the purpose of this study and the recognition of the power of language in LGBTTQ and people of color and indigenous communities, and for accessibility of the study for broader audiences, I will use QTIPOC in this study. I adapted the findings and analysis accordingly as participants in the study framed their identities with labels and language to stay true to their experiences.

For the purpose of this study, resilience was defined as both a process and an outcome (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2010). From the viewpoint offered by ecological approaches, resilience is one’s capacity “…to recover from environmental stresses in a way that leads to system sustainability…” (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2010, p. 335). In other words, it is the ability to adapt using existing resources for both present needs and future sustainability. A detailed discussion of the historical development of literature about resilience is provided in chapter two.

Summary

Chapter one provided an overview of the purpose and significance of the study. Additionally, the research questions highlighted the central focal points in which to explore further the lived experiences of QTIPOC mid-level Student Affairs administrators. Discussion of terminology and the historical, as well as contemporary, context of language and the goals of participant inclusion were also detailed.
Chapter two will provide a deeper historical understanding of the available literature on issues related to higher education professionals and administrators. Chapter two will also highlight the absence of literature about Student Affairs administrators who identify as both LGBTTQ and POCI.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Literature about the experiences of Student Affairs professionals has grown tremendously. Much of this work has focused on mid-level administrators, as well as a significant concentration in new or entry-level professionals (Renn & Hodges, 2007; Burkard, Cole, Ott, & Stoflet, 2004; Mather, Bryna, & Faulkner, 2009) and senior administrators (Reisser, 2002; Beeny, Guthrie, Rhodes, & Terrell, 2005; Moneta and Jackson, 2011). To gain an understanding of this study’s focus on mid-level administrators and their role in the profession, an overview of current entry-level and senior-level Student Affairs professionals will follow.

Entry-level professionals are defined as “first-time, full-time Student Affairs staff with five or fewer years of experience” (Renn & Hodges, 2007, p. 367). Their responsibilities include providing “…direct student contact, …program development activity and conceptualization of direct services.” (Burkard, Cole, Ott, & Stoflet, 2004, p. 290). These professionals enter higher education institutions from a variety of prior educational and professional experiences and research suggests the support received by their supervisors, mid-level administrators, is essential to their retention and job satisfaction (Mather, Bryna, & Faulkner, 2009).

Senior Student Affairs officers (SSAO) are the highest ranking Student Affairs leader at their higher education institution or system, often with the title of chief Student Affairs officer or vice president for Student Affairs. Current literature about the experiences and concerns of SSAOs has centered on strategies for personal and professional balance (Reisser, 2002), including the gender differences regarding approaches to work and life balance (Beeny, Guthrie, Rhodes, & Terrell, 2005). In a study of 374 SSAO participants, 78% reported a Student Affairs administrator role prior to their current position (Beeny et al., 2005). SSAOs reported high levels
of job satisfaction, low perceptions of work and life balance, and emphasized modeling balance and promoting flex time and other similar benefits for their supervisees and subordinates (Beeny et al., 2005). Moneta and Jackson (2011) highlight one essential role of SSAOs and the future of Student Affairs is dependent on their “…ability to recruit and retain a talented people” (p.8).

Given the high turnover rate of entry and mid-level Student Affairs professionals (Renn & Hodges, 2007), the role of mid-level administrators in orienting, socializing and supporting entry-level professionals is very important. Not only do mid-level administrators supervise and offers support to newer professionals, but they also are supervised and seek support from senior level administrators. For many, they previously navigated higher education environments as entry-level professionals and advanced in their position. While issues pertinent to entry-level Student Affairs professionals “…remain largely unexplored,” there is much more to be gleaned from the examination of mid-level administrators and their experiences to date. Their multiple roles as supervisor and supervisee offer the potential for reciprocal channels for support, as well as experiences of success and resilience culminating in their advancement in the field. Mid-level administrators also represent a role that bridges entry-level and chief Student Affairs administrators (Mills, 2009).

Research on factors related to mid-level Student Affairs administrator experiences has steadily increased since the 1990s (Fey & Carpenter, 1996; Gordon, Strode-Border & Mann, 1993; Rosser, 2000). However, less research is available regarding issues impacting professionals of color in higher education settings, as researchers have predominantly focused on faculty of color. Literature regarding faculty of color has examined recruitment issues (Hughes, Horner & Ortiz, 2012), retention and mentoring concerns (Thompson, 2008), and academic
disciplines (Mkandawire-Valham, Kako, & Stevens, 2010). As for LGBTQ faculty retention literature, Kristin Renn (2010) states, “studies of the experiences and identities of LGBT faculty, staff, and executive leaders have been nearly absent” (p. 136). Literature about the experiences of higher education administrators identifying as people of color, as well as LGBTQ administrators, is absent from empirical scholarship; even less is currently known about their experiences regarding support and resilience. This study aspired to make a qualitative contribution to the field in pursuit of bridging the gap in literature about the lived experiences of LGBTQ mid-level administrators of color in Student Affairs in terms of support and resiliency.

This chapter presents a review of literature pertinent to Student Affairs mid-level administrators in four overarching areas: mid-level administrators, QTIPOC personnel and administrators, support, and resilience. It is essential to note that race, transgender identity, and sexual orientation are intersectional identities of Student Affairs mid-level administrators in which scholarship is currently deficient. Given this status in the field, the intention is to synthesize the literature for mid-level Student Affairs administrators, LGTBQ and POCI personnel and administrators, then highlight relevant research pertaining to support and resilience of each of these sub-communities within the QTIPOC community. Subsequently, I will point to existing literature about individuals with QTIPOC intersectional identities within mid-level administration research, as well as research about support and resilience. The chapter will conclude with a focus on the theoretical underpinnings guiding the epistemological and interpretive approach used in this study.
Higher Education Mid-Level Administrators

Mid-level administration is a growing area of inquiry, whether the location is in corporate, nonprofit, or higher education settings. Much of the current research about mid-level leaders in higher education aggregates Student and Academic Affairs concerns, in which each have unique context and histories resulting in distinct organizational issues and experiences. According to a report from the U.S. Department of Education, mid-level administrators are estimated to comprise 14.4% of full-time staff in higher education institutions (Ginder, Kelly-Reid, & Mann, 2015). This section will briefly highlight the pertinent circumstances impacting higher education mid-level administrators and literature regarding their work-life issues in order to contextualize their experiences in higher education environments. Additionally, a detailed summary of the literature for Student Affairs mid-level administrators is provided, including research on professional competencies.

Work-Life Issues

Considerable research pertaining to mid-level administrators is centered on work-life issues and the impact on morale, satisfaction, and intent to leave (Johnsrud, Heck, & Rosser, 2000; Johnsrud & Rosser, 1999; Rosser, 2000; Rosser, 2004; Young 2007a; Young 2007b). These studies provide important information about the complex interactions of their identities and their professional environment. According to Johnsrud (1996), three work-life issues are areas of primary concern for mid-level managers: the nature of the mid-level role, lack of recognition, and inadequate opportunities for advancement and career development. The inherent nature of the mid-level administrator’s role as an intermediary of the organization lends to its complexity (Young, 2007a) and ambiguity (Moore & Twombly, 1990). Additionally, minimal
participation in institutional governance has been observed (Henkin and Persson, 1992; Moore & Twombly, 1990). Taylor (2007) describes the role of mid-level administrators as “key strategic actors” (p. 127), in which they “translate strategy into action and results” (p. 129) and serve as “conduits for information” (p. 129) to flow from the professionals providing direct service to senior level administrators. They act to create the vision for their team as translated from the goals of senior administration, then they provide continuous feedback and guidance to the direct service professionals and report results up to senior administrators. Managers encounter the paradox of their role in a changing the professional landscape, where simply knowing how to manage rather than to lead is no longer a viable option. Managers must master both the technical and human resource approaches to perform the complex task of managing from the middle (Taylor, 2007).

The second area of work-life concerns is lack of recognition for professional contributions. Recognition includes, “guidance, trust, communication, participation, confidence, and performance feedback” (Rosser, 2000, p. 9). In addition, mid-level administrators often report feelings of under appreciation (Scott, 1978). Lindgren (1982) found mid-level administrators to increase their work output, or effectiveness, as a response to the recognition and acceptance of their contributions. General morale increases when recognition expectations have been met (Johnsrud and Rosser, 1999; Rosser, 2004). These findings emphasize the impact of factors within the environment that lend to perceived support, in connection with perceived recognition.

The third work-life area Johnsrud (1996) suggests for examination is professional development and career advancement. Several scholars have observed a lack of professional
advancement and development (Austin & Gamson, 1983; Bess & Lodahl, 1969; Fey & Carpenter, 1996; Johnsrud & Rosser, 1999; Moore & Twombly, 1990). Professional advancement is important in higher education institutions given limited internal advancement opportunities. Career pathways are not clearly defined for mid-level managers (Rosser, 2000). Increased opportunities for enhanced status through internal pathways could increase mid-level administrators’ decision to stay at a given institution, and even in the field of Student Affairs. Johnsrud, Heck, and Rosser (2000) found administrators’ perception of work-life concerns noted previously to effect intent to leave, as well as resulting departure from professional roles and institutions. Given the lack of data for QTIPoC mid-level Student Affairs administrators, issues of career pathways and advancement are potentially telling of gaps in the top leadership tiers. Subsequently, this study will focus on mid-level administrators whom both enact supervisor and supervisee roles within Student Affairs.

Rosser (2004) conducted a national study of mid-level managers regarding work-life issues and the impact on morale, satisfaction, and intent to stay or leave. Participants included, “those academic or non-academic support personnel within the structure of higher education organizations” (p. 324), often reporting directly to a senior-level administrator or dean. Rosser observed a negative correlation regarding ethnic minority mid-level managers and overall morale. These findings suggest mid-level managers perceive that their work denotes a lesser value and a lower ability than peers to contribute to the institution’s overall goals. Additionally, she found managers who experienced discrimination were more likely to express intent to leave. The nature of the mid-level manager role, lack of professional development and advancement opportunities, and the impact of work-life experiences on their morale, satisfaction, and intent to
stay or leave provide introductory context necessary to understand the complexity of the mid-level manager in higher education environments. A recurring theme of recognition for individual contributions, morale, and intent to leave for mid-level managers (Johnsrud, 2004), as well as experiences of LGB workplace discrimination (Croteau & Lark, 2009) for professionals and the factors associated with occupying ethnic minority social status (Masse, Miller, Kerr, & Ortiz, 2007) leaves much to be explained regarding their lived experiences. Next, I will review the available literature regarding mid-level administrators within Student Affairs functional areas.

**Student affairs mid-level administrators.** The research on Student Affairs mid-level administrators portrays a leader who is required to demonstrate fluency in the languages of each constituent base (Young 2007a), exercise the ability to communicate and address institutional challenges and opportunities (Rosser, 2000), as well as demonstrate the breadth of student development outcomes related to the institution’s mission. This professional portfolio is quite diverse and often results in ambiguity of professional identity within the field of Student Affairs.

Definitions of mid-level administrators vary. Young (2007a) notes, “defining mid-level management is difficult, and that impedes our understanding of it” (p. 7). He stresses the importance of mid-level managers in higher education, “Mid-level managers are the key to institutional collaboration, collegiality, and change, precisely because they are located in the middle. They know their strategic role and enjoy using it to improve their divisions and institutions” (p. 5).

Given the complexity of higher education organizational structures and correspondingly, the organization of Student Affairs mid-level administrators within these hierarchies, it is first important to elaborate on established characteristics of these professionals. Young (2007b) offers
the latest definition of the Student Affairs middle manager in the 21st century. Applying the assumptions of The Student Learning Imperative (ACPA, 1996), he proposed three competencies necessary for the success of mid-level administrators. Mid-level administrators in Student Affairs are able to:

1. describe the issues, problems, and opportunities inherent in a given Student Affairs division so that they can properly re-allocate resources and staff toward enhancing student learning and development;
2. model communication and collaboration with all levels of internal and external stakeholders; and
3. demonstrate the academic mission of the institution, bringing it alive for student learning and development. (p. 36-37)

He encourages focus to remain consistent within these three competencies in order to ensure successful and effective mid-level administrators in Student Affairs (Young, 2007b).

Mid-level Student Affairs manager’s role in higher education institutions is that of an educator, as well as an administrator tasked with supervision of professional staff and programs (Young, 2007a). Student affairs mid-level administrators balance the “transformative goals and transactional realities” (Young, 2007a, p. 15), noting a dual role as educator and administrator and the need to be experts in both domains:

Student affairs mid-level managers balance on the seesaw between the transformative goals and transactional realities of their work. They have to be experts at both, and they do not need to apologize for doing their transactional work well. Their talent and concentration should not be diminished by criticism, especially from within (p. 15).
Rosser (2000) further defines mid-level managers as, “those academic or non-academic support personnel within the structure of higher education organizations” (p. 324) and “usually, they are not classified as faculty, but rather as a nonexempt, non-contract group of administrative staff” (p. 5). In addition, “Mid-level administrators tend to be appointed from among qualified entry-level individuals within the institution, which may provide more ethnically and racially balanced pool of candidates” (p. 7). Mid-level administrators can be classified as administrators, professionals, or specialists and their positions are distinguished by specialization, experience, and skills (Johnsrud, Sagaria, & Heck, 1992; Trombly, 1990) and they often report to a senior-level administrator or dean (Rosser, 2004). Mid-level administrators maintain a constant balance between the directives of senior leadership and the needs of students, faculty, and the general public. They are considered both frontline professionals and firing-line managers who enforce policies, but seldom have the opportunity to change them (Rosser, 2000).

Scholars have examined the significance of the mid-level administrator role as well. According to Rosser (2000), mid-level administrators are the “unsung professional in the academy” (p. 7), they are “vital to the efficient and effective operation” (p. 7) of the institution, and are too important to be ignored (Young, 2007a). Rosser (2000) also declares, “Midlevel administrators are integral to the institution’s spirit and vitality” (p. 7). Young (2007a) stated they, “…have the greatest potential of any group of administrators to effect collaboration and change in an institution. This is their positional advantage” (p. 4).

**QTIPOC Personnel and Administrators**

In this section, I will offer an overview of literature regarding on the personal identities these leaders bring with them to their professional environments, specifically QTIPOC identities.
Subsequently, connections to findings concerning support and resilience that informed the design and implementation of the study will be highlighted.

**Methodological Concerns**

Five trends are observed across literature of Black LGBT concerns that parallel those found in the larger body of LGBT research (Follins, Walker & Lewis, 2014):

1. conflating gay and bisexual males in research, therefore ignoring their different experiences;
2. lack of resilience research about black bisexual women and transgender men
3. lack of resilience research about Black LGBT youth;
4. aggregation of Black and Latino samples in LGB research; and
5. focus on lesbians and gay men in LGBT research. (p. 204)

They noted the recurring absence of empirical inquiry about transgender and bisexual individuals, and this trend is repeated within queer people of color-focused research as well. My study aimed to contribute research pertaining to intersectional identities often omitted or aggregated in the literature.

**POCI Administrators**

Given the positions’ nature regarding career pathways, advancement, and institutional hiring practices “The ethnic and racial makeup of mid-level administrators at many colleges and universities tends to reflect student and local community populations more closely than do faculty or senior administrative groups” (Rosser, 2000, p. 6). A closer look at this mid-level administrator group reveals that women hold 60% of positions and racial minorities represent
20% of these positions, with a considerable gap in salary earnings compared to male and Caucasian peers respectively (U.S. Department of Education, 1995).

Scholarship regarding experiences of people of color mid-level administrators’ experiences is scarce. Two significant issues highlighted in current literature pertains to intersections of race with career goals and job performance, as well as gender, for POCI mid-level Student Affairs administrators (Masse, Miller, Kerr, and Ortiz, 2007). Mid-level administrators of color received numerous messages about expectations to represent their entire race or ethnic group, and conflict between dual roles of professional and representative for their respective group. They experienced, “pressure to assimilate to dominant culture at the host institution” (Masse et al., 2007, p. 163), while maintaining a commitment to serving students and “making peace” (Masse et al., 2007, p. 163) with their minority status.

The role of gender for mid-level administrators of color regarding the career decisions of women were shaped by external and internal factors, whereas for men, they were shaped by internal factors primarily (Masse et al., 2007). Women’s expectations and roles as mothers and caregivers influenced their career decisions, whereas for their male counterparts this was not a pertinent factor. Additionally, the visibility of male members of color in the profession was heightened due to their lower numbers in the field of Student Affairs (Masse et al., 2007). The experiences of these mid-level Student Affairs administrators highlight the influence of multiple race and gender minority identities and their corresponding experiences of job satisfaction, career goals and advancement. These narratives are an important addition to the literature. In the next section I will highlight literature about lesbian, gay, and bisexual Student Affairs professionals.
LGB Professionals

The complexities of LGB Student Affairs professionals have not been sufficiently examined in academic literature. According to a study conducted by the Williams Institute, estimates of the national lesbian, gay, and bisexual population size range from 2.8-5.6% of the general population (Gates, 2014, p.4) and 31-40% of the LGBT population is estimated to be multiracial and people of color (Gates, 2014, p. 6). The variance of self-identification and researcher-identified sexual minorities is a recurring controversy, particularly to accurately capture self-identity of those in transgender communities. These inconsistent measures of population size and demographics leave us with an inadequate portrait of the QTIPOC community, although recent years have shown a steady increase in literature on this community (Albin and Dungy, 2005; Alimahomed, 2010; Croteau & Lark, 2009; Renn, 2010; Singh and Sim Chun, 2010).

Scholars have examined the relationship between LGB Student Affairs professionals’ degree of openness regarding sexual orientation and their experiences of homophobic discrimination and corresponding job satisfaction (Croteau and Lark, 2009). Discrimination of LGB Student Affairs professionals was reported in two categories: (a) employment decisions and personnel policies, and (b) regular work activities (Croteau & Lark, 2009). Performance evaluations, salary increases, and promotion consideration were employment decisions in which LGB Student Affairs professionals reported discrimination. Discriminatory policies negatively impacted those with same-sex partners for live-in campus positions and benefits (Croteau & Lark, 2009). Possible connections are made to previously discussed literature regarding career pathways and difficulties for mid-level administrators to advance professionally. Given the
incidence of discrimination at the policy level and individual level regarding employment
decisions, promotions, and evaluations, one would assume LGB Student Affairs entry and mid-
level administrators experience differential and potentially obstructed career pathways.

These findings related to public recognition of an individual’s LGB identity in the
context of socio-historical events, such as same-sex marriage legislation, as well as advancing
LGBT human rights and recognition in Western society, may explain why LGBT professionals
insist on being out in their workplace although the incidence of discrimination and harassment is
a possible side effect of their visibility. Many environmental cues, including federal and state
laws, institutional policy and culture, as well as individual interactions, communicate whether it
is safe for some LGB professionals to be out in their workplace.

**Transgender Administrators**

Less is know about the demographics and experiences of transgender Student Affairs
administrators. A self-study conducted by the Consortium for LGBT Resource Professionals
(Tubbs & Beemyn, 2014) is one of the few data collection efforts regarding gender identity, race,
and sexual orientation demographic information for higher education professionals working in
LGBT Services across the nation. Mid-level administrator positions comprised the majority of
survey participants, with 22% people of color and 32% transgender and genderqueer. Position
titles of mid-level administrators consisted of coordinator, assistant director, associate director,
and dean. Ninety-five percent of total respondents identified their sexual orientation as an
identity label other than heterosexual. Fourteen respondents (8%) identified as
transgender/genderqueer and people of color (Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource
Professionals, personal communication, May 14, 2015). Differences in educational attainment
contextualizes potential advancement pipelines in the profession, with 33% transgender and 24% people of color participants holding a masters or doctorate degree, compared to 85% of overall all participants.

Tubbs and Beemyn (2014) noted the absence of transgender and genderqueer, as well as people of color professionals (2%) at the dean level, or above the level of director. Five cisgender LGBQ professionals held dean’s positions. It is important to reiterate that this data pertains to individuals providing all or part of their duties in the form of LGBT services and is not exclusive to Student Affairs units. However, this data (Tubbs & Beemyn, 2014) also reveals one potential career pathway for QTIPOC mid-level administrators to advance within higher education, and documents the concurrent lack of transgender, genderqueer, and people of color at the level of dean, or “advanced middle” level (Chernow, Cooper, and Winston, 2003) within this pathway. The need for further research about the issues preventing transgender and genderqueer higher education administrators from advancing to senior Student Affairs positions is pertinent to discern the factors contributing to their absence.

Incidence of discrimination and decisions regarding the ability and consequences of bringing one’s personal identities to their higher education professional environments was discussed in this section. Existing literature details the issues confronting Student Affairs professionals with singular sexual orientation or racial minority identities. Specifics regarding the lived experiences of mid-level administrators identifying as both indigenous or a person of color, as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer are unknown. A discussion of the literature regarding support and resilience is offered to provide further context to this study pertaining to the lived experiences of QTIPOC mid-level administrators in Student Affairs.
**QTIPOC Identity Politics**

Given that the individuals in question possess multiple socially marginalized identities simultaneously, it is important to understand the corresponding visibility and invisibility that occurs. Given that many professional associations and diversity initiatives focus on single-identity communities and issues; it often leaves a person with multiple minority identities in conflict of which identity to choose. More specifically, identity politics of gender identity, race, and sexual orientation shape the identities and experiences QTIPOC professionals bring to the college and university environment. Washington and Wall (2006) examined the pressure experienced by racial, gender, and sexual minorities to select a primary identity above the others. Conversely, Green and Boyd-Franklin (1996) found that individuals with these minority identities experienced a “triple jeopardy” indicating an awareness of all three of these identities as prominent and determined by social context and other external factors. Implications for awareness of simultaneous minoritized identities in a society embedded with institutionalized forms of racism, sexism and homophobia has implications for the lived experiences of those experiencing this “triple jeopardy.”

Alimahomed (2010) argues that queer Latina and Asian/Pacific Islander women were historically excluded from feminist and LGBT movements and today are marginalized within these communities. She posits that they occupy a status that Hill Collins (2004) labels “outsider-within” (p. 103), observing the historical forces of racism and homophobia, pushing them out of these communities and asserts “...the present relegation of women of color to the margins of the LGBT movement is not the result of an explicit form of exclusion, but instead is the outcome of an unmarked, yet pervasive form of invisibility” (p. 155). Participants in this study note the
erasure of their voice given that they do not represent hegemonic forms of either lesbian or Latina or Asian/Pacific Islander identity as perceived by others. This was particularly salient in their employment environments (Alimahomed, 2010). Participants mentioned the importance of local organizations and groups representing their multiple identities, but described the absence of these organizations, even in their urban locale (Alimahomed, 2010). Environments created by supportive mentoring and supervisory relationships can positively impact QTIPOC professionals, both as the supervisor and as a supervisee.

**QTIPOC Supervision**

Regarding their role as a supervisor, Singh and Sim Chun (2010) proposed the Queer People of Color Resilience-Based Model of Supervision. This model of supervision by queer supervisors of color incorporates strengths from the, “rich mixture of both oppression and resilience experiences” (p. 38) in order to “enhance the provision of culturally competent and affirmative supervision” (p. 40). They believe this model addresses the impact of simultaneous heterosexism and racism and its influence on the process of supervision for therapists, ultimately benefitting both supervisor and supervisee. The Queer People of Color Resilience-Based Model of Supervision centers the supervisor’s race and sexual orientation identities and encourages the growth and development of the supervisor as essential to the supervision process. QPOC supervisors are encouraged to engage in self-reflection of power, privilege, and oppression, as well as affirm diversity and empowerment throughout the process (Singh & Sim Chun, 2010). Although this model is proposed for use in mental health practitioner settings, it has implications regarding the multidirectional and potentially reciprocal relationship of supervisor and supervisee, as higher education mid-level administrators have the privilege and challenge of
enacting both roles in complex institutional environments. These interactions are influenced both by their present experiences of their multiple identities and the historical processes of oppression and resilience.

Supervisors greatly influence the work-life environment of QTIPOC mid-level administrators as well. Yabusaki (2010) encourages a process of supervision that promotes “‘āina,” a native Hawaiian term for the land. ‘Āina is “…an emotional connection to the source that gives birth to, supports, and sustains all life (Elbert & Pukui, 1979, p. 3), and “It represents a place of belonging- a haven for physical, emotional, and spiritual growth and a sense of well-being - that transcends color, ability, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and the differences that separate us” (p. 3). An outcome of this process is that supervisors help their team members to “discover their voice” (p. 3). Yabusaki (2010) believes the supervisor can reach this outcome by acting as an advocate, a mirror, and an encourager of growth (p. 5) for their supervisees. Centering their life experiences, modeling authentic self-exploration, and providing a safe environment in which to enact these processes, ultimately results in supervisees in the spirit of ‘āina.

Support

Higher education professionals receive support from various professional and personal sources. Professional associations are one such source of primary support in the field of Student Affairs. Additionally, individual institutions have the opportunity to cultivate environments of support for QTIPOC mid-level administrators and other higher education professionals.
**Professional Associations**

There are numerous higher education associations in the U.S. In the field of Student Affairs, there are two national professional associations for administrators, NASPA and ACPA, as well as numerous local, state, and regional organizations. Additionally, each of these associations has smaller interest and identity-based communities of which members can elect to participate. These associations fulfill an important role, both personally and professionally for their members (Albin & Dungy, 2005; Masse, Miller, Kerr, and Ortiz, 2007; Segawa & Carroll, 2007).

Support from mentors, supervisors, cultural support of minority identities, and professional association communities were all important sources of support for mid-level administrators of color (Masse, Miller, Kerr, and Ortiz, 2007). Professional associations provided venues where mid-level administrators of color can locate mentors, helped balance isolation of their campus roles, and served as an important source of support in general (Masse, Miller, Kerr, and Ortiz, 2007). Establishing communities where they could be themselves, acquire career advancement and other success strategies, and obtain personal support were instrumental to their sense of belonging.

Albin and Dungy (2005) detail the role of Student Affairs professional associations in supporting LGBT professionals by offering a narrative of their own lived experiences. Albin describes the instrumental role of gay, lesbian, and bisexual networks (known as Knowledge Communities) at the regional and national level in her experiences as an out lesbian professional and also emphasizes the importance of the social justice values of the professional association.
and the mentorship and support of other professionals to maintain her visibility as a lesbian professional (Albin & Dungy, 2005).

Dungy, the executive director of NASPA, describes the role of professional associations as essential to cultivating positive environments for LGBT professionals (Albin & Dungy, 2005). Dungy believes that advocacy is an important role of professional associations, particularly for LGBT community because they promote institutional concerns of LGBT individuals originally asserted by Wall and Evans (2000): visibility, normalcy, and equity. Albin and Dungy (2005) state:

Our ability as professional organizations to create, use, and model vibrant, inclusive practices and to struggle with the hard issues of the day will model the leadership necessary for campuses to provide services for all students that treat members fairly and provide opportunities for LGBT staff, administrators, and students to find their voice. (p. 96)

In addition to much needed support and resource sharing provided by higher education and Student Affairs professional associations, institutions play an important role in supporting QTIPoC mid-level administrators.

**Institutional Support**

Areas of support for mid-level administrators of color include career mapping, developing professional supportive networks, attention to multiple dimensions of identity, and mentoring entry level professionals (Masse, Miller, Kerr, and Ortiz, 2007). Orientation and on-boarding programs for new professionals are also an important source of institutional support. Inadequate attention and institutional resources are allocated toward orientation programs for
entering mid-level administrators (Mather, Bryan, & Faulkner, 2009; Winston & Creamer, 1997). Given their unique professional characteristic, the design of orientation programs for mid-level administrators should focus on: life and work role transition, role complexity, leadership demands, technical skills (Mather et al., 2009, p. 245), as well as policies pertaining to staff development, campus resources, and informal expectations within the institution (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Mid-level administrators are less likely to have an institutional network of peers with familiarity of their job functions or peers entering the institution at the same time, receive fewer institutional resources for transition, and face a steep learning curve given the complexity of their position and oversight of budgetary and leadership duties (Mather et al., 2009). Scholars have suggested ongoing orientation models, rather than one-time models (Mather et al., 2009).

As discussed previously, the demands on their leadership can emanate from their position “in the middle” (Young, 1990; Young, 2007a, p. 3) of the organization, where they are translating the goals of senior administrators and motivating and monitoring the delivery of programs and services by entry-level professionals. They also possess specialized technical skills (Young, 2007a) distinct from their colleagues at a particular institution, which can lead to a perception of isolation and lack of a clear professional identity (Young, 2007a).

Institutional implementation of orientation and on-boarding programs intentionally designed by institutions with these factors in mind, can buffer or lessen their impact for incoming mid-level administrators. The resulting environment can be characterized by recognition and professional development, and perceived as supportive by QTIPOC mid-level administrators. Supportive environments can provide work conditions where mid-level administrators perceive themselves to thrive, or in negative conditions they may decline personally and professionally.
Subsequently, literature on resilience in adults describes both environments as possible precursors for resilience outcomes.

**Resilience**

In order to gain an understanding of resilience, this review reveals the contemporary strengths-based approach employed in adult resilience research, while noting that the study of resilience has commenced in three waves; the first two waves focused primarily on risk and coping, or deficits-based approaches. The third and most recent wave of resilience research focuses on strength-based approaches, as well as environmental and lifespan issues. Next, several definitions offered by scholars and a description of resilience for the purpose of this study that incorporated cross-cultural considerations will follow. A discussion of resilience in higher education environments is also presented, concluding with a synopsis of the current literature on LGB, transgender, and QTPOC adult resilience.

The study of resilience originated from developmental theory, centralizing social and physical ecological factors (Ungar, 2011). The contemporary debate is primarily concerned with moving away from a deficits-based approach to assessing human resilience. Strengths-based approaches include social constructivism and feminist theories (Greene, 2012), among others. Development is framed as a process of complex interactions between people and their environment, wherein they conceptualize the positive outcomes as a possible response to adversity. The person and environment are viewed as mutually dependent and this process is viewed to occur over a person’s lifespan. Factors influencing resilience are interconnected within and between various social networks, such as family, community, and organizations. A detailed discussion of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory and its application to this study
will be discussed later in this chapter. First, a discussion of the cross-cultural definition of adult resilience is provided.

**Definition**

Resilience has been broadly defined and debated by scholars. Vulnerability and protective factors are important individual-level constructs needed to understand resilience. The complex interplay between risk, vulnerability, and protective factors comprise today’s understanding of resilience as both a process and outcome (Greene & Conrad, 2012). Masten (1994) defines vulnerabilities as “…a characteristic of an individual that makes that person more susceptible to a particular threat to development” (p. 7). Protective factors exist internally and externally, working to ameliorate, buffer, or even prevent risk (Greene & Conrad, 2012). Further, “Resiliency is usually used to describe individuals who adapt to extraordinary circumstances, achieving positive and unexpected outcomes in the face of adversity” (Fraser, Richman, and Galinsky, 1999, p. 136).

Resilience has historically been used to describe material objects and their physical properties, specifically the ability of an object to return to its original shape. Adult resiliency, in psychological terms, describes individuals who “…adapt, learn, and change, and as a result become more resilient over time” (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2010, p. 335). They don’t only return to their original state, or “shape,” but they engage in a learning and adaptation process.

In an ecological form of understanding, it is the ability to adapt using existing resources for both present needs and future sustainability. In other words, one’s capacity “…to recover from environmental stresses in a way that leads to system sustainability…” (Denhardt &
Denhardt, 2010, p. 335). This study will approach resilience using the definitions offered by Denhardt and Denhardt (2010), wherein resilience is both a process and an outcome.

**Individual Networks of Resilience**

Networks of resilience, or “relatedness,” pertain to the social ties of individuals to respective communities, including feelings of social support and connection (Greene, 2012). These networks are the formal and informal arenas for interpersonal interactions where support is reciprocated. Peer relationships, professional networks, and organizational support systems are important social support systems for higher education professionals. Here, an individual develops a sense of belonging, affirmation, and membership. Greene (1999) attributes membership as an essential component of an individual’s “personal and societal well-being” (p. 52). The “goodness of fit” is an important factor in resiliency research, describing the relationship of an individual’s characteristics and supports with the demands and resources of their environment. The compatibility of the individual and the organizational environment and resultant support are important considerations for mid-level administrators’ experiences of resilience in higher education institutions.

**Cross-Cultural Resilience**

Scholars have also investigated cross-cultural adaptations for adults (Gonzalez Castro & Murray, 2010; Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2006; Ungar, 2010). Variations of resilient behaviors have been documented across social identities, such as race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender. Meaning-making, adaptation, and support are essential components that interplay with the individual, their environment, and their social identities within the temporal
context (Greene & Conrad, 2012). The temporal context offers a central consideration of the sociopolitical and economic events of the historical time in question.

An additional factor of contemporary debate pertains to the cross-cultural fit of previous understandings of resiliency as either an outcome or a developmental process. Ungar (2010) posits that resilience is both an outcome and a developmental process, and suggests a more fluid definition and conceptualization of resiliency that includes contextual and cultural influences:

In the context of exposure to significant adversity, whether psychological, environmental, or both, resilience is both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to health-sustaining resources, including opportunities to experience feelings of well-being, and a condition of the individuals’ family, community and culture to provide these health resources and experiences in culturally meaningful ways. (p. 225)

Ungar’s (2010) approach centralizes two principles, culture and negotiation, as the primary resiliency constructs. He further argues “…there is both homogeneity and heterogeneity in outcomes and processes associated with resilience when cultural pluralism and contextual variation are introduced into how we both conceptualize and investigate stress and coping in resource-poor ecologies.” (p. 404). He goes on to say, “Within any single cultural context, the nature of negotiations to define events as positive or negative (stressful) may be difficult to deconstruct when cultural insiders’ assumptions of normality discourage critical reflection” (p. 406).

Identity is viewed as a “complex construct” within resilience theories (Schwartz, Montgomery & Briones 2006), reinforcing the importance of cultural context (Greene, 2012; Ungar, 2008) and processes of cultural adaptation (Gonzalez Castro & Murray, 2010) by
conceptualizing one’s identity as being comprised of (a) personal identity, (b) social identity, and (c) cultural identity. A person is anchored by their personal identity and influenced greatly by their social and cultural identities, informing the social and cultural norms that guide their interactions with their environment. Ungar’s (2008) framing of one’s identity allows for social and cultural interpretations, experiences, and meaning-making of QTIPoC mid-level administrators, in which these identity-related processes influence their understanding of self and others.

**Resilience in Higher Education Settings**

Resilience research in higher education has focused on students, staff, and faculty. Resilience has been studied pertaining to students of color and their academic resilience (Morales, 2008), as well as adult and nontraditional student academic performance and campus comfort using deficit-based resilience models (Keith, Byerly, Floerchinger, Pence & Thornberg, 2006). Keith et al. (2006) state, “A hallmark of the resilience model would be persistence even in the presence of great difficulties in institutional settings that are rarely designed to address needs of adult students” (p. 549). This study examined the vulnerabilities (deficits), as well as strengths and assets (resilience) of adult students on their academic performance and perceived campus comfort in relationship to their age and maturity. Connecting the institutional environments typically structured for traditional college students and the framing of models of resilience to study those existing in higher education environments historically not structured with their needs in mind, relates to the study of QTIPoC administrators and the examination of their persistence within higher education environments.
LGB Resilience

Kwon (2013) proposed that these three factors, social support, emotional openness, and future orientation, have a direct relationship to an LGB individual’s stress buffering and reactivity to experiences of prejudice, resulting in positive psychological health and resilience outcomes. The importance of positive role models (Cohen, 2014), as well as differences in experiences across ethnicities, and for bisexual and transgender-identified individuals are areas recommended for future inquiry (Kwon, 2013).

Transgender Resilience

In recent years, research has increasingly focused on transgender identities. Engagement with other transgender community members plays an important role in the identity development process and psychological wellbeing of transgender individuals (Testa, Jimenez, & Rankin, 2014). Themes of connection and locating a supportive community reiterate previous findings (Lev, 2007; Singh, Hays and Watson, 2009) and are vital to understanding their experiences through resilience theories, emphasizing membership in various networks of support and the complexities of interactions within various environments over time.

To date, little is known about the experiences of resilience for transgender people of color (Singh, Hays, and Watson, 2009). Singh et al. (2009) conducted a phenomenological study of 21 transgender individuals’ lived experiences of resilience and offers insight into the transgender people of color community with 11 participants identified as Black or African heritage and four identified as multiracial. They note, “...transphobia and transprejudice manifest in the objectification, misunderstanding, and pathologizing of a transgender person’s physical appearance” (Singh et al., 2009, p. 21) and the corresponding absence of legal protections at the
federal level and often at the state level, leave transgender people open to discrimination in the areas of employment, health care, and other areas of public access. They discovered five common themes among transgender participants: evolving a self-generated definition of self, embracing self-worth, awareness of oppression, connection with a supportive community, and cultivating hope for the future (Singh et al., 2009). The impact of communities where transgender mid-level administrators of color obtain identity-specific support in higher education institutions and associations were one aim of this study.

**QTIPOC Resilience**

Much of the research about queer and transgender people of color has originated from the field of psychology and has used a deficits approach. Greene (1994) developed the concept “one-down” to refer to the experiences of gay and lesbian clients of color in mental health services. She noted these clients experiencing additive psychosocial stressors for each additional oppressed identity. In this case, their race/ethnicity, sexuality, and other identities, such as gender, sex, religion, and socioeconomic status. Echoing this observation of multiple minority oppression due to socially constructed identities, Root (2000) notes the importance of ecological influences on racial identity development for lesbian, gay, and bisexual people of color as well. In the past ten years, research has increasingly focused on resiliency of individuals with multiple minority identities, particularly queer people of color. Recent research is available within higher education environments as well.

A study of resilience of 19 Black lesbians, (Bowleg, Huang, Brooks, Black & Burkholder, 2003) affirmed the six predictors of resilience in Kumpfer’s Transactional Model of Resilience (1999) and observed evidence that Greene’s concept of “Triple Jeopardy” (1996), or
multiple minority stress due to intersecting race, sex, and sexuality identities, was in fact experienced by the sample of Black lesbians in her study (n=19). Several individual strategies were noted by Black lesbian participants, including self-monitoring or code-switching, identifying literary resources written by and for Black lesbians, and travelling to social events to be in community with other Black lesbians. Internal or psychological factors promoting resilience were: (a) spirituality, (b) feeling unique (c) self-esteem, and (d) emotional stability defined as optimism, humor and happiness (Bowleg et. al, 2003). Participants described their engagement in resilience strategies in several ways, such as direct confrontation of oppression, defining their own realities and opting out of bearing the burden of others’ bigotry (Bowleg et. al, 2003). A prominent strategy discussed by Black lesbian participants related to their communities of support, including friends, partners, religious communities and to a lesser degree, their families. Participants described experiences of racism as a significant stressor, as well as sexism and heterosexism, although these were often experienced “through the prism of race and racism” (p. 102). Again, the complex interplay of vulnerabilities and assets (Greene & Conrad, 2012; Keith et al., 2006) is an important consideration related to experiences of resilience.

The development of resilience for Black LGBT individuals is another area of scholarship, including related socialization factors and personal traits (Follins, Walker and Lewis, 2014). The process of socialization for Black LGBT individuals and their relationships within their various communities, or networks of membership (Ungar, 2010), impact their experiences of adversity and resilience (Follins et al., 2014). Individual strategies, or personal traits consist of coping strategies, self-definition, and self-efficacy (Bowleg, 2008; Bowleg, Craig & Burkholder, 2004;
Follins et al., 2014). Individuals enacted these strategies in order to negotiate their multiple identities. Kwon (2013) proposed a theoretical framework similarly situating individual traits (emotional openness and future orientation) and social support as necessary correlates of resilience in the form of positive psychological health. This section highlighted related literature about the experiences of individuals falling under the QTIPOC umbrella of social and cultural identities. The subsequent section will outline the details pertinent to the theoretical framework of this study.

**Theoretical Framework**

Qualitative research strategies inform key aspects of this life story study. What follows is a discussion of the theoretical frameworks underpinning this study, including a detailed discussion of three areas: “...assumptions, paradigms, and interpretive frameworks” that “...often overlap and reinforce each other” (Creswell, 2007, p. 16). Regarding the first area, assumptions, “Five philosophical assumptions lead to an individual’s choice of qualitative research: ontological, epistemological, axiology, rhetorical, and methodological assumptions” (Creswell, 2007, p. 15). “The qualitative researcher chooses a stance on each of these assumptions, and the choice has practical implications for designing and conducting research.” (p. 15). A discussion of constructivist paradigms and their relationship to the design and implementation of this study are offered, which include intersectionality and queer theory as the two interpretive frameworks. Feminist standpoint theory (Hartsock, 1983) informed my role as researcher and corresponding interactions with participants. This theory will be discussed further in this chapter. These decisions influenced the design, implementation, and analysis phases of the study, including the
types of questions asked in interviews, the inclusion of contextual information in all phases, and the awareness of the influence of the researcher-subject interactions and histories.

**Interpretive Framework**

The interpretive theoretical framework, “informs specific procedures of research” (Creswell, 2007, p. 16). The interpretive framework for this study was comprised of queer theory, intersectionality, and feminist standpoint theory, which guided the conceptual lens used in approaching the topics and issues. Paradigms, or “the beliefs of researchers that they bring to qualitative research” (Creswell, 2007, p. 15) and their related “claims about knowledge” (p. 15) are important to understand. The lens in which the researcher arrived to this study, specifically constructivism, informed my processing of social phenomena and knowledge as subjective.

**Queer theory.** The application of queer theory (Jagose, 1996; Watson, 2005) enables the researcher to understand the complexity of QTIPOC individuals’ identities and contexts. Queer theory emerged in the literature in the 1990s (Jagose, 1996), although it is difficult to identify any single scholar for its entrance in the field of women’s, gender, and sexuality studies. Queer theory centralizes, “…how the production of gendered/sexual identities occurs in historical, cultural, discursive, and relational locations” (Watson, 2005, p. 74). This body of theories inform and position the contemporary and historical influences shaping the meaning-making of participants’ lived experiences within a context of socially constructed systems of power relations.

The use of these lenses enhances our understanding of the subjectivity and sociocultural origin and influences to be considered at all phases of inquiry. Given the literature on homophobic discrimination and workplace issues regarding sexual and gender identities of
higher education professionals, it was my intention that queer theory would center a participant’s gender and sexual identities and the interaction and influence within their professional environment and identity, if any at all. Additionally, intersectionality was an additional lens that informed knowledge construction regarding social identities of QTIPoC mid-level administrators.

**Intersectionality.** Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) is a lens used in understanding daily life experiences. It is rooted in the historical and contemporary context wherein, “…social identities and inequality are interdependent … not mutually exclusive” (Bowleg, 2008, p. 312). It frames the function of social identities as mechanisms to reify systems of social power and privilege. An intersectionality approach affirms the complex interplay of salient social identities (race, gender, sex, sexuality, etc.) in various environments within a context of systemic power, privilege and oppression based on these identities (Crenshaw, 1991).

Crenshaw (1991) further observes the numerous dimensions in which intersectionality exists, at the structural, political, and representational domains. She argues that analyzing the experiences of women of color through an intersectional lens allows for an awareness of the fundamental differences of their socially and structurally constructed identities and experiences from that of their white female counterparts.

Crenshaw goes on to task the reader with the ongoing work of, “thinking about the way power has clustered around certain categories and is exercised against others” or “the ways those values [attached to categories] foster and create social hierarchies” (p. 1297). It is within these hierarchical systems of values, or meaning-making stemming from social identities and environmental contexts, that this study aimed to examine the intersections of race, sexual
orientation, gender identity, and others to elicit an understanding of the lived experiences of resilience for those holding multiple identities of co-existing power and oppression. This lens allowed participants to situate their identities and experiences within its relevant socio-historical context, influenced by socially constructed systems of power, privilege, and oppression related to their intersecting identities.

The central tenet of intersectionality is highlighted regarding the lived experiences of Black lesbians, “For Black lesbians, race, sex, and sexual identity are intricately related not only to identity, but also to the stressful experiences that inevitably accompany these identities” (Bowleg, 2008, p. 97). This study examined the identities and lived experiences of the participants as interdependent social identities within their relevant social context, both contemporary and historical. Historical and systemic racism, for example, cannot be extracted from one’s experiences of sexism, transphobia, and ableism when one possesses these identities simultaneously in a society that privileges white cisgender able-bodied men. The resulting environments and complex interplay of interactions of person and environment are essential to understanding the lived experiences on QTIPoC mid-level administrators in Student Affairs.

**Feminist standpoint theory.** Feminist standpoint theory (Smith, 1974; Harding, 2004; Collins, 2004) emerged in the 1970s within the context of feminist critical theories. This theory addresses issues of “relations between the production of knowledge and practices of power” (Harding, 2004, p. 1), engaging sociologists at the time in questions of researcher neutrality. This theory posits that knowledge is socially situated and that research “…does and should ‘speak’ from particular, historically specific, social locations” (Harding, 2004, p.4). “The only way of knowing a socially constructed world is knowing it from within. We can never stand outside of
it” (Smith, 1974, p. 28). Harding (2004) elaborates on the experiences shared by members of oppressed groups: “Thus, to the extent that an oppressed group’s situations is different from that of the dominant group, its dominated situation enables the production of distinctive kinds of knowledge.” (p. 7) Therefore, knowledge is constructed, “…by starting from the perspective of women’s experiences and lives, as well as from the lives of other social groups ordinarily excluded from the dominant social order.” (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1995, p. 14-15)

Collins (2004) offers an intersectional understanding of this theory’s relevance for women of color and other people with multiple minority identities. Collins noted that people who occupy social positions of oppression are “outsiders-within” whom, “occupy a special place-they become different people, and their differences sensitize them to patterns that may be more difficult for established sociological insiders to see.” (Collins, 2004, p. 122). The advantages of researcher and participant sharing this outsider-within status lead to the possibility for richer meaning-making and offer insight into the subjective and positional nature of knowledge and its construction.

There are additional epistemological benefits of feminist standpoint theory. According to Harding (2004) “…standpoint theories map how a social and political disadvantage can be turned into an epistemological, scientific, and political advantage” (p. 7-8). Scholar and activist, bell hooks (2004), adds, “Often when the radical voice speaks about domination we are speaking to those who dominate. Their presence changes the nature and direction of our words.” (p. 154) This reminder of code-shifting in daily environments and social institutions is important given the life-story interview’s focus on the precise language and meaning-making the participant attaches to their lived experiences. As researcher and participant of intersecting identities of
minority race, sexuality, and possibly gender, we were able to minimize the influence of
dominant language to arrive closer to authentic narratives and meaning.

In this section, a detailed review of literature regarding qualitative inquiry and the
application of queer theory and intersectionality to this study was presented. To conclude this
chapter, a discussion of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1979) that was used as the
framework in this study to analyze the lived experiences of QTIPoC mid-level administrators
follows, concluding the chapter with a summary of the entire review of literature.

Ecological systems theory. Ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)
encourages the acknowledgement of human behavior as a product of complex and reciprocal
interactions between the individual and their environments over time. He emphasizes the
influence of two axioms, (a) environment is a crucial and time-dependent factor in examining an
individual’s development, and (b) the interpersonal interactions of the individual’s immediate
surroundings are important. Three claims distinguish Bronfenbrenner’s approach from that of
other behavioral psychologists, (a) the individual is an ever-changing organism that interacts
with and restructures the environment in which it resides; (b) the concept of “mutual
accommodation and reciprocity” (Renn, 2009, p. 29), characterizing the two-way directionality
of person and environment; and (c) the environment is a complex concept, contrived of the
immediate surroundings, external surroundings, and interconnections between settings. Core to
understanding and applying his approach are the elements of Person-Process-Context-Time
(PPCT).

PPCT. Bronfenbrenner (1979) posits that PPCT elements interact with one another to
influence the unique developmental environment and processes an individual encounters and
which occur in a “nested structure” of ecological subsystems. Renn (2004) later applied his ecological theory to multicultural identity development. She offers the following description of a person within an ecological context, “the individual is the canvas on which becomes evident, she is the vessel in which developmental change occurs, or he is a collection of demographic data that can be used to compare developmental outcomes and learning outcomes” (p. 30).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) frames the second element of PPCT, process, “…critical to ecological theory, proximal processes are enduring forms of progressively more complex, reciprocal interactions between a developing person and the persons, objects and symbols in her or his environment” (in Renn, 2004, p. 30). Renn elaborates on the third element, context:

Taken individually, the micro-, meso-, exo- and macro-systems exert powerful influences on individual development; by taking into account the interactions between and among the systems, the entire context of the ecology model becomes not only more powerful, but also a dynamic, elastic environment that influences the individual and is influenced by her or him (2004, p. 42).

Time, the fourth dimension of PPCT, can be understood as a “chronosystem,” or a system of personal and historical time. This approach to understanding human behavior as a product of external complex processes over the lifespan lends itself to the application of life story interview methods (Atkinson, 1998), detailed further in chapter three.

**Ecological subsystems.** As discussed, the four elements occur within a “nested structure” of systems conceptualized by Bronfenbrenner, “The ecological environment is conceived as a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls” (1979, p. 3). These nested structures occupy four subsystems: micro-systems, meso-systems, exo-systems, and macro-
systems. Bronfenbrenner was interested in the impact on psychological growth and human development in relationship to interconnections within and between environmental systems for individuals and social groups. In order to conceptualize how these systems exist and the interplay between each system, one must first understand the social processes taking place within each one.

*Micro, meso, exo, and macro.* The four elements include the micro, meso, exo, and macro system. The first system, or micro-system, includes the immediate or daily environment an individual interacts with and by. The next two systems, meso-systems and exo-systems, exist further away from the individual in question. He offers the following definition of mesosystems:

A mesosystem comprises the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates (such as, for a child, the relations among home, school, and neighborhood peer group; for an adult, among family, work, and social life).

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25)

Additionally, he states it is helpful to conceptualize that, “A mesosystem is thus a system of microsystems” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25). He provides an explanation of the third subsystem, or the exo-system, “An exo-system refers to one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person” (p. 25). This system exerts influence on the individual; however, the individual is not an active participant.

Interconnections are made within and between systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The fourth system, the macro-system, consists of the ideological and social organization of these interconnected systems. Each macro-system has a similar structure of the nested structures, but
inter-group social norms and correspondingly, structures, will be very distinct from others (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Within higher education environments, each macro-system contains the social and behavioral norms guiding professional behavior in a single institution, geographic region, the Student Affairs profession, as well as cultural, personal, and spiritual norms and beliefs influencing one’s behavior and meaning made about oneself. Each macro-system defines normative behaviors and expectations, and establishes outcomes or goals guiding membership. One’s understanding of her or his social, cultural, and professional identities will change and adapt accordingly as he interacts with their respective norms and outcomes for membership.

**Chronosystems.** Bronfenbrenner (1986) later added chronosystems to his model to include internal and external elements influencing a person’s development. This construct incorporates the element of time and its impact on environments and human development throughout their lifespan. Socio-historical events, such as advances in civil rights, the aftermath of 9/11 Twin Towers attacks on racial and religious policing, and same-sex marriage legal advances are just a few examples of external influences pertinent to QTIPQ mid-level administrators socio-historical context. Internal factors could include socio-psychological and cognitive development, age-related physiological changes, or even physiological shifts due to gender transition for a transgender individual, and cognitive shifts for individuals who decide to come out as lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer.

The ecological systems theory offers an understanding of the individual as an engaged participant within numerous physical, social, and cultural systems of interaction and influence, both direct and indirect. It centralizes the social and contextual interplay of persona and
environment. When considered in tandem with queer theory and intersectionality, it offers a more nuanced approach to examining the multiple social identities of QTPOC professionals within the various environments and networks they occupy.

**Life Story Approach.** The life story approach (Atkinson, 1998) held many benefits for this study. It offers an understanding of the individual as influenced by their environment throughout their lifespan. Life story interviews center the participant in meaning-making processes and validating their expertise of their own history. Through our interactions and rapport-building, the participant is able to construct their story and although I influence the process as the interviewer, the focus is left on their words, sequence, and selection of which stories and details to share.

**Summary**

This chapter detailed the literature currently available related to Student Affairs mid-level administrators, LGBTTQ and POCI personnel, and support and resilience. There exists inadequate scholarly inquiry of Student Affairs professionals who occupy a mid-level administration position and LGBTTQ and POCI identities simultaneously. More specifically, the experiences of those occupying these multiple identities and organizational status and its relationship to support and resilience have yet to be examined. A qualitative approach focusing on the social construction and systemic power and privilege context of queer theory and intersectionality allowed a nuanced understanding of the individuals’ identities and corresponding meaning-making. Finally, the ecological systems theory situated the individual within systems of interaction and influence in order to examine the complex interplay with and between ecological systems.
Chapter three will highlight the research design, data collection, and data analysis strategies employed in this study. Research design includes the role of the researcher, reliability, sample, and measures to protect participants. Data collection methods include the source of data collected, logistics of data collection, and details of data analysis.
Chapter Three: Method

This chapter reveals research design decisions, relevant theoretical lenses, procedures for data collection and analysis, and the plan to increase validity and trustworthiness. A discussion of my role as the researcher, particularly within the life story interview approach (Atkinson, 1998) will also be provided. Finally, the interview and member-checking process will be detailed.

This study employed a qualitative research approach. According to Creswell (2007), the decision to apply a qualitative research design strategy is:

…when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in the study…We conduct qualitative research because we want to understand the contexts or settings in which participants in a study address a problem or issue. We cannot separate what people say from the context in which they say it – whether the context is their home, family, or work. (p. 40)

According to Henwood and Pidgeon (1995) qualitative research closely aligns with feminist research:

The more unstructured ways of data gathering typically associated with qualitative research, such as interviews and participant observation, can allow for a closer degree of involvement between researcher and her participants, and consequently a greater sensitivity to the rights of participants as persons rather than objects of research. (p. 9)
The goal of the qualitative process for this study was to engage QTIPOC mid-level Student Affairs administrators engaged in rich description and meaning-making of their lived experiences of support and resilience. As discussed in chapter one, the definition of mid-level administrator for the purpose of the study was a higher education mid-level administrator that serves in support-service or technical-professional roles, reporting to a top-level administrator, dean, or officer (Rosser, 2000). Correspondingly, the eligibility criteria for student affairs mid-level administrator in this study included: (a) an individual who reports directly to the Chief Student Affairs Administrator (CSAA) or occupies a position one level removed from the CSAA and (b) is responsible for the direction or control of one or more Student Affairs functional areas, and (c) supervises one or more professional staff members (Fey & Carpenter, 1996). For the purpose of this study, these professionals have been referred to as mid-level administrators.

**Role of the Researcher**

The following concerns constituted areas of thorough consideration related to the role of the researcher and the research design and implementation process: (a) frames and framing, (b) position of the reader, (c) research design approaches, and (d) position and power of the researcher (Grbich, p. 17, 2007). Regarding frames and framing, the previous chapter included a discussion of the theoretical underpinnings framing this study using queer theory, intersectionality, and feminist standpoint theory as a framework, as well as social constructivist perspectives. Feminist standpoint theory informed the position and power of my role as the researcher in this project, with the ultimate goal of engaging with the participants’ stories in a manner that closely honors their words, meaning making, and context from our social locations.
The life story methodology (Atkinson, 1998) encouraged the collaborative nature of storytelling and interviewing, centering the agency and authority of the storyteller and emphasizes the passive role of guide for the interviewer. The power and position of the researcher in qualitative research and subsequently the life story interview approach promoted a fluidity of subjectivity and objectivity dependent on the stage of inquiry. The experiences and identities of the researcher as a QTIPOC higher education professional both enhanced the research process and resulted in an inherent bias as a “native researcher” (Kanuha, 2000, p. 444). Clarifying the researcher’s assumptions before and during the study were important strategies to remain true to the participants’ experiences and words. Examples of researcher assumptions included definitions of terminology or acronyms, shared experience with participants, and other experiential knowledge derived from the researcher’s lived experiences. Feminist standpoint theory offered a beneficial lens of socially situating knowledge and experiences as “outsiders-within” (Collins, 2004), reducing power disparities, although not completely eliminating them. Asking clarifying questions of labels, terminology, acronyms, and other language used by the participant moved the researcher closer to the participant’s meaning-making and experience.

**Research Design**

The research design aimed to gather rich description of a group of individuals occupying mid-level administrator roles. The subsequent discussion will engage in related design questions for the study, including methodological concerns, data analysis, and limitations. Data analysis includes issues related to transcription and interpretation of data collected.
Reliability and Validity

Issues of reliability and validity were an important area of concern for the qualitative study in question, “Generally, reliability has to do with the extent to which questioning will yield the same answers whenever and wherever it is carried out. Validity is the extent to which inquiry yields the ‘correct’ answers…” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 58) or closely matches the expected narrative. Given that no two interviews will produce the same narrative, reliability and validity for life story narratives is dependent on the strength of the relationship established in the interview process (Atkinson, 1998).

There are, however, measures of internal consistency and corroboration that standardize the life story process. Internal consistency as a quality check for the researcher, ensured that the story, as told by the participant does not contradict their telling of this story at another phase of the interview process. The second measure, corroboration, pertained to the participant’s confirmation and support of the story as it was recorded in the interview transcription.

Sample

Given that very little information is available about this population, it was important to send recruitment announcements to as many higher education professional associations as possible through Student Affairs social media groups and association listservs. It was the researcher’s goal to obtain a diverse group of participants using purposeful sampling (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015), or select cases that are “information rich” and “illuminative” (Patton, 2015, p.46), rather than generalizable to a larger population. After online pre-surveys were submitted, the researcher determined diversity criteria in terms of race and ethnicity identities, sexual orientation identities, and institutional classification within a Midwest geographic location.
Snowball sampling (Creswell, 2007) was not used for recruitment, however, was a secondary strategy available for participant recruitment in the case of low response to the research invitation.

Criteria for participation in this study included, (a) self-identity as a member of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two spirit, and/or queer community, (b) currently hold a mid-level Student Affairs administrator position at a higher education institution, (c) currently supervise professional staff, and (d) self-identity as a person of color and/or indigenous person (POCI). This information was completed by participants using a pre-screening survey and served as the basis for selection to participate. It was important to note at this stage that a given individual may self-identify with multiple categories within the LGBTTQ identities, as well as occupy dual identities as a person of color and an indigenous person. Unfortunately, this study did not include any indigenous participants and additionally did not include any transgender or genderqueer participants. I aimed to select a diverse range of identities and corresponding voices in this study to make visible a broader range of untold stories in academe.

Recruitment methods included a letter of invitation (Appendix A) with pre-screening survey link emailed to numerous national and regional professional associations of which I am a member. Associations included the National Association for Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), American College Personnel Association (ACPA), as well as their state, regional and subcommittees pertaining to POCI and LGBTTQ concerns; the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals and relevant subcommittees. The sample size was four participants due to the depth of qualitative data each participant provided.
Purposeful Sampling

This study employed a purposeful sampling technique, “Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2009). Criterion sampling was used to recruit participants for this study. In this regard, participants met the criteria for participation listed previously and relate the concept of resilience to their lived experiences. Given this purposeful sampling of participants who occupy mid-level administration, the social identities in question, as well as a relationship to the concept of resilience in their lives allowed me to focus on resilience for the professionals in question.

Measures to Protect Participants

Protection of the participants in the design and implementation of this study was crucial. Several steps were taken, including: providing the informed consent letter (Appendix B), providing interview questions in advance, gaining consent for audio and video recording of interviews, and the use of pseudonyms and identifying characteristics to protect confidentiality of institution and personal identity. Obtaining consent for participation in study included:

1. submission of online pre-screening survey (Appendix C)
2. participant review and signature on the informed consent letter before the initial interview.

Data Sources and Collection Methods

In chapter two, an overview of feminist standpoint theory (Smith, 1974; Harding, 2004; Collins, 2004) was provided and its related epistemological benefits to this study. The interpretive lens of feminist standpoint theory (Smith, 1974) also informed the researcher’s
approach to data collection and analysis. A deeper discussion of this will follow regarding the previous influence on the role of the researcher and the impact on data collection.

Interview questions and prompts were designed in connection with existing literature described in chapter two and their relationship to the research questions guiding this study. The study’s overarching research questions include:

1. What are the lived experiences of mid-level Student Affairs administrators who identify as QTIPOC?
2. How do QTIPOC mid-level Student Affairs administrators experience support?
3. How do QTIPOC mid-level Student Affairs administrators develop resilience?

The methods for data collection consisted of:

1. pilot study;
2. online pre-screening survey;
3. initial semi-structured life story interview;
4. second semi-structured life story interview; and
5. final semi-structured life story interview.

Each juncture of the interview process had a particular focal point in relationship to the larger study, as detailed in the following section.

**Pilot Study**

I conducted a pilot study with two participants meeting the criteria set forth. One interview took place in-person and the other took place via video conference call. Through these interviews, I was able to revise my assumptions, language, and sequence of the questions in each of the three interviews. I realized that the interview protocols had too many questions, so I
removed and re-ordered questions for better flow of storytelling and to meet the time parameters of the interviews. Participants also communicated the length of the pre-survey was adequate as well. Meeting with these participants was impactful, because they expressed excitement and anticipation for the study given that they felt there aren’t are other spaces for their stories to be heard.

**Interview Process**

The life story approach (Atkinson, 1998) offered a rich and reflexive environment in which to elicit the lived experiences of these queer mid-level Student Affairs administrators of color. Atkinson (1998) outlines three steps in the life story interview process:

1. pre-interview,
2. interview, and
3. post-interview.

The first step, or pre-interview, entails planning and “preparing for the interview, including understanding why a life story can be beneficial” (p. 26). Additionally, this pre-interview period involved the collection of contact and demographic information on the pre-screening online survey. The second step involved the actual interview process, or “guiding a person through the telling of his or her life story while recording it on either audio or video tape” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 26). The third and final step of the life story interview process, the post-interview, included transcription and interpretation of the interview. One element of the interviewer’s role in the transcription process included “leaving questions and comments by the interviewer, and other repetitions, out (only the words of the person telling the story remain so that it then becomes a flowing, connected narrative in the teller’s own words)” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 26). This process
was ongoing and dynamic given the interactions between researcher and participants. Participants had the final determination of which parts of their story were shared and the manner in which they were shared.

Atkinson (1998) offers several guidelines for conducting life story interview research in an affirming and meaningful manner. The researcher followed these guidelines prior to the start of the interview process: a) clearly explaining the researcher’s purpose to the interviewee with great detail, b) taking sufficient time to prepare for the interview process, and c) inviting the interviewee to the process by inviting her or him to include photographs, timelines, collages, or short written reflections on their life. During the interview process, the following guidelines were followed by the interviewer: a) creating a setting that promotes authentic storytelling, b) using an open-ended interview format, c) guiding the storyteller through their story and keeping the interviewer’s voice in the background, d) being flexible and responsive to the story and the needs of the storyteller, and e) centralizing their focus on listening as a primary tool, and f) being grateful for the honor of sharing in the story of the interviewee (Atkinson, 1998).

**Online Pre-Screening Survey**

The online pre-screening survey collected contact information, personal demographics, institutional affiliation, self-identification information, and provided an overview of the study. The cover page included a brief description of the study (Appendix D). Survey data was distributed and collected using Qualtrics, a trusted software platform. This data was accessed and stored on my personal computer located in my home under password-protection. After reviewing the submitted surveys, I looked at the collective group of individuals eligible for the study and compiled a diverse sample group of identity characteristics, gender, location, administrative unit,
and institutional type. I emailed these individuals to schedule all three interviews. Data will be destroyed three years after the completion of the study, including transcripts, field notes, and other related documents to ensure the security of the data.

**Interview Format**

Each interview focused on a theme or stage of the participant’s life. Each of the three interviews was scheduled to last 60-90 minutes (Atkinson, 1998), however ranged from 50-90 minutes in implementation. Topics related to environment, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, culture, and professional experiences are several in which data was collected in the form of life stories from participants. Interviews took place predominantly in-person given the geographic location of the participants, except for Justine, whom I met with in-person and online synchronous environments.

As for the format of the interview, I implemented a semi-structured interview approach (Kvale, 2007). Semi-structured interview protocols consist of an outline of topics to be discussed with related questions (Kvale, 2007) designed with the goal of eliciting a detailed understanding of the study’s research questions. Evaluation of questions along two dimensions was necessary to ensure they meet the flexibility and openness of the interview environment. Kvale (2007) suggests evaluation of semi-structured interview questions thematically and dynamically, or based on the likelihood of enhancing knowledge production and interpersonal interaction respectively.

Data collection consisted of one online pre-screening survey and three interview protocols (Appendix E-G). Each interview consisted of 10-19 questions; many questions had prompts and follow-up questions to elicit deeper storytelling and exploration of themes. The
researcher remained responsive to the needs of the participant and the direction of their storytelling, as well as flexible in the path our interview process will follow, asking for elaboration from the participant to extract rich detail and meaning-making. I obtained informed consent for participation before the first interview began, provided a review of the study, details of the interview process, and I reiterated the voluntary nature of participant involvement, “which allows them to withdraw from it at any time” (James & Busher, 2012, p. 184). Additionally, I acquired permission to record a digital audio or video file of the interview session. I audio recorded the interview using a mobile recording device for face-to-face interviews, as well as for online interviews, in which Justine was the only participant in which online interviews were completed. I then transferred the file to my password-protected laptop soon after the interview was complete. If a participant did not wish to have the interview recorded, the researcher was prepared to take notes by hand during the interview.

The three interviews focused on topics related to the participant’s personal and professional life. After the third interview, participants received transcripts of the interview sessions via email. They were asked to review the transcript for accuracy and representation. They had the opportunity to remove any parts of their story they did not wish to be included in the final published version of the dissertation. They were also asked for consent to publish the final version of their life story.

**Initial interview.** The first interview (Appendix E) encouraged the participant to engage in their personal and professional story as it is experienced today. The first interview will examine the participant’s life today, including their understanding and experience of the mid-level administrator role, and their perception of ideological messages.
Second interview. The second interview (Appendix F) continued to engage participants in their contemporary experiences and insights, as well as the participant’s experiences growing up. Questions explored interactions with their environment, their experiences as LGBTQ and POCI, and their experiences growing up. This interview began with present-day experiences, then focused on childhood, adolescence and early adulthood experiences.

Final interview. The final interview (Appendix G) included questions about their lived experiences of resilience, personal and professional insights, as well as vision for the future. This interview also engaged the participant in a discussion about overall feelings related to participation in this study. The researcher provided an opportunity for the participant to offer any additional insights to conclude the interview process. Soon after the completion of this interview, the researcher emailed each participant the transcripts of the interviews. Review of the transcripts provided an opportunity for each participant to clarify meaning, offer revisions, and delete any part of the narrative.

Analysis

The interview and post-interview analysis process was constant and ongoing throughout the study. The post-interview process was driven by the overall research goal. This process included transcription and interpretation of the life story interview recordings, as guided by the interactions during, after and between interview sessions with participants as partners in meaning-making and interpretation. It was concluded by a careful review and revision of the life stories by the participants to which they belong.
Transcription

Transcription followed Atkinson’s (1998) recommendations for life story interviews. He recommends summarizing each interview recording section with highlights and create a cover sheet for each interview transcript with pertinent participant information. He further offers guidance for the transcription process to include removing my interview questions and comments, only typing their words in sentence and paragraph form, moving toward the goal of a flowing narrative as the end product. Pseudonyms were recorded at the beginning of each interview and corresponding audio or video recording, replacing identifiable information included in the transcript to protect the data’s confidentiality and integrity.

After transcribing each interview, the researcher read through the transcript while listening to the entire interview recording again. The goal of this phase is “getting the meaning of what was said originally” (p. 57) ...and identify any language, themes, and form of the story being told. The researcher then listened to each of the three interview recordings while reading the transcripts to gain a coherent sense of their life story across the three interview sessions. After completion of the third interview transcription for each participant, participants were offered an opportunity to review the transcripts for accuracy and respond to or discuss each transcript as well.

Interpretation

Data analysis followed the interpretation guidelines set forth by Atkinson (1998) and the use of thematic analysis provided an additional lens, “Essentially, two aspects of interpretation are to validate the story itself and to explain the meaning of the story” (p. 58). He elaborates that interpretation involves several factors: (a) quality of relationship and interactions between
researcher and storyteller, (b) theoretical perspective of researcher, and (c) prior researcher experiences (p. 58).

The voice of the researcher came through in a discussion about the life stories and their emerging themes in the chapter following the life stories, as well as pertinent commentary before the start of a story. Commentary includes social and historical context, or even information about the interview process itself that sets the tone for the story or provides necessary background information not conveyed by the storyteller. The themes and interpretations use the participants’ words in order to reduce the incidence of bias of the researcher. Member checking also increased the trustworthiness of the study.

Regarding the application of theoretical understandings to the analysis process of life story interviews, such as feminist standpoint theory, Atkinson (1998) offered this advice, “Applying any theory to a life story would also be a matter of seeing if there is a theoretical perspective out there that addresses the discovered meaning of the story as a whole” (p. 66). The choice to apply this theory, as well as Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory, aligned with an understanding of the individual’s whole self as one that is influenced by complex interactions with their environment across the lifespan.

**Human Subject Approval – Institutional Review Board (IRB)**

Several measures to protect the participants in this study from harm were implemented. Confidentiality of pre-screening data and interview transcripts were ensured through password-protected data files and approved online storage programs, such as Qualtrics, for pre-screening survey data. Informed consent was obtained from participants for participation in the study and audio recording of the interviews (Appendix B). The participants’ names, and identifying
personal and institutional information, were protected through the use of personal and institutional pseudonyms, and replacing identifiable program and department names. I received approval from the St. Cloud State IRB to conduct the study in December of 2017 (Appendix H).

**Member Checking**

Member checking is the process by which the researcher presents the preliminary findings to members of the population being studied in order to elicit feedback about the data's authenticity and accuracy of any inferences made. Additional strategies included asking questions for clarification, inquiring about meaning-making, and asking participants for elaboration. Atkinson (1998) recommends that the storyteller, or interviewee, should have opportunities to review the transcripts of their story throughout the process, having complete authority regarding what is ultimately shared. Additionally, the researcher kept an audit trail, or detailed records of the research process, including a reflexive journal to track the interactions and my reactions as the researcher. These steps helped me to track and document the research process in order to serve as a check on the amount of researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is important to note that the revised transcript becomes the primary source for use in the analysis process.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations include the decisions made by the researcher in the design and implementation of this study in order to narrow the scope or focus (Wolcott, 2009). The original intention of using video conferencing software to conduct interviews was a financial decision and may have excluded administrators with lower comfort levels using technology, or even those who did not want their identity to be known to others. Recruitment through professional
associations and social media networks reached individuals involved external to their institution, potentially missing those interacting predominantly with the physical environment of their respective institution. Other delimitations included demographic and professional criteria for participation, including race and sexual orientation identities. Additionally, focusing on mid-level managers who fulfill both a supervisor and supervises role excludes one-person departments and offices. The choice to require a reporting line to the CSAO also has implications for those in student service capacities whose unit reports elsewhere.

Summary

This chapter included an overview of the design and research study methods. An overview of qualitative inquiry and its suitability for this study, data collection and analysis procedures, and methods for increasing validity of the findings were also discussed. Chapters one to three provided an overview of the purpose and significance of the study, a review of literature, and the research design. The study aimed to elevate the lived experiences of QTIPPOC mid-level Student Affairs administrators, capturing and sharing their stories with integrity and respect.

Chapter four will include the life stories. Chapter five will include a discussion of the results, implications for research, theory, and practice in relationship to the literature and research questions. Additionally, recommendations are provided for practice in higher education settings.
Chapter Four: Life Stories

Justine

“The process of empowerment cannot be simplistically defined in accordance with our own particular class interests. We must learn to lift as we climb.”

Angela Davis

I’m Justine. I’m the assistant director for Student Multicultural Services at Jesuit University, a private Jesuit institution in the Midwest. I have worked in Student Affairs for seven years since I completed my Master’s degree. I’m a queer woman of color, a queer black woman, and I’m currently on a journey to re-integrate my faith identity and locate a ‘church home’ that is queer- and Black-affirming.

I’m one of those folks who have had tremendous mentoring from women of color, from queer women of color. They are the ones who have guided me through this whole process, from getting the courage to apply to a Master’s program, to moving across the country, to applying to a doctorate program. I am a firm believer in ‘lifting as you climb’, because I have been the recipient of that gift, so I view this as my duty to do the same for other folks. I’m proud in my queerness, I’m proud in my identity as a woman of color, as a black women, so I’m committed to making sure I leave those doors open for others.

My passion is for working with any students from vulnerable populations, but I’m particularly passionate about women of color and queer folks of color. When I saw this opportunity come out to share my story, I saw it as an opportunity to pay it forward. Also, I’m a doctorate student trying to figure out what kind of research I want to do and as a student, I really want to learn as well. They go hand-in-hand, so that’s what brought me to this process.
I was raised in the black church. The funny story my parents tell me is when they decided to raise us in a predominantly white town, they made a decision to raise us in a black church. This was when we moved away from my mom's side of the family to a little suburban town. They both grew up in a black church and that was the top priority for them. Though I was in a predominately white town, my black church became the home away from home where I saw people who looked like me be successful, where I was encouraged to be a leader, and not just settle for bare minimum, but to go over and beyond; that's where I was challenged. I really latched on to the values that were being taught to me. I talk about that because this is where my leadership skills come from; from the values I got growing up in a church.

Within that faith socialization, I never really had a space to think about my sexual orientation or my queer identity. I didn't have the language and though I was in a black church, which is great, I was still in a black church that was homophobic. I internalized some of that homophobia to the point that when my mom was really encouraging me to attend an all-women’s college; I was like, “No! Why would I want to be at an all women’s college?!” We knew someone from our church who worked there, so my mom said, “No, I really think you need to consider this. It will be great.” I ended up loving the school. I remember having to defend myself by saying, “No, I’m not queer, but I love Audre Lorde College.” Then, in my sophomore year I fell in love with someone. I bring that up because being in a predominantly white town that was a hetero Christian-based community, it wasn't until I went to college that I was able to really explore my identities.

The only person I actually was scared to tell about my queer identity was my best friend from church, because I was afraid she would be the one friend who pushed me away. So, instead
of telling her, I pushed her away, and she would call me like “Hey, what happened? What’s wrong? We used to be so close. Did I do something wrong? I apologize.” I just kept ignoring her because I didn't want to hear her say, “You're wrong; You can't be gay. You can’t be queer.”

She was the only person that I was afraid of being condemned for my identity and then finally I built up the courage to tell her. Then, to hear her story, it saddened me. It made me realize the types of communities that you're part of…if you're in affirming spaces, your transition perhaps could be easier and she never got that opportunity and when she did try to, she was really shut down by family and by church friends. She just decided to leave it alone and so I always think about that. It wasn't until I went to my first job that I really unpacked this memory. I realized, “Oh my God!” I think had I been in a more open environment, perhaps I would have explored my queerness more as a child.

I think about how many folks within the LGBTQIA community don't get the opportunity to explore and come in to who we are, and how much we suppress or internalize, and how that shows up in other ways in our life. It also makes me grateful for how things worked out for me. My father is also queer-identified, he’s gay, and we came out together in my sophomore year of college - not by choice; we were kind of forced into it. It’s just interesting that I also have a parent who shares the same identity as me; not everybody has that narrative either. It's very interesting to think about those moments growing up that define who I am. I think that feeds into the community and I think people who have been supportive or played an active role in helping me be successful, despite the dominant narratives that are out there.

In my undergraduate experience, I went to Audre Lorde College, an all-women’s institution. The funny thing about it is I fought so hard not to go there because I believed, “I'm
not gay.” That was my first thought, right? Why would I go to an all women’s institution? My mom was really pushing it on me. I did an overnight visit there and I fell in love with the college (laughing)… and through that process, I literally came into my queerness (laughing). It was during my sophomore year, the sophomore slump, where I was really struggling academically, but thriving leadership-wise, that I found my community, and I fell in love with my first love, my first girlfriend. When I was going through that entire process, I had one of the best mentors, Sherri; I call her my “life mentor.” The cool part is that at the end of the story, I came to work for her here at Jesuit University. That’s how I got to the Midwest. She supported me through my coming out process. She cared enough about me when my grades were dipping to ask the question, “What's going on?” She said, “I know who you are at your core. I want you to be successful. How can I help you?” That's when I was able to really open up and say, “Look, I love this person and I am deathly afraid to talk to my family about it. I also don’t want to let them down given the fact that I don't want to be an engineer and I'm failing classes that I'm just not willing to fight for.”

Sherri really coached me through what it means to talk with your parents and about coming into your own identity…which is what we all do in this work, right? She really supported me in that process and communicated, “I need you to take care of yourself and I also need you to go to therapy.” I was resistant, saying, “No, no, no… I don't need it. I'm fine.” Sherri’s response was, “If you want this job, you will.” I said, “Dang it; okay.” It was the best mandate or decision ever and I kept going to therapy and using that resource. I didn't realize that I was suppressing and holding so much, especially so much fear. Therapy really helped me say what I needed to say, and practice it, and it gave me some courage in talking to my family about who I
was on the college campus versus who I was when I was coming home. It was a difficult period of time, but I had the support of the community, of my chosen family, so I was fine. I kind of separated myself for a period of time from family, too, because I knew I had that support.

Sherri helped me with my coming out process and then I asked her a question… and that's when the doors, light bulbs, everything, went off. I said, “I realize that I don't want to be a math major; I'm good at math, but I hate this. I really just want to be a leader twenty-four-seven. I want to continue being the president of Collective for Black Women and I want to be a resident assistant.” So, I asked her, “How did you get your job?” Sherri said, “I thought you’d never ask.” She basically told me I could have any major and it was more so about my Master’s degree. At that point I never considered going back to school for a Master’s degree. When she told me I needed to get a Master’s degree to do this work, I thought, “That sounds fun, because I actually like doing this stuff.” I changed my major to early childhood development and immediately I was getting A's, I was thriving, I loved group projects, I loved presentations, and sometimes liked to write, but not really (laughing). I finally had found my niche and my efficacy just skyrocketed and everything aligned.

The next step of applying to graduate programs was scary. Sherri had left Jesuit University right before my senior year, so we were all sad, but we had good networks at that point. I had someone who really helped me with my personal statement and Sherri still wrote the letter of recommendation for me. I went to University of the Northwest and I still remember to this day, the energy and the excitement of getting that big letter in the mail about my acceptance, because nowadays they just text students that they got in, which is interesting. So, going to your mail and opening something was awesome. That's how I got into higher education.
After I had graduated from the Master’s program, I went to California University and worked in Residence Life for a bit. Then, I was kind of done with Residence Life in the best way possible. There was a position for a Multicultural Development coordinator that emphasized women of color programs and I thought, “Hell yeah!” So I came here to Jesuit University and it was a dream job.

The work was, “Women of color”…boom; it's an intersectional space. I was charged to come in and add more depth to the program’s student engagement, create more room for students to explore their identities, and that's my life story. My job was to come in here and get our students to think deeply about all aspects of themselves. I created educational workshops around intersecting identities, with queerness, being a woman of color, talking about class, talking about resistance, and talking about health and wellness. We were doing a lot of workshops and turning this program into an intergenerational space, where we weren't just working with undergrads, we were also bringing in grad students, staff, and faculty. I also learned, “Wow, there's a network that we can create here with faculty and staff that never existed before.”

There’s multiple layers to how this department works and I would say this department was and is an intersectional space, hands down. That's the vision that Sherri had for this space when I first got here. There's a Men of Color Program, there is the Q+ Program, we have our DREAMS Initiative, our high school outreach program, or ACCESS Initiative, talking about access into higher education, and many other miscellaneous things as well…we stay busy over here.

I was in the coordinator role about three years and it was rewarding, but I also started to get to a point of, “Yo, as someone who is passionate about this work, I'm burning out and I'm
concerned about my finances.” That's the stress that was coming upon me. I got to a place of asking myself, “How do I advocate for myself?” I started looking for other opportunities, but also it's not often that you find cultural spaces that really understand intersectionality and prioritize it. So, there was this fear of, “If I leave, will I find something else that compares to this?” I went out and interviewed some places and then Jesuit University leadership said, “We want you to stay.”

I continue to be here and I luckily got a chance to move up in this department and become an assistant director. It just so happened that Sherri had left and the director position was open, so the assistant director then moved into the director role. I was able to come to this space and my other counterpart went on to another institution as an assistant director. Our whole department went through a huge shift.

Now, I assist in the visioning for our department, which is exciting and fun. Now, my programming piece focuses on first-generation college students and students of color. The new challenge has been, “Let's focus on the marginal within the marginalized.” We have all these spaces, but there are narratives that are not coming to the forefront of our programming and I'm concerned about that. We have our Q+ Program that is amazing, but we know there's a lot more LGBTQIA-identified students across campus in these respective programs, but we are not making it a priority to say that this is a queer affirming space. So, what types of trainings and workshops can we give our students so that they can think more about their exploration? We've been prioritizing that more as well and I think by the nature of my own queerness, I bring that experience to my role in this work. My counterpart, the person who was in this role previous to me, I love him to death, but he doesn't have the queer experience.
I have been a professional struggling to figure out this idea of separating your work from personal life. Though I'm all about practicing self-care, a lot of my friends outside of work are friends from work. Another thing that I've been tracking only because of my ex and current roommate is that I tend to just zone out at home, shut everything down. I’ll be watching T.V. and that becomes an escape for me, like Netflix binging and stuff like that, though I love it. It becomes something else if I’m just so tired from the time I get home and that's it. The challenge has been finding other things that I’m doing in my life aside from that. I also love cooking, making new recipes, and things like that.

So, those are the things that are on my mind today, of wanting to get to this next place of stability or… I hate to say it, it’s like that ‘American dream’ of working, then finding love, then starting a family, you know? So what does that mean to me? It feels weird to say ‘American Dream’, because what is the ‘American Dream’? I find myself thinking of those things and also very happy to be in a city that's diverse and still working on expanding my community beyond the folks that I'm close with at work.

My life today is also about my spiritual development and continuing to visit churches, like tonight I'm going to bible study, which I've been looking forward to. I want to see what that's like. It's a women's group and I'm nervous. I'm experiencing anxiety about that because I'm a woman of color and I'm queer and so in the past I've always had this anxiety, especially growing up, how the church played a role in my mom’s decision-making when my parents divorced. It really left a bad taste in my mouth due to how they pressured her and made her feel like she was doing something wrong when my father was coming out and coming into his identity. It wasn't her fault. They were trying to get her to stay with him. It really made me question organized
religion and it’s taken me a long time to get comfortable with being mindful in church settings or I’m interrogating these religious spaces, because I don't want to find myself in a place that's going to have me internalizing homophobia or making me feel like I can't be my full self.

The women’s bible group is a part of the church that I’ve been visiting for a bit and they are really big on social justice and race reconciliation, which I've never seen a church really make a top tier priority; it’s one of their pillars, it’s all over their website. They are queer-affirming, and though it’s a multi-ethnic church, and usually multi-ethnic churches are predominantly white, so it’s still been interesting navigating that part. They have a women's group and I've been experiencing anxiety as a queer woman of color, and getting comfortable in their church setting, in the main service.

Someone gave me advice about going to a small group, because they have different themes and you’ll be in a smaller space, so you might be able to build some more relationships with folks. You’ll have some key people to talk to and share more about who you are, rather than coming to church and not knowing everyone. There is a little bit of anxiety in terms of being in a new space. I don't know what I'm going to get from tonight. We’ll see what happens, but at this point what do I have to lose? I can say “no” at any point and what I do like about this church is there hasn’t been this message of “we need you to be here” like give your time all the time. Instead, they’re like, “we’re going to do this work with or without you.” There’s no pressure and I appreciate that. I’m intrigued.

Messages about professional expectations originate from wherever you come from in life, from home, from family relationships that you've been in, whether or not you've been affirmed or validated first, but if you don't know what that feels like you have a completely different
experience that you have been affirmed by. For example, I felt like I had a community to thrive in, and even though at home it was really hard to come out and be my full self, I knew that when I came back to school everything would be fine. I would be accepted for who I am, I was thriving, but not everybody has that narrative, so that trickles into what you bring into the workplace. If you work in a place that does not validate or affirm or take time to stop and get to know individuals in the workplace for who they are, you miss opportunities to learn from one another, to challenge one another, to feel comfortable advocating for yourself, because if you don't know who you're dealing with or working with, again there's a level of vulnerability that you have to decide if you can do it or not.

The messages I receive from Student Affairs are…if you want to be student-centered, how many times are you meeting with students? To backtrack, I also view Student Affairs as a place where like all those overachiever leaders in college go, who are proud of what they did, not all of them, but a good number of them were functioning at a high level, so they just pushed themselves already. Then, the culture, it comes out, and in terms of what's the next best, like how are you challenging yourself, how are you pushing yourself? Excellence is the word that comes to mind. How are you achieving excellence in your work? Then, even with this, I call it the academic side of the house versus Student Affairs- there's always that push and pull. So then there's an added layer of pressure of, “I have to make my work count because it might not be as good as a faculty who's in the classroom teaching,” which I think is completely false. I think both are needed equally.

Those are the narratives that we hear…Are you collaborating with faculty? Are you teaching? Those are the new buzzwords right now. It’s not enough just to program, but have you
taught a class yet? Are you considering a doc program?...It just never stops - you’re in this ‘hamster wheel’. So, I think that's the message we get in Student Affairs.

Also, there is this ‘martyr mentality’ of having to be the best and being the best advocate and ‘going all in,’ even if you lose your job. That’s a hard thing to carry, too, and I think that gets even more exacerbated in marginalized communities within Student Affairs staffing, because then we've been socialized in all these other areas of trying to compensate for x, y, and z because of how we're perceived, even though we're already great as is. There is this need to stand out, to get noticed, to set myself up for the next step.

As soon as you get in, people are like, “So what do you want to be?” It's so funny because now when I get that question, I say, “You know, I'm focusing on being present,” because, actually in reality I've seen some things in my time here at Jesuit University and I really have changed. I used to say I want to be a VP or a dean of students and I'm seeing what these jobs really entail and I'm nowhere near excited about taking on those roles if it means that I have to be tied down in other ways. It just might mean that it's just not my time yet. So when folks ask me that I'm literally responding, “I just want to stay present.”

There are also challenges to this mid-level work as a queer woman of color working at a predominantly white institution (PWI). I am in an office where I work with predominantly folks of color, predominant marginalized communities. The other piece too, is tokenizing; being tokenized, tokenized as the queer person, as the person of color, and sometimes those come together. They just need someone to be in this space, to be able to say we have this particular identity.
There is this dual labor of work. For example, dealing with white guilt is so pervasive and frustrating, but we’re in positions that require us to really subject ourselves to that, with colleagues, not even just with the students. I’m willing to sit with students and work through it. Not only do I have to work with my students and console them, but now my staff and staff across the university, are saying, “I have people of color friends” or “I have queer friends and I don’t want you to think I’m this or that.” I don’t have the time to deal with them, as well as our students’ needs, so that’s been an interesting task.

That is what we have also been trying to work out. Everyone runs to us, from the faculty track, folks within student development, also there is our academic counterpart to the division, the academic house of Student Affairs, so they come to us. We had to get to a place of saying, “Wait, we need to decide who we are, who we are serving. Our title says Student Multicultural Services. We need to serve students right now. We need to cut down on workshops we are doing for staff and faculty. The university needs to give us more resources to support those things.” We are in the middle of figuring this out right now. In a predominantly white space, there is this assumption of, “We have the one office, so what do you mean you can’t handle this right now?” Those are some of the challenges or experiences that come with being at a PWI, and I would say a predominantly hetero institution as well.

One last challenge recently was when same-sex marriage passed. That meant folks can get married here, because we are a religious institution. The institution moved so quickly to say, “We are only marrying folks that are Catholic and this and that,” instead of saying, “We won’t marry same-sex couples.” They made a rule that pretty much excludes LGBTQIA folks from getting married here without saying that. Also, when the Pope basically said trans folks are
confused about their identities, or something along those lines, that really hurt a lot of our students. Those are moments when I’m like, “Damn, this is the type of the institution that I work for!” We have queer students who are Catholic, so they discover this really hard tension… I don’t know what to call it, a friction or a collusion… something that just doesn’t work when you’ve got two identities that are important to you, but they are not fitting. I’m sure that is a narrative for a lot of folks, including myself and my faith around my queerness.

We’re at a Jesuit institution that says, “Sure we'll give you the Q+ Programs, but we're not going to prioritize LGBTQIA students.” Actually, I would say that it's an invisible community, because in assessments and climate surveys, they don't even ask if there are LGBTQIA-identified folks. I bet you would find a lot more concern if you asked folks, “What are your experiences?” in a climate survey. So, there's an erasure, almost. That is what we're trying to figure out; how to strategically work on LGBTQIA-inclusion and it's hard because we’re a Jesuit school. We are also blessed because they do give us room, more so than other Jesuit schools, to be about this LGBTQIA work.

It's been interesting as a queer person navigating an institution that doesn’t acknowledge or want to prioritize this specific population. We are often told, “Our priorities are retention and access for students of color.” With that in mind, we're trying to be smart about how we do our work. The more we infuse our Q+ Program into these other programs, we now can assess their experiences, and we now can say, “Look, we have poor folks of color; So, they are part of your retention priorities.” We're trying to get strategic with our work. It's baby steps, but I see it as something that we can handle.
Being at a PWI, sometimes I just experience frustration. Because I'm in a space where a lot of us share a similar identity, we can really talk to each other, be pissed together, and strategize together. Let's get smarter then, if they're telling us that this is not a priority. Also, we're role models for our students and it also occurs to us to talk to our students. That's the resiliency part, of being frustrated, identifying your allies who can support you and help you navigate. I do feel that our director has been really key. Not only him, but also our past director who laid the foundation of what is not going to happen here. And that's been helpful because we are respected across campus.

I am the Assistant Director of Student Multicultural Services (SMS). In my role now in this mid-level place, if you will, I'm at the table a little bit more and can make suggestions that actually make impact. There is a different section of the table that I’m sitting at. I think a lot of us are at the table, but I’m at a different section, where I could say a little bit more and something might happen because I said something. Whereas, when I was a coordinator, that wasn’t working. I'm able to prioritize with the coordinators to see how we can infuse these things more strategically and bolster our Q+ Programs, while also deepening our other mentorship programs.

In terms of reporting structure, all of us engage in one-on-ones; I have a weekly one-on-one with my supervisors, I do one-on-ones with my supervisees, they do weekly one-on-ones with their graduate assistants, as well as their student leaders. Everyone has a group of students; even Joe supervises two social justice peer educators.

What’s unique about our space, too, is we train our students to be the faces of these programs. So it’s not about how many times we are presenting in front of our students and lecturing them, it’s about giving our SMS Leaders the tools to facilitate difficult conversations,
to facilitate workshops that are engaging, for them to get the experience of organizing yourself amongst a group of individuals so they take on committee work, they chair committees. We provide that supervisory support; we’re the money holders if you will, to make sure our budgets stay together.

We have a lot of students that we work with, so luckily, and this is not every multicultural space, we have 37 SMS Leaders that work with the different program. I have 18 students that report to me for our First-Gen Initiative, and then the other Multicultural Development coordinator has 2 Q+ Program Leaders and 8 Men of Color Mentorship Program Mentors, and then the Women’s Empowerment Program, which I feel is the biggest portfolios, has 4 scholars, but then also runs the committee for the Affinity Group for White-Identified Students, which consists of grads and staff who are running these spaces, so she has to train them. Then on top of that, there is running ACCESS Initiative, which has 14 volunteers who aren’t getting compensated by their SMS Leaders. So there are a lot of folks involved with our work.

The work is cut out for us. The way I explain the director’s role is Angel is the outward face of the department, working with the VP and the dean of students for policy, for strategy when students experience bias in the classroom and outside of the classroom, to student demonstrations, which right now, for the past two or three years have been around racial climate. The racial climate has been really high. Our department has been tapped a lot and because our students are demanding support, as they should. So that’s kind of his role. And my role is more so internally; the visioning for our SMS Leaders, the training, the workshops, the events that we are doing, and making sure those things stay together and run smoothly.
I’ve taken on this additional role right now, with the burnout I experienced; I am really concerned with the workload of our coordinators, because I was once a coordinator. So my conversations center around, “We need to let go of some stuff.” We have the hard conversations. We have really important programs, but maybe we cut down the number of times we do things, or we ‘sunset’ some projects that can be merged into one, or things like that. Literally, I am finding my rhythm with what advocacy looks like. I am taking it very seriously and still trying to figure out the dos and don’ts; where I can push and where I need to be more of an observer. I’m a strategizer, so I will be patient and take my time and learn who will work with me or work against me, so that I don’t waste time. I am also learning that you have to use your voice.

My life today is work. I really love what I do. I do work where I’m emotionally invested; however, I'm learning how to balance that emotional investment, because what I'm learning is schools are not loyal to their employees and I'm learning that the bigger institution is looking out for itself, not for it’s individual employees. I really learned that this year in this position. I think it's because of the burnout I experienced and it really did change how I negotiate taking care of myself, prioritizing taking care of my self, and setting that expectation for the people I supervise, working with them in doing that and sharing with them what’s difficult for me and what works, and what doesn’t work.

In my first year here, I may have struggled really addressing issues here at Jesuit. So, in my first year I wouldn't have known how to navigate. I think I would just be really upset, vent, and then let it go. So over time I've become more vocal and comfortable. I think also part of that also has to do with my position change, so I can speak up more now because I'm at a different section of the table.
Intersectionality is so important to me. From religion, to financial hardships, successes, and then with race and ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation…all of those things have been tied in for me in different ways. This is the first time in my life where I work in a predominantly queer space; but that's not the narrative everywhere for multicultural spaces. It's awesome, because I feel affirmed where I work. We also have a director, and our past director as well, and we were a predominantly queer space even when Sherri was here. The other coordinator with me as a coordinator was also queer-identified, so that's just been the kind of energy in the space, but that's because we've had directors who are like, “Yes, your sexual orientation and your gender expression should not be a limitation; it should be viewed as a strength.” We've been affirmed in that way, so that's just kind of how I'm wired at this point.

I don't even know what it's like to be in a space that wouldn't…well, I can imagine because I've experienced oppression in my queerness, absolutely; but I’ve been allowed this freedom that I know from colleagues and friends that they don't have or don't feel.

Regarding the opportunities of being in a mid-level role, I think it’s about this different section of the table that I sit at now. We are part of the Division of Student Affairs and a sub-unit called Department of Student Leadership. Our sub-unit is highly collaborative, and it includes Student Activities, Greek Affairs, Student Leadership, Student Conduct, Off-campus Living, and a couple of other departments. The point is we are really collaborative, we are vocal, and we talk about what’s working for us and what’s not working. Everyone is invited to that table. Then I talk about sections of the table, because there are certain meetings and places you are invited to and others that you are not. This university is hierarchical. If you are not an assistant director, you will not be asked to those places where those decisions are made.
I’m still not at every table, but I am in closer proximity, meaning I even have the ear of my director. For example, if my director is going to a meeting, I can give him talking points because we need to ‘sprinkle some of this on there’ or locating funding. I say, “I know you’re having a meeting with our dean and our VP. I know that we are trying to focus on trans-inclusion, so how can we incorporate some funding into this and that?” That’s my mindset in this role.

I am kind of in between these two worlds. I’m also fresh off of being a coordinator, so my rapport with coordinators allows me in some ways to be that ‘coordinator friend,’ so I can hear folks out. I can be honest with people and let them know when I can’t say, when I can’t really answer that piece, but regarding their concern, I explain how I can bring it up. There is this weird world where I live in-between, where I can give talking points to the director for his meetings, and then be a tool for coordinators who are trying to get their concerns across. It’s not just coordinators in this office, but in our sub-unit as well.

The ‘lifting as you climb’ approach, not just for students, but for the staff, has been amazing. Efficacy is everything. If you don’t believe in your abilities, that can stop you from applying to that job, from applying to that Ph.D. program. I’m not a shy person in sharing even my struggles with applying to do this doctorate program. I’m able to be honest and not just talk about the excellence, but also the stuff that happens below, the struggles, the sadness, and the grit. That is beneficial to folks coming up the ranks, or up the ladder; that’s a benefit.

The other benefit that I experience is I have the coolest community to be a part of, to be a queer person of color, whoo! There is just no better intersectionality. I’m sorry; I’m not trying to put down any other intersecting groups. I experience the truest forms of pride, and I am in this
Midwest city, where there are just so many beautiful folks that are living, accepting, supportive, and truly about being your true self. I came from the California where queer life was huge, especially for queer women of color, so there is also this level of confidence. I have experienced it; I have been mentored by it. I can’t be in a city where I’m not going to find community. That’s my benefit, the network that I get to have.

Regarding the job search process, I also make it my job as a supervisor when we're looking at candidates, I'm charging my coordinators to think about those marginalized identities and what does it mean to have a qualified queer person interviewing for positions and you have another qualified person. I ask the question, “Why not bring on your queer person who's most qualified? Why not?”

There is a responsibility for supervisors who are supporting queer mid-level staff to look at hiring practices and advocating for the best interests of LGBTQIA-identified folks,’ especially being at a religiously affiliated institution. It's hard sometimes for me to trust that people really have LGBTQIA-identified folks’ best interests in mind, or because of their heterosexual identity, their lack of understanding…I hate to say ignorance, but just not even knowing why it would be important. Supervisors need to be an active ally and advocate on behalf of both, even when they're not with you, and that requires a lot of self-work and seeking out training opportunities, and not only just going to NASPA and the ACPA, but going to Creating Change, or going to a conference that will help you build those skill sets. So that's important.

As a supervisor, I also promote a student-centered approach. As part of that strategy in our office, the coordinators and I are not the face of our program; we give the tools and the resources to our students so that they can be the face of our programs. We work with them on
developing agendas for their programs and picking their committee that they want to work with. We role model at our staff meetings how to create agendas and how to run meetings, and then they become chairs and committees with people in their organization and they make events happen. They create their agendas, they create timelines, and delegate tasks and roles; we role model that.

I always thought that a student-centered approach was something that everybody does. I’ve started to realize that that was just how I was mentored. Now, I just apply that and it’s a serious thing that never happened here at SMS. Sherri told me that’s why she brought me here. She knew I would bring that type of work in this office that we haven't had yet. Someone brought me in intentionally to bring us that skill, so I would bring that with me as well.

The challenges of a mid-level role are when people don’t value pieces of your identity. I would say even in my queerness, I still read ‘straight’ to folks, so I still experience the micro-aggressions from my hetero colleagues, where they express discomfort around queerness, and then I let them know, “I am too,” and then it’s awkward. I have to pick and choose my battles.

These are people who don’t understand why something would be so important. It’s hard too, even for the ones who do understand how important it is, and their hands are tied, or they are unable to see how their privilege prevents them from really selling why this needs to happen. This is why I’m someone who will give others talking points or ask them, “Can you invite me to that meeting?” I’m a sales person at heart; I can always sell something.

That’s the challenge; when people don’t find value, particularly senior-level administrators, and it really does start from the top. If they don’t find it valuable, then they won’t
fight for it the way that it needs to be fought for. They won’t pull together the data to tell the story the way it should be told. That’s the struggle.

Luckily, I have really close friends that I can talk to about those moments. They will stop me sometimes, because I will recall a story and not have any emotion, and my friends will have to interrupt me and say, “Wow, that was probably really difficult to deal with.” I have also been socialized to ignore or compartmentalize things, to not pick every battle.

For each position, as you move up the ladder, there is this expectation that you will be able to control your feelings or emotions. This idea that, “Yes, you’re representing these marginalized identities, but you can’t wear your heart on your sleeve. It can’t be all about the feelings.” That is a weird position; where you have to be more strategic about showing those sensitive points, because sometimes people use it to hurt you. That sounds really weird to say, but when we talk about survival with marginalized communities, it’s something I’m sure a lot of folks experience, of having to pick and choose, and be strategic, and to not want the stigma of being a ‘broken record.’ You are the one who is always talking about this, who needs this, so that’s hard; that’s a serious challenge. Even when I experience that from the colleagues I like.

For me, personal and professional support is almost the same. I think that there's a blurred line between my work life and my personal life. A lot of people I work with are my real friends in real life here as well. I am fortunate to work in a field where my personal values are infused into my professional values; they're not separate beliefs. That's why I feel like there is a lot of overlap.

Finding your community, finding my community, and valuing mentorship for myself, has been essential to thriving in personal and professional lived experiences. I need them in both
areas. I tend to gravitate towards QTPOC spaces, so I think it's important to name that, because I identify as a queer woman of color, so oftentimes I don't feel affinity within majority white queer spaces, or it takes me a while to warm up or buy-in to being marginalized within marginalized space; When I say that, I mean being the only person of color in a white queer space. I'm wary of those spaces and I don't like to put myself in that position. So for me, I thrive most in queer and trans people of color spaces.

When I was at University of the Northwest, which is supposed to be the place of love and a great place for LGBTQIA folks to thrive, I experienced isolation and sadness. I had a lot of white queer folks in my program, but I was maybe one of the few queer people of color, and all the bars and hangout spots were so white-dominated and also white cis-male dominated and so it took a while for me to kind of find my footing and so that's what I experienced. I remember calling my dad and saying, “I want to leave! I'm done with this place and I'm lonely. I'm tired of doing what my white queer friends or white friends want to do. I feel like if I bring up my ideas of things that I want to do, they don't receive it well, or they don't want to do that. So I'm tired of trying to be friends and give more than what they're giving to me.” I struggled until I found a partner and then we together and found spaces that worked for us, but it took me the first half of my grad experience to even find that stride.

Maybe that ties into resiliency, too, like the struggle and finding your community. It's something I didn't really go in depth about, how to find your community and sometimes it takes time and energy. I don't want to compromise what I need in my community spaces to feel whole, so I went a whole year struggling and finding that community to thrive in. I think that's important
there are a whole other level of resiliency strategies, like taking time, being patient, and finding your communities.

Regarding personal spaces where I feel supported, I have to give a shout out to a social space local to my city. Creative Black Joy is a predominant space for folks of color, specifically queer black folks, but also queer folks of color. As a career woman of color, it’s an intersectional party scene and it's definitely predominantly black, but it's the most intersectional space I've been in where I feel affirmed. I don't feel like I'm being assaulted by cis-men. I can go with my home girls, I can go with my gay boys, or I can go with whomever. I can bring everybody together with me and enter this space. It's a monthly party that happens, and they’re usually day parties and occasionally they’ll have a night party, but it's just one of the most affirming spaces I've ever been in. I’m so grateful for that and it just keeps me grounded to know that I can unplug from work and have a socializing space that’s not connected to work colleagues. Though, some of my colleagues and I are friends in real life and we do party, and then some of my colleagues just stay colleagues. I’m grateful to have that space in my life for the past year and a half. It brings me life, tremendous life.

Growing up, my support definitely came from my church, where they set the bar high for me and I really rose to the occasion. It wasn't related to my sexual identity development, but more so my leadership development. For middle school and before then, teachers weren’t interested in me at all. I was only doing good because my parents were like, “You better be doing good or else.” I didn't really have anyone really invested in me until I went to high school and started getting involved.
In high school, no one was encouraging me to go above and beyond. I was a likable student and it wasn't until my mom asked me, “What are you doing with your life? You’re not involved in anything and you need to do something.” I actually remember that conversation; I was so mad at her. I just wanted to be a student. Then, I realized, “Well, maybe I should get involved or something.” I discovered a real passion for leadership. I realized the more involved I am, the more teachers are giving me passes to be out of class and teachers are recommending me for cool opportunities I’ve never had a chance to do. I don't think they would think of me like that, but only because I was a leader and it probably was a counter-narrative to what they expected from black youth. So once I caught on to the benefits of holding leadership positions, my life was twenty times easier and it was kind of fun.

In church, our First Lady was really invested in my success, encouraging me to go to church conferences, sing, and direct the choir. She just had me doing a lot of things, taking me places, and telling me how important education was, in addition to my family members, who felt the same way. In high school, once teachers saw that I was really taking well to leadership stuff, they became more invested in me, too. I started to understand a little bit of what networking meant without having the vocabulary for that. Those were my support networks when I was in high school, moving forward.

When I went on to college, I was looking for those leadership opportunities the way that I had gotten them in church and the way I received benefits from a predominantly white high school and I fell in love. In hindsight, I wish we would have had a black student union in high school, because we never had that. I mean there was like 10 of us, but we never had that. So when I went to Audre Lorde College and there was a Collective for Black Women, I thought,
“Oh, my gosh.” That's where everything came together, from my church leadership experience to what I learned in high school.

Faith identity development has been a thing for me since before Sherri left. In fact one of our one-on-ones was around being free now to go back and start exploring, because as an undergrad I completely disconnected because of my queerness and I just didn't feel like I saw myself within the black church. So I have this resentment toward the black church and things like that.

I took her up on that challenge. She asked, “If you're in a new space and a new city, what does it mean for you to explore that; not committing to things, but exploring it?” I’ve been visiting churches and things like that. I’m trying to play with what it means to be my full self, but I don't quite have a full answer. I can't fully be like, “Yes this is who I am authentically.” I'm still trying to figure that out, my faith and queerness intersecting. It’s not that I don't feel like I can't be queer in those spaces. It's just if it's not queer affirming, I’m not with it.

Being raised in a Black church, it’s weird, it’s in me. I want to be in these spaces because that's how I was raised, but then I also refuse to be in spaces that aren’t going to affirm me. It's been hard trying to find a church that is black-centered, but also queer- and black-centered. I found a space for a moment and that was the thing that I needed, but then in terms of self-care, there were some other issues that came up, so I chose to leave that place at the time.

I would also say that it's been interesting in my spiritual life, because of my experience in the church when I came out, and what it did to my parents and things like that, I completely stepped away. When I came back here, I was encouraged by Sherri when I was expressing that there's a void and I need to fill it. I knew I needed to follow through, but I'm also nervous and I
don't want to be in spaces that aren't going to affirm me. She challenged me to explore that because I'm at a religiously affiliated institution where I'd probably be able to find other resources and support. There were some other African-American staff who were looking for church homes and so we kind of aligned, but I also shared my particular piece about a queer-black-affirming church, and they were like, “Yeah, us too. We want to look for something like that as well.” So it was cool to hear people who didn't share my identity say, “Yes, that's important for us too. Let's look together.”

There's a church called Trinity which though they won't say on their website that they are queer-affirming, their pastor is highly intersectional and has definitely supported same-sex marriages. He has been very vocal and it has taken a lot in terms of politics within the black church for him to even do that. He's been taking risks more and more. There was another church that I found that was queer-black affirming, but in terms of me finding a space where I can also be encouraged to live a balanced life, it became more about, “What are you bringing to this church?” and “What are you doing for this church?” Their expectation was, “We need you here all the time.” I was like, “Yo, I can't do that, and be in school, and work and also want to sleep and rest, and have part of my weekend.” So, I had to make a decision. I left that church and it's been an interesting journey. I do feel that my spirituality and faith have been a part of my grounding and it’s an ongoing process of trying to make meaning.

One big source of personal support is my family, hands down. I get to brainstorm with them. You know, I'm extremely close with both of my parents and I use them for support in different ways. I think that my father really has supported me. He's calm, cool, and collected, and we also share a queer identity. There is a particular connection my dad and me have that is very
different from my mom, and I'm also very close to her. With my dad, I can be so free and open with him and he's not judgmental. I could talk about the complexities of work and he's not going to like over-hype me and say, “What are you going to do? Are you going to shut it down? Are you going to do this, do that?” He really listens. He might offer real talk in terms of being smart about how I set myself up for success. He doesn’t just think in the moment, but he thinks futuristic-wise about what's the best decision for my career.

Then, I've got my mom who's like a cheerleader, who thinks I could do no wrong. She's the one who will hype me up like, “Girl! Get it. You can do no wrong.” Even if I am in the wrong she's like, “No, no you're not in the wrong.” So it is an interesting balance of support that I can get from both my parents and, and I really appreciate that. I can be vulnerable with them in different ways.

There are some people who are like, “I'm so NASPA,” “I’m on every NASPA committee,” and “I'm on this committee,” and things like that. National conferences and sometimes even regional conferences overwhelm me. I also don't want to get into the game of, “How many things are you chairing?” “How many committees are you on?” For some reason, I just never had this natural gravitation toward professional associations and conferences. I go to conferences for professional development and to network, but I really haven't taken it on in terms of professional advancement, more so as professional development, just to become better at presenting to peer colleagues and things like that, and getting feedback from peer colleagues, and reuniting with friends from grad school and folks that I know from the field. Though I am communal and I thrive in community, if it's too big, it's just overwhelming for me. I haven’t utilized national conferences and professional development conferences in terms of personal
support. The way I get support from professional conferences is through practicing my presentation facilitation skills or learning something legit from other neighbouring institutions.

Support from the institution looks like asking about LGBTQIA experiences when a climate survey goes out. We work at a school that won’t even put that identity group on a climate survey and find out, “Is this a safe place?” That has everything to do with the religious affiliation aspect. Although I must say I am working at a school, that out of all the Jesuit schools, this is probably one of the most liberal universities out of the Jesuit system. There are several other similarly affiliated religious institutions that tend to be on the cutting edge. Those tend to be the ones that are most liberal and queer-affirming enough. That's what the support looks like for me professionally. The way that it has changed over time as I've just become more vocal in really owning my needs, and not being apologetic for asking for things, or asking the right people who are at the table.

Another authentic space for me is this department. The cool thing about this space is we are familiar; it’s definitely a family space, where we are looking out for each other, and the ‘lifting as we climb’ mentality is intertwined through everything that we do. So here, I am unapologetically, fully Justine, the queer woman of color who is trying to find their way in their faith identity development. This has been the most inclusive space I've been in, or worked in, where people I work with, and work for, have been amazing. I can really practice what I preach, and preach what I practice; it’s been phenomenal.

I found out recently that I received the Employee Excellence Award. They ask you a series of questions and you get your photo taken, and then the announcement goes campus-wide. In my responses, I made it a point to name my identities. I forgot what the question was exactly,
but I just remember naming myself as a queer woman of color and for a moment I did experience that nervousness in disclosing all of my identities where anyone can see that.

Where some folks might be like, “Oh I didn't know that she was LGBTQIA-identified.” I had a moment where I thought, “Are they going to be upset that I'm really making this political because in all my answers I was talking about social justice and our responsibility as a community to advocate and to be present to make space.” I wondered if they would email me back and ask, “Could you lighten this up a bit?” It was interesting to experience that nervousness.

As we talk about resiliency, I think it's because of the community that I have in our division that I still decided to move forward. There's enough people who know my work ethic and who support my work. So, I used it as an opportunity for other staff if they want to feel more comfortable in their queerness, if they want to be out at a religiously affiliated institution. Perhaps it will be something good. I don't think anyone will ever directly tell me that something is wrong with that, but who knows? I would be interested to see if there's anything that comes from that.

I do want to believe that I’m in a community that will be supportive and not act ‘brand new’ after they see that. Once it was posted live, a link went out to everyone and an automatic pop-up appeared on everyone’s screen, so everyone has to see it as soon as they turned on their computer. I clicked on it to see my profile and everything was there. They used what I sent…awesome!

There’s a strong network here for women of color faculty and staff. A major source of support is being in spaces with people who look like me and share similar identities. There is a
group on campus called the Still I Rise Group that meets for lunch on Fridays. That's a big source of pride for me. This group is just staff and faculty who come together who are Black-identified. For some reason, there's this large black woman population here at Jesuit University, of which I'm not accustomed to either, but a lot of these women and others I have gotten to know through my role on campus and reaching out to them about being involved. Relationships formed amongst faculty and staff women of color and that was the catalyst for the Still I Rise Group to also branch out and do things for them especially during Black Lives Matter movements and things like that, and we are actively responding to this question of, “How are we feeding each other black joy?”

This lunch is so much fun. We’ll have a little question and talk about a lot of things. I’m my authentic self there. Sometimes my queerness becomes salient for me because I realize it's a predominantly hetero space, so there is negotiation sometimes about how queer I can be. Then, I push myself and tell myself to be my full self. So far, it's been great. So it's been a base of support when that was just a lot of negativity and political unrest and social unrest as a place to release rather than suppress. I value it because I used to work in an institution where that did not exist. So I am grateful for it.

I didn't mention this, but there is a Group for LGBT Friends as well, that tries to get together, although it’s not as consistent or as large. We also are at an institution where some folks are not comfortable being out and so we have to be mindful about that. Though there might be 10 or 12 of us, I know there are so many more queer folks here on campus. Campus leadership also won't really let us have an official affinity space for LGBTQIA staff and faculty.
To be fair, we have a staff council here that represents all the staff, and they haven't quite yet bought on to having affinity spaces, period.

If we can get them to endorse the affinity spaces for particular groups, folks of color, queer folks, and things like that, it would be pretty awesome to see that take off. So, those are my dreams. That's what support would look like for me: institutions acknowledging the presence of their LGBTQIA staff. But, I just don't have the energy or have the capacity to push for that right now as there are so many other pressing things happening in the office and in the world with our president and things like that. For example, we're focusing on undocumented students right now.

There are meaningful people who have shaped my professional experience. My life mentor, Sherri, although she was not LGBTQIA, she was an active ally. She wasn’t just saying, “Hey I'm here for you. I have a safe space sticker,” but she was essential in challenging policy, in creating safe space, in hiring LGBTQIA staff, and not having a problem with a department of majority LGBTQIA staff. That just doesn't happen too often. She's been in my life since my undergrad experience and was the first person that I came out to. I want to emphasize the importance of folks who are not within the LGBTQIA community, of their responsibility, because it is not often that we are in majority spaces where we are affirmed with our LGBTQIA identity. That's a challenge or a push for those not inside our community to really be aware of their hiring practices, the policies they support, and the policies they challenge.

I don't know what I would have done if it wasn’t for Sherri. Who knows, maybe I would still be at California University. I don't know how to explain it. She's my life mentor, so when that position came up, I trust her and we totally fall in the same… I don't want to say group-think, but our values align, so it made sense. While working for her, even as an undergrad, I
never felt that I had to compartmentalize my identities, whereas I've gotten really good at compartmentalizing my identities in these different spaces.

People assume that I'm straight in my cis-ness, but here, a lot of folks know that I'm queer. I bring my partner to work, so there's just a difference, I guess, in how you are affirmed from your upper level management, if you will. I never had to worry about that piece. Part of why I chose here is because I knew what I was going to get. I knew I was willing to work hard for and with Sherri in this role. Now, because of that experience, even just working with her for the two years as a full-timer, I have the confidence and the courage to work in any space.

When I am searching for my next opportunity, I don't think I'll be like, “Who do I know?” I think it's about, “You get what you get.” I'm interviewing them as much as they are interviewing me. That’s been a part of my practice even when I came out of grad school. I talk about my queerness in my interviews as a gauge to see if folks were going to be put off by that. Surprisingly, there were some schools that were nervous about what I was talking about regarding intersectionality. So I use that as an indicator to know whether this a place I want to be at, and just challenge myself to be my full self, you know? And if that's a problem, then that can’t be a place for me to thrive.

Another big lesson that I picked up in grad school, at University of the Northwest, was this lesson of self-preservation. When I was a grad student, I wanted to do everything, engage in every opportunity. I wanted to prove myself; I wanted to show that I was a great person and quickly found myself overwhelmed. At the time I wouldn't called it ‘burnout’, but I'm sure an acute version of ‘burnout’ was happening. I had a mentor at the time who was like, “Look, every opportunity is going to look like a golden apple and you can't handle every opportunity or you'll
be left with nothing.” So, self-preservation was something that came out of that experience; that I don't have to constantly overachieve to show my greatness. I still had to learn that a couple of times.

I think the biggest time where I've truly accepted that advice was when I burned out in my coordinator role. I think self-preservation is key. I think it's easy for folks with marginalized identities to… or it's been easy for myself to feel like I have to prove myself, that's the imposter syndrome that exists, trying to defeat that.

That's the competitiveness in me probably, and just my passion for making a difference and care for students, and really wanting to make an impact. I’ve had to learn how to tone that down and I can't do everything. I’ve had to learn how to pick maybe one to two things or opportunities for yourself and deepen those experiences, and not try to do everything. I can't present at every conference. Going to a conference once a year is very nice and not overwhelming. If I try to present at every conference everywhere, you know, go to this drive-in and that, then I'm going to burn out quickly, and I'm going to fall behind in work.

So, self-preservation is key. I learned that in grad school before I went to work, but I think that applies even in my personal life, too, like trying to be there for family and trying to have a personal life, and trying to manage relationships. How do you protect parts of yourself so that you're still whole when it's just you, by yourself?

My most supportive moment with a supervisor happened here when I was supervised by Sherri. It’s a funny story because I just had a moment for myself. One, my energy, my capacity, was so low, and there was a decision that had to be made. We were all asked to go to this team meeting, but we had a journal publication at the time and I somehow overbooked these meetings
where we were actually going to decide what would be published in the journal. So in my mind I was wondering, “Why do I need to be at this team meeting, when most of the team was already going?” I told Sherri, “I really want to go to this meeting.” Sherri replied, “You made a mistake, I get it, but I need you all here and we’re not going to reschedule this.”

I was so sad, so mad, and I was running on such short fumes. I started crying. I wasn’t being petty; I just hit a wall. She closed the office door and gave me some tissue. She said, “Let it out; whatever you need to do.” We just went into conversation. She asked me, “What’s really going on? There is more to this. What’s happening?” I felt supported because she was hearing me out still. She wasn’t telling me to get out of her office. She said, “You can come to me and you can challenge me, and I will give you my reasoning.” She took time to make it a learning moment, and she helped me to problem solve as well. She told me, “You’re running this journal. You make the final decision on what gets published or not. In the future, you have to make sure your calendars are up to date, and make sure you are organizing your time.” She really heard me out, and she still had to hold me accountable as the director, and get her point across too.

There was a little bit, as my friend would say, vulnerability hangover, like, “Dang, I just cried and I feel a little silly for doing that.” She’s not one to hold it over my head either. She said, “Guess what? We all have these moments. I’ve cried with my supervisor before. I get it, so it’s okay.” She also normalized it by saying, “It’s not like you’re in here crying everyday, so it’s not a problem.” I was also feeling guilty for even crying, showing emotion. I thought, “I’m supposed to be this strong black woman; I’m supposed to be this strong person who can handle things…and now it looks like I can’t.” She let me know that wasn’t what was going on. That was the moment where I felt most supported. She role modeled for me.
Because of that experience, I don’t have as much fear in intimate spaces with staff. If I’m sharing my tears, folks will hold me, and if they are sharing their tears, I can hold them, because I know what that felt like. Also, just because someone is sharing tears, that doesn’t mean someone can’t do their part to hold people accountable. There is a way to hold people accountable without dehumanizing them, or taking this top-down approach of ‘doing as I say’ as the director.

Professional development plans are the best thing ever. Every year we have to do this as a part of our evaluation process. The cool thing is every year I set some goals and I actually hit them. I think that's because I'm in a supportive environment that's committed to my success. My first year here, I was deathly afraid to present. As much as I love interacting with people, as much as I’m in front of people doing presentations and trainings, there was this legit fear of going to conferences and presenting in front of people I didn’t know. They might judge me or this topic might not apply to other people’s schools. I didn’t know how to do proposals. I thought, “Is it good enough? Are there enough citations?” and things like that.

I felt that the best way to address this fear of writing and sharing my work was to actually put this in writing in my professional development plan. Angel, who has always been my supervisor at this point since I’ve been at Jesuit University, really stayed on me and would remind me by sending me opportunities and deadlines. He would ask me, “Hey, have you thought about it?” In my first year he was encouraging me, but I still didn’t do it and then he helped me to strategize. He is super involved in Knowledge Communities and chairing committees. He's actually co-chairing one of the national conferences. He let me know I don’t have to do it by myself and at the time I worked with Sherri as well. She would tell me about
panels she was invited to, and she reminded me that my presentations don’t have to be lecture-based; they can be interactive. They de-mystified what it means to submit proposals. I started doing things in groups. A couple of us would get together to put together proposals and submit it. In my second year, I submitted two proposals and they got accepted; one for a regional conference and the other for NCORE.

Every year at this point now, I’ve been presenting two times a year here and that has been so helpful, because I’ve gotten more creative and more confident about coming up with ideas. I started thinking, “Who can I get me to make this happen?” It falls in line with my leadership style. I do think that collaboration is a big part of who I am a leader, so once someone told me you can collaborate on these things and it’s not about you having to hold the knowledge yourself and do it by yourself. Instead, they told me I can work with people and everyone can contribute to the success, and technically when you collaborate you're also building up other people’s professional development. I'm so passionate about women of color, I started to align myself with other women of color who want to do this work. So it’s just grown bigger and better for me, just putting myself out there and not being so nervous.

It trickles down…I find myself being much more comfortable talking to students about their fears around presenting and telling them my story and that I still get nervous the day before a presentation, once I overcame that hurdle. That's when I shared that I want to pursue a Ph.D. and I now I'm in a Ph.D. program. My supervisor, Angel, is really good at reading and editing, so I began to trust sharing written work with him. He was really developmental in giving me edits and talking me through them. That worked for me very well. Pulling from that, even for me as a
supervisor, I know what my strengths are and I try to play to those, like Angel who knew he was good at editing and writing, worked with me in that way.

I do want to name the very first queer upper level administrator that I admired very much and still admire to this day. She is still my mentor. Dr. Love was the dean of students at Audre Lorde College. I could talk forever about her, but any time that I talk about where I've come from and how I've been successful, there is Sherri and there’s Dr. Love. We didn't have enough program support at Audre Lorde College and she tried to bring it, but unfortunately there's a cost with that; so, they couldn't do it.

She personally invested in me. She paid for me to go to NASPA when I was a applying to University of the Northwest for grad school. She also gave me my first suit and though it was a ‘hand-me-down’, the point is I didn't have a suit, so she gave me a suit. She was able to cover my hotel costs through her budget at a nice hotel and gave me my own room. I just felt so special and thought, “Wow, maybe one day I could be like her and do this for other people.”

She really spent time with me and I have this piece of art from her in my office. In it, different shades of black women and it says “Black and Black.” I was in her office one day and I said, “Dr. Love, I really like that picture.” When I graduated, she gave me that picture and she wrote me a message on the back. She said it was given to her, and she carried it, but now she wanted to give it to me. I just love Dr. Love from the bottom of my heart, although I don’t talk to her everyday.

She now works for herself. She has a really cool story as well. She is a consultant and does life work; she’s a life coach. She came to visit two years ago and still to this day gave me great advice. I was crying about my finances before my promotion happened and she totally
normalized it. She told me her story and she was like, “Girl, you’re going to be okay, even if you default. It doesn’t mean that’s the end.” She just really made me feel so much better. This is someone who played a big role in my life, someone who personally invested in me. I would be remiss not to speak about that. She’s awesome.

Human capital is important in my professional environment. I work in a division that you just have to know there are different cultures within different departments. I have learned to know who my allies are and then know who isn't, and let that frame how I move through this institution. I've also learned how to use my human capital, which is why I put a lot of effort into the relationships I build, not just with students because they are human capital as well, but also the staff and faculty that I meet day in and day out. Human capital, for me, is the relationships. There is wealth in the relationships that I've developed, whether it's positionality, or whether it's through mentoring.

Support from peers is essential. I work within a sub-division that is communal and we are invested in each other. This is my fourth year. Now, I understand the lay of the land and I do have rapport with folks. I had to spend time cultivating those relationships, and so the advice within that is, “How do you align yourself with folks and build meaningful relationships?” Building allies and building relationships is important in this work.

I value my peers just as much as I value my mentors. For example, there was one day where I was really down and I left the office to just stand up, take a break, and go have lunch, because I didn't eat anything, but I was feeling very emotional. Immediately, I thought, “Girl, you're feeling like you're going to cry. If you feel like crying, maybe you shouldn't be alone. Maybe you should go hit up one of your peers, one of your staff friends.” And so I did. I shared
with her what was going on and she was very supportive through text messages, building me up, and normalizing my feelings, and also just saying, “Hang in there.”

At other institutions I’ve worked at, I wouldn't feel so freely about talking to peers about what was really going on inside. I think over a period of time that is something else that has changed for me, too, really sharing my current story, whether it's good or bad, you know the good, the bad and the ugly, with peers and knowing that not all peers are going to be my friends, but there are some who are my friends. So I do confide in them. There are people that are invested in me and I'm equally invested in them.

One of my strengths is that I'm an activator. The way that I understand that is that I'm hella (very) innovative! I'll come up with ideas super fast and I'll add a bunch of new ideas that make our programs better and/or add new components to them, which then makes everybody's job more complex, right? Cool, but it requires time and energy to carry it out. So for me I need support by peers and/or my supervisor saying, “These are great; but for your wellness, though, we can't do all of these things because you already have so much on your plate.”

I think it's important for us to be honest when you see your peer struggling, or doing so much already, to be upfront about caring for their wellness. “If we're going to implement this new idea, how do we take something else off your plate?” or “Look, park that idea; it's great. How does it fit into our strategic plan?” Something that helps slow down the burning desire to just keep adding great things. That's real support for me because again I am an activator, so I will catch on fire and just get so excited and run with it and execute it. But and then after the fact, be like, “That was so much and I'm so tired.” Support looks like advocacy with me at the table or when I'm not at the table.
I think resilience is your ability to overcome challenges, and adversity, and that resiliency can happen in your personal life, your professional life, and your educational experience. I also look at resiliency as character building. Not only is it your ability to get through things, but it also gives you the tools necessary to sustain and advance to the next level. There’s a saying in the church I was raised in, “For every new level, there's a new devil,” which means you need to have the skills and the tools to be able to defeat whatever that devil, if you will, is going to be. Resiliency, I think, is the weapon of choice when advancing to new levels, to new heights. Resiliency can be used to advance your career.

Resiliency can be what you use for yourself, but then I also think resiliency can be shared and role modeled with people around you. I think it's important to make sure that you do that; share the resilience, share the stories, and share the narratives. Don't just hold onto your experiences for your own advancement. The more I talk about those experiences with students and with staff, I hope that I'm also role modelling what it means to thrive in community, seek your community, choose your family, and things like that.

An early experience of resilience took place in high school. I went to a predominantly white high school and I specifically remember...there are actually many moments that I remember almost as if I was there again. One particular moment in high school, Mr. Wilson in my economics class, had us do some type of career plan, a 10-year plan or something. I named the schools that I wanted to go to and I remember him saying, “I noticed you put all these UC's down, University of California schools.” These schools are more like research one institutions. He was like, “Oh, these are great goals, but let's be more realistic. Maybe you need to consider community colleges or state schools, because you have to have the grades and the test scores.”
Mind you, he did not know my grades at all. I definitely went through high school with a 3.8 GPA. You could probably say my SAT scores weren’t helpful, but the point is he made some judgments just off of who I was. I really think that race had to do with it. I remember feeling kind of like, “Well, damn, maybe I can’t do this.” I actually I started to reconsider different colleges and things like that.

Then, my mom forced me to consider an all-women’s institution, Audre Lorde College. I did not want to go to Audre Lorde College because of my own internalized homophobia. I was like, “Oh my God, why would you send me to a school of all women? I'm not gay. I don't like women.” She made me do the overnight and then I fell in love with the college.

It ended up being the best choice of my life. The point is I remember getting into Audre Lorde College and being really proud because it’s a private school and it's well known. I was so proud I got into the school and I went back to Mr. Wilson, even though I didn't have his class anymore. I went to see him and I was like, “Yo, I got into Audre Lorde College and it’s a prestigious school.” And you know what he said? He said, “Oh, well I would never send my daughters to an all-girls' school. I guess it’s private, but that doesn't really mean anything.” He really wasn't trying to show me any love. What I realized in that moment was he really doesn't care about me. That’s one of my earliest lessons around resilience.

So, I think my resiliency showed up in my parents being proud of me. I knew that I had achieved something big. From that point on, I made some decisions in my life, such as whatever I'm passionate about I have to pursue it and I can't look for others to affirm me. And so there's a little bit of resiliency in that. I think that also treads a little bit of a dangerous line in terms of not
looking for affirmations or not having affirmation, or getting used to that, and it has thickened my skin.

I don't go around looking for affirmation from others, but I really value affirmation from the people who are most important to me, like my life mentor, Sherri. I care if she says, “Nah, I don't think you should do this or that.” I really think long and hard, but the resiliency skill that I learned was to trust my intuition, follow my passions and rely on people who have my best interests in mind. If I don't trust them in that way, then I won’t seek advice from that person or look for their affirmation.

So that's a big lesson I learned about resiliency fairly soon in my life. I think because I've been mentored and supported by so many people, that is a resiliency skill. I have received benefits since I was a child from having big sisters or since I’m oldest in my family, I always wanted an older sibling or something like that. I am always seeking that kind of mentoring and role modeling. For some reason I always took it seriously. So that's a resiliency skill for me, too, because whenever I enter a new environment I'm looking for who I know, who looks like me, who shares similar values as me, and I align myself fairly quickly in new environments.

When I moved out here, I was coming straight from Residence Life. You don't pay bills yet, and this is me coming out of grad school into the ‘residence director life’, so I just didn't have that experience. Basically, from undergrad I was a ‘res life baby’, so I was a resident assistant all the way through. Coming here was like the real life: you have to find the apartment, you have to furnish your apartment, you have these bills and though this city is not as expensive as living in California, it was a struggle based on the salary. Then I had to get roommate and
luckily I found a roommate who is queer-identified and also a queer person of color, awesome! I really thrive when I surround myself with queer folks, outside of work and in work.

So, finances became an issue because I also have loan debt. If I didn’t have a loan the salary would be fine, but my narrative around loans and stuff runs deep. It’s a long story and it makes me sad, but I’m paying two rents essentially. So I was like, “Something has to change here and I need to feel more comfortable and I can't leave work going home and being stressed about how to make ends meet.” For me, there was this piece around, “How do you advocate for yourself when you know you're doing a lot of work?” In my position, though it's a coordinator title, I’m teaching classes, I'm running three major programs, a mentorship program, I was running an all-white-identified space, I was also doing the high school outreach program, and advising the multicultural learning community, and it was just so, so much!

All while I’m doing that, I’m building great relationships with students that I care for immensely. I felt this commitment to students as a person of color, as a queer-identified person. I feel this commitment to supporting students, being there for students, because they don't get that in the classroom, or they might not get that in their other leadership roles because those are also predominantly white spaces and predominantly straight spaces. So I had to make the time for students as well, and it became draining, so I got to a place where I needed to find something that I can still love to do, but that I needed an increase in pay and I needed to think about how to balance myself more.

The only way I can explain burnout, because we hear people in the field all the time say, “Avoid burnout, etcetera.” Yo, I really experienced burnout! It was not just a word. It’s like a physical feeling on your body; I turned into a zombie, tired permanently, like permanent grainy-
ness in my eyes, getting colds really easy because I am at my wits ends. Then, our whole department transitioned, so even when I did take this mid-level position, it was just me and a director. We had no coordinators and we also had new graduate assistants. So, we had to train the grads and I was pseudo-running the coordinator jobs and Angel was still doing the First-Gen Program. So, we were at our wits end. Then, we had to recruit to fill these positions, so just the feeling… I never want to feel that again.

I’m in a doc program now, so I'm sure there'll be some other feelings of stress. But the point is I never want to get to that point where I am that exhausted and even after the school year had ended and I had the summer, it wasn't enough time to recover and so then there was a feeling of resentment that I think comes with burnout. Once you have time to get through the burnout phase, you're kind of resentful of the work that you're doing. I felt like, “I keep coming every day and it’s the same thing and I've got a lot of things to do. I feel guilty for saying ‘no’ to students, but I'm trying to practice self-care.”

Then, luckily we hired amazing coordinators where I could be honest with them about where I was at, for example, telling them, “Look I'm a on the verge of tears today” and saying, “What can we do to help each other out?” We hired coordinators who really understood where I was at, and I also recognize that no matter how tired I am, we all have workloads, so feeling trapped, too. I thought, “Who am I to ask for help when everyone is being asked to give their all?” So, there's guilt around that sometimes, too, but luckily I have a team that challenges me by reminding me that, “If you don't ask for help, you're not giving us the opportunity to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ if we can do that.” I'm still grappling with that today, as we speak.
I am way more conscious right now in terms of not becoming a slave to the work. I had a partner at the time; we're no longer together, but the biggest gift they've given me was saying, “Your self-worth cannot be wrapped up in the work you produce.” That’s what was happening. Also, not feeling trapped because I feel like I'm not doing my best if I'm asking for help or I’m not doing my best if I'm not producing excellent work, over-achieving work, not just your basic work, you know what I mean?

Now, I'm just in a new place of saying “no” and also trying to role model that for my team, and the team that I directly supervise who are also queer-identified, so now there's another level of awareness, too. They are watching me in terms of how they think someone should be when they move up in a position and so I try to normalize things. I really try to talk to my staff if I'm not having a good day, or if I'm exhausted. You know, my winter break was the first break where I decided not to travel, to just stay here, and to stay put. To sleep, eat, drink…whatever I wanted to do. I actually came back rejuvenated, because I turned everything off, I let the phone go; everything. I actually came back how I would have liked to come back in the fall.

The point is I that again the ‘lifting as we climb’ is a part of my responsibility not just to talk about excellence, but to talk about the difficulty in this work, that asks us to give so much of ourselves for. I would even say we're probably not compensated how we should be compensated for the work that we do, and on top of that, what makes this work and Multicultural Affairs-like offices or Multicultural-type offices is that there's an emotional labor that other departments don't have to deal with. They can close up shop and disconnect from the work.

Now, I am from Res Life, so that's a whole other experience too, of being “on” twenty-four-seven, because you live where you work. But, here it was, “wow, the emotional labor!”
Also, just knowing that we're working with marginalized communities that are coming for us for double, not just for the programmatic experience, but for life guidance because of their identities.

So, when I think of our hetero colleagues and our white colleagues who don't have that experience, they're not being tapped the way that folks with these identities are. When we talk about how oppression is interconnected, since I'm a queer-identified person and a woman of color, since I'm a queer person, a woman, and a person of color, imagine… that's three different levels of students who are reaching out to me the way that I reached out to my mentor, because I was looking for someone who looked like me, who shared similar experiences as me. So it's a lot to carry.

Surrounding myself with positive community and mentors is a resiliency skill big time! I always credit any of my achievements, “Yes I know that I made these achievements, but I don't do them alone.” I would not be where I am without the help of others and there have been several people who have been essential to my successes. You don't have to do it alone. I'm a firm believer that there's power in numbers. So my effect on my own, sure it would be good, but will the impact be really lasting? Will the impact really affect a lot of people?

That's why I do believe in community, too. I don't know everything. It actually makes my life easier. I let people show me the way, so that I don't have to figure it out for myself. Asking for help is essential, especially when you're holding multiple marginalized identities that are intersecting. There's so many things that you have…or I have to combat day-to-day, and to have that support is essential.

I support my staff through innovation, promoting self-preservation and self-care, and overall advocacy. For me, I'm innovative. When my staff comes to me and I'm not sure how to
problem solve or how to create something, I can help them in a moment, because that's my strength. So I think it’s about identifying your strengths and applying them to your supervisory style. Those are ways you can help boost up your staff when you're supervising.

My role as a mentor and role model is important for ‘lifting as I climb’ for my supervisees. And guess what? My coordinators are there for me, too. I think it's because when they first started in their roles, I said, “I want to paint a picture for you.” I described where we were at as a department, how everyone was tired. I told them, “Yeah, like I'm actually burnt out right now. I’m committed to your success, but I’m also burnt out right now. I want to be engaged and committed, but I also need some flexibility and some grace. Here's the training plan, etcetera, etcetera…”

Immediately they were like, “Okay, thanks for letting us know.” I communicated that Mondays had become a hard day for me. I call them ‘Monday Blues’. I wouldn't want to come back to work over the weekend. The weekend wasn’t long enough; it simply wasn’t long enough. I would be emotional about even having to come into the office on a Monday. I let them know, “Mondays are particularly hard for me right now. I don't know where that's coming from. That's never been my story before, but I just need to share that with you. Are there things for you all that I should know in terms of where you're at in life? We want to start this off as being here for each other and I do pride myself in being an office that cares for the whole person. So I need to share with you. Do you all want to share with me things for you?” I try to role model and then invite them to also share with me.

There was one memorable time where I’ve had to support, hold, and push my team to practice self-care. I had a coordinator who was just doing so much and you could tell that they
were just so tired. So we had to have a conversation around what does it mean for you to say no? What does it mean for you to block off time on your schedule so that you can do administrative tasks and not be overwhelmed because at the end of the day we do need these administrative tasks to happen and they do need to happen in a timely manner. Here are some strategies I’ve learned over time, so this is not a reflection of your ability or not a reflection of who you are as a staff member, it’s just a time for us to really reflect and think out loud together what we can do to protect our time in the office. And yes, our job is to have a student-centered approach, but also in tandem with that, in order for our office to be here, and to have proper funding, we have to make time to do our budget reports, we have to make time, without a doubt it has to happen. Those are things for me, what do you think would work for you? So, guilt came up. We’re supposed to be student-centered.

When you are new in the job, you want to put your best foot forward times ten. There is this pressure to perform, perform, perform. We had time to talk about that too. Where is that guilt coming from and what does it mean to talk to your students about the things that are on your plate and how you have to operate in your job? If you have to say ‘no’ to a meeting, or to a connecting time, it’s not because you don’t care about them, it’s because you also need to support the department’s efforts to keep the department here.

There's an element of risk in advocating for my marginalized identities in the workplace. Recently, we had a major in-service for our division and there was a special committee put together to focus on our strategic plan. Basically, this whole strategic plan is about advancing social justice and there's four main components to it, but the first one is student access and
retention. So, they name the committee that has been pre-selected and literally they’re all white individuals, and no one from our office, Student Multicultural Services.

So, the committee was all White and there was one queer-identified person, but almost immediately I was like, “W.T.F.!” I was thinking, “How do they not see or not draw connections? This whole committee is dedicated to student success or student access and retention and no one draws the connection? That's just terrible.” Also, “What does that say to everyone here?” We have a pretty diverse division, so a lot of folks that I work with who are folks of color or who hold marginalized identities, noticed the same thing. Everybody talked about it after the event.

I was angry, upset, nervous, and I was also thinking, “How do we say something about this?” I mentioned it to my supervisor at the time and he said, “That's wrong,” but no one was saying, “This is what we're going to do, we're going to bring this up to the VP or the AVP, or whatever.” So I was like, “Who can be my ally? Who's at the table, even though I'm not?” I talked to one of the assistant deans and I perceive him to be an ally. Also, his name came up as the person leading that committee, so I felt comfortable talking with him. I brought it up and I said, “I'm not going to lie to you. I'm feeling disappointed in the fact that there was no thought or consideration to who was selected to be on the committee, especially given it’s topic and who the population is going to be. When we talk about retention and access, it's predominantly our folks of color, our queer folks, and when we talk about low S.E.S… nobody's represented.” He said, “Well, you're right. I didn't even think about that. I didn’t pick the committee, but I'm willing to share the information. I think the person who did pick would be open to hearing your thoughts.” If you send an email, I will do my part and follow-up and talk at the next meeting about that.”
So, we made a plan of how he would reinforce my message and support my message, so I wasn't the only person bringing it up. I drafted an e-mail and then I took a break. I drafted the e-mail first; stopped, then just took a minute, then I went back and looked at it again to make sure I was being strategic about my words, and that I wasn't necessarily blaming, because again I don't want to become a target either, but I do want to hold us accountable to our mission.

I then let my supervisor read it and then he also offered support by saying, “you can copy me on this e-mail, which means I am tied to this as well.” So I was like, “Cool, I will copy you on it.” I shared it with that individual and he said, “You're right. I'm going to share it with the VP and I also told them in that e-mail, “Although the harm has already been done, even if you decide to add someone or a couple of folks to this space, just know that the harm has been done in the fact that we were not a part of the initial thought process.” The question now is, “How can we avoid this in the future?” I'm glad that it was received well, if you will. I also don’t think people would say, “No, you’re wrong. How dare you?”

Within 10 minutes, the person I e-mailed, responded to me and included the VP on their response, and they met and that's when they asked me to provide names of individuals to be on that committee, and then they invited folks into that space. Then, they responded by saying, “This is going to be for everyone. We want everyone to have this experience. Anyone could be on the committee.” But we were like, “Yeah but y’all ‘pre-selected’. You actually said ‘pre-selected’.” Sure, you can make it open to everyone now, but just know that the harm is done. I did say that in the first e-mail, you know, the harm is already done, but it's about how can you correct it in the future? What can you do to change the makeup of the committee now?
I didn't feel like there was any chilly environment after that. The process I went through involved finding my ally, finding someone who can also speak on my behalf who maybe has a higher position of authority, if you will. I also made sure I had the support of my supervisor, so he’s not blindsided, should someone have a problem with what I did. Then, also being thoughtful… if you want to make something happen, choosing your words wisely. You can choose words that stick and that are powerful, but if it’s overly confrontational that may not help, which is why I had to take a break from it and then reread it to make sure it was objective. It's really sad that you have to edit yourself like that, but I think that's the other resiliency, too, from lived experiences. You have to be careful to not become a target if you need to keep your job. Is this the ‘sword you want to die on?’ It was important to me, I addressed it in the meaningful way, and I was also clear about it not about me being on the committee. So I was like, “Please, here are some names of some people who I think would be awesome.”

In relationship to my past financial lessons, I wouldn’t have signed the papers for taking on education loans in hindsight, because student debt is real! I do believe that everything happens for a reason, I really do, and that you won't build resiliency if you never experience conflict. I wish I had someone tell me, “Look, this is not the only way for you to attain your college degree. This is a lot that you're about to sign off on” and really communicate that the first job is not going to be my highest paid job; that you're going to be struggling financially. I didn’t know what rent meant, I didn’t know credit…All I knew was I would love Audre Lorde College and I was willing to do anything for it. My mindset was, “Oh, there's no cares. I'm going to get a job and I’ll pay it off.” I just had no concept of what that actually meant, or how interest adds up.
I just wish that someone would have really painted that picture. I wish someone would have said, “As an R.A. they gave you your money directly instead of applying it to your tuition. I was getting money and I was like, “Woo! I’m getting money!” I was just spending money that didn't really need to be spent. No one really sat down and painted that picture. I think right now with where we’re at with student debt, I think there is more awareness around that and we’re really trying to paint that picture for students; at least I'm making it my priority and I share with students what it means to take on debt. I tell them if you have to transfer because of financial reasons, that is okay and you’re not ‘less than’; you are being strategic and putting yourself first. That's where I've been at and if someone's going to be taking on $40,000 worth of debt, I’m like, “Whoa, that’s a red flag.” I share that there are other ways that they can do this and ask them, “Is it really worth it if you don't have support from your family?” My father lost his job and that's why I had to take on a lot of debt and I was willing to do it.

I think there would have been a lot less stress on me, a lot less tears to experience, because I was pushing myself so hard and experiencing exhaustion and tiredness. For me, when I'm stressed I stress-eat, so poundage...Those are things that I would give myself advice on. Luckily, I still have people who role model that for me, but also I was young. So, no matter how much I talk about going back and telling myself something... when you're young, you’re gonna do what you want to do. Sometimes you just have to learn firsthand and that is what happened to me. I learned firsthand what burnout feels like and how to avoid that shit in the future.

I believe that you won't build resiliency if you don't find community. Community does not mean the largest group of people, it means even if you just have one or two people in your corner that you can talk to you, that you can ‘unmask’ with. How many times do we really get to
‘unmask’ and talk about the things that make us vulnerable? How often can we talk about the things that don't make us look ‘polished’?

I’m one of those people who work really hard to stay looking ‘polished’, to be looked at as someone who is a hard worker and produces great, thoughtful, meaningful work. I’ve been challenged these two years with my ex-partner, who really challenged me on that. They would tell me, “I’m not interested in the ‘work Justine’; I want to know the real you.” I believe the sooner I tap into that, the better I can affect my students’ experience. If I'm only showing them my best self, my perfect self, my polished self, then there's no room for them to see that it's okay to make mistakes; it doesn't normalize humanity. That’s what I would tell myself.

There are a couple important areas of support for future mid-level administrators. One, I would like to see a mid-level institute just for LGBTQIA folks. They could engage in topics like how to balance their career, how to be the best supervisor, what does networking mean, and what is the responsibility of ‘lifting as we climb’. It would be an application of my philosophy for who I am as a person of color to my queer identity. I think that would be one cool thing. In an ideal world, queer folks working in multicultural spaces would get together and share resources and things like that. I would apply that to LGBTQIA folks. In another world, I would set a goal for how many LGBTQIA folks need to be hired in every workspace in student development. That would be really important to me, because there's not a lot of us in mid-level positions, or we get ‘pigeonholed’ into this work. The first thing I heard in this field about doing LGBT work was that you get stuck, or your career involves you as the director for the LGBT Center and that’s it; and that's not true.
I also recognize that there are some LGBTQIA folks in Student Affairs, as folks with marginalized identities, we want to do the work around our marginalized identities, so we are also drawn to those identities. I think career advancement for us can become narrow, having the options based on your passion and it gets really competitive. In my utopic world, competitiveness… I wouldn't want there to be the scarcity mentality of having to be the best, because there's nothing for me. In my perfect world, policies are really accommodating and inclusive, such as hiring practices and setting LGBTQIA folks up for success, like already having restrooms that are accommodating. For gender nonconforming folks who are doing interviews, there can be a lot of anxiety around questions of “How will you support me if I get this job?” It’s awkward to ask “Are there restrooms for me?” or “What is the climate at your institution?” and the questions becomes, “How do we fix those things?”

One thing I’ve seen and admired from my mentors is that they hire wisely; they bring in folks that they know can do the work and that are not afraid to ask the questions. I really have seen that firsthand, folks hire their folks. You have these growing circles, folks you went to grad school with, or we come from the same lineage of grad life, and we bring each other wherever we go. I probably would take some of that with me. I think there are amazing people that I've met over my time and I hope that I’m even considered one of those people to go with other folks that I really look up to. I would bring that with me and I think I've already done that in some way in terms of bringing in Kirti, who is a multicultural development coordinator, emphasizing in women of color programs. She was highly involved with us, she co-taught with me, she's someone that I really trust, and we share very similar values and outlooks on how this work gets done. I think there's room there to question how do you avoid “leadership prototype”? But I do
think that there are particular people who are fearless and able to think critically, so hiring practices would be something very important to me, a strategy.

The training that you provide for your teams is important, for example, when divisions want to bring a consultant to come and do social justice work and depending on who your upper level administrator is and their comfort level, they're going to say “no” to someone who's going to rock the boat, or they're going to say “yes” to someone who just maintains status quo. As someone who has a critical lens, you can actually bring in people who help not just your staff who holds marginalized identities, but actually working more so with some of your folks who hold more privileged identities. They can help them unpack, point to where you need to do some work, where you can be a better ally, where you can use your privilege for the good of others. I see a missed opportunity there, when I see administrators who are afraid to bring in somebody that will make their staff think long and hard about who they are.

I'm a student-centered person and I have seen from my undergrad all the way through grad school, I’ve seen deans of students spend time with students, brought students to the table to have discussions, or work with a team of students in advising her in decisions. I've seen a vice president of student development at University of the Northwest, and at least for a year and a half here at Jesuit University, create a Jesuit Scholars program where he brought students together and they worked on large-scale programming and he gave them a budget to do things that would better this campus. I’ve seen a vice chancellor who actually knows students’ names and has one-on-ones and takes students to lunches, and makes himself available, dedicates a set of hours where it's open to students exclusively. They can come in and talk to him, so I do know that you can be student-centered the higher up you go, but you have to find an institution that will support
you in being student-centered and is not afraid of a professional who's actually going to listen to
students and help advance their development as well.

My future vision involves having a family and a life partner. It also involves a completed
PhD degree, and I see myself as the director for a Multicultural Center. I really want to do some
research on chief diversity officers, because also I'm just interested in what they do.

Another thing that’s come up for me is that I want a life partner, but I'm extremely busy
with work and with school, so how do you factor in love, queer love into this? Also, I’m thinking
about if I want a family. Those are the things that are often on my mind and constantly trying to
get to this place of financial stability. Those are things that I think about. There are a lot more
folks in my circle that are getting married and trying to figure those things out. I would say here
at Jesuit University I would say I probably have…I tend to be drawn to folks of color, and the
queer folks of color population is really small here. So, most of the folks who are taking these
next steps in their life in terms of buying a home and getting married, are cis-hetero folks, so I’m
trying to figure out what that means for myself.

Are there other role models I can find or queer folks? I do have a friend who has a wife
and a daughter now. It's been interesting seeing them go through their process and they’re both in
the medical field, one is a midwife and the other is in med school right now finishing up, and it
looks so complicated! As a queer person, my trajectory won’t look the same as cis-hetero folks
and I have to be patient. There is a lot more things to take into consideration if I do want to start
a family with someone. In my queerness, I’m starting to come into my identity as a pansexual
person, so that's been interesting owning that a bit more; it's going beyond being bisexual, but
like really being open to love. So there's also this nervousness of what it might mean if I end up
with someone who is cis-heterosexual and what does that queer love look like because I am queer-identified?

I am really interested in organizational structure, so I keep thinking here at Jesuit University, “What’s missing?” In our division we have an assistant dean who focuses on Title IX, another assistant dean who focuses on students of concern, but there is no assistant director for diversity and equity. I can definitely see myself working in that capacity within the division that is at the table really influencing policies and can speak to it.

Unfortunately, with our director, though he gets tapped for so many opportunities because of his title, I feel like people listening to him immediately is a bit harder. He really has to think carefully about how he advocates for himself. I think if he was an assistant dean and then you also had a director of our office, I think the stress load of trying to meet the demands of students, staff, and faculty would be alleviated because you would have someone who's able to focus more so on the staff and faculty content of diversity and inclusion. They could be a representative, who could be at the table and work with the academic side of the house on providing trainings for staff and faculty. That way, our office can really just focus on the student advancement as it relates to our social justice work…

The point is this assistant dean can really work with that person and then work with the academic side of the house. Right now, there's just not enough time in the day for our director to play all of those roles, but they treat him as such. It puts him in really tough positions, where it's hard for him to be present here in this office and to really support us the way it needs to be, and still fulfill the needs that the institution expects him to fulfill. So I wish that we could more evenly distribute that. I would be interested in positions like that in the future.
Like I said, I'm highly innovative, so I see myself really helping restructure or...one of my little dreams if I stay here at Jesuit University long enough, and should this director position become open, I would really try to advocate to make a position more so as an assistant dean and move in that direction. I think there is a missed opportunity and our department is taxed to do so much with so little. And honestly if you compare our office structure to other multicultural spaces we are pretty well staffed, but it’s the amount of work at the university, everything comes to us and through us. They want us to respond to every single thing that happens, nationally, within the campus culture, and within our department. So, we are pulled to do a lot.

I see myself staying in this area of diversity and equity. I hope to stay in this work and effect institutional change. I really want to support campus climate for students who are marginalized, but campus culture or campus climate for marginalized students who are marginalized, or the ‘marginalized within the marginalized’.

Then the last thing that I'll say is I've been really thinking about my next steps in this field and slowing myself down, because in this field everyone will ask “What do you see yourself doing?” or “What are your next steps?” I'm like “Yo, just finishing this Ph.D.” At this point, I don't know if I want to teach. I don't know if I want to be a dean of students one day. I've been really observing folks in leadership, like vice presidents and dean of students, and those are things I used to say I wanted to do. I've seen people in these positions and it’s made me less excited about doing that work, because the higher you go, the more you have to lose. I think the further you're removed from students, the more you have to fight to be student-centered.

Sometimes schools aren’t interested in folks in those positions being student-centered. I've been really questioning myself around what I really want out of this career. I've been
thinking, “What if I just want to be a director?” “What if?” and that’s okay. “What if I want to be director and have kids and have a partner for life and be more invested in my family than being invested in Student Affairs?”

I do recognize that I need some income, absolutely. I don't see myself just being at home and that's it; that's not my goal. I really want to continue to work with students; I really want to support them, to increase retention, especially for our marginalized communities at universities. That's what I've been thinking about. It’s been less about the fast-tracking or wanting to be at the top, and being more realistic about what my values are, what my strengths are, and how do they suit me?

Right now, they suit me here in this role and there's no need to rush. I think there is pressure in Student Affairs to get to the top as quick as you can, how many people do you know? I'm great at networking and I'm not interested in job-hopping. I'm more interested in being in institutions that are giving me the right tools so I can be successful. I don't know if every school is really invested in their employees; I don’t know if that’s a fair thing to say.
I’m Kalia. I’m a queer multiracial womxn of color, an artist, and serve as an assistant director of a Campus Multicultural Center. Although this is my second mid-level Student Affairs role in the Midwest, this is the first time that I'm supervising as many professional staff as I am currently. I’ve worked in higher education for seven years and my pathway has taken me to multiple campus roles and functional areas in the eastern and western United States. I am active in the field of Student Affairs through leadership roles in multiple national professional associations.

I have been mentored by three rad womxn of color and have made strategic career decisions in order to arrive to my current position. Through their influence and that of my grandmother, I have developed a style of leadership that is cultural, holistic, and transformational. I have experienced institutional ideologies that center liberation, intersectional feminism, and today I find myself in a very hostile and violent institutional environment. I knew coming into my current position that it was actually going to be really, really hard, and in some ways that has helped me to survive this long. As Grace Lee Boggs said, “The most radical thing I ever did was stay put.” When I envision the next 10 years of my future, I see a lot of healing and creating. If I am in education, I'll probably be working at a large institution, because the systems are so complex that someone needs to infiltrate them; someone needs to be up in there.

I don't think that I realized how meaningful my grandmother was in my life until I moved away to the east coast. My grandparents were my primary caretakers in my younger years, when
I was two or three years old, maybe younger. When my grandparents moved here, they were in their teens; they are both from around the same area. Toishan is from around the coast, but more of a remote village and when they moved here to California, they were by themselves. When they met each other and decided to have a family, they moved back to China, then came back to California. By this time, there were some Toishanese people, but not a lot, and our dialect is very distinct.

I felt really safe with my grandmother. She wasn't necessarily a warm and loving and cuddly person, but she was someone that very much was full of love and did lots of acts of service to show that she loved – she would cook for me, or show me how to make a quilt, or teach me how to play the piano, and she would do art with me. She was my biggest source of affirmation and my closest family. I spoke English first, but I spoke a lot of Chinese when I was little. My grandmother and I would do a lot together when I was little. She taught me how to use chopsticks, we would fold paper cranes, and we would go to the library. The thing that is most visual to me is when I was little she would take me to Ranch 99, the Asian market.

At Ranch 99, we would get all of our groceries, sometimes we would go multiple times a week, because the grocery store was where she socialized more than anything and it felt familiar. We would go from aisle to aisle and get different food and supplies, and treats; I would get treats, like cookies or fruits. We would go aisle to aisle and whenever she would hear someone speak Toishanese, she would drag my little tiny body across the aisle to go see who this person was. She would say, “I don’t know you; I’m from Toishan, too. This is my family. What’s your family? What bank do you go to?” They would just get real personal, real quick. “What are you shopping for? Where do you live? What do you do?”…you know, all those things that older
Asian folks do. Then, by the end of the time that we were together, she would have so many friends at the grocery store and eventually they would all come over to her house. I would be sitting there coloring or doing a craft, or just sitting by myself and she would be in the kitchen with all of her new friends cooking some kind of food that they all decided to cook together, or frying things. Then, we would all have a meal together.

When I think of my leadership style and who I am, I’m really similar to that. I didn’t realize how formative those very basic experiences, and immigrant experiences for my grandparents, became central to how I understand my Chinese identity. Things like building relationships around food and knowing that ‘if one person succeeds, we all succeed’. She taught me that we need to know each other and have conversations to find these common areas of interest, because we want so badly to belong. I wouldn’t say I have this burning desire to belong or need affirmation from people, but there is still this need I have for human connection, especially with people of similar identities or just having moments of affinity, whether that’s my queerness or my gender or my racial identity. So, there's just like all of these really complicated pieces around being a U.S. citizen but then also being very much Chinese and multiracial.

I’m still the person that goes through the grocery store and finds people and brings them with me, or I’ve been that person that has been brought along. It’s about that relationship; that web-like structure that ebbed and flowed. That was a way for us to connect and collect knowledge and gain capital and try to figure out what we needed to do in community to be successful. They would trade stories of, “Don’t go there; that person is really racist.” They would figure out how they were going to navigate together. Navigating has really been central to
my life, because I needed to know what places were safer and which places to avoid. It was a lot about that community knowledge and community care.

Right when I was finishing undergrad my grandmother passed away and she passed away right before I left to interview for grad school, actually. I was technically still in mourning and I wasn't supposed to travel, but I did and I think that was another break in my culture that was pretty significant, but I also knew that needed to happen, to be out and away from all the things. I think that relationship with my parents changed and developed and was very different once I was also able to name violence and abuse. So I got that support mostly from my grandmother.

College was hard for me, because I navigated a lot of addiction, substance use, and mental health stuff. When I was going into my second semester, I started getting involved on campus. The first thing someone noticed was that I was really struggling and they asked, “Why don't you be involved in this one leadership opportunity?” When I reflect back it's probably some ‘white saviour’ stuff, but whatever. I do appreciate that that was really the jumpstart to get me to thinking about the ways that I could lead, the ways that I could be in community, and the ways that I could be a scholar, but then also put that work into practice and do community organizing.

So I got involved there. I got involved all over, whether it was with New Student Orientation or Housing or Greek Life, or other leadership roles within our student involvement. I eventually went to a retreat around identity and got connected with the Cross Cultural Center, so I started working there. That was a really positive experience for me, because it's the first time that I actually had a supervisor of color, a multi-ethnic womxn of color supervisor, who very much had high expectations of who I could be and high support to meet me and help me grow.
I felt so supported by my first supervisor from my undergrad experience, because she was the first person to actually challenge me. For me, support isn't like, “yeah, do whatever the hell you want,” but it's like “wow I noticed Kalia that you're in this program and you're talking about multiraciality, and you're saying that ‘we're all human’ and that's problematic- let's talk about that.” For me, being challenged is a really supportive process, and I was like, “Wow, I never thought about that.” When I look back as a professional now about how she was really there with me, I think to myself, “Wow, you spent a lot of time trying to support me as a student and I needed some help.” There's a lot of pieces there, but she really socialized me into understanding who I am in terms of my racial identity, my sexual identity, my gender, and so on through an intersectional lens.

I still utilize that in my supervision… asking questions. Just yesterday, I asked a person who I supervise, “I heard about a certain e-mail that went out and I'm wondering why I wasn't CC’ed on it. What do you think that was about? Let's talk about it.” I learned from her that it is okay to have conflict. Even though it's really hard, my first supervisor really role modeled it for me. When I was really struggling with supervision in my current role, we talked and she said, “I think you just need to name things.” She taught me how to name things and how to ask questions. I went to a meeting afterward and I said, “Our team just needs to heal from whatever happened and we need to figure out how to work through it. And as the new person I'm starting to feel the impact of whatever is going on here. So what do you think we need to do as a team?” Like, damn! Almost seven, ten years later, that still sticks with me!

I finished my undergraduate degree in three and half years, because I had to pay for it myself; I couldn't afford to be in college anymore. When I was getting ready to finish school, I
started getting these pamphlets on my desk at work for higher education graduate programs. One day I collected them all and I said to my supervisor, “Stop putting this shit on my desk. I am not going to go to grad school, because I barely even got into college. I'm not going to do this; I'm just going to go work and go do whatever out of school. I'm not going to do that, because I need to go back home or I need to figure things out.” It was funny, because she said, “Okay, you do what you want,” but her partner, who was also in higher ed, he is a multiracial man of color, showed up at work one day and said, “Listen, you're going to go to grad school.” Then, he sat me down and showed me how to do it. I think that he hella (really) saw through me and called me out, because part of it was I didn't know how to apply; I didn't know how to do these things and so he said, “We're going to help you with your application process. If you need to talk to people who went to these schools, this is how you could do it.”

I just sat down during fall break and did all my applications over a week and a half, and I applied. I took the very last GRE that you could take before not being eligible to go to grad school. I submitted them and to my surprise I got accepted into all six schools. It was not something that I ever thought would happen, but then also that's how I got into higher ed. I was going to a predominantly white school in the northeast and worked in First Year Experience, Orientation Programs, and Multicultural Affairs and did pave my own way; then, I realized that I did want to stay in higher education. When I applied to grad school, I wanted to focus on multiracial folks and people of color in higher education, so that was originally my driving force. Then, I realized how much I actually loved being a practitioner and so that's how I stayed in the field.
When I was in grad school, I worked for a black womxn of color, who's also multiracial. She was the first supervisor that was just ‘pure love’, and it's hard to explain, because she'd be like, “Are you sick? What’s going on?” and then she would say, “You need to go home” or “Yeah, let's talk about the professional stuff, but what's going on outside of work? How are you balancing everything? What are you doing for fun?” She would also ask, “What are you doing to take care of yourself?” That was one of the first supervisors that actually said, “Girl, with your identities and as you're navigating all of these things and unpacking this trauma that you navigated growing up, and cycles of violence are showing up in your life, you can't be a good professional in this context unless you're going to really heal yourself.” Then, she would say, “What do you need? How do we do that?”

I think in many ways she set it up so that she was my mentor, my supervisor, and a confidant. With our similar identities, the lines definitely blurred, but I think that it also taught me I am a really relational professional. It also taught me there are times for supervision and there are times for friendship and mentorship. They don't have to always happen at once, but they aren't mutually exclusive. She taught me how to embrace the vagueness of relationships and work through what is womxn of color leadership.

She taught me that sometimes you need to show up and also there are times you need to sit in silence and be strategic. She taught me that, “You need to figure out where you're going to sit at the table. You're going to have to check yourself and say 'where am I at today? Can I pick and choose this battle? Is it worth it?’” She just really opened up that process for me and I remember that she's someone who's one of the most levelheaded people I know. She also taught me important lessons about the role of emotions in this work. She said, “Rage and anger are
healthy, even as an administrator - you need to figure out when you need to use it and be real about it, and who will actually hear you and won’t just label you as an angry violent womxn of color and be aware of that.”

My last supervisor in the Women's Center… she was a ‘hot mess’ a lot of the time… I love her! This was the first time I had another Asian womxn as my supervisor, a multiracial Native Hawaiian womxn. It was the first time that I just didn't have to explain my Asian-ness or how immigration impacted my family, how work wasn't going to be my number one all the time, and that I had things going on with my family and I had to work from home at times. She really understood the ways that violence impacted our identities and impacted our work and she was the first supervisor that would name things like, “That’s administrative violence” or say, “Sexual harassment is not okay. Let's talk about that.” She would just carve out space. When I would sit with her, I knew I was the only person in the world that she was listening to right now. She absolutely drove me up the wall with a lot of things, but she also taught me how to be a professional that takes care to a different level, whether it's having baking soda out for people who are scent- sensitive, or making sure that our single-stall restrooms are actually gender-inclusive, and when we're supporting a survivor, identifying the resources we can take away. She taught me that I didn't have to always go the extra mile, but she was ready to go there if that's what the person needed.

All of those things impact who I am as a supervisor; they impact my ability to show up, to ask questions, to be real about identity, and when to say, “What do you actually need?” That kind of holistic supervision really has impacted me. Those three rad women of color taught me and continue to teach me how to supervise and how to be better at supervision.
I knew that no matter what, after working in such an affirming, liberating, and authentic work space, surrounded by people with similar identities and political identities and just being on a radical campus where one of my last things I did was support students in their 40-plus day sit-in in our chancellor's office, who eventually got fired. I knew after doing that kind of amazingly transformational work and supporting students and being there with students who were thinking of killing themselves, or needed hormone therapy, or needed access to an abortion… I knew that transitioning to a new position, no matter what, would be hard. It would be especially hard in a work space… you know, growing up in L.A., being Chinese, working class, and being a direct person, I knew also moving to the Midwest there would be that other cultural element of like I can't just be like, “Yo, that's messed up” and be respected in the same way. It would have to be a very coded navigational process.

I only interviewed for one or two positions and then I got this offer and I accepted it because I've always felt strongly about working in diversity and inclusion work and equity work. I knew that it would be kind of a stepping stone position. I also knew that at a big school like Public Midwest University, an assistant director position that I would most likely be doing more than the mid-level manager work, and it would be a good way for me to think about “Okay, do I want to stay here or do I want to move up?” It was a very strategic move for me. I've been in this position for almost eight months now.

I knew that it would be a very strategic decision that if I'm going to move to a new place and do a role like this, where I'm getting professional supervision experience under my belt, even though it sounds like the workspace had a lot of organizational trauma, that a lot of stuff had happened and gone down and people could just not get through it or over it. I knew that I would
be kind of stepping into a mess. And then I knew that my role, not different than many other roles that I've been in, had once been two people doing two different jobs, pushed into one. I knew that the expectations would be not just I'm one person, but I'm doing the work of multiple people. And I think that that's a rub or a challenge as mid-level professionals, because I think that mid-level folks they're getting the pressure from the people they supervise and students and then the people above them.

I also came from a structure that was much more web-like; we tried to have a very flattened intersectional feminist way of working with other professional staff, with students, with faculty, that even though we were in a bureaucracy we really tried to make sure we were as ‘flat’ as possible. We had consensus decision-making for almost everything. Identities were always brought into the mix. We were always talking about dynamics. We were always talking about what we had to win and what we had to lose. It was a very open and feminist praxis, really.

Support in my personal life involves spending time with people I care about. On the weekend, I either go to a coffee shop and do some work or do some writing, or I’ll do some art here at home, or play some music. I’ll spend a lot of time with Jade, the cat, or go for walks. Often, I’ll call a friend or family member and check-in or visit. My partner always says that I’m going to rest or take care of myself, but I'm often trying to find people to connect with or be in community with. This past weekend, I probably had four or five different events or things that I did and I said, “I swear, I’m just going to rest.” It's all about relationships for me and if I'm not just trying to build relationships and maintain them, then I am in a lot of quiet and stillness, or creating.
In my professional life, I roll into work between 8 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. most days. I have one-on-one meetings with the staff I work with, I’ll go to a few meetings, then take a little bit of downtime in the afternoon, and then I’ll ramp back up again and do a couple more meetings, and then go home. My goal is usually to leave between 4:30 p.m. and 5:30 p.m., because at this point in my life I center my personal life over my professional life. It would be different if I felt more invested in my professional life or if I felt there was reciprocal support. I think that’s what’s different about my personal/professional life today, early on in the first four years of my career, it was all about my career and making strategic career choices. And now it’s about making choices for myself to preserve myself, so I have the energy to come home and do good work within my family. That's something that's very different for where I am in my life.

I have a really solid personal, political, artistic, or just affinity community outside of work. Before I moved here people connected me with friends, so I came into community with a whole bunch of people that were ready to receive me. I felt great, which was a surprise moving from the West Coast where I had a really established community there of queer people of color. The second I got here, people were asking me to hang out, asking me how I was doing, and I felt almost ashamed to say, “I work at this one office at Public Midwest University,” because within my own communities people are like, “Oh, you work there...?” They know of the violence that's happened against queer trans students of color who protested and they all got arrested. So, by hiring me it feels really tokenizing, because they're trying to prove that they're not all of these things; that they're not homophobic, they're not sexist or racist or … They can say, “Look, we hired the person.”
I'm also very aware that when I interviewed, all the other candidates were Asian women, too. The person who was here before me was an Asian man, and he got released from his job and the Pan Asian Studies department was livid and students in Pan Asian Studies made a list of demands and they said they want more Asian administrators. I recognize that in some ways I am a token hire. Even though I am the most qualified, I know that I'm a damn good professional and I'm very keenly aware of that. I'm also very keenly aware that my community who knows anything about my office knows that, too. There's a larger reputation and also there's tension between the faculty members in our office, there's tension between local organizations, the Native community, the Hmong community, the Somali community. There are tensions between all those communities and my office, so whenever I meet people it's one of two things: I let them know who I am as a creative person and as an artist, as a person outside of work; then, I might let them know I work at Public Midwest University. Either they say, “I want to still have a relationship with you” or they say, “Oh, you work there and we’re done.” It's just a really challenging tension.

But, what I will say is that there are faculty members who tell me, “I will never work with your office, but I'll support you and I'll work with you.” They ask if I want to get dinner, or come over, or ask me if I have somewhere to go for Lunar New Year, things like that. For holidays, there's constantly people who are checking in on me, because inherently they know I work in a very violent space. I feel like I've been met in many different ways. I'm a pretty upfront person and try to be authentic. I do feel like sometimes that it is deceitful to be like, “Get to know me! I'm frickin awesome!” and then to be like, “Oh yeah, by the way I work here” all of a sudden. In activist communities, they either trust me or don't trust me
anymore and that sucks, because they know I work in a system that's really gross. I also recognize that as people with our identities, we need to be in the system and be subversive, and be able to navigate and maneuver within, and do some change within, and agitate from within, in order to make the spaces better moving forward.

I've had such a solid Student Affairs experience. In Student Affairs, everyone wants to help each other; they're really great and they're really nice, but I don't necessarily know the broader Student Affairs group, because I work with people who are mostly people of color and queer. The people that I work with are using critical theory, they're critical scholars, so we're highly critical and questioning all of the norms, and questioning who education is made for, or not. And if we are the ‘or not’, then we need to pave our own way. I've really worked within Student Affairs circles that are highly innovative and I’m going to challenge professional associations to be more inclusive, I’m going to challenge associations to have more leadership pathways for people of color, I’m going to challenge professional associations to have bias incident protocols. I'm going to say, “We are here; You can't erase us and you better listen to us.” I feel that there's so much more play for me in the expectations of Student Affairs because we have our ACPA and NASPA guiding principles.

Even within that, I can maneuver and be either as anonymous or as prominent as I need to be in terms of being an innovator in the field. People know that of me in Student Affairs and they respect me because of that; they respect the fact that I'll ask questions or if I am in a leadership position there in a professional association or in Student Affairs, people know that I'm going to show up and say, “This isn't okay; What do we do?” That has been much more of an empowering experience for me versus this microcosm of Student Affairs at this particular
institution, because they're like, “No; Just be quiet and sit down. We're just going to function how we want to and we want someone who is just going to do what we say.” And for me, that was a very different experience.

In terms of professional associations, that’s also where my capital has come in. My mentor is really involved with NASPA, from our graduate school network and is so well-known. We have this well-known reputable following of really well established professionals in the field. I was brought into ACPA and NASPA so early. I was in my first year of school and people were asking me to be on their leadership boards. From that moment on, there was no way that I couldn’t be deeply ingrained in professional associations. Because of my capital, senior-level professionals have always been really close and asking me, “How can I support you? You want a job there? Let me call these three people for you?,” those kinds of things. They have become my confidants.

As I have struggled in my professional experiences, I have really felt seen in these associations. What a huge disconnect! I would think that being out on my campus that I would be recognized on my campus, but that is not always the case. A really good example is that I have won multiple national awards from professional associations or asked to be on different workgroups for the professional associations, presenting, asked to be a panelist with other professionals at other institutions.

Because I’ve been so challenged and supported in navigating those large institutions through our professional associations, when things are really shitty at work, I can go back to the professional associations and know that I’m a fucking rockstar. I think to myself, “Why don’t these people understand?!” I think resilience is sometimes going there and bouncing back and
being like, “No! I am a phenomenal professional who understands my identities and systems of oppression and how we can be creative in dismantling systems of oppression in claiming our own liberation and transformation.” The mentorship from professional associations has allowed me to really move around and be respected and in the field. I feel seen and respected and really well supported in my professional associations; but on my campus, because of my positionality, they have no idea; they don't care.

As someone who's worked in so many different regions, there are so many different messages that I've gotten. I mean other schools that I've been at, it came down to messages of, “We want to build authentic relationships and we have the same goals, so why don’t we work together?” I worked at multiple large research one institutions that are extremely or predominantly white or historically white public universities. I've worked at other kinds of universities as well, but I think that's kind of the comparison for me, but in different regional areas. So I've been in the East, the West and now the Midwest. So, there's just different levels of this spectrum of authenticity that I really show up with.

I'm at that point where I'm so comfortable with my identities for the most part and who I am as a leader, but in many ways I have to figure out how to navigate and re-navigate, but then also conforming in some ways and compromising. I'm also really comfortable just being who I am as a queer womxn of color professional, because even if there are expectations, I can't take away those signifiers. Even if I don't always ‘out’ myself, people know something’s up. I have colorful hair, I have facial piercings, I have all these tattoos, I just I feel like there's so many different pieces. In my previous role, it was expected that I show up as my whole self. Here, that's not the case. They say, “We already know who you are, so let’s take that race and gender
and sexuality shit out of it; let's just get the job done.” And also, “We don't really care what has to happen or what the process is, because at the end of the day, we need to make money; at the end of the day we're transactional.”

Expectations for professionals at our institution also feels very ‘professionalized’. People are more formal; they wear more business attire. It's not really about feelings; it's about the facts and, “How do you know what you know?” and “How can you prove it?” and “How can you assess it?” Even though there's qualitative knowledge and just knowledge from my own experiences, my body, my empathy, and my culture, that's not really valued, especially at a research one institution. The main questions are, “Where did you get the numbers? How do you prove it?... prove it.” For them, it's always about who can be the best, which is a super white supremacist way of thinking, rather than thinking, “If you succeed, then we all succeed.” I feel solid in my professional identity. I have to code and pick and choose and navigate, but that's so that at the end of the day that I could give and be with the people I actually love and care about. The other expectation is that I need to be everywhere, know everyone else, also be a good steward when anything multicultural or diverse is happening, that I should always be showing up. These are expectations within my functional area, or maybe that's just how I have internalized them. If you don't know the answer here and you’re a student of color, you automatically go to this one office. My staff doesn't always know what's happening, so then they automatically put it on me because they don’t believe that’s part of their job.

As a mid-level person, that’s the expectation from the people that I 'serve', or that I supervise. From above me, they expect me to do my job, but then when they can't do what they're supposed to be doing, they're like, “Well, Kalia will do it.” So, I think that some of it is
just institutional dysfunction and some of it is just sexism, for people to just assume, “Well, I don't want to do it, so Kalia can do it instead.” I don't know if that’s an expectation, but it is also the pattern of behavior that's happened.

I knew that after that experience, going to another bureaucratic large public institution that’s less diverse, I knew that I was going to be working in a Multicultural Center that was ‘old school’ in many different ways. I knew that it was going to be highly bureaucratic and I knew that the structure wasn't going to be flat anymore. I knew that there would have to be compromises in many different ways than in other spaces.

I also get adversarial messages from my current institution that trickle down from our senior leadership, but also some of it is their own internalized ‘impostor syndrome’ and how that shows up in ‘respectability politics’. I theorize these dynamics using racial formation theory. We're told that, as people of color, we're doing these leadership roles, but there are only so many resources and we’re pitted against each other for that pool of resources; of course the resulting dynamics would then be adversarial. Instead of saying, “We have all these resources; why don't we work together?” It's based on ‘respectability politics’ and the fear of losing your job. They must think to themselves, “How can I position myself so that I am the ‘good queer Asian womxn of color’ and that person is ‘the bad one’.”

It's pretty much the polar opposite of that feminist praxis, which would center questions like, “What do you need?” or “How can I support you?” and “Can we communicate or make decisions together?” That's just not what happens here. In my previous role I was working around people with similar identities or same identity with maybe different experiences. I think there is just a common understanding of ‘shit is hard’ and we’re here to support each other and
lift each other up as much as we can. Coming to the table through a feminist praxis and being real about our identity dynamics as people of mostly marginalized identities… we couldn’t ignore it. The whole university is a white supremacist institution, and we were in it together.

Here, the culture is the people are in it for themselves—it is white supremacist in a different manifestation; it is capitalist; people want to advance and do everything they can with the least amount of work. It feels that people are just in it for themselves. When we are working with students with marginalized identities and the mentality is, “I can do this for you, but what are you going to do for me in return?”… For me, that’s not how support shows up, especially in community. That mentality actually reinforces a lot of really painful sexist and racist and homophobic institutions. People aren’t willing to leverage their privilege because they don’t want to lose it; they don’t want to lose the power that comes with the privilege. That’s a generalization, but I think I’ve been there long enough to notice, “Hmm… that’s weird; that’s different; that’s a pattern.” Imposter syndrome, respectability politics, and emotional labor, I think that they’re all very much connected for me as someone who's a one and a half generation US citizen.

Another thing that comes up is emotional labor. One thing I think a lot about with mid-level managers, especially of color, especially queer folks, I am often asked to be the representative or the token or the person that speaks for the whole group. They say, “Kalia, you’re the queer womxn of color here, what do you think?” So, I’m either hyper-visible like that or I'm completely invisible where people don't give a shit about what I think or they say, “well, no, her experience isn't relevant to us.” I also inherited a workspace that was quite frankly just a mess. I was asked to come in and not just clean it up and balance our books and to try to ‘fix
everything’ (because I didn't have that expectation of myself. But I was just expected to with my identities and my experiences that I just had to do it). I would have to take on the healing and the fixing and the bringing people together and hearing people and supporting people in the more traditionally womxnized or feminine ways of people’s understanding of how I'm supposed to show up and be nurturing and listen and take care of people. I was automatically assumed to have to do that even though there's nothing about that in my job. And the people who work above me, who are mostly cis men of color, don't have to do that. They could just go and be the ‘breadwinners’ and go out into the community and do what they need to do and I'm left to look over the Center, or ‘look over the house’.

There are so many pieces of embedded sexism and racism and homophobia in that. So those are the ways that I frame the terms for myself and connect them. There's no way in my narrative or in a lot of people's experiences that those things can't be necessarily completely parsed out. They have to be interconnected because that's how the systems of oppression work.

Ableism shows up in my work as well. I think my team gets annoyed with me, as someone with chronic illnesses or with a disability, because I do have to take time off. They get annoyed, because I’m not doing everything they want me to, or there’s an expectation that I should be hyper-productive and be everywhere and be everything. When I do the things they ask of me, then they are hyper-critical. They say, “You did all that and now you’re not taking care of yourself” or “It’s still not good enough,” rather than saying, “You did all this; How can I support you?” I don’t think anybody has ever asked me that in my job. The answer is always, “Well, you need to figure it out. If you need something you can ask us but we’re not going to do it.” Unless
it benefits them, they don’t want to do it. You just can’t win; especially in a space where they are not trying to dismantle white supremacy, it actually benefits them to just uphold it.

In the Midwest region, although I haven’t been in the region long enough, but it does feel very ‘black and white’, ‘straight or gay’, and it's very much binary. There are also expectations of professionals and respect given to them because they’re publishing or they have a PhD; you either have all of the credentials or you're nobody. That's very different from the regions where I was before, because it was so deeply relational. There were so many more professionals who identify similarly as me. It was just the norm to be queer, or Asian or multiracial, or a person of color, and I saw people who looked like me all the time, versus here there’s an expectation that you’re the ‘only one’ so, “You better do it well.” I think that's white supremacy and meritocracy.

Coming to the Midwest, I don’t see people that look like me at work at least. In my personal life I see people all the time. At work, I ask myself, “What do I need to do? Whose knowledge can I call upon to make it through the next hour?” That’s been something different; because I cant say that’s always been my truth. There’s something about being here and being in the Midwest that I have felt the need to call upon the people of color who have been in my family and in my life in a very different way; which is very weird for me.

My identities have shifted in their salience here in the Midwest as well. Race has always been the most salient identity, no matter what. Working at a Women’s Center in the past, my cisgender privilege and my gender identity have become more and more salient. My queerness is really invisiblized here, even though I think I look hella (very) queer and my partner and I together look hella (very) queer, but according to the Midwest, maybe not so. They read us as a
straight couple, so that feels really weird and off, because that is just not our truth and not my truth.

Messages and experiences regarding my education level and class have shifted as well. People make a lot of micro-aggressive comments toward me, such as “Dr. XX… oh wait, you’re not a doctor…” in an attempt to micro-invalidate me, because I don’t have a terminal degree. My class has come up a lot, because I’m the primary funder or financial source in our house now. My family needed someone to have a salary and this is the position that offered me the most salary for what we needed. I think that's true for a lot of mid-level professionals and people coming from a working class background, so I just needed a job and that's just what that is. We went from having two people that made quite a bit of money to only having one. We’ve had to make a lot of different shifts in the way that we spend and save.

My ability has also shown up differently in the Midwest, because I have gotten more sick and my anxiety is showing up. There are days when I can’t, I just can’t; like holding things, moving my hands, and also influences like weather, stress and stuff. Race is always there; my gender, my sexual orientation, too; my ability is showing up in a very different way. I’m also a very spiritual person, and not so religious, but I do some Pagan practices, so I’ve been trying to hone in on some of that spirituality, trying to find solace, or healing, and calling to my ancestors more.

In my experience, there aren’t a lot of spaces for mid-level managers in general to talk about their experiences; then, with the intersection of being a womxn of color, a person of color, as well as being queer and pansexual, there really aren't those narratives in the spaces that I am
able to occupy and to hold. When I think of others in mid-level roles with similar identities, I could only name maybe six or seven other people; that was scary.

For many years, when I go to the table, I’m the only person who likes like me, but as a mid-level administrator, who people perceive to be really young, and as an Asian womxn, as a womxn of color, as a queer womxn with lots of tattoos, those kinds of things, I show up to these meetings and people think I’m a student. There’s nothing wrong with being a student, but they assume that I’m young and super liberal and they get really uncomfortable around me like, “You don’t know; you’re too young.” Or they’ll say some micro-aggressive shit, or just some dumb shit; I can’t even think of all the dumb shit people say sometimes. When I say, “That’s not okay,” people are almost aghast, partially because of the culture, but then they also read me subconsciously as a small young women of color, something’s off and it’s not so ‘straight’. I’m assumed to be passive. So when I say something, people either really love me or they don’t like me.

I’ve also experienced from people who feel they are as far along in their careers as me, that they feel threatened, and they will do everything in their power to make themselves look good. They’ll say things like, “Well, she’s young, so I know better than her.” For example, I’m going to be a faculty member for a NASPA institute with undergraduate students and one of my colleagues who is in a higher level position, also got a faculty role. We were on an email thread together and he knows I am also in this institute. His email read, “I’m going to be a faculty member and blah, blah, blah…” One of my mentors waited a couple of days and I did, too, and she responded, “That’s great that you’re doing that; as is Kalia.” And no emails have happened since hers went out. It’s those types of things where people are trying to invalidate me based on
my identities, whether they realize it or not, to make them feel better, or they just don’t want to acknowledge all these things they are ‘accomplishing’, I’m also doing that and I’ve been in the profession many years less than them. So, there is an inherent threat and discomfort with that.

At the same time, I have been really thinking a lot about leveraging my privilege in the identities where I do hold dominant identities; I want them to be seen. Sometimes I’ll be in spaces and I’ll be like, “I’m white too,” even though I don’t really strongly identify as white. I’m just trying to get in, so I’m not as threatening or for other cis people. I’ll try to engage people in single-stall bathroom conversations, but here in the Midwest, people are like, “No, I don’t care about those.” The way that people understand me and my visual cues, automatically to them makes me ‘less than’ in ways that I didn’t experience in my other mid-level experience. I have to be careful to not come off as angry, too. Then they’ll be like, “There’s this young, unprofessional, uncouth person in this meeting that can’t keep her shit together.” I’m navigating some ‘stereotype threat’ around that as well, too.

I'm not as ‘out’ as I have been in many other spaces because there is this inherent tension that I wanted to process through and to share and then also to highlight the ways that racism and homophobia and sexism and internalized transphobia really impact the ways that people perceive me. In my current work setting, I'm really one of the only ‘out’ people and even at that it's a different experience with outness.

In addition to ‘impostor syndrome’ or ‘respectability politics’, or even my own ability to code-switch or to get through from day-to-day, I think that there's something really important in being able to share that with other people with similar identities. It helps to build that kind of consciousness or that tool kit for people. Then they will know, “I know I'm not the first person to
navigate this; I'm not going to be the last.” So, having that oral history or having that documented history or tactics feels like there's a lot of opportunity for community.

When I think about the benefits of my mid-level role, I think that strategically I've extended my portfolio. I'm supervising and I'm balancing an almost $300,000 budget, I'm trying to re-frame, and do the assessment stuff. I think that being a mid-level professional, I'm not necessarily working one-on-one with students on their development, but I'm helping create more of the policies and the initiatives to foster that. I'm actually able to access and sit in certain rooms and places and committees that if I was still in a new or professional role, I just wouldn't inherently have the capital to be in those rooms.

I'm also able to get into rooms and agitate and say, “Have we thought about centering the most marginalized students?” or, “Wow, I heard you're working on first-year and transfer student programs, but what about students of color?” I can say, “You're talking mostly about first-generation students, but what about that intersection?” You know, I'm able to be that voice or be someone who is allowed to ask certain questions. People will stop and respond, “Oh, I never thought about that before,” because mid-level and up it's mostly white people or men of color who are just trying to ‘buy-in’, so they can survive and succeed. For me, I don't really have things to lose, but at the same time, I'm like, “What are they going to do to me?” I'm speaking my truth and I'm navigating how to speak my truth, but I think that that's a benefit.

When I think back, I can think of a few memorable supervision experiences. The first person I ever supervised was a straight white womxn, who was super privileged, had hella money, went to college, just all of it. She was one of those people, have you ever met someone that everything just happens for them? That was her. She was super thoughtful and
nice, I became her supervisor right when I moved back out to California. I sat down with her and I said, “Okay, so I'm going to supervise you. Let's talk about expectations.” We talked about feedback, we talked about training, and professional development. Within three weeks, I found out that she had gone over my head multiple times already, and she was all of a sudden serving on this huge commission for Title IX, and was spitting out totally bogus information about sexual assault and violence. It was a liability, especially as an institution that was under an O.C.R. (Office of Civil Rights) investigation. So I emailed her and I was like, “Can we have a conversation? I'm concerned about this and I trust you and I want to hear a little bit more.” So we sit down and she comes in hella (really) defensive. She's like, “Who the hell are you?! You have only been my supervisor for a few weeks and you're questioning everything that I'm doing, critiquing whiteness…” and all this other stuff. I responded, “I'm here to make sure that whoever you are since the time that we started, that you're better by the time we finish working together. I am going to critique white privilege, power and privilege, and systems of oppression, and I'm also going to hold myself accountable. We need to talk about that also in terms of positionality. If there's something going on, I need you to also tell me ‘What’s up? What is this about?’” She never had another supervisor or a womxn of color come in and say, “These are all the things I expect from you and this is what you need to do, blah, blah, blah.” She said, “You don't even care about who I am or about my narrative or anything, and you're just telling me what to do now!”

That was a really good moment in my first experience as a supervisor and I said, “You know what? You're right!” I realized that I can't be defensive and I can't be upset. If I had been working there and a new supervisor showed up and just said, “Here's all the shit you need to do,
which I had always been told I did everything perfectly, and all of a sudden there's a queer womxn of color who comes and is like, ‘no, that's actually not the truth’,” that would flip someone's world upside down!

Some of that was her fragility; some of that was me trying to posture and be like, “I'm your supervisor, so stop going over my head.” But, it was a good moment to pause and say, “Let's talk about it. I gave you my expectations and I really should've stopped and said ‘what do you need from me, really?’ ‘You've been here and you have so much knowledge already, what does that mean?’” And to this day, that's what I do whenever I work with a supervisee. I am also very clear and upfront in the very beginning that I am very critical of systems of power and privilege. I'm going to name it in our meetings and that might make you uncomfortable, but let's unpack that together, because that’s my job.

My job is that you can better serve students and by the end of the year, this supervisee told me, “I remember I just hated you at first!” She just straight up said it. I asked her, “What was that about?” She said, “It's probably because I'm racist and and in some ways probably homophobic. And that was playing into like me wanting to just be good, and just to prove to you that… and you read me before I read me.” I remember thinking, “Oh shit.” I told her that she taught me as well, taught me that I need to ‘pump the brakes’ and not just go in with supervisees and say, “All these things need to happen” and “get your shit together.” She still, to this day, gets me.

It became one of the best supervision experiences that I had, because to this day we still talk and we still unpack things. She'll call me to say, “I did this fucked up thing at work. What do I do?” I would tell her, “I don’t know. What do you think you need to do?” She has said she
never had a supervisor that just didn't tell her the answers, that I was the only supervisor that would ask her questions. Then, after a while she started to pull my own shit on me when I would come to her. She would say, “Well what do you think?” It became one of those really great relationships, where we could be in meetings and she would say things like “I, as a white person and as a straight person, I'm feeling really uncomfortable with the dynamic that's happening right now.”

She became one of my best allies, and for me that is what transformational supervision can be; we were ‘going to bat’ for each other and she gave me critical feedback. She would share with me the next pieces of her journey, then how she was getting herself there, but also asked for help in how I could get help her get there. She would provide three things she needed from me, like she needed to shadow me when I was on duty, work with students of concern, and figure out her three other professional development opportunities because she just wasn’t getting that at our institution. It wasn't until she started doing that, that we were able to actually get there. I think back fondly and I think that supervising a white womxn was a huge challenge for me, and I think it also proved to me that like I had my own shit about working with white people, specifically straight white women. So she challenged me in every way, shape, and form.

I think the disadvantage is that the people I supervise expect so much from me. They thought I was going to come in and ‘poof!’; everything was going to be better; that I was supposed to just be magically…. someone in my division said verbatim, “Oh, you're going to come in and fix everything; you're going to save everything.” With that tone being set from before I even got there, I was set up for failure, because there's no way that one person can do that.
The other disadvantage is because I'm the person that oversees some of the collaborations and the relationship-building and people know who I am and I'm in a lot of ways a charismatic leader that people think, “Yeah, I can get behind that!” or “I'm into it!” What ends up happening is because I'm able to do those things, then my supervisor and his supervisor are trying to put more and more things on me. They think, “You built relationships with all these faculty members, well then, why don't you do three more things for that?” or “Why don't you be the one spokesperson on campus climate for this?” For example, we're currently navigating a really messed up grant situation where our funder funds DAPL (Dakota Access Pipeline), and I have been very vocally opposed, but people don't know that because it happens behind closed doors. I’m in this situation where if I say I do oppose them, then it's like I'm insubordinate and I'm not on the same page with my supervisor and his word is always right. I'm navigating all those pieces.

People also don't understand when I say things like, “Well, what you’re saying right now is really homophobic” when they say things like being ‘butthurt’ or they won’t necessarily say, “That’s so gay,” but they will say things like, “Why is that person wearing those clothes?” or “they seem like really fabulous,” things like that. I'm like, “I’m the only like really, really out queer person and that's really fucked up.” There's these expectations that I have to be perky or make everything better, and then when I say I need to take care of myself, the response is “You're doing too much” or “You need to do better managing your time,” rather than “how can I support you?” So I’m constantly almost walking-dancing around eggshells, on them, and sometimes the eggshells are glass, and it hurts. So, that pressure from below and above, there's no one else to distribute that - I become that landing field of everyone’s ‘shit’. That has been the
theme. So, I have been thinking, “How do I keep growing? and “How do I determine if this is healthy for me?” I also ask myself, “Is it like this everywhere?” (which, I know it's not).

I think being a mid-level manager who's a queer womxn of color, people just automatically assume that I'm just going to take on their stuff, and that I'm going to take care of them, or that I'm just going to fix everything, that I'm a ‘unicorn’. And it's just not realistic. And being Asian, people automatically think that I could just take it and that I can just be okay.

This institution is making me physically sick. Being in high stress, challenging, violent environments. There are studies that show that people of color have physical and mental effects, that it has impact on our bodies and our minds. I inherited a position and a role that has a lot of organizational trauma. There are some toxic people on my team that haven’t processed through their own violence and harm, the harm that has been done to them, and I think they are re-enacting it on other people. So I think, “Of course it’s making me sick!” I need to think about the ways I’ll take care of myself or remove myself from the situation, especially as a survivor of trauma. Being a survivor, it’s always been something I’ve named for myself, and when it comes to ability, they are very much interlinked, because a lot of my trauma impacts my health. As I experience more and more trauma, of course I’m not going to be able to show up to work, or my chronic illnesses will show up in different ways. With the stress, my immune system won’t necessarily show up in ways and ‘go to bat’ for me. They are absolutely always connected.

There's another piece of navigating trauma, growing up in violence, where I feel impostor syndrome is constantly present, like “Do I belong here?” and “Should I be here?” I feel guilty because there's other people in my community who we have similar opportunities but maybe we're not in similar places. Does that mean I'm better than other people at this point in my life? I
know it’s not about that, but I think that how I’m perceived within my communities of origin and
where I came from and where I am now it looks completely different.

I have a few different spheres of support. I have my family, my sister, my partner, my cat,
people who are really, really close friends who I consider family, who if the world is ending, I
can call them. There is that blurred personal and professional family piece, like my friend says,
“We’re friends and family, like the Gap discount”; those people. Then, I have really close
colleagues that I consider close confidants. I was talking to another friend-colleague the other
day and he said he is ‘re-emerging’ after starting his new job. He said, “I remember when you
first got here,” I would come and do a walk-through in the basement every single day, because I
work on the first floor of our building, and I walked down there everyday and I would visit with
people. I just popped my head in I said, “Hey, how are you?” He said, “When I first met you, I
was like what the hell is wrong with this person?! She is coming in here being like ‘how are
you?’” I would ask him, “What’s going on? Is there anything I can do to support you?” And he
just didn’t understand, because that is not the culture at this institution, but over time I really
wore him down.

That’s one example of the people that have become really close to me, like Jayden or Sid
or Katrina, my partner also works at the institution, my friend Fabian… so I came into this
institution already with some capital because of my mentors and because of my friends, because
of my professional affiliations, people knew me from that. I have been able to build real and
honest relationships with people who are around the same age as me, who have similar
educations, so I realize that all of that comes into play, but we have a very similar context as
queer people of color and indigenous people of color.
As a person with my identities I don’t think that there is anyway that my personal and political my professional, it all overlaps because I can’t remove my identities. It’s also a very specific context because most of my friends work in Student Affairs. Most of my friends are in helping professions. My partner also went to… we also have the same socialization. In my personal life I’m not code switching as much. I am much more open and honest and real about what’s coming up for me. I feel more ability to be more creative and do weird shit, because what is professional anyways? There’s a different level of authenticity that I do show up with in my personal life. At work, I have more boundaries; I am more on guard. In my personal life, when I am in a relationship I’m there. With people at work, unless they are the same people in my personal life, I’m not that way. That’s a healthy boundary for me and the people around me.

What’s central to all of it is relationships. At work, I will do a walk-through of the basement and visit people once a day, and say, “hello,” and check-in with folks, and see what’s going on, and if there is anything I can support them with. I have my rituals, right? I ask folks if they want to have lunch together, or have a cup of tea? Or even let’s make tea together. I think that's very much like my grandmother and very cultural, now that I'm processing that. Also, there are just no queer people, so I go downstairs to see some people, be around some people, experience a moment of affinity, you know, be seen. One of the benefits, or the redeeming qualities of my job, is I work one floor up from one of my best friends. I don’t have to talk with her, I can just sit there and we don’t even have to make eye contact, and there is that personal and professional crossover, where that relationship exists in our personal lives, too. And, if it’s not that relationship, then it’s art. I come home so I can make art, or I come home so I could be with Jade, or make a meal with my family. Those are the things that feel important to me.
Since getting into Student Affairs, I've probably had two or three womxn of color as my supervisors, and I'm not saying that just because they're womxn of color they're automatically more supportive, but there was a common understanding of this work being hard and some solidarity. I don't think I've ever been supervised by another queer womxn of color, or someone with the 'exact same identities'. They're my family and we talk all the time. They are also some of the first people I call for things like when my partner and I had our commitment ceremony. When I got into grad school, they were the first people I called, before I even called my parents. When my partner and I decided we were going to move, or any life choices we make, they're actually the people that I call first. They were the first people that ever showed me that people could love or to care in healthy ways. If it wasn't for that mentorship and radical love of some of the people who really mentored me and pushed me and challenged me, I don't think I would be in higher education at this point.

There have been some ups and downs the past few days in my personal life. I’m experiencing this great growth about my art and building community and feeling a lot of frustration and dread about work. This morning I woke up and I was like I don’t want to go. I think some of it is about me processing through and starting to unveil some of the challenges that I’m having through us talking. I am thinking a lot about reframing, thinking about my sources of support. Who are the people that feel safest to me? Who are the people that I can go to and be like ‘whoa’, period? And what does that all mean? I’ve been thinking about how I process through and put things on paper so that’s what’s coming up for me, period. Although it’s only been a few days, it’s becoming more and more salient to me, what does it mean for me to show up to my work every single day?
I think that there's a lot of dissonance in sources of support in my personal and professional life. I often talk about my life in a duality of work; then, everything else. Not that work doesn't also encompass everything else; I bring a lot of art to my work, I work with people who are friends, and the people I work with, we sometimes do stuff outside of work, but I'm very cognizant and very conscious of what that balance is.

When I think of resilience, I see many different images. Right now, what’s coming to mind are things with hard shells that are actually super tender on the inside. They have developed these hard exteriors over their lifetime to protect them or have shelter. It allows them to be vulnerable when they need to be. I thought of the snail, or turtle or different kind of plants that have fruit with hard exteriors, like pomegranates or things like that. I also think a lot about darting or moving, whether it’s a bee or a cicada. Cicadas are bugs that hibernate for like 17 years before they return. Japanese folks believe that they are ancestors calling to us, but they are also super adaptable and they have been living since prehistoric times. Their bodies have to be smart enough to figure out how to manage through, so I’ve been thinking a lot about them. They can fly, they can hibernate, and they still just keep showing up every single summer.

I’ve experienced resilience as the skills, or the abilities, or even my own willingness to get up and do things all over the next day and show up. A lot of it is day-to-day or even meeting-to-meeting. I think about, “What are the ways that I can learn, whether it’s from a mistake I made?” or, “What can I do to protect myself moving forward after feeling drained from that meeting?” or, “Ouch! There were several micro-aggressions in a row! Do I need to confront it head-on? Do I need to just take it or do I just let it go?” I’m just picking and choosing.
The other piece of resilience has to do with power and privilege, and trying to figure out, when really racist, sexist, homophobic things happen, what it means for me to feel like I still have agency and to feel empowered to speak my truth. Sometimes that’s through modes of resistance, like art, or maybe it’s just trying to take care of myself and compartmentalize. Resilience can be lots of things, but for me it’s about stopping, re-evaluating, shifting modes, moving or doing something differently, or being playful in my work, so I can hopefully get through to the end of the day.

I think a lot about resilience in my first job. I was navigating a lot of racism and sexism. Most of the community that I was working in, they were mostly queer folks, but a lot of cisgender queer folks. As I navigated being in partnership with someone who is gender nonconforming and gender queer, or trans, there was a lot of transphobic shit happening, things that people would say to me, and things like that.

One thing I think about is that one of my supervisors kept pestering me and it just got to a point where it felt like micro-managing, and I felt that I could not do the work anymore. At that point, I had been open that I was job searching, that I wasn’t happy in my role, students had issued death threats toward me because of some of high-profile conduct cases, and I was really struggling. I had some really intense panic attacks and was diagnosed with PTSD and had to make some really important decisions about how to navigate moving forward. I asked myself, “Should I get on medication? Should I leave my job early? What can I do just to survive?” What I ended up doing was I kept seeing my therapist, I was on medication, I started to have tools and tactics to disengage if I needed to or how to give really important feedback to my supervisors, or
thinking about going to HR and filing an affirmative action complaint, finding my allies, just all of those things.

I had to make some really hard decisions and some of what was resilient was getting through the last couple weeks of my job and leaving, accepting other jobs, trying to figure out where I could find joy, whether it’s through art or my cat, or my relationship, and also just knowing that I didn’t have to fight every single battle. Sometimes, being resilient is recognizing what you have left, your life force, and figuring out what you can do to preserve that.

One other time regarding resilience in my life is right now. I’m trying to navigate being resilient, and still continuing to show up and support people I supervise and support students, or my family. For example, today my supervisor just showed up and asked, “How are you doing? How is your health?” I told him, “I’m feeling fine.” Then he says, “I’m not doing well, so I’m going to leave.” I asked him, “What do you need from me?” and I’m trying to figure out and decipher what is going on. At the end of the day, I realized it wasn’t about me. I could ask questions and I could try to show up and I could try to challenge my supervisor, and at the end of the day I need to be able to take care of students and take care of myself and be able to show up to the work that I’m doing, and show up fully in the spaces that I choose to.

I am really trying to pick and choose how I show up and challenge my supervisor and do that authentically, and also role model that for the people that I supervise. At the end of the day, it’s about being able to show up tomorrow for my own mental health, for my own wellness. This morning I didn’t want to go to work. I woke up and felt like I couldn’t get out of bed, but I just tried putting on pants, and then drinking some tea, then petting the cat for a second, to have these small little victories to be able to make it.
I think that shows up in my work environment of constantly feeling the need to perform; I need to do well, but then also that's covering up, because I don't want people for a second to think that I'm not supposed to be here. In many ways that kind of starts playing into ‘respectability politics’, where I'm working in a very white supremacist dominant workspace where people wear suits every day, where they privilege white cis men or white women who are hyper-femme, or men of color who are like the paramount of ‘success’.

For me to show up, I feel like I sometimes have to buy-in to those kinds of leadership styles where I am the one that has to balance the budget and do assessment and speak louder or wear certain outfits on certain days. I don't feel as comfortable playing with my gender or showing up in authentic work clothes for me, which may be uncomfortable for them, and then I don't get invited to the table anymore. There’s this constant negotiation within myself of how many ‘fucks do I want to give’ anymore? and also do I want to potentially move up – it’s a cost analysis.

My authentic understanding of my leadership and the way that I work with people is much more relational; it's collaborative; it isn't me being the loudest, it’s me not having to code and having to sound super White. There are different ways of reasoning where I'll be more circular or more creative or process information a certain way, and in order to survive in that space I feel myself sometimes colluding with this really dominant space, feeding into my own ‘impostor syndrome’, but just also trying to get through the day. It becomes a survival mechanism.

I learned those skills of resilience as a young person of color and a queer person who was lower working class growing up. I think I already had those skills of resilience. I knew I had to
go to members of my community, I had to ask for help, and share that capital with different community members. They helped me with how to navigate the pathways, to identify, “What are the opportunities?” and, “What can you do?” I learned those things early on and used them in different ways once I got to college. From that point on I kept honing my skills.

When I think back on all of my professional challenges, I haven’t had an easy experience in Student Affairs. It keeps coming down to who my mentors are, how to find out who my allies are, and who are going to be the people who say, “I know about the situation and it’s hella (really) fucked up. I’m gonna call you and say, ‘this is what happened’ and say, ‘this is not okay’.” Who are the people that are going to say something so I don’t have to say something? Those are the modes and the different ways that I have been able to navigate in a really savvy way. Each time, as I reflect on my professional experiences at different institutions, each time I’ve gotten better at it.

I think that especially for me also being racially fluid, the fluidity was something that is really salient for me, so knowing that there's many different ways that I identify and I think that I use queer as a label because it's more of that umbrella term for me. I don't want to have to explain to people my sexual identity. And sometimes I’m just like “I'm queer and you just need to fucking figure that shit out.” That ability to pick and choose and be fluid and navigate in ways that feel good for me, I think that's the way for me to protect myself and also find empowerment in the different ways that I navigate and the different modes that I utilize to survive in research-one, predominantly white public institutions.

Resilience looks different. Resilience looks like carving out time for lunch every single day, resilience looks like I leave by 5 p.m. or 5:30 p.m., and if I have to stay late, I flex that time.
It means I prioritize going to the doctor, caring for my mental health, and going to therapy and preventative care. I have to do that, otherwise, I won’t have the energy to be resilient and I won’t be able to support other people in the ways that other people have supported me.

I was in my last year of college when I decided to go to graduate school and I had broken my dominant hand. I couldn’t even write; I had three surgeries to help me be able to use my hand again. My parents were supportive, but were also being abusive and manipulative in that time, because I was super drugged up, and they wanted me so badly to be dependent on them. I was struggling academically. I was in all of these law classes for my major. I was struggling and not really able to even show up for work, you know, all of these pieces were going on. Through mentorship and some of my peers who showed up and asked me, “What do you need?” and together, we laid out a plan piece-by-piece. It wasn’t by myself; it was very much in community. Then my mentor sat me down and said, “Here are some options to consider for graduate school.” Then her partner came in and said, “This is how you’re going to do it. We are going to plan it out all together.” Eventually, I was able to graduate and I got into schools. I was able to figure out how to do it financially, because I had gotten another job and was working, and somehow I finished my classes all within my last semester of school.

When I think about the strategies I used, I remember just sitting and crying and letting out my emotions, because I felt like I just had lost my physical ability, lost my mental ability - I couldn’t even put together a sentence half that time. My brain was functioning so much slower than I was used to. I sat down and went to therapy. I talked with my therapist and got that professional help and started my own mental health medication regimen again. I also let my peers and my mentors know what I was struggling with, and I said, “I can’t even put on my pants
in the morning!” So they were asking, “Okay, well are you asking for help to put on your pants?” I said, “Yeah, sometimes. Can someone come over and help me once a week cut up the vegetables that I need to cut up and help me with my meals, and help me with transportation because I can’t drive?” I was able to ask for help.

The last piece, even though I was in a vulnerable situation, once I realized what was going on with my family regarding the continued abuse, was setting boundaries. I was able to say, “This is what I need and how I need it in order to protect myself and take care of myself.” This was my biggest of all the challenges I had as a young adult going into Student Affairs.

This was also a time where I was figuring out how to ‘come out’ and be really honest with my family about how I identified. Around that time, for the first time, I had a conversation with my family about what it means for me to be multiracial and my mom to be white and ask them, “Why didn’t we ever talk about this?” It was a time where I was really honest about who I am and how I navigate the world, and how with all of these added layers of marginalization and also the privilege to access healthcare, to be in school, to be able to afford to go to all of my doctor’s appointments, and figuring out how to be really honest about what was going on. I was figuring out how to hold that mirror up to myself and say, “This is who I am. What does that mean?” That was a really pivotal time in terms of my identity development and figuring out what my identities mean as I went into Student Affairs.

When I worked at an institution on the West Coast, I was one of the more senior RDs (resident directors) there. I oversaw the largest program; I had 1,200 residents, the largest staff, and was supervising professional staff, and I might have been the only queer womxn of color on the entire professional staff team at that point as well. That sets the scene. The area I was
overseeing was one of the whitest, most affluent communities, up in ‘Golden Manor’, which was five minutes away from campus, up a hill, it was not very accessible.

Three or four months before I was going to leave, my partner and I were considering a domestic partnership; we didn’t want to get married. We both worked in Student Affairs at the same institution, and if we needed to move-in together, we wondered, “How would that process be?” Something as simple as getting them on my meal plan, which is a basic benefit for all of the work that I was doing in Residence Life. When I asked about a meal plan for them, I was told by my supervisor who was a white cis gay man, “No, we don’t compensate people that way; You have to be married.” I said, “There are white straight couples who are living together and they’re not engaged, they’re not married, and they’re not domestic partners, so what is that about?” He replied, “Well, that’s different, because they’re going to be married.” So, I knew my partner and I would just have to figure it out. They ended up getting their own apartment and I would help with the rent there, because my rent was free.

As I was getting ready to leave this position, and my co-RD had left as well, they hired someone and they were going to promote her, professional staff member that I supervise, they would make her another professional full-time staff member essentially. They were going to make this cis-white straight woman, who is upper class, affluent, an RD from an assistant RD position. At that point, she had left the university and didn’t know if she wanted to come back. One of the pieces they ended up using to try to bargain with her was for her partner to live with her, as well as a full meal plan for them. They’re not married, they’re not engaged, none of that bullshit. She called me right away and said, “What the fuck is this?!” and I said, “You’re right. What the fuck is this?!” I already felt super ostracized and I had been putting in a ridiculous
amount of work. I thought, “How could that be okay? That’s so unfair and it’s so discriminatory on multiple levels, as a womxn of color, as a queer womxn, my partner identifying as gender non-conforming and genderqueer,” just all of these different pieces.

So, I took it to my supervisor and I took it to HR and filed a complaint. I felt so disempowered and absolutely disrespected, and marginalized and oppressed, even though I knew how to navigate the systems. As someone with the most experience on my team, it felt like a slap on the face. In terms of strategies I used, they were really similar. I talked to my mentors, I talked to my therapist for a while, my partner and I tried to strategize about the costs and the benefits, and what do we have to win and what do we have to lose. We had to think about whether it was even worth it? I talked to my friends at other institutions about how they would navigate this. They helped me to think of others that can help in this process.

Another way, resilience has shown up in my life has to do with my choice to interview in the ways that I did to get my current job. When I interviewed I showed up one way to get the job, but now that I work there it's different. I was very keen on that and aware when I interviewed for my position now. I dressed much more conservatively and I covered up all my tattoos. I contemplated taking out my facial piercings. My hair was pretty monotone, maybe I had a little bit of purple in my hair, but that was it. All of my interview answers were very cut and dry. I played off my femme-ness, and I didn't mention that I was queer. I let people make mistakes around my racial identity and said what they wanted to hear; I played the game versus feeling like I don’t have to do that in the larger Student Affairs field.

I don’t need to code switch in the same ways or there's more room for advocacy and I'm heard in a different way, but I also have different capital in NASPA or ACPA because I’ve
served on leadership teams for the past five or six years now. But, this new institution that I'm at that’s super racist and homophobic and sexist, they don't want to hear from me in the first place.

I'm still trying to play with how to show up authentically and so the expectations are to be quiet and tone it down; you're going to be okay with it; you do what you're told and you can’t challenge it. That's not who I am as a person, so there is direct conflict with that.

Racism and sexism and homophobia and systems of oppression and white supremacy are so deeply embedded in all of our work at a colonial institution on stolen land, that one person is not going to fix your whole culture. It takes everyone's work, and everyone's like, “What is in it for me?” I'm constantly the person who is reminding people, “It's not just about you; it's about all of us.” I’m asking, “So, how will all of us do this?” or, “How can we all come together and make this decision?” or, “How can we all feel empowered to do this kind of work?” I'm constantly hitting wall after wall and it's exhausting.

I'm a Student Affairs administrator and my greatest transferable skill is the fact that I work with students and advocate with and for them. My first experiences in the field, even in grad school, I chose to work outside of Multicultural Affairs. I felt that I could bring a Multicultural Affairs lens to the work we were doing, to First Year Experience, to Orientation, to hopefully be more inclusive. So, I think that I've always been playing with that since day one, because I knew that with my identities and mostly with my marginalized identities, that I would always have to be ‘lifting as I was climbing’. I always knew all that, that no matter what my position was, they could say, “Kalial, you're the vice chancellor of magic and unicorns” and that students with similar identities would still seek me out, because they just don't see people who look like me. I don't really work directly with students anymore, but I have regular lunches or
coffees or teas with queer womxn of color, queer Asian womxn of color, queer multiracial womxn of color, who are like, “I don't belong and I don't think you belong either and I'm seeing that, so can we come together? And will you support me?”

I know that no matter what, my role will be in an institution even if I'm not in that institution anymore. There will always be that need for human connection and understanding of power and privilege, and the ways to navigate it. That is something that I know I've needed, but then also the students at every school that I've been at have been there for. What I will say is that I feel that because of my very solid Student Affairs socialization and not like that, “fru, fru… we all belong” and “let's hold hands” socialization; that really like coded white shit, I was socialized into the profession through an equity, diversity, and social justice lens to be critical of the work that we're doing. And, because I know that I benefit from the capital of my mentors, people respect them in the work they do and they lifted me as they climbed, and they still continue to do that.

For me, transformational supervision is not transactional. Like some of the people I supervised that were just like, “Okay, well I don't need anything from you; you don't need anything from me” and it's just like, “Let me just check the boxes”… We're not transforming and challenging the academy. I think for me holistic transformational supervision is figuring out who we each are in this space. It’s about asking, “What's the stuff that comes up for you?” “What's the stuff that comes up for me?” “What are some of our strengths and also what are some of our challenges?” Also, in the larger scheme of things, thinking about, “What are the systems of oppression that we're working in?” and “We're working in bureaucracy,” it's a white supremacist
organization of higher education in general. You know, settler colonialism, colonialism, and capitalism impacts us.

For me, it is being able to work with someone who says, “Yeah, we're in this. How are we working on ourselves and recognizing our own internalized oppression and internalized white supremacy?” And then it’s about, “How do we outsmart the system so that we're making it better for ourselves? And most importantly, that we're making it better with the students that we work with so that they know that just because the prescription or the pathway for some people is ‘you do all of the requirements: you get into college, you are part of every single opportunity, you get all A's, you do all these things, you get a job and you graduate.’ That's not the formula. We're actually providing options for people and empowering people to make those decisions for themselves, to figure out what they need to do to live a more holistic livelihood. As a supervisor, that's my job for the people I supervise, too. If I'm not role modeling that for the people I supervise and they're not challenging me back, and building those relationships of open communication and trust and unpacking our privilege, or unpacking what we know, and how we know it, that may help students and that may also hurt students that we work with.

For me, transformational supervision is a mutual investment in each other in order to unlearn our white supremacy shit and rebuild or reconstruct what radical loving education can look like. That's what it is for me. But, I also think that it takes both people wanting to do that; it's not just about transforming the person that I'm working with, but we're doing that with each other. It doesn't always have to be perfectly equal, but there has to be some kind of acknowledgement that we're in relationship; we’ll push and pull. It's much more of a feminist praxis - we're going to make decisions together. I'm going to be as transparent as I can and I need
you to do the same for me. That's that understanding and that agreement and we're working on it.

My ideas of support stem from growing up Toishanese and multiracial. Support looks like honest conversation; you’re not bullshitting, and it’s not passive aggressive. Honest conversation is, “This is what’s happening; This is what’s going on; Here’s what I need from you; What can you do for me? How can we do this together?” For example, if I say I’m struggling with assessment, then you would say, “Okay, so what are you struggling with? Let’s talk about that. Can I show you how or can I provide you resources?”

Also, for me showing up or support means actually providing feedback and consistently improving, like helping me grow as a supervisor and also when people are being passive aggressive and petty and don’t cc me on an email because I’m a womxn of color and a queer womxn of color and they’re just gonna talk to the men of color who they think have power and skip over me and go over my head. I need supervisors or supervisees who are gonna loop me in and say, “What the hell is this?” and hold people accountable. I think that accountability and communication, that trust, are very minimum things.

Support for me is also having a supervisor or people in my life that will ask me if you’re not well, then take care yourself. Because if you can’t take care of yourself, how are you supposed to show up? You can’t do your job and take care of yourself, so I need a supervisor who really utilizes that framework, or just people in my life, like other mentors or confidants. For example someone today said, “Girl, I think that work is making you sick; what are we going to do?” I didn’t even have to say that I needed support; She just said, “I’m going to tell you what I see.” I told her, “You’re right.” She didn’t just mention the problem; she helped me to solve it.
If someone has not been socialized in that, it could feel really, really funny. To actually work in a setting where someone is like, “I see you and I care about you. What's going on?” People think that supervision (or at least the people I supervise) think that supervision is transactional, that it’s just one-on-ones. For example, when I ask them, “What do you have for me?” and they respond, “Nothing.,” I'm like “Really? Do you want to get to know me as a person? I'm going to try to ask you some questions,” but, their response is, “No, I don't want anything to do with you.” I'm like, “Okay, cool, well that's your prerogative. I can't say I didn't try.”

So, yeah, it's just a very different environment versus other spaces where I've been a supervisor of professional staff. When I first came in to that role, they actively resisted working with me, and then by the end they’re critically thinking about their whiteness, and maybe they discovered they want to go into Student Affairs, or really critiquing capitalism and administrative violence, or opening up about wanting to talk about Title IX and how sometimes it's so transphobic – we were really able to get there. It was because they unveiled themselves in some ways and I was able to meet them through mutual sharing and growing and challenging.

Looking back, I wouldn’t have done things differently. I very much believe that things are supposed to happen the way that they need to. And I also believe because of the spiritual side of me, I believe very much that the ancestors will help guide me along the way.

You know, I remember there was this one time before I even went to live in Vermont and I woke up and thought “You know what? Vermont is going to be really good for me.” And initially, I didn't want to go; I did not want to go there. That’s some white-ass shit; why would I go there? There's going to be no one I want to meet and on my interview weekend, I met my
partner. We didn't date at that time, but years later we started dating. I remember thinking
“Maybe love, or relationship, or really good things will happen to me because I made this is
really, really hard decision.” I intentionally went somewhere that was super white and super
different, and working in a functional area that was really uncomfortable for me, and because of
it, this is where I am now.

I think that every single pathway has happened, things have happened, to lead me to
where I need to be. Not that I need the validation, but I win awards, I’m successful personally
and professionally, even though it doesn't always feel that way. I know that I'm doing the best
that I can with what I have.

Also, I very much believe that when we’re born and as we go through life, things are
supposed to happen to teach us what we need to know that we didn’t get from our previous lives
or spiritual experiences. I keep coming back to that; there has to be something that I'm missing
here, because this is really hard, there has to be something that happens. I wrote my thesis in
grad school about hope and consciousness and hope is praxis and love is praxis. I strongly
believe that they still, even though they don't always feel like they're present, they’re still present
in the work that I’m doing and it has to be intersectional. I can’t be like, “Things need to change,
I should’ve done this.”

I do wish that people weren’t so fucked up sometimes, or that systems of oppression
weren’t fucked up. Now, because I've experienced these things I can help other people not have
to navigate it in the same way that I did, or if they do, then I can say, “What do you need to do?”
I can reflect on what my mentor's asked me, or the people that I care about said, “Your work is
making you sick; You need to do something differently.” Those are things that are supposed to happen.

To be really honest, my future utopic vision of education involves dismantling the entire system of education and reformatting it. I don’t know what that would look like, but I know it stems from K-12 education. I think it’s capitalism, I think it’s white supremacy, but, what I would really love to do is to create an educational space that was based on feminist intersectional praxis that centers queer and trans people of color, that honors knowledge that’s not necessarily found in books. It would be a system that gives people access if they want to get a doctorate or publish or live their whole lives and be ‘out’ safer, emphasize family, or their well being, and health, and care. I would want that. I would want people to be able show up as the leaders that they are and also not necessarily have to create structures with more boundaries so that people can't get that shit. I would want to have mentorship programs, I would want to be able to play, to actually sit down and do hard work and learn our own internalized oppression and internalized white supremacy, and the ways that enact violence on each other. I would want education to be a different kind of education that’s creative and people can be creative. They don’t necessarily have to just have the ‘nine to five’, but they can actually show up and be messy and be in what they are.

I also think that in terms of mid-level professionals, for us to have supervision that is holistic. I think that is one thing for me to try to supervise people, but also people that are mid-level and queer and trans and people of color, drop out because they get so exhausted. What ends up happening is that we get weaned out, we go to other professions, or we do something completely different, and then you see these mediocre professionals rise to the top. How does
that even happen? So, what I would want is good, real supervisors, who are going to get feedback and be critical and challenge others, and be aware of their shit, because if they're not, then what are we going to do?

I think the other piece is probably for people to feel empowered and have the agency to ask for what they need, to tell you what they need, and I think that a lot of us, or at least I don't…and this is a generalization, but I know that there have been times where I've been afraid to say things like, “Well, my partner and I aren’t married, but there's this thing going on and I need to be able to go support them.” I need to make sure that we both have access to health care or these basic every day things and that's not always the case. I want people to feel like they’re seen if they want to be seen, supported holistically, whether that's the systems and the structures, because I know inherently that if people are getting to college. If they access a Master's degree or go into higher education, that’s great, but then you see this whole other monster of colonial institutions. If that doesn't wear you down and you can persist and be resilient, that’s a whole other piece. For me, it comes down to that system. If I had endless money and ability, I would just do some different shit; not that I'm perfect, but I think that until the structures are different and they change and people actually have competency and understanding who they are and how that impacts people, I don't know if it will get better.

I have some advice for future mid-level QTIPOC administrators: Know your network, know your mentors, because you're probably not going to see or experience a lot of people who identify as similar as you, or have the same identities as you. The further you go ‘up’, or the more degrees that you get, it’s only going to get Whiter. Knowing that there’s all different kinds of knowledge, it doesn’t have to be book knowledge, or the same knowledge as the White people
or the people who get the accolades, but I think that there's an experiential knowledge that helps with resilience, like building a network, sharing stories, trusting your body and consciousness and what comes up for you, and knowing that there has to be some kind of balance and care for yourself. If you're not taking care of yourself...systems were not made for us, these spaces were not made for us to survive...so, we've got to find different ways and be savvier and outsmart them, and it's possible.

Locate where you can find affinity, that's a thing. Just because someone's queer or brown doesn't necessarily mean that they're going to be ‘your people’. It's important to have a life outside of the work, because the work is only work. Something I think Student Affairs people believe, “I’m going to save the world and they’re going to be all better.” No, at the end of the day, it’s actually a job. If you can do something good in your job, that's amazing, and I'm so happy for you. It's just a job and it could be a tokenizing and hard experience and it doesn't have to be your whole experience. I think if I had told myself that in my early career, I think that would've helped a lot in terms of navigating or in terms of my own mental health, because I thought I had to fight it all and in actuality, I didn't. Some people are just fucked up and they're gonna do some fucked up shit, and that's okay.

Five to ten years from now - I don't know if I'm going to stay in higher education or in post-secondary education, because of all of those things that I alluded to. I think it's an inherently violent system. I want to work with students of concern or students who might not be retained, to support their navigating processes, because I know I needed that and that's a valuable experience for students to have. Maybe I’ll have another degree, but if anything, it won’t be in education or
higher education, it might be in ethnic studies or art, or creative shit. I think there's a Degree in Creative Shit somewhere (laughing).

For me, art is essential. I went to this really rad reading on Friday night and there were some really powerful narratives so, I’m thinking a lot more about creative writing, and more about my poetry, and how can I use those as tools to process, and also for self-healing and self-care. It sparked a little bit for me. Something to get it down on paper, the “So what, now what?” to be creative and telling my truths.

I'll have a lot of art on the side, because I think art and healing has a place in the academy, as well as a place in who I am as someone who is resilient, who can make choices that are holistically good for me. I fully want to name that if I am in positions of power, I’m going to break that shit down and hire people who are good and can do the job, but also who actually need the jobs, and are hopefully other queer and trans people of color, women of color. I would focus on what is the actual labor, the emotional and physical and spiritual labor, that people of color do. I can see myself doing that. My family and I will also be doing really magical, creative things in our every day life, whether that's writing, mentoring people, or just doing some wonderful loving things in the community. I think there's going to be a lot of healing and creating in the next 10 years.

In terms of support to attain this vision, I think some of it will just have to be peers or mentors trying to help me figure out the pathways and different solutions. I recognize that from the time that I've been in school, I've not taken a traditional route and I keep getting fixated on ‘all these other people did these three things and they became a director and assistant dean. I'm very much realizing my identity and experiences are different and I’m going to just have to do
something differently, so I need thought partners and other creative people who are not just people who are painting like I do, or sculpting or whatever, but they're actually thinking creatively and outside of the box around, “here's how you work through systems.”

I think some of the reality of financial support, in order to make risky decisions, is first to have financial stability. In my future vision, my partner and I are not in school; that is a reality and a privilege that is just real. My peers will be even more important as I move up, or if I move up, because there’s going to be fewer people who look like me. Maintaining those relationships will be even more important. Real talk, support from my therapist, like the helping people in my life; that kind of support is going to be even more important. So I think that those are some of the pieces of what I’ll need. I’ll need friends who are family or just my own family to help me envision what the next steps look like.

I was at this womxn of color artist space on Saturday night. It was amazing because I was in this space with queer and indigenous womxn of color. I might have been one of the only queer people there, but I was hearing these narratives and a lot of them were working in higher education, actually. They were noting that they were struggling post-election, because these spaces feel violent. I put it out there that, “I’m really struggling too and what’s getting me through a lot of this is Grace Lee Boggs and her quote, “the most radical thing I can do is stay put.’” I keep coming back to that in terms of resilience – there’s meaning in it and also you need to just leave. There is that tension between staying and going and what is better for your health? I’ve been thinking a lot about that. Because I put myself out there at the event, I was just being honest and said, “I didn’t even know if I wanted to be at this shit, because I didn’t know who would be here.”
I was nervous and anxious to put myself out there, because as a mid-level person, as a queer womxn of color, I'm constantly asked to put myself out there and be the spokesperson and be vulnerable. I also think that there is something really magical that came out of that, because I found all these people who want to support me, people who said, “Do you want to illustrate a book?” or “Do you want to do different projects?” or “Any time you want to come over, please do” or “Come over whenever and pet my dog.” I think that there's real power in being able to do and be honest about, “I’m not feeling resilient. I don’t know if I’m going to make it. I don't know if it's worth it.” To find community outside to say, “I don’t know if it’s worth it either, but I’m here for it.”

It’s okay to stay put, because it's radical; it’s also really radical to leave, when systems or places are really violent. There’s something about that, that I am working through some internal ‘model minority’ and like ‘martyr’ shit, and probably even just being a survivor and my brain being hard-wired to just survive; there's something there. It opens up a lot of opportunities to heal. Being a mid-level administrator, I don’t envy people now who are in mid-level positions, because I think people who are in the mid-level are probably in the shittiest position, because they get pressure from below and above, and they're just compacted. As someone who survived violence, I’m recognizing how violent the system is, and in a way that I didn't before. I’m really questioning, “Should I stay put? Should I go? Where can I get support? And what is my strategy to be resilient?” I’m also recognizing that there is no wrong way to be resilient or to resist, especially with my identities. That is what has sparked for me. I think that I'm going to have to do it and maybe some of the other people or how they’ve prescribed it, is just not going to make sense for me. I can be creative and create my own concoction or recipe for how I will survive
and identify what the conditions will be so that I can actually thrive. I think a lot of people on my level are really jaded and cynical, or they just give in.

I have to remind myself that it's not mutually exclusive to be a good professional and to survive - to give up my values. I just can’t do that. As someone who is a value-based leader and someone who is very much a cultural leader, there is not room for erasure, and I just can’t give in, so I’m thinking a lot about that. I am hoping that thought and that musing will only become more clear over time. That’s where I’m at today.
Hillary

“Listen to where love is calling you next.”

Unknown

My name is Hillary. I’m a Southern gay black man and I’ve been in the field for over 20 years. I’ve worked at numerous types of higher education institutions in the field of Student Affairs. I have always aspired to a mid-level role, to be a director, so that I could do social justice work in the context of Student Affairs. Middle management is where I get to serve students and support professionals, and receive support from my supervisor. I’m currently College Access Program (CAP) director at Jackson Hope College, a community college in the Midwest.

The biggest source of influence in shaping who I am today was my mother. I was a ‘surprise child’ and she always knew I was different. She and my father, given where I grew up and their backgrounds, and all the culture that was swirling around them, they did an amazing job of parenting a very different kind of child. I was very different than all the other children. My brothers were all sort of traditional and masculine. I think my parents knew on some level who I was, and they always nurtured and supported that.

They did a really good job of letting me make my own decisions; they knew the importance of that. They did not want me to go to the Southerly University, but I did not know that until graduate school. I remember my mother told me that and I was thinking, “That is really some amazing parenting.” How many parents would have the discipline to not tell their child their opinion, especially if they felt strongly about it out of fear for the child?
For them, it was about racism. They knew the racist history of the University and they were really afraid for me, but they didn’t want to influence my decision. For them to have the presence of mind and the maturity to be able to do that is really extraordinary for any parent.

So, my mom was definitely a big influence in my life in all kinds of way. I was a ‘momma’s boy’ and she was always there for me. The way that she parented or the way that she just was with me was nurturing, without being a super nurturing personality. That wasn’t really her personality and yet she got that across to me.

My journey into the higher education profession began when I was an undergraduate at Southerly University. I intended to become a journalist, but, after a year, I decided that I did not want to report bad news to people all the time and did not want the lifestyle of a journalist. One of my advisors said, “I embodied Public Relations,” so I changed my major. I enjoyed studying Public Relations, but soon decided I would likely not do it as a career as it seemed too much like putting a good face on bad things for wealthy corporations. I became interested in Residential Life and thought that it was great personal development work. I gained a lot from my mentors in Residential Life at Southerly University and enjoyed the work. I loved people and I loved Residential Life. I wanted to know more about Student Affairs. I went on to get my Master’s in Communication, which is marketable for Student Affairs. I worked in Residential Life after graduate school at Elliott College.

That was the beginning of my journey into higher education work. I enjoyed the Residential Life experience. It’s a wonderful foundational position; it’s not long term for everyone given that you’re living in lots of crises, you’re up all night, so I knew I didn’t want to
do that forever. I thought that I wouldn’t last. About three years in, I started to look for other positions in and outside of Student Affairs.

Before I got the Residential Life job at Elliott College, I remember seeing an LGBT position at Elliott the year before. When I saw it, I thought, “That would be so cool to do that type of a job.” I didn’t give a lot of thought to it. This was the early 90s, so it was a developing field at the time. I actually met the person who took that job and she became one of my good mentors. When I was at Elliott, I needed to move on. One of the reasons I was hesitant about the field of Student Affairs was that I didn’t have plans to move around a lot, so it seemed that you needed to be open to moving to different places, and often in the middle of nowhere, in order to move up in the field. I didn’t want to do that. I also didn’t want to leave the South. At that time, my mother was still living, and Atlanta is where I wanted to be. I thought I would either get a Student Affairs job in Atlanta or I’d do something else, but I’ll just be in Atlanta.

Then, a job description came across my desk from Fitzgerald University for a director of LGBT affairs. I had already been interested in the position before, and I loved the person I worked with at Elliott, and thought, “This looks so cool.” I looked at it and I literally didn’t consider applying for it. It was my dream job, except it was in Midwest, so I wasn’t going to apply. I wished that it was in Atlanta. At the time, I had a staff member who was a graduate of the Fitzgerald University and I just mentioned it to her in passing. She said to me, “Hillary, you have to at least apply. Fitzgerald University is awesome; it’s so great…” and she was just telling me all about the local coffee shops; she was just this great ambassador for the university. Then I thought, “Well, I have to at least consider it,” because on paper it was everything I had wanted to do.
Later that year, my mother passed and I thought, “What have I got to lose? I’ll just apply.” So I applied and I got an interview. I did not have high expectations. I don’t know if you know, but Fitzgerald’s LGBT program is very well known and the director had been very big in the field at the time. They had had this man who is still around, Jim Dean, who is a great activist in the state around LGBT rights. I didn’t know all this at the time. These were big people to follow. I went on the interview and I remember thinking, “I just want to do the best that I can do; it’s not ‘do or die’ for me.” I wanted the job, but I don’t think I necessarily wanted to move to the Midwest. I grew up in a very small town and I had lived in a college town during college, but I loved the city, so I wanted to be in the city. It was great; I had a good interview experience and I really liked them. When I got home, I thought, “I really liked it. I don’t know if I’ll get it. They would have to give me an offer I can’t refuse.”

They waited about a month to contact me. When I didn’t hear back after a couple weeks, I figured I didn’t get it and I just went on with my life. I got a call from the VP and they offered me the job and it was indeed an offer I could not refuse. I also am a spiritual person and I noticed that every time I applied for a job outside the state of Georgia, I at least got an interview; there was interest. When I applied for jobs in Atlanta, I got nothing. I thought, “This must be some sort of cosmic message from beyond.” My mom knew I applied for the job in the fall, and she died in November, during the interview process. I thought to myself, “My parents aren’t alive anymore; there is nothing keeping me here. I don’t have children and I don’t have a partner here. This is a great opportunity. How can I say no to this?” So I said, “Yes.” It was one of the absolute best decisions I’ve ever made in my life.
To this day, it was the best job I’ve ever had. I don’t think I’ll have a job as good as that ever again. It was ‘of a phenomenon’, everything about it, I loved. Not that there weren’t challenges; there certainly were. I had a very challenging staff at first, but we really gelled and I’m still in touch with and still connected to them now. One person in particular, we really had a hard time, and we are very close now. Every time I go back to Fitzgerald, we spend time together. Colleagues - amazing! Fitzgerald University had this Multicultural Program, so I got to work very closely with people from Student Activities and Leadership, Intercultural Group Relations, Multicultural Affairs, International Center. We formed this Multicultural Program and it was amazing work there at the time, in the late 90s. I had an amazing boss and amazing students. It was a great seven years.

In this time, I moved to the Midwest knowing it wasn’t where I was going to stay. I met my husband there, interestingly enough, I met him when I returned to Atlanta to attend a conference. At the time, he was in a doctoral program in another state, so we were long distance for almost a year. Then, he came to visit me that summer. He was in Residential Life, so he was able to pick up and come away for a summer; so he did that. We decided that he would come to Fitzgerald when he was writing his dissertation and that he would just lead the next job search. That was fine with me because I was still early in our time there and didn’t really have any desire to stay there.

We were very entrenched in the community. We really loved it and he got a job there at Fitzgerald University as well. It was awesome, but after being there for a while, he finished his degree and he was ready to move on. He got a job at a college in Philadelphia, so we moved to
Philly with every intention of putting in roots and staying there. I stayed in the area for a year after he had left. I used this time to sell our house and wind things down there.

Then, I got a job as the director of residential life at a for-profit art college in Philadelphia. I was skeptical, because it’s a for-profit institution, although I didn’t know a ton about for-profits at the time. I knew that concept didn’t seem quite right to me. They had just hired a new president and a new dean of students, both of whom had come from traditional Student Affairs programs, and the students were artists. When I went on the interview, I felt really comfortable with them. Had it been a bunch of corporate people, I might have been more skeptical. I was actually pretty sold going in to it.

Then, it was awful; it was everything you would expect a proprietary college to be. A couple years in, I started looking for a new job. I had a hard time getting to the next level, of getting another job there as well. I did get an interim position at Maple College, which I really enjoyed, but, overall, Philadelphia was not a good fit for me. It was not where I wanted to be.

There were other personal things that happened in addition to the professional stuff, but I knew we had to get out of there. We launched a job search and we both looked for jobs. He got a dean position in a different Midwest state. He had an opportunity in Philadelphia as well. I had gotten an offer in Texas as well, and it was a really exciting opportunity, but there was no way I was going to take it because they weren’t going to insure my partner. I thought, “Well I can’t ask him to move to Texas and not have insurance.” That wasn’t an option, so I said “No” to that.

The job I had at Maple College was interim; I applied for the permanent position and I did not get that job. It was a painful experience. I loved the dean of the college there, so I had a good experience. They are a Quaker school, so they do everything by consensus, including the
hiring decisions. They had three candidates, but they could not agree on any one of the candidates. They asked me to stay on for another year, and then reapply. It didn’t make any sense to me, because it was the same committee who would make the decision again. I thought to myself, “I just interviewed with you, you’ve seen my credentials, why would you choose me now?” I stayed on, but I knew I wouldn’t get the job. I decided not to put myself through that process again. I was diagnosed with cancer that year; it was an awful year.

So, then we moved to a new part of the Midwest. I was very excited to move here. I moved here without a job. We moved here to the Midwest and I was so happy about that. I was just going to see what happened. As it happened, Urban University had both an LGBT Affairs director and Multicultural Affairs position. I applied for both and they interviewed me for both. They offered me the Multicultural Affairs position, which I took, and I enjoyed. I had an awesome boss, certainly lots of challenges, but really had great students, a good university, and I really learned a lot in the experience.

When I was hired, they didn’t have a VP of my office. When they did hire a VP, then my boss left, he was the assistant VP, and they hired someone to fill his role. They then decided they wanted someone else in my position. They in fact wanted new leadership, but also to dismantle and re-organize the office. I was let go, or they just didn’t renew my contract or some of my staff’s contracts. There were 15 staff or, so. By the time I left in June, half the staff was gone, because they made it clear that that’s what they wanted to do. While they only non-renewed me and one other person, the assistant director, who had been there for 25 years, they let the staff know they might have to re-apply for their jobs, so people decided to apply for other jobs and they left.
I left Urban University in 2015 with the intentions of taking a ‘self-care sabbatical’, going to lakes and parks, meditating, and doing all kinds of really cool stuff. I was also applying for jobs, in which I had applied for several jobs. The College Access Program was in their new grant cycle at Jackson Hope, so there were several positions open. I got the job here at Jackson Hope College at a time when they got the grant back after losing it after 20 years. I’ve been here almost a year and a half.

In my personal life, I have a good relationship with my partner, so I enjoy spending time with him. We are different than some couples in the sense that we can do things separately and really be okay with that. We are both okay doing things for ourselves, so for example, if I want to go see a movie and he doesn’t want to go, it’s really okay for me to go by myself. So it’s been really interesting to learn over the years couples who can’t or won’t do that. I don’t understand that really. Why should he have to suffer through a movie he doesn’t want to see? There’s plenty that we do in common. In the evenings, we’ll watch a little TV and maybe I’ll talk on the phone with friends; I’m a phone talker and like connecting in that way.

On weekends, we like going out to dinner, and we like theater and movies, and that kind of thing. I will spend time and do stuff with my church. I’m doing a circle with them about coping with the first 100 days of the Trump Administration. We don’t go to the same church. He’s Christian and I’m not and we visit churches from time to time, but it’s really okay that we go to different churches. We don’t travel as much as I’d like to, but it’s mostly seeing family and friends and things like that. I would travel to Hawaii if I could. I turn 50 this year. We don’t know exactly when, but I will go to Hawaii.
Professionally, life today is what you would expect as a Student Affairs professional. I have fewer administrative meetings in this job than I’ve had before; a fair amount certainly, but it’s not as meeting-heavy a job, which is good. I have lots of student meetings as well. On an optimal day, I use morning for administrative work: email, going through my inbox, working on different projects – desk work. Then, the afternoon is when I prefer to go into my ‘meeting circuit’. That’s when I’ll schedule my student coaching appointments and things like that. Part of that has to do with when my slump happens during the day. I found over the years that it’s better for me to go into meetings at two o’clock, I’ll wake up rather than if I am sitting at my desk.

I receive messages about professionalism and boundaries in these settings from various sources, and the messages have shifted by geographic context as well. One of the things that I’ve struggled with in the Midwest and I have struggled with it here more than anywhere else, is I experience people in this part of the Midwest to be pretty walled off personally. To me, one of the reasons that I got into this work is I see it as a high-relationship field; we are not manufacturing anything, we’re not building computers, we are helping to build lives. To me, that takes relationships, so I struggle when I work with people who are not relationship-oriented in this field. It doesn’t make sense to me. I don’t know how you get into Student Affairs work or equity and diversity work and not be relational – but there are a lot of people in positions of power that do not value relationships. I think some would say maybe they care about their relationships with the students and not the staff. But, I don’t know how you can say that. First of all, I think the relationship we have with each other informs the work. I think students see things and I think they know. We don’t have to be friends, or going out on the weekends, or babysitting each other’s kids, but I think a basic collegial relationship just feels essential to me in this work.
more than in this state than any other place I have worked. I am still trying to figure out how to reconcile that.

It feels like there is less room here at Jackson Hope and at Urban University for more personal relationships or friendships to develop at work. There is a sense of, “We’re just here to work” and that is also new for me. At Urban University, I remember when I first got there, I thought it was so strange, I had this large staff and I remember observing that they don’t seem to like each other; they didn’t go to lunch together, they didn’t have much of a relationship, and they didn’t place much of a value on that. What I’ve learned is when I place the value on that and being open to that, and when I have the warm and collegial relationship with people, that was seen as favoritism. People had their own opinions and did their own gossiping, so they had relationships, but they didn’t want me to have relationships.

I’m from the South, so I would argue we maybe don’t have enough boundaries. People from here have too many boundaries; we need to kind of find an in-between. I’ve hugged my boss at an awards ceremony once, and I’ve hugged one or two of my staff members maybe once, and I’ve worked at places where that would be uncommon. Here it is not common, like I need to step back. I can remember when I started at Urban University, having that feeling the first time. I felt this clear distance, like you do not step over this line.

When I worked at Fitzgerald University in LGBT Affairs, there were a lot of challenges around what it meant to be a professional, queer culture being what it is. I learned a lot there, some of which would not be considered professional here, for instance. There, in some ways, people were more free or were encouraged to define professionalism for themselves and have that be respected generally.
Here at Jackson Hope College, it’s a more stayed professionalism. There is not a lot of informality. It feels much more formal than other places I’ve worked and more distant; more boundaried. It’s funny because I was talking to a colleague about the topic of texting students and she said it was a boundary issue and she doesn’t text with students. I understand that. I’m reminded of when I was at Fitzgerald University and the VP said she gives students her number and she said, “I don’t think students will abuse it,” and they didn’t. I think that’s an interesting difference. I don’t think either one is wrong or more right than the other; they’re just different.

Here, I get a similar message, but healthier than Urban University. For example, I’ve been here a year and a half. I do not have one work friend and I think I’m a pretty open person. I’ve invited people out to lunch and some have gone, but none have initiated and said, “We should do it again.” I joke and say, “I can’t pay people to go to lunch.”

There have been a couple people that did really nice things for me in the job, so it’s not considered a bad thing to take people out to lunch to thank them where I’m from. I’ve done that a couple times and people indirectly said, “No.” The first person, it was really bizarre. He was someone who always answered my emails really quickly and I sent him that one, and I got no reply. I ran into him a couple days later and he said, “I got your email. I don’t know what to say. You really don’t have to take me out to thank me for that.” I let it go, because what I wasn’t unsue about was he uncomfortable going out with me to lunch, period; or was it about me paying? What was interesting to me was he could have said, “I’d love to go to lunch with you, but let’s do ‘dutch’.” He rejected the whole thing, not just me paying.

The second person did amazing work for us, so I invited her out to lunch and she said, “Yes.” We had it on the calendar, then she was sick, so I rescheduled it, but, then she was too
busy. By now, my opinion is the onus should be on you to reschedule. I emailed her and said, “Let me know when and if you would like to reschedule.” I never heard back from her. Still a great colleague, but she’s not trying to go to lunch with me.

I don’t know what I would think if someone invited me into their home. I’ve been in this state five and a half years and only one time was I invited into the home by someone from here, by their invitation. There is something about the way we do work relationships here that I have never seen and it has to be influenced by the regional culture. Everybody’s polite, but the message is, “It’s just work.” The relationships don’t go deep.

We provide academic coaching for low-income, first-generation college students, and students with disabilities. My job is to lead and supervise the staff, as well as lead the efforts to develop policies and procedures. What was really neat about my current role was that it was the chance to really start an office. We had nothing; we had a grant. All of us were new; they hired all the staff at the same time. We didn’t have an office space or anything when I first got here. The grant is very prescriptive, but we had the chance to do some creative things and so forth.

We are in Student Affairs and I report to a director in our division. Here, there seems to be a symbiotic relationship between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs. We collaborate a lot with faculty. We get mid-semester reports from faculty on how the students are doing. For example, last semester we got a 60% return rate from faculty. People are glad to have College Access Program back, so there has been a lot of support for it.

The institutional context here at Jackson Hope may be influenced by the fact that it’s in a large state system, which might explain all the rules. From my perspective, I don’t see why this should be that different as a middle manager here than at other places I’ve worked. At a larger
school, it may be more political because of the position and all that, but the work is very similar. I don’t see why there should be any difference in the level of autonomy and flexibility, for instance, at this institution versus at any other institution that I’ve been at. Also, I’m in a union, which is unusual for a middle manager, but I have come to believe the micro-managing I have experienced is not about the union.

Regarding the influence of my identities on my work, I feel I should have more to say about that because it definitely influences the work. I’m still trying to figure out how, exactly. The most salient identities in my experience, if I had to choose, would be race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and education. Race and ethnicity, that is so obvious. It is so important in the kind of work that I do. It’s very clear and out front.

I would say gender is so salient for me because of the ways in which I transgress gender; not that I think I’m all gender transgressive, but I think that I don’t present myself in the way that most people would expect a larger black man from the South to do. That is different for people; like, I’m this gentle man who is in touch with his feminine side and it’s just not what we expect in this society. There are many reasons for that. There are many reasons why black men won’t act that out, so I think that is different. I don’t think people expect it and I think it’s important for people to see, especially young men who themselves feel the same way, and want to see someone who is kind of open about who they are.

At my previous institution, Urban University, I paid a higher price for being black than I pay at Jackson Hope College. It was a more visible position. It’s only been in the last few years where many places would be accepting of someone like myself for a position like that. John hired me at Urban University, and in many ways, he took a risk, and he was aware. In my
evaluations, he said, “You pay a price for just being a gay black man on this campus.” Years ago, there were places that would have been comfortable hiring a black man in that position, but not a gay black man who is effeminate.

Here at Jackson Hope College, it’s hard to say how my identities influence my experience, because I’m trying to still figure out the college and these identities. I haven’t felt the ‘sting’ around it, and a lot of it is that this isn’t that political of a position. The people who I interact with the most are the people who hired me, especially in terms of administration who are in charge of me. They knew who I was when I came, so that hasn’t been an issue with the administration. It also hasn’t been an issue with the staff or the students.

From a student perspective, I think it’s important to have that representation on the staff. I haven’t faced any challenges that I’m aware of, although you never know for sure. I feel pretty safe in that regard, because they knew who I was when they hired me. I have felt, particularly around the election, that people don’t ‘get it’ necessarily. They haven’t been as sensitive as I would have wanted them to be around that, so I did have that experience.

One of the reasons I didn’t get the permanent job at Maple College was they did not feel as though they could hire a black person for that job. The position was dean of Multicultural Affairs, but they had a Black woman in that role for 20 years and they had another Black woman who was an administrative assistant and she had a strong personality. They didn’t get along and they worked together. There had been some sort of drama that happened, which caused the person to retire. The critique had been that she ran the Center as if it had been a Black Cultural Center. So a lot of the students that were not of African descent, didn’t feel like the Center was theirs. I think they felt they needed to bring in someone who was not Black. Of course they
didn’t say that to me, but what they also didn’t say was they actually did offer the position to
someone that first year and he didn’t end up coming. They actually ended up hiring an Asian
woman, so I think they were pretty intentional about their recruitment, of recruiting people of
color who were not of African descent specifically. In that sense, that played a role around color.

One of my most memorable experiences as a supervisor took place at Urban University. I
had this staff member who was really sharp and a very good worker. She was a young
professional and very independent, and she told me I was the best supervisor she ever had. That
really warmed my heart, because I think a lot of her. With her, I was a relational leader, and I
think she really appreciated that. I think she appreciated the trust and autonomy I put in her to do
her work. I have people from Elliott College that I supervised that I am still connected with that
are still very much in my life. It’s been the relationships I’ve been able to develop, the ones
where folks have been more open to being in relationship that have been the most beneficial for
me. Those that have been really open to learning in the relationship, those are the ones that have
been the best for me.

I love middle management; there are many benefits. This isn’t going to sound very
ambitious, but mid-level is what I’ve always wanted to do in Student Affairs. It’s not that I
would reject the opportunity to be a dean of students in the right situation, but I love mid-
management. I like having a supportive supervisor and I like supervising staff. I like having good
access to students. I coach students; I have a caseload, so I am very much involved there, as well
as supervising the staff. I don’t think I would be as satisfied in a role where 95% of my
interaction was with staff who are serving students directly. I like this level; I like being a
director. I don’t really feel the need to be a vice president or anything like that.
I think the other benefit of this role is that we all bring who we are to work. We bring our identities, whether we want to or not. I think there’s always a benefit in education when there is diversity. I think the fact that I’m a Southern gay black man brings a particular perspective. It informs the work that we do. It informs how I coach students. I think it demonstrates something important to LGBT students of color, to LGBT students not of color, to all students. I do think that that voice needs to be there. My staff is predominantly white; they are all white, but we just hired a black woman. I’m glad we were able to hire a black woman, because both coaches were white. When I started here, interestingly enough, it was all men and one woman on staff. I’m really glad we were able to find a woman of color. She’ll be great. We had a great pool, but the predominant group we serve is women of color. That’s important to me, these identities have to inform the work in positive ways.

There are some challenges to this work as well, although it depends on where I’ve worked and what the environment is. You don’t necessarily have the same power if you were a dean of students or a VP to influence what is happening with students. Most of where I have worked, I have felt pretty empowered to do what I needed to do. I’ve had pretty good influence up to my supervisors; everywhere that I have worked, I would say that that is true. I will say that hasn’t necessarily been my experience here as much. It’s not as bad as it might be other places, just because what I’m doing is specifically for the College Access Program. If I were a director of Student Life or something like that, it probably would feel more difficult not to feel empowered in those ways. I am really only officially responsible for CAP students, so it hasn’t stopped me from being able to give the services for the students. Again, we are a grant, so there are certain things written into the grant that I have to do and fall back on in ways that I might not
be able to in other roles. As a result, I don’t have to fight to do any of those things, so the fact that I don’t feel as empowered here as I have at other jobs, it doesn’t affect the outcomes in any negative way. It doesn’t even affect that much of what I would do.

At Fitzgerald University, my identities were very clearly an asset. At Urban University, it was more mixed. I definitely paid a price for being an effeminate gay man of color; there was definitely a price to be paid for that there. Here, it’s kind of hard to say. It’s such an interesting and different environment, and in some ways I feel confined to CAP. The level of interaction I have with my colleagues or the impact that I have on their work is so limited.

I have felt a little bit around being a person of color and gay in the context of where we are in the country right now. I was disappointed in how Jackson Hope College responded, or didn’t respond, to Pulse last summer. I was also disappointed in their lack of response to the results of the election. Those were times when I really felt that my identities came into play and I was confused as to why we didn’t have stronger responses in both of those instances. What I learned through those experiences is that I can do what I need to do in CAP and when those types of events happen, I need to make sure that we are having a specific response in CAP and not wait for leadership on high.

What I was used to and what I think should happen is there should be some leadership and some discussion at that level with the directors who are closer to giving the direct services. Now, I would not expect that to happen. What I would do is I would make sure we as a staff talked about it, and figure out what our response is going to be, and not assume I’m going to get any leadership on that.
Personally, there are lots of spaces where I receive support. I have really great friends and a really great spiritual community, where I totally feel like I can be myself. Most of my friends are either in Student Affairs or have some kind of a connection to it, so they have an understanding there. My partner is in Student Affairs. My family, I don’t think they understand much of what I do.

I believe you have to have friends. I have people that I’ve known since college and we talk all the time, like really intimate conversations. I can really tell them what I’m feeling. I’m a member of a 12-step community, so that has been really helpful to me. Having those support mechanisms, like being really active in therapy, and just having someone to listen and bounce things off of is really useful. Those things have really helped me to come through a lot of it.

I’m clear that I need people and I need friendships where I can be really honest about how I’m feeling. I journal a lot and that’s a source of support for me. I kind of have to have those things. I don’t always love that about myself though. I don’t really like that I need people as much as I do, but I’m very much a communitarian; I believe we’re all connected and that we all need each other. I do think the world would be a better place if we acknowledged that and leaned into that and learned how to be there better for others. What I find is that a lot of people struggle with that; with being honest with their emotions. I don’t really struggle with that. I struggle, because I know other people struggle, and I don’t know if should really tell them then, because they might not be able to handle it, they might not be able to hear it. If you’re not sharing at a deeper level with me, then maybe you don’t want me to share on a deeper level with you. So that happens.
What I really need from people more than anything is I need to know that you care and that you’re there. One of the things for us as human beings is, and I count myself in this, is if you tell me that you’re in pain, I want you to not be in pain, so whatever I can do to help with that, I want to do that. Where we often go is, ‘fixing, saving, setting straight.’ I’m either going to tell you what you need to do and it will be resolved; or I’m going to save you from yourself or the world, or whatever; or let me set you straight and tell you what you’re doing. I think those are the most common responses and I think those are the wrong responses. I just need people to listen. That’s really kind of it. I don’t think I’m alone in thinking that people need or want more of that.

To be fair, in my life, I have wanted people to fix me. I have wanted to share some pain I was having and then the other person could share some wisdom they have that just makes it all right. I might have always known it wasn’t realistic, but I was wanting it. If I just hear this pearl of wisdom from this person and they just tell me what to do, then all will be well. I no longer expect that; I know better than that. I need for more than anything from my closest friends is to just meet and just listen, and not feel the burden of solving my problem. Sally, my supervisor at Fitzgerald, was a great example of that.

I think that’s where it can be difficult for me; I’m very careful about who I share things with, because I get frustrated with a lot of interruptions if I’m trying to share something that’s happening with me. That suggests to me that you’re not listening, that you’re more focused on what you’re going to do to solve a problem or whatever it is, and that’s really not very useful to me. I know the answers; it is within me. What others can do is facilitate it by listening, maybe asking questions, maybe giving affirmations or feedback. I think people struggle with, “Where
does it ends?,’” like I need to fix this person. In some ways it goes back to grief; if I care about you or you’re someone that I love, I don’t want you to be in pain, so how can I fix it? I would posit that people don’t follow up in six months because they can’t fix it, or it’s uncomfortable for them, or they can’t handle the pain. I dabble in Buddhism as well and one of the things my teacher talks about is being comfortable with the suffering of others, or at least not being afraid of it; not being afraid of what you bring into the relationship or what comes into the door. These are just life experiences. That’s harder to find than I would have imagined many years ago.

Professionally, I don’t feel completely professionally comfortable in this region. I don’t feel like I can fully be my authentic self here. It’s not that I’m having a bad experience, it’s just that those norms are different than my own. One example of different norms relates to hugging. I am a hugger and I don’t feel completely comfortable with that here, because I know that’s not what other people do. I would certainly ask someone before I hugged them; even if I already got that permission, I don’t feel like it’s really the culture to do that.

Here, I feel like I need to be a particular kind of professional. I’ve explained why I would not go to my boss and say certain things. When I had the concerns about our response to diversity, there is no one I really trust to share that with here. Or if I have concerns about leadership, this is the first place I don’t feel comfortable sharing that with anyone. With my boss, I don’t want to make her uncomfortable and I’m not sure what she feels she needs to share; that’s not clear to me. There isn’t that space for me here at Jackson Hope. I could certainly choose to take risks, but there’s no place where I really feel invited to really bring all of who I am.

It’s a lot of the same people in my professional life that support me in my personal life as well. In the past, I’ve had strong colleague support, although I don’t feel that strongly here at
Jackson Hope. That’s really helpful to me and important to have colleague support as well. The program is very supportive and I’m extremely supported by my boss, but I don’t experience a level of colleague support here that I’ve experienced in other places. So that has been a challenge.

I have just been so fortunate really in my professional life to have some really great supportive supervisors, including my current supervisor; she is very supportive. Going back to Fitzgerald University, I’m thinking of Sally who was just an awesome supervisor. She was amazing. There was so much that I learned about multiculturalism and social justice there. When I was there, the Matthew Shepherd situation happened and I was new in that role. The support that I experienced from her was phenomenal. Even now, I call her up for mentorship. She was supportive around that, but also so many other things. I could go in and talk to her about what I was feeling and experiencing, and we could talk about diversity-related issues and social justice components of different things. She taught me a lot not only by sharing her experiences, but also just by listening and being with me in it. Also, she was very clear that I was the director and that I needed to decide. It wasn’t at all micro-management, but always knew I could go to her and she would allow me to make the decision and make my own mistakes, or have my own victories. She was always there.

Sally is probably the most relational supervisor I’ve had and that’s really important to me, because I’m a very relational leader. The fact that she was like that, she was able to help me tremendously. I remember once I was telling her about something and I probably did want her to tell me what to do, although I didn’t say that. She got it and she said, “I’m not going to tell you what to do.” She was so respectful and so real, and encouraging, and easy to talk to, and just a
really good person that it really made my job much more bearable, although it could be a difficult job.

Another supervisor I would mention is when I was at Urban University, John was a person who hired and supervised me. He was not as relational, but he was very loyal, and really helpful. What he did that was really great, he always gave me university context about situations that might effect my work. That was really great. He trusted me and he was very honest with me. He was tough; he had a little bit of an edge, but he always had my back. This was important, because Urban University is a very political environment. He always made sure that I knew anything that he knew that could potentially effect my work and I did the same for him. I noticed the difference when the new person came on board; that was clearly not their style. He wouldn’t tell me his perspective on anything he knew or was seeing and that actually made my job harder, whereas with John, he made it a lot easier because he did tell me things.

I’m a highly relational and verbal person; I like to talk. I’m a quiet person, but I do like to share what my thoughts are. I work best with a supervisor who gives me broad autonomy and flexibility, but who is there when I need to share and I’m willing to share, that I can vent and bounce things off of. That need is pretty much the same. I communicate a lot up; I give them a lot of information, probably too much information.

I think I give my current supervisor too much information. Part of that is also trying to figure out how to manage the environment. I share less of my personal reactions to things with her than I have with supervisors in the past; not because I don’t trust her. It’s because the things that frustrate me about working here are not things she can do anything about. She is very invested in my happiness here, and when I have shared my frustrations with things that are
beyond her control, I think it may worry her in some particular kind of way, because she can’t do anything about it and I know she can’t do anything about it. With Sally, I would tell her everything that I think. It’s just different with my current supervisor, because my sense is that she is uncomfortable with it and that it would make her fear that I would leave. It would make her unhappy to think that I’m unhappy and I don’t want her to think that I’m not happy. Also, I can’t be sure exactly what she would be comfortable for me to share so I want to be careful, so that’s different than I’ve usually had.

It would be great if I could have more colleague support here; that would be nice. I’m not sure how to create that. If I could write the script, I would have a mentor here; someone that I feel I could really trust to help me navigate some of the politics and someone that I could go to and talk about concerns that I have and trust them. That’s what I don’t have here and trust that I could get.

My job then, becomes figuring out how to really adapt to that, because this is a new experience for me; every experience is a new experience for me. I’ve never had a work environment where I didn’t feel like I had that kind of mentorship and colleague support, so there’s a way that I feel alone here and I don’t know what to do about that; I have no clue how best to deal with that. Also, being a highly social person and not having those social opportunities in the workplace is challenging. I don’t know what to exactly do about that. The other CAP directors at other campuses are a source of support, but it’s not the same. It’s not someone who knows this environment and this culture. They know CAP and they are really helpful, but they are not at Jackson Hope. There is something to be said about having that colleague experience.
Recently, I had a party in honor of the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) and invited a colleague who I had lunch with. We aren’t close at all, and yet he is the closest colleague I have here at Jackson Hope. It was an anti-inauguration party and I didn’t even invite my boss, because I love her and I would have loved to have her there; but I just don’t know her politics. I didn’t want to say, “Come to this big anti-inauguration party” and “We can’t stand Trump” to find out she voted for him. I just didn’t know.

Resilience, I think the work I need to do is figure out how to navigate feeling alone in the workplace when I don’t have that mentorship support or colleague support. I have a very good relationship with my boss, but I can’t call her a mentor in the way that I call Sally and John. She is supporting me in it, but she’s not, and I don’t think it’s her fault; I think there are also some ways in which she really doesn’t have the power to, but she’s not really helping me to navigate…it’s hard to explain…I don’t think there’s anything that either one of us could do, or more that she could do necessarily in this instance, but we’re just trying to lay low rather than how do we really navigate these politics and make it better. I think neither one of us really knows how to do that and I just don’t know that the environment is set up for us to do that.

Resilience is the ability to persevere in the face of difficulties; to keep going when you don’t want to. It’s really hard for me to pick just one story about resilience in my life. In many ways, I wasn’t supposed to succeed. I was an African American kid from the rural South, where they don’t have a really strong developmental education system, and schools aren’t well funded. I was always an effeminate boy and I faced a lot of homophobia, so I don’t think I was really supposed to be who I am and be okay with that, then to move through to success. In some ways
being gay saved me because I knew I had to get out my small town from age eight. I knew I had to move on. I knew enough to know education would give me that opportunity to move on.

As an eight-year old, I remember an experience where I was playing in the yard with two of my friends, Stacy and Marvin, who I’ve known since I’ve known myself. We were running around this truck that was parked in our yard, and there was the football team…we lived across the street from the elementary school and next to the high school…and the football team was practicing behind our house. It was a really rocky gravelly surface on our property. So we were running around this truck and I remember that there was a rock that was moving in the wrong direction; it didn’t make sense. If someone had kicked the rock, then it would be moving the direction we were running, but instead it was going the other way. I remember thinking that was really odd. I ran around the truck again and I was hit right above the eye; I was knocked out. I still have a little scar there and it had just missed my eye. What I believe very strongly is that someone threw the rock. The only people around were these people playing football, so it had to be someone from there. It was a big scary deal; ultimately I was okay.

My mother went back there and talked to them. What I learned was there was a guy who bullied me every time he saw me; calling me epithets for gay people, and he was back there practicing with the football team, so I put it together that it was him who did it. There was this fear and intimidation that is always there in these cases intended to hold people back, to stop them from expressing themselves, in particular if it’s something that is uncomfortable to the perpetrator.
To go to the Southerly University with essentially an inferior educational background, knowing that I would have to work harder than my classmates to succeed there was an example. Again, being in Alabama as a black gay man at the college level also was not easy.

Then, in college, I had a number of experiences, but one happened during my first semester; my first month. I was living with a guy from high school who I think was at least bisexual, if not gay; he would also get teased from time to time. So, we were living together in this hall. We were the only black boys on that hall and we were perceived to be gay apparently by our hall mates. There had been a “Get on Board Day,” like this event out on the quad with all the student organizations and you learn about what’s on campus and decide what you want to get involved in. I went and I do remember there was a Gay Student Union on campus at the time and they did have a table, which I avoided like the plague, because I didn’t want to be gay, I didn’t want to be seen as gay…I had my stuff around that.

We started getting harassed; people would call our phone in the middle of the night and hang up, call us names, knock on the door and run away, write epithets on the white board on our door, put an article about the Gay Student Union on our door, and all these things. There was some really scary stuff happening to us. We also had a community shower, so we would shower with these boys, and there was this fear, these homophobic feelings of, “I can’t shower with another guy, especially if I think he might be gay.” There was that stress around us. We would shower in the middle of the night and do all these things to try to avoid being with these fools.

My roommate went home one weekend and I didn’t go. I chose to stay to study and do something with friends that weekend. My hall mates pinned me in the room by putting a bunch of pennies in the door in the middle of the night so I couldn’t get out of the door. It was a whole
big thing and the residence hall staff got involved. They called a floor meeting and asked us not to come; they talked about it. That was one of the scariest times of my life. The good news is that after that meeting, they actually stopped and actually started being friendly towards us after that. We had no more problems in that particular residence hall as a resident. Later, during my sophomore year, when I applied to be a resident assistant, one of the hall directors at the time ‘blackballed’ me because he thought I was gay. I tell that story because it’s related to resilience; it didn’t stop me from studying or experiencing the university. It was very hard, but it didn’t stop me from doing that.

Regarding resilience in my personal life, my mother passing away when I was 30 would be the hardest thing that ever happened to me in my life. I was and still feel very close to my mother; I was very much a mother’s boy. She was extremely supportive and she was supportive about my being gay. Although she didn’t know much about it, she was very clear in her support. It was 1997, and she had been ill earlier that year, and I started doing some anticipatory grieving. I feared that…she was sicker than I had ever seen her. She had this gall bladder surgery and she just bounced back. She was pretty much her old self after that, which I thought was really miraculous. She was 72 at that point and I remember breathing a sigh of relief thinking that people live long and I at least had another decade with my mother. So, I wasn’t worried anymore. She came to visit me that summer and we had a really good experience and lots of great stories from that trip. I really thought she was going to be fine.

Then, in October of that year…she used to hold family reunions every year, and it was a really big deal. It was family and friends, and it was a small community so lots of people would come and it was just very open. I am very close to my parents, but not so close to my siblings,
who are a lot older than I am. We didn’t communicate in a lot of ways and connect. They would just do things that I found offensive, so I just didn’t enjoy being around them; so I didn’t want to go. I said to my mother, “What if I do this? What if I don’t come to the family reunion, but I’ll come the weekend afterward, so it will just be us?” She was having none of it. She said, “You need to get over here.” I’m glad I went, because it made her happy. It was very important to her.

That following month was when she had the brain aneurysm and died. It was like the rug had been pulled right out from underneath my feet. I was not prepared for it. It was totally related to what she had been sick for earlier. Her mother died from a brain aneurysm as well. It happened in 1966, the year after the Voting Rights Act was signed. My mother was a big proponent of voting…to this day, I wouldn’t dare not vote, mostly because of her, but for many other reasons as well. On voting day, she would get dressed up and she would take me with her, and we would do this whole thing, because black people in the South just weren’t able to vote. She was a poll worker. My grandmother was in line to vote when she had her aneurysm and my mother had watched this. What I don’t know and wish I would have found out was whether she actually voted or not, because this would have been her first time voting. I don’t know if she actually got to cast that vote or not; which is really powerful for me.

On resilience, that was something that happened in my life and I thought, “What can I do?” I remember her saying to me once when I was a younger about her mother dying, “How will I possibly go on?” I felt a lot of that; it was really difficult to get through that. I was in the middle of a job search, and I don’t really know how I got through that. I think a lot of that was time passing, I participated in a grief support group, I had a lot of wonderful supportive friends, and I saw a therapist who was really helpful. Utilizing those resources along with the passage of
time helped me. As a general rule, I don’t shy away from emotion and dealing with emotion, and sitting in that. I’m a believer in order to get through a painful experience, that I have to allow myself to go through the painful experience; I can’t pretend that it didn’t happen or go on and just do ‘happy things’. I have to allow myself to actually have the experience. People deal with grief in such interesting ways and respond to it in such interesting ways in this culture. It always strikes me that when someone dies, they tend to get the most support around the immediate death, but down the line people aren’t really asking. That is really fascinating to me. That’s when everybody is there; but six months later, the person is still gone and you’re still grieving, but people aren’t necessarily asking or offering support as much. Sometimes I’ve heard people say, “Well, I don’t want to remind them of the grief.” I think, “You’re not going to remind me that my mother has died, by asking me if I’m okay.” For that, a lot of it was time; at first it was very difficult and with each year it got a little bit easier, where I could think of her without being sad, having happy memories and being able to access the joy without the pain being as intense.

The second story of resilience was about me moving here. We moved to Philadelphia and we thought we wanted to stay forever, but I hated it and I had a horrible job. The institution was proprietary and it was all about making money and exploiting low-income and students of color in my opinion. That was hard. I was in that job for two years, because I wanted to try and make it work, but I knew I needed to go. I started looking and it was very hard to find another job. Eventually, I had the opportunity for an interim position at a small college there, at Maple College. I liked the position and I liked the person I reported to, but it was interim. I was able to apply for the permanent position, so I did; I did not get it. That was painful. I was a finalist, but I did not get the job.
Philly is a gritty city; not really great city for me. There is lots of pollution in many ways, and I had a lot of health problems while I was there, and I just did not like Philadelphia. Leading up to that, I remember my stomach was always bothering me and I thought it was the stress. There was always just something that was hurting or bothersome, and I thought it was related to the stress. I remember thinking, “I am never well.”

I also have an autoimmune disease, a neuromuscular disorder, in which the nerve-muscle communication is disturbed, so it causes muscle weakness. Fortunately for me, I only have it in my eyes. I’ve had it for over 22 years now. It causes double-vision, blurred vision, and those types of problems with the eyes. It doesn’t really affect my technical ability to see, but depth-perception becomes difficult, for example, if I’m walking on the sidewalk and there is a raised part of the sidewalk, that can be hard for me to see. While in Philadelphia during the second or third year, I got a really bad case of it to the point where I had to stop driving. I actually considered getting a cane; I had terrible vision. That was something to really work through. I had surgeries and all these different things, and it just took a long time. It did get better when I left the first job at the proprietary art school. When I was at Maple College, I was able to drive to work.

Then, we’re in our last year there, because my partner and I are looking for jobs now all over the country, and then I got diagnosed with prostate cancer. This is January 2011. I thought, “You’ve gotta be kidding me; you’ve really gotta be kidding me.” I was 42, which is young for getting prostate cancer, which usually affects men much older. I had gone to my PCP and I was having some symptoms. He said, “I think you might have prostate cancer” and he referred me to a specialist. So that was striking. I went to see this other doctor, and he said without testing me,
“No. You don’t have prostate cancer.” He diagnosed me as not having prostate cancer and probably having prostatitis and told me I could have a biopsy if I wanted to, but it’s not necessary. I was privileged enough to have insurance and I thought, “Why not?” I wanted to have piece of mind.

So I go and do the biopsy and I go back to get the results by myself, because it’s going to be negative. I told my partner, “Just go to work. I don’t really need you there; it’s not that big of a deal.” I get there and they ask, “Where’s your partner?” Then they said, “Well, it is cancer…” I was so mad, because they were so sure, so confident that it wasn’t cancer before. They tried telling me that we caught it early, and it’s very minor…and I’m not believing a word they’re saying, because they were the same people telling me I did not have cancer. I thought, “Why should I believe I’m not going to die tomorrow?!” I went and got a second opinion and started to feel comfortable that it wasn’t the worst type of cancer.

I had to have my prostate removed, which meant I couldn’t have children biologically. It was funny because that was kind of a sad experience for me, but I didn’t want kids, but that meant the choice was taken from me, at least biologically, which I don’t know if I would have gone the biological route anyway. That’s also very interesting. I knew very early on that I wanted the kind of freedom I have in my life today. I knew I didn’t want the financial stress of having kids. I didn’t really want the stress of worrying about someone else in that way. Part of the reason I didn’t want kids is I knew I couldn’t give my kids all that my parents gave me, just in terms of that time, alone. My mom was a homemaker and my dad was retired by the time I was born, so I had lots of time with them. There was just no way I could give a child all of that.
Then I knew I was done with Philly; so much had happened. I know it wasn’t Philly’s fault, but we had been there six years and I just could not live there any longer. Also, during the last couple years we were in Philly, we befriended this young guy who did some work at our house; he was a painter and had a painting business. He was a sociopath and ended up stealing both of our identities after we became really good friends with him. He tried to rent houses in my name, charged $30,000 of debt in my name and my partner’s name. We were able to clear all that up after getting the police involved; there were investigations and we weren’t liable for any of that. That could have caused us financial ruin. Not only that; this was someone we trusted and allowed to live with us for a time.

We also had some economic concerns because my job was going to end and we had a house, and this was in the middle of the housing crisis, so our house was ‘under water’. He got the job in the Midwest and also had an opportunity in Philly as well, which I think he really wanted. He took the Midwest job for me; I asked him to take it. I told him, “I need to leave.” I did not believe I could find the right job in Philly and I did not like Philly. I had all these bad experiences and I truly believe it affected my health. I have been much healthier here than I ever was there. I really wanted to get out, so we left.

When I knew I wanted to get out of there and we would just visit other places, I would literally get off the plane and felt that I could breathe. It felt so stressful all the time, because all these things are happening and I would go out downtown, but people were rude. Fortunately, they were nice in our neighborhood; we had a really nice neighborhood. The ironic thing is that I felt very connected with there than I feel in the Midwest; I had deeper, richer relationships there than I have here, but the general experience of being there was just difficult. Even just walking
down the streets and watching people litter the streets. People had no regard for others. That is
the rudest city I’ve ever lived in.

I remember in June of 2011, after my partner left to come here, I was still in Philly. I
remember this really serene moment that I wish I could capture at the time, when I was thinking,
“I don’t know if I’m going to live or die. I know I have cancer and we’ve got to do something
about that. We might lose our house, face financial ruin, and I don’t know what this means for
my career. I don’t have a job and I’m moving to the Midwest and who knows what’s going to
happen there.” But, I did feel that experience of serenity and it was great for me to get out of
Philly. I’ve lived in a lot of places and this was the only place where I wasn’t home sick for it;
not one day. I literally flipped it off on the way out, I literally, flipped it off on the plane as we
flew over it. It was just not my city. That was a long six years.

When I lost my job at Urban University, when I got here and I was lucky enough to get
that job, I had a couple different opportunities at Urban, and I was hired by John, whom later left.
That job was a very difficult stressful job from the beginning because of a lot of stuff - it had
been around for quite some time, it was dysfunctional for many years, it was a very recalcitrant
staff. Looking back, there were a lot of people who had been there for a long time, really since
before the office even started. They had a long history with the Center as well as with Urban, so
what I really think now in a couple of cases…there were people there, and this is being very
human…that wanted the job themselves. I don’t know if they applied, but I don’t think so. My
sense with one person in particular is he wanted to be asked. I think they knew enough to know
because of the politics or whatever that he probably wouldn’t get it. So, their job was to make my
job harder. It was a hard job, however, I loved the job and I loved the students and it was well resourced, and it was a great place to work in many ways. They did make it more difficult on me.

In some ways, I made it more difficult on me because of my highly sensitive nature, that I would take a lot of things they said to heart too much. I want to be the kind of leader who listens to my staff; someone who listens to the criticism as well as the praise. I think that’s really important; I don’t want to stop that. I think I took it in too much and maybe a little too personally at times. I didn’t really accept that that’s just how they’re going to be, which was recalcitrant and difficult, and figure out how you manage that. I had a lot of support from my boss and from the acting VP at the time, so it was very doable.

Then, along came the new administration, who wanted their own staff. I think they thought what they needed to do was to basically dismantle that office, because it was so rooted in all that stuff, that they felt that was what they needed to do. While they wouldn’t tell me exactly what they thought, I think they thought I wasn’t the best or the strongest leader for that unit. What was really painful is the new VP came in and I got along really well with her, I thought I did, then the new AVP came in, and I got along okay with him. He was not a communicative person; he didn’t really tell me what he thought and wouldn’t give me context of the university, and he really believed in ‘less is more’ communication, and he’s the type of person that believes ‘information is power’ and so, “I’m going to just keep the information to myself and keep the power.” I can see that perspective to an extent, but he did it with me and I was his direct report overseeing a unit.

That caused a lot of problems for me. It’s hard to manage that kind of a job if your boss isn’t giving you information; enough other people aren’t going to give you information. So there
was that. He also came with no supervisory experience at all. He supervised a graduate assistant and an administrative assistant, and that was it; no higher –level professional staff, no units, or anything like that. In my opinion, he was in over his head. I don’t think he really knew what he was doing. He got promoted quickly, jumping a lot of levels to get into that position. I just don’t think he knew what he was doing. He would not give me feedback; just, nothing. It wasn’t anything negative and there were a few positive things in the time he was there, and then it was at my evaluation that he gave me his feedback. He said how he thought I needed to lead the staff differently.

This is kind of classic in higher education, where people will sometimes hold you responsible for behavior of people who are on your staff. I get that to a degree. They were behaving in these ways and I wasn’t ‘controlling them’. The fall semester of that year was really hard for the staff, and then the spring semester it started to turn around and he acknowledged that. Here I am, sharing all that I’m doing and sharing all that’s happening, and trying to work through, thinking that I had his support, while he was giving me no feedback on it. Then, he said that the staff’s behavior for the fall was “a strike against you” and he used that language. I was surprised by that, so I said, “Why didn’t you tell me this before?” and he said, “This is the evaluation. This is the time for me to tell you. It’s okay for there to be surprises in an evaluation.”

It is not okay for there to be surprises in the evaluation; that is ‘Supervision 101’. He didn’t say he wasn’t going to renew my contract, it was just the things he thought I needed to work on and the things he wasn’t really happy with. I was really disappointed in that, because this was six months earlier. I had the strategy that I’m sharing with him on, and he’s affirming
that things are going better, and even at that point, I wasn’t thinking so much that it was a strike against me. I’m glad they’re behaving differently, and this was because of things I’ve put into place, but I wasn’t thinking of it as a performance issue of mine necessarily, until the evaluation. I left that meeting knowing that I could work with him for a couple more years, but I’m going to have to look for another job. I can’t work with somebody who’s going to surprise me in the evaluation and think that’s okay. He was not going to communicate with me what he’s thinking or what he’s seeing in the university that can affect the work that I’m doing.

Then, he just called me in on a surprise and put a meeting on my schedule without any explanation of what it was. It was a noon meeting. This is how naïve I was. I asked him, “Do you want to meet over lunch, then?” and he replied, “I have other plans for lunch.” I asked him what the meeting was about and he just didn’t answer that. In the meeting he said, “I think the staff needs new leadership. I’m not going to renew your contract.” That was it. That was the feedback that I got from him. At Urban, they will do that, given they have annual renewable contracts. So, they gave me three month’s notice.

That was really painful. It was a really difficult situation, but I remember thinking, “I can’t be bitter. I can’t be pessimistic about my future.” It would have been easy to go to, “My career is over,” but I don’t know that, so I’m not going to live into that (give that any power in my actions). So, that really helped me. I’m a big proponent of saying good ‘hellos’ and good ‘goodbyes’. I was very intentional about saying goodbye to everyone I worked with, even the staff who had been very difficult; I wrote all of them notes. I think that really helped me. Having a very supportive partner was key, and my friends, and deciding that I was going to utilize that
down time to engage in radical self-care and giving service to the community. Then, in two months I had a new job.

In my religion, we talk a lot about ‘listening to where love is calling you next’ and I was able to really think about that. I was never devastated, which I thought I would have been, but I was never devastated. I think part of that was because I was relieved from these day-to-day backstabbing experiences I was having with the staff. Now, I knew I couldn’t trust the administration and I would have been miserable there. If I’m having the staff treating me like this and they’re doing these things, then the administration is going to say, “Well you just need to fix it” and not really support me, then I would have been miserable. I wasn’t miserable at Urban University; I was frustrated, but I really wasn’t miserable. A lot of people there are miserable. I had the best job on campus in some ways, but it didn’t work out. It’s about really trying to listen to where love is calling me next. That is what the self-care was going to be about and so it did work out for me.

When I look back, I’m really right where I want to be in many ways in my life. I’m here and I like where I am, so if I changed anything, then that would change the course of things. I very much wanted to put down roots somewhere, such as Philadelphia or Atlanta, and I’m kind of glad it didn’t turn out that way. It has made me a richer person. I think that living in different places and having different experiences of different cultures, even within the US, it enriches you. I think my life is so much richer for having lived in different places; much more so than it would have been had I gotten what I thought I wanted which was staying in Atlanta forever. I couldn’t have imagined, in fact, this is what I wanted to avoid; I didn’t want to move around. I’m just so glad that it happened.
I’m glad I had the Elliott College experience and totally glad I had the University of Midwest experience, which again, I was resistant to. Even Philadelphia was an important experience for me; I learned a lot and gained a lot. I definitely grew from that experience. That part of the question is really interesting to me, the part about “Knowing what I know now, would I have done things differently?” Would I have moved to Philadelphia? I don’t know. Maybe it’s a good thing that we don’t have the ability to choose everything in our lives, because when I look back and think about the things I got out of it, like how I grew as a professional, and grew personally, there were relationships I gained that I would not have now had I not had the Philadelphia experience.

I think I studied the right things, I wanted to be a director. I’ve long wanted to be a director. I don’t have aspirations for being a dean or a VP; I like this level of work. I knew that would be the case. I like the freedom that I have. I never felt the call to parenthood and I don’t regret that decision. I like kids and I knew I never wanted to raise one and I still don’t; I think I would not like that, therefore, I don’t think I could be good at it. People tell me, “You’d be a great father” and I appreciate that. That’s a complement about who I am as a person and the qualities that I carry, but I think it takes more than those qualities.

If I were to create support systems for mid-level managers, there would be resources to connect across the world. There would be professional development opportunities and opportunities to connect with other colleagues in-person that would be readily available for folks. There would be scholarship monies available for people who wanted to attain a higher-level degree. We would all be paid well enough to live well and not have to worry about having enough money to feed our families and ourselves. No one would have that kind of stress. I wish
for everyone the kind of environment and experience that I had at Fitzgerald University, where I had that really strong colleague support on campus from other mid-level managers of color.

This support was both formal and informal. We had something called the Student Affairs Multicultural Portfolio; within that were the inclusion and social justice departments, as well as Student Activities and, and Greek life. It really was a multicultural connecting point, so it wasn’t just multicultural people getting together, necessarily. We had an associate dean who was in charge of that program, so it was formalized. Then, people just got along and we worked well together. This was ‘of a phenomenon’ - it probably won’t happen again in my career, but I loved everybody on that team. I could go to any of them and ask for support and we were all supportive of each other’s programs. I would wish that for anyone.

Five to ten years from now, hopefully I’m still directing. It’s hard for me in a job somewhat like this to imagine myself doing anything other than this. I like Multicultural Affairs, maybe LGBT Affairs again, or CAP. I see myself at middle management making a difference in the lives of students and staff and having that connection to both students and staff. What’s true about me is I wanted an opportunity to do social justice work within a Student Affairs context. I don’t always know what that’s going to look like. Other people can say, “In five years, I want to be a dean and in 10 years, I know I want to be a VP.” That’s not really my way. I want to be making a difference in these ways and I don’t know exactly what the job will be. It could be as a director, or a dean, or an associate dean - it could be that; I’m not closed to it, but that’s not my aspiration. My aspiration is more the work. Where can I do that work best? It could be in any number of ways.
Regarding the types of support I will need to get there, I think what I have now; the friends, the mentorship professionally that I have, I think having more experience helps; it doesn’t hurt. Again, I’m not necessarily aspiring to a higher level in the hierarchy if it were. It’s not like having 10 more years of experience is what’s going to get me to that…I’m really happy being a director in these ways and I already have the experience to do that, to do the job. The work is probably more internal in a way than getting a degree or particular experience I need to gain to get there. It’s the work of journaling and getting in touch with who I want to be. I think it’s also about looking at the kind of leader and the kind of leader that I want to be. Is there a way that I can be a better leader for staff and a better leader for students? I think it’s about those things.

My path has taken me where ‘love has called me next’ and I wouldn’t have changed anything about it. I have been blessed to have amazing supervisors and staff members, and see a future of connections and opportunities for future mid-level administrators. I see myself continuing middle management work where I am impacting the lives of students and staff and doing social justice work within the context of Student Affairs. I see myself thriving in a role where I can do that work best.
Joshua

“I’ve gotten to a point in my life where I’ve synthesized all my identities; I can’t separate one part of myself out.”

Joshua

I’m Joshua. I work at Dean University in Residence Life and Student Conduct. What’s unique about my current position is I hold both a mid-level and senior-level role. I’m a person of color from a working class family, who is also gay and Mexican. I have worked at Rural University and River Mountain College prior to my role at Dean. I have been in the field for over 20 years. My path has been non-traditional and I share my story often in order to maximize my impact as a gatekeeper in the field as I mentor and support newer professionals.

Growing up, my parents and the influence of education were important. Both of my parents are Mexican. They did come to the US illegally when they were younger, although both took different paths. My mom’s father came first and he was one of those people who knew up front that he needed to get here, get a job, get a house, and get the paperwork ready for his kids and his family. He knew getting them here would be a struggle and he predicted that even if you have a green card, it wasn’t enough – look at our days today; he passed away quite a few years ago. My mom is a citizen; she became a naturalized citizen quite a few years ago. My dad’s father came first, then he sent for my dad to come work. He came on a train and he is also a citizen now as well.

Education and family were important. My mom’s mother and father were very much about education, you know, you need to go to school, you need an education, and that kind of thing. My dad didn’t have the support for education, but he knew you needed an education, so
that I wouldn’t have to work in a factory the way that he did. Education was always very big and very important in my family. You’re always going to school and your job is to go to school.

When I wanted to get a job in high school, they said, “Nope. You’re focusing on school. As long as you’re in school and getting good grades, we’ll give you what you need.” The same happened with college; it was never a question of, “Are you going to college?,” it was a question of “Where are you going to college?,” and “Where can we afford for you to go?” That was so much of what was instilled in me growing up and it had it’s good and it’s bad. As you start going through school and you start getting in trouble, or you start doing things to have fun, but your family doesn’t like that, that becomes a stress.

Being a first-generation college student was also stressful because I started learning what it meant to be in college and my parents didn’t, so they would have questions like, “What do you mean you don’t get report cards every few weeks?” or “What do you mean you get grades at the end of the semester?” They didn’t understand what that meant. They would ask me, “What do you mean you can’t come home; what time are your classes?” I would explain to them, “Well, there’s things to do other than classes.”

I was also the oldest out of all the grandkids as well, so I was the only one initially going to college. To get kicked out college my sophomore year was traumatic for the family. Changing my major was traumatic for my parents; they wanted me to study business and computer science, but I wasn’t doing well in that, so I changed to an English major. They didn’t know what that meant. They didn’t understand what I was going to do with an English major. That was a big struggle for them. Anything that deviated from their understanding of what they understood things to be like, it was a struggle for them. It was hard for them to adjust to it. Growing up, that
was a big influence.

Family was also very important growing up as well. You represent the family when you step outside the door. When I got my first earring, that was the end of the world, because it’s so disrespectful and they asked, “What are people going to think about you?” That was hard for them as well. As I got older, things got easier for my two younger brothers. I don’t think they were pushed as hard into school as I was, although they were still expected to go to school. If they weren’t successful, then it wasn’t the biggest deal in the world. By the time they got their tattoos and piercings, my parents were like, “Whatever.” I’m the one that set the tone for them to have an easier time with that. We were a very close family.

Something that’s important, too, is my parents put me through English as Second Language courses when I was younger and my mom said I struggled a lot with that. At home, my parents were trying to learn English and I was trying to learn English at school, so that’s why I think I don’t have the accent today. I still speak some Spanish, but it’s not the best. They said they would put me in an all-English or all-Spanish school if they had to do it over again, because I struggled a lot with trying to do both. They said I learned my English from Sesame Street and Channel 11 on PBS. I watched all of those programs and they were good. That’s how kids learn to talk and speak, and use words and all that. That was a big struggle. I grew up in an all-Mexican neighborhood up until the fifth grade.

One day when I started the first grade, my mom said I came home and wanted to take a bath in milk. She asked me, “Why?” and I told her, “I want to be white. Why am I not white? Why am I brown?” That hurt her a bit and she wondered where I was getting this from. To have such an early acknowledgement that I shouldn’t be brown, that played along the way growing
up. For example, we were the first kids to get bussed to the white neighborhood to go to school. Then, moving from one neighborhood to the better neighborhood, which was all-white, that influenced growing up as well. Those are things that shaped who I am today.

My pathway to higher education was very non-traditional. In my undergrad years, I never had the GPA to be an RA, even though I wanted to because I kept hearing it was a great experience. So, I ended up doing night security for quite a while. I did see people that were doing the hall director job in Residential Life and I was very curious about it, so I started asking about it. I remember talking to my supervisor in Security, the area director who supervised our building, and others about these positions, asking them, “What are they doing? Who are they? Why did they get this apartment? What's their job” I started hearing more about it and I thought to myself, “That’s something I could see myself doing.” I also worked summer conferences with them and the hall director staff were the professional staff on and so I got to interact and ask questions at that point as well about “what does this mean? And who are they?” and “what kind of education do you need for that?”

When I started asking about it towards the end of my graduation, there were no mentors and I didn't get a lot of encouragement or a lot of reinforcement to get into it. It was more of experiencing roadblocks, like, “You need to have this kind of degree…,” and “You had to have this kind of background….” I thought, “Well, everything that I've heard they do, I think my skills are good and I've been doing that in Security in ways as well.” So, the last person I talked to when I was getting my Bachelor's said, “Well, they don't hire anyone without a master’s.” I said, “Well, you don't have your Master’s.” She said, “I was the exception.” So I said, “I’m going to get the job, you watch.”
I started applying towards the end of my senior year when I was getting ready to graduate, but I also graduated in five and a half years, because I almost got kicked out of school my sophomore year for low G.P.A. So, it was towards the end of my senior year and I already had been working other jobs, seeing if I could end up getting this job. And I focused so much on this because I didn't know that other schools had these jobs. I didn't know there was a place they can go to apply at other places. For me, Rural University was the only place I can do this. I don't know about other places to be able to apply for it as well.

I applied three times at Rural University and on the third attempt, they did finally hire me on a temporary basis and that was my initial avenue into it. I think what happened on the third time, now being on this side of it, is they had a position probably open up and had already gone through their typical selection process, and knew that I was interested. They put me in as a temporary hire for that one semester initially. So on my third attempt I had already graduated. I wasn't sure if I’d be coming back in the spring semester, but they were able to get it approved so I was back for that spring semester. It sort of became more of a challenge for me if, like, “You tell me I can't and I'm going to do it.” I got hired later than the rest of the R.A.s, so I didn't have the training that all the other professional staff went through. I kind of got thrown into it and everything that could happen, happened that first semester, and in the first few weeks. My supervisor at the time said, “I can't believe you're able to just go out and step in and do this.” That was my first step into the field, without mentorship, without direction, and then it was sort of like, “I think I can do this; I know I can do this.”

In my interactions with Residential Life staff, what I was seeing them do was a lot of crisis management and emergency response. My thought was, “Well, that's sort of what I do in
this position now. I could see myself doing that if that's what it means.” The only other interaction I had with someone in that position was my junior year, where there was three of us in the suites, and me and my one roommate went to our hall director, because we had concerns about our suite-mate attempting suicide and some mental health stuff. As we were talking to her, she was in that position too, and again I could see myself being this person to counsel students, to offer assistance, advice, and to offer crisis management.

Throughout this time, the majority of the people I saw, except for one person, racially, they were all white; there was one woman and a black woman named Bree. I know we always look for someone to compare ourselves to, like, “I could do a better job than that person.” Bree was the one person that I thought, “I could do a better job than you,” but I didn't see many people that reflected me. I believed I could do a better job than her in that sense, because of my limited interactions with her. At that time, I didn’t know a lot of out gay people. I was on a lot of panels and I was involved in a GLBT group, but I didn’t know many professional staff who were openly GLBT people. So again that was another roadblock of, “How do I get into this field? If I’m not reflected in those people, could I actually be doing it? Who are they hiring?”

The pathway to my current role began during my undergraduate years. I started with an entry-level job as a hall director at Rural University and after my first year there, again not knowing if I'd be rehired the next year, is when I started to meet others that told me about the Oshkosh Placement Exchange (OPE). That's where people go to interview for Hall director positions and all that stuff. I wasn't going to go, because I didn’t think I was qualified. I had two friends going to OPE who told me I should go with them, so they convinced me just take a weekend with them, a sort of a vacation to take some time away. Then, they told me, “Bring your
resume,” then they said, “Bring your suit,” then they said, “Why not just register?” At OPE, I had three days of back-to-back interviews and I didn’t realize you’re supposed to schedule breaks, or that you’ll be going from one tower to the next, so I ran around crazy because I needed a job. Luckily, I got a job.

What happened next is I moved up from the hall director into the next-level position. I believe this happened because I was able to make decisions on the spot really quick. I mean that's part of the job and that's what I had to learn to do; it’s that crisis management that I always thought I was good at. I think it’s the way my first supervisor, David, trained me. Also, I think it's just who I am as a person and that I don't rush through things; I take everything I can learn from where I'm at. So, I was a hall director for many years. What I hear from newer professionals after three years is, “What's next? What's next?” For me, I'm like, “Okay, I don't know what's next, because I still have more to learn in this position.” I just took my time. From Rural University, I went to River Mountain College and I was a Hall director there for three years. I had very great experiences and I also had a very ‘come to Jesus experience’ as well with my supervisor. When I left there, I ended up here at Dean and began a hall director position. I think that my work and my style of working and how much I really was committed to this work just allowed for promotions to happen. So it's been a very slow process and I appreciate it because it has prepared me for the positions I’m in today. It's just sitting it out and waiting and I have never been one to say, “I need to move up to the next level now.” I’m more like, “Am I ready to move up?” That's always been my question to my supervisors as well.

My supervisor helped me move into my current roles. When the director of Housing, who hired me, left, I thought, “Oh, maybe I'll apply for that director position,” but I was told very
quickly by the then dean of students at the time, “Don't even think of applying; You’re not going to get it.” I said, “Oh okay. Thank you…I guess?” So, I didn’t waste my time. I won’t even assume why. So, when my supervisor was one of the candidates that applied for the director position, I got to be a part of the search committee. She got hired and I knew right away I needed to build a good relationship with her, and I think what she was saying was the same thing. If I’m the person that's been here in this role, I would be her best ally to get people to buy-in into her being the director as well.

Very early on, my supervisor and I had great conversations; they were very open and honest. We talked about, “What do we expect from each other?” I’m one that gives trust initially until it’s broken, so I thought, “She has all my trust; I hope she will do right by me” and that kind of thing. Very quickly she did; she admitted when she didn't understand something around identities, like race or GBLT issues, and she'd also ask me, “What do you need from me?, “How can I help support you?, and “How can I be your voice if you can't have the voice?” She empowered me quite a bit in that way.

As she moved up and other opportunities came up, she would come to me and say “If I move up, would you be okay with this?” or “what do you want?” or “do you want to be in this position?.” And so it's just always been a very open conversation of “how can I help support you?” “what do you need from me?” and “where do you need me to step back?” So, she’s been a very good ally and friend... I use friend loosely, because she's my supervisor, but a good friend as well, that I trust. We’ve been able to challenge and push each other as well, and she knows the things that piss me off basically, and I know the things that will piss her off. So, when she’s
talking to me, she says, “This is how we got to this, Joshua; We didn’t bypass you” I’m like, “Okay, well here’s what you need to know.” So, we just have built a pretty good relationship.

My life today has become more structured. I remember as an entry-level person, what I enjoyed about work was you never knew what you were going to deal with at work that day. You were always just working with students, so you never know what they’re going to bring to the table. That’s what I really enjoyed about the work. As I moved up, what’s happened is there is a lot more structure. Each day I come in, I know to check email and check my voicemails, respond to this, what meetings do I have for the day, and what has also shifted is due to my added responsibilities. My day used to be a lot more flexible, where I could walk across campus, I could go home for an hour and hang out with the dogs, and now I have to carve that time out. Now, my day is really filled with lots of meetings, and following up with requests, and trying to get information out as soon as possible. It’s also a cycle, too, because the beginning of the school year is busy for me and every semester around March, things are going to die down for me and it will pick up for my staff. Summers are not as busy for me, as they are for other people on my staff, so it’s about knowing the break will come and it’s a cycle. The work in Residential Life is a cycle; you view it in seasons rather than in days, such as ‘room selection season’, then it’s ‘staff selection season’, then it’s a ‘low season’, before it will pick up again.

Life today is interesting, because when my partner moved in my whole life changed. Before, a typical day for me is I get off work, I get to go home, relax, and play video games, eat dinner, when I want go to the movies, I don't have to check in, I just go. I can do everything I want. A typical day for me now is…. I don't know where the day starts, because it's like the minute I get up, it's about taking the dogs out, then getting ready for work, then heading out,
getting to work. When I get home, if it's a day that I have to pick up Christopher, then that's the rest of my night is with Christopher, doing homework and that kind of thing. My alone time now is between 9:00 pm and midnight; that's my time, because my partner, Jeremy, goes to bed early and his son, Joshua, goes to bed early. If Jeremy is home when I get home, then right away we’re cleaning and making dinner.

So much of my life has changed and I look at it and think, “Did I want this?” I miss my alone time. I don't like having it just between those hours. The other part that's an interesting change is that I can't just get up and go anymore, because there's a family there. For example, having to check-in about, “Hey, there’s this conference going on. Is it okay if I go?” Before, I would be like, “I'm going. It's my life.” So that's changed a lot as well, but there's a lot more structure to my life. Before, I enjoyed the freedom; to go out, spend what you want, do what you want to do, but there's just so much structure now that it's become second nature. Other people see me and they wonder, “Do you ever have any fun?” and I say, “Yeah, I do; it just comes in very different ways now in how I do that.” So it’s wake up, go to work, get home, do work, and then relax in the evening.

Personal messages I receive about my mid-level professional role are often from my mom. It's funny because whenever I talk to my mom she's like, “Oh how are you?” and I say, “I'm just tired” and she says, “You work too much.” I tell her, “You're the same person that on a Saturday when I wanted to watch cartoons, you're like ‘well there's work to do. We can clean the house’.” She would say, “Aye, I'm so sorry mijo (son), but you've got to take time for yourself.” She taught me that I should always be working and I can’t just sit still, so it's funny how she sees now the messages she gave me and how much I do it. She can’t believe I listened to her, but also
she tells me I need to take time for myself. My parents influenced me a lot with that work ethic to work, work, work, always work; you shouldn't be sitting still. Even when she retired, it was hard for her, because she was like, “What do I do now?” and she would have odd jobs here and there and just to keep busy. She says, “I guess you have to work hard now, so you won’t have to work so hard later in life, but you have to take time, take care of yourself.” It’s a mother’s care; she knows I’m taking care of myself, but she is always surprised at how I’m always tired. I’m always tired now.

The reason I bring up socio-economic class is that it has impacted my job search in Student Affairs. For example, when I was ready to move up to the next level, I did a search and I had an interview at a college in California named the New Ivy College and it was a small private college. With that being my first job search, I didn't realize how much it costs; I didn't realize you had to have all that money upfront. You had to pay and you might get reimbursed. So, I remember going to this job search and I didn’t have a lot of money. I got there a day early and they asked me to go to the movies and I didn’t have money, so I had to fake that I had gotten sick because I couldn't afford to go. When their hall director picked me up to tour the campus, she picked me up in a convertible, and I'm thinking, “I can imagine me driving across country in my little beat up pickup truck and parking it here… no.”

Even though they really wanted me to go there, from talking with their director and the students, they really liked me. I couldn't work there, because there was too much money there. So that really impacted me, as well as where am I going to work, because even though I have a job now and even though I can afford this, I don't fit into this kind of environment. Being a person of color there was fine; there were a lot of international people and I saw a lot of people
of color. I’m never really concerned anymore about being openly gay in Residential Life, because I think it's a pretty open field for GLBT folks. Then, there was the money - it was all about the money and I couldn’t work there. So, that influenced where I would go next in my career.

Support from professional associations, for me, the best way to have seen that has been UMR-ACUHO, our Midwest housing group and there's also ACUHO-I, which is the international association, so different regions fall under that one. I remember initially going to these conferences and seeing who was there. One, being representative of the positions that we're in, but for me the biggest one was who was on their executive board, because they're made up of professionals like me. I noticed who was receiving these awards for the work that they're doing, and also who are the awards named after. For me, that’s the best way, because the majority of them were white; all of the awards were named after someone who is male and white, and the people receiving those awards were all typically white.

For me, that's the initial response where I ask myself, “So, where do I fit in there, because I'm like, none of you? Everyone else is looking at you as the housing gurus, so I thought, “Will I ever be there?” and “Can I ever be that person?” There’s a little more diversity at the international associations, but still, as a Latino senior housing officer, at the mid-level I saw very few of me there. At the entry-level of the U.S. group, I saw a lot of people of color and Latino people at the entry-level, but the numbers dwindled as they moved up in the profession. I’m not saying there wasn’t any, but I just couldn't find them. So that was the thing is that it’s hard for me to see them.
In my experience through conversations with other professionals in Residence Life, I perceive GLBT folks to have more support than people of color in the field. I don’t want to make assumptions about how someone looks, but in conversations I've seen more out GLB (gay, lesbian, bisexual) folks working in the profession and they seem to be well supported, more so than I've seen professionals of color. I haven't seen many trans folks yet in the field and that's an area that we need to address.

When I was trying to figure out my dissertation study, as I was talking to people, people who identified as either lesbian or bi, they always talked about how they had a mentor, this support network, and how they were able to get into the field. Professionals of color rarely had that; they said, “Well I had to go out and find mentors or others who look like me. I had to go and seek mentorship out” and “There aren’t a lot of people that look like me or that I can talk to.” That’s from my personal experience; that's why I feel that the Residential Life field is more open, in particularly for gay men, than it is to professionals of color as far as who is there and represented. My experience has been with residential life. I don't know about Student Affairs in general.

More recently, I’ve been involved in Student Conduct and I’ve gone to a few conferences. What's interesting with that area though, is that I see more professionals of color in the conduct field than I see white professionals moving up in the field as well; and in residential life, it's not a lot of professionals of color moving up. But, for GLBT folks it just seems like we're represented at all levels in all areas. I've met directors of Housing who identify openly as GLB and I have yet to meet another director of Housing who is Latino.
I am currently working at Dean University, a liberal arts institution that is loosely affiliated with the Methodist belief, although I don't practice that. It is a small private school in the middle of an urban setting. There are a lot of people in the education department, although I actually think we're all educators, but what we’re seeing in Student Affairs and in faculty is there is a lot of care for students and for current issues. I think that we have this divide between faculty, staff, and contracted staff, and that's a hard thing to see sometimes, because I view us all as educators, but the faculty don't see anyone outside of faculty as educators. When I try and instill that in the people that I encounter, I'm like, “No, you're important in what you're teaching students” and they want to believe it, but it's hard because that's not the messages they're getting from other people as well.

It's a small school that really cares about people, cares about social justice issues. I think it struggles with how to address some of those issues, though. I think that the institution as a whole, we want to be culturally aware, but there are a lot of people who just don't know how. Recently, we had a panel and a speak-out or teach-in about the immigration stuff that turned into a Black Lives Matter topic, which I think is just as important. What happened is the students who were protesting and talking didn't have the language and the words and the methods, so there was a lot of swearing there, which is fine; let out your emotions, but I think back to when I was a student and I didn't know how you go about change. I think the students here are in the same place. I think administrators and faculty freaked out like, “What do we do? How do we fix this?” and I'm like, “Well, you've taken diversity social justice education away from staff and you said it's all about faculty, but faculty don't know how to deal with it. So now you're coming back to us saying ‘fix it’, so which is it?” So that's what I mean by we struggle; if we were a unified body as
educators, then we would have better ways of handling the things that come up.

The current political context influences the issues we are dealing with here on campus. I had an incident the first time Obama ran for president and there was an article posted by Tim Wise about how Obama and McCain were being treated based on race. I shared it on my facebook along with some interesting points about the article. At that time, my facebook was connected with faculty, staff, and students. I have never invited someone to connect with me, but if someone asked to connect I would say, “Sure.” There was a student that read the article and was very offended by it to the point where he started to say, “I’m abusing my power to influence political blah, blah, blah, and how great it is that I can post someone else’s words and not even my own thoughts.” It got to the point where he complained to the president at the time, then the president of the college, who called in the VP of Student Affairs, and at this point there was a lot of stuff going on in my feed about that.

There were students asking for my resignation, because I was abusing my power, faculty were stepping in and saying, “Well what’s wrong with what he’s saying?” I got called into the VP’s office and they say, “It’s your facebook, so do what you want with it, but you need to end this now. The president doesn’t like the publicity and she doesn’t want the emails.” In essence, I was told to take down what I was doing and put an end to this issue.

What that taught me was that I needed to create two separate facebooks; one that was my work one and one was my personal one. So this is where you get the ‘real Joshua’ and this where you get the ‘professional Joshua’. I also did it for other reasons, because I had started my relationship with my partner and I wasn’t out to the rest of my family at the time. I’ve talked about how I merged my two lives; that is one place where I’ve had to separate them out.
I had this personal one, where I was connected to all my friends, who also knew my political views, then I had this professional one, that also all my family was connected to.

I don’t think students view me as a person who also struggles with these things, so if I start to share how the politics affect my life, they don’t see it that way; they see me as a staff member and that I should be there for all the students. The students that I have built some of the best relationships with, the ones where we have differing viewpoints, is with Republican kids, because I don’t agree with them on things, but I will listen to them. They know that they can come in and share their views and I’ll listen to them, and I won't shut them down automatically and try to talk them through it.

The student who was challenging me, he didn’t even know who I was, because we had never met. One day during a student congress meeting, I attended to see if my facebook post would come up there and he was there. I walked up to him and said, “Hi, my name is Joshua and we’ve never met, but you shared some views about this facebook article.” I said, “The way I view facebook is that anyone who connects with me understands who I am and where I stand on things. I don’t think anyone would ever ask to be part of my circle, if they didn’t know that this is who I am. I’m telling you now that I’m removing you from it, because obviously we have different views and opinions, so there is no need for us to connect in that way.” So, I removed him.

Also, with the current climate, there’s ways that I have to be able to voice where I am with things, but I also have to consider whether I’m going to get in trouble because of my past experience around it. Yesterday, I put something up on my personal facebook about the protest they’re doing today on the immigrants and not to go shopping, and I put that up freely, no
problem. I also put it up on my professional one, but I also had to explain the reason, the story behind it, and how it affects me. I’m less concerned about it, knowing that my supervisors know who I am and they’re supportive of me in those ways. Our current president is a black woman who grew up in the civil rights era, and I have had the privilege of talking to her one-on-one where she says, “I am a black woman as president; do you know what I go through?” and I can only imagine, so they would understand where I am coming from if I were to put something up. I wouldn’t have the same reaction as I had with our previous president, who was a straight white woman.

White colleagues are afforded more access and input in a way that I am not. These experiences led to my dissertation study topic. One example was when we were trying out the campus life model and there was someone who was working here who was white, but also gay, and he had just started. I had been here already for about 10 years, give or take. What I noticed is he was getting invited to meetings with the president and with other VPs. He started having all this input and I'm like, “Well, that affects my department. Why am I not getting invited to the table?” And he was like, “Well, you probably should just go and ask.” I replied, “That's a nice thing to say, and you're assuming that after 10 years I've never asked.” That was my best, biggest example of how I saw our differences. We both identify as gay and we're both very open, but he was white and he had more of the traditional route than I did. To see the things that he had access to, the people he had access to, and the resources he was getting - I wasn't getting the same response. I thought, “What's the difference here?” and the racial difference was what I could identify.
Messages from my peers within the institution shape my experiences in the field as well. There's a colleague here at Dean who is also the director of another department and he's talked to me a lot about, “Well you're in this position, so this is how you should be looking and acting now.” For me, I'm like, “But, that's not me being authentic; this is who I am.” And so I have gotten some messages that way.

These messages I received over the years about professionalism included expectations regarding tattoos, dress, and professional behavior. I also received messages about piercings. I was very paranoid about piercings, even for example with Joseph, when I had my tongue pierced, I went up to him and said, “Joseph, I did something; I hope it’s okay.” He was like, “Well, what did you do?” I said, “I got my tongue pierced” and he replied, “I don’t care: I don’t know why you would do that, but I don’t care.” I was so conscious about how I presented myself, especially if I want to get the respect of some of these people and unfortunately they will look at some things and be like, “that's not professional,” but, so far at least with my supervisors and the top leadership and the president, they've been fine with it, as far as I know. They've never questioned the way I present in that way.

Another thing that happened took place at Rural University. I left there with a bad feeling and I would never go back there; even if the supervising has changed and the people who run it have changed. I was hired on a temporary basis and it felt bad; it didn’t feel like I was being mentored or treated as a professional staff member, now that I can look back on what that meant. What happened was the director of Housing from Rural University was at a conference with the director of Housing from River Mountain College and they started talking and my supervisor, Joseph, said, “Have you worked with Joshua?” The other director said, “Yes, he worked at Rural
University. Is he dressing better now?” Joseph came back to me, and he didn't do it to hurt me, but he asked, “What happened between you and this person?” I said, “I don't even know him; he didn't talk to me much, because Rural University was such a huge system.” I added, “No one never told me how I should be dressing; no one ever mentioned that to me.” So that's another way to set the tone of how dressing is really important in a professional field. I didn't know that; I didn't get mentored into that, and I told Joseph, “I wish he would have come and talked to me and said ‘you look like a student the way you're dressing’ or ‘you’re not dressing like a professional staff member’”

So we have the one person that works here that is very much about how you present and your image. I really don't think he likes my piercings and I'm like, “But this is who I am and I got hired into it and my supervisors are fine with it.” Then I had this other experience where someone never even told me that the way I was dressing was inappropriate. Today, that's how I talk to my staff. I don’t assume they know.

I supervise five professional staff; the hall directors and our office manager. In the Residential Life Office here, that's it; that's who I supervise in that area. I'm also responsible for the university's Conduct system and so it's interesting because I have a dual role. I don’t supervise anyone in conduct; it’s just me. As for Housing, I'm the director; I’m the senior-level Housing person. For Conduct, I’m in that mid-level, so I report to someone else in that role. For Conduct, I don't have any other staff. I do have volunteers that I train for conduct boards and conduct meetings, but that's only me doing the Conduct basically.

Having two reporting lines seems to work here. My supervisor for Housing was the former director of Housing here. She moved up and then I got to move up, and she helped to get
me up to the next level. As we kept moving up, the reporting line stayed the same; and that's been great. The dean of students is my supervisor when it comes to conduct, because my supervisor is also the Title IX coordinator. It’s a best practice not to mix the two roles.

In terms of the conduct, the dean of students just lets me do what I need to do; keep him informed and give him outcomes, if needed, for appeals. With the director of Housing role, I have a very close relationship with my supervisor. She does all the budgeting, our retention numbers, all of that, and I do more of the residential programmatic side.

The other part of my job is Student Conduct and it’s interesting because when I have conduct meetings, I love those meetings; those are fun and I haven't had one of those in a long time. Those are over conversations where I get to talk with students about, “Tell me about your decision-making?” and “Was this your best choice?” and I get to relate my experiences. You can't go wrong when you relate to a person, but when it's numbers and contracts, that you can go wrong in.

Because you're in the mid-level position, you never have the full decision-making authority, but you have some decision-making authority. It's interesting how other people view it, because your position itself is already questioned. Working with parents and students, they say, “Well, you're not the person in charge. So I want to talk to who is in charge.” I’m left questioning, “Is that about my position? Is it about my race?” Sexual orientation is only if they know that of me and maybe that’s where it comes out, but visibly they can see I’m a person of color. So in the mid-level position, with these identities, you're always wondering, “Okay, what's that about? Is it about my position? Is it about my identity? Is it about me?” Well, it’s always about the other person; it’s not about you. You’re always wondering, “Why did this happen?” or
“Why didn’t it?” or “Why wasn’t my voice heard?” I think you’re at more of a risk of feeling like, “Where do you belong in your organization?” If the people in charge, your supervisor, and the people that work with you, if they do it right, you’re going to be given the credibility and the positional power that you need; you're never going to question that. If it's not done right, you might be caught in the middle, because you don’t have the decision-making power, so if your supervisor doesn't say, “Just go ahead and make that decision,” if you're always having to check with your supervisor, then people are going to eventually ask, “Why am I even going to you? I'm just going to bypass you.”

Being a person that has a dual role, senior level and mid-level now, for people that are in other mid-level or entry-level positions that I supervise, I give them as much decision-making authority as I can. That way, people aren't bypassing them. Our office manager, for example, she deals a lot with contracts and placements. In the beginning, she would ask, “Joshua, can I, or should I?” I’m like, “Just do it. I trust you.” Now, she can go and make that decision. Now, students know what she says is final and it’s not, “Well, let's check with Joshua first.” My supervisor has created that; now, when people come to me, they don’t go to my supervisor, because my supervisor says, “Well, if that’s what Joshua said, then that’s the decision; it’s done.” You have to create that culture, otherwise it’s hard being in a mid-level position because of those reasons.

I’ve gotten to a point in my life where I have synthesized all my identities; I can’t separate one part of myself out. I’m a person of color from a working class family, who is also gay. I receive all these other messages around that. It's other people that make one identity more
prominent than the other. At particular institutions throughout my career, one of my identities has become more salient, but I am all of these identities.

When I think of Rural University, my first job at Rural University, there it was a lot about my gay identity. I did feel there were no spokespeople out there for it and that was at the forefront. When I went to River Mountain College, my boss was gay and a person of color. Other people there were mistaking me for being Native American. I got to see a small glimpse of how they were being treated and other students were making my race the issue. So race became at the forefront. Here at Dean University, because I've been here so long, it's ranged of what becomes at the forefront. A majority of it has been race, because I think our campus is very open to our GLBT folks. It’s very welcoming; there are support systems in place and our retention is good. Our professionals of color support and retention isn't - so other people are making race the issue.

How you look, how you dress, and your body size, that impacted it a lot. I know all of these would happen, but that's the other big one that outside of race, sexual orientation, class and body image, and not yourself, but how other people perceive you. So, going back seven years, I had gastric bypass surgery. I was a much bigger guy and it was interesting to see the way I was being treated also because of that. So when I lost the weight, you could see how people interacted with me differently, through facilities, through athletics. I don’t say that to take away from the other identities, but that is just that in itself. There was a different type of way people would look at you and talk to you.

When you’re a bigger person, you're also concerned about how you dress, so you don't want clothes that are too tight and you want clothes that fit, so when I lost the weight I was wearing a lot more of the shirts, ties, and suits that also lent in to how people viewed me as well.
I gained some credibility when the weight was lost; I gained a small place at the table when the weight was lost. Some of it might have been my own, because when you lose that much weight, you learn to carry yourself in a different way, physically and mentally. You carry yourself in a different way and you expect yourself to be treated in a different way and then when it happens, it validates that, “It shouldn't be this way, but it is.”

Socio-economic class is a big part of who I am. My class experience impacts how I mentor others. When I have students who are going to do a job search, I'm very upfront with them and I say, “You're going to need to pay for this; you're going to pay for that. As a department, I will help pay for this for you, because I know it's expensive.” With the hall directors, the people that I supervise, we only get paid once a month; so, when my newest hire, John, was hired, there was some issues with his paycheck and most people would have said, “Well you should have came prepared not to have money for a month.” I said, “No. We worked with Accounting saying, “He needs money; he needs it. Can he use the university's credit card, then he’ll pay it back? Can we get him a cash stipend?” You cannot expect a person to go a month and a half without a paycheck. So that is how it comes up today.

I'm very conscious of what that means being in the mid-level position and senior-level position, because students come in and tell me they’re having trouble with their housing and they don't want to leave and they owe the university a thousand dollars. So, I work with them and tell them, “Well, let's work that off and I'll credit your account for you,” because I know what that's like. I think that plays a big role in how I see the money and the value of that.

Just because you are in a mid-level position, doesn't mean you don’t struggle financially, because I'm also living paycheck-by-paycheck. So you live in a part of the community, where the
gay community is supposed to have a lot of money and expendable funds, and I'm like, “I don't have that kind of money.” People say, “As a person of color who has lived in, then you should have saved all this money” and I’m like “No, I don’t.” So money really is interesting how it comes up as well.

Being politically aware on a campus is important, because you are in that mid-level position. If you are looking to move up, you have to think about, “Okay, who are you going to help support?,” “Who's going to hinder you?,” “Who do you have to build social capital with?”

Another thing that's been interesting is with staff that I supervise, but also with students, there is more risk of me losing my job for being on the frontlines when they’re protesting or disagreeing with policies. When I was a hall director, I had more freedom at the time to be on the frontline with them. I would be like, “Great, let's go.” Given this risk, now my job is helping students understand, “I can't be on the front lines with you, but I can be here helping influence policy now and procedure” and “No, I can't do that, because I need my job and if I'm gone, I'm not any help to you.”

That's been something that I have also come to realize, how much you can't be out on the frontlines with certain things. You have to learn how to play the political game, but still be authentic, because I don't think anyone would ever say that I'm a politician trying to get this here and there. It's more about knowing how to navigate the higher ed system now and who to talk to; how to get things done versus challenging everyone every step of the way. Like my second supervisor, Joseph, said, “If you come to the well too often, it's going to dry out.”

So, what battles are you fighting as well? And which battles do you choose? I ask myself, “Am I willing to lose my job over this?” That's really how I have to look at it sometimes.
In the mid-level you do that a lot more, because you're so close to students and the supervising staff, but then you're also up in the administration and so that's a hard thing to navigate. I don't think I would get afforded certain chances that some of my other colleagues would, because they're white and straight, so for me I have to think, “Is this worth me risking myself for?”

The benefits of being in a mid-level role have been when I'm the one that has gone out to help hire people; they get to see me in this role. You know, I am who I am. I don't deny any part of me. I’m very open and it helps build authentic relationships. I think it also helps with students to know when I'm meeting with them and I'm very honest with them and let them know, “Let's have an honest conversation; Don't hold back.” I also let them know, “If you're going to swear, you're going to swear; If you're going to tell me about drug use, let's talk about that.” So, it helps in that way.

I think my mid-level role has been hindered or there has been a challenge, with the other administration at the university. I think there are perceived stereotypes of me; one with me being Latino and they might wonder, “Why are you in this position?” Also, being openly gay, and working with facilities staff, for example, has been a challenge. It’s been a challenge being a person in this position of power to ask them to do things. The way I’ve felt my experience in working with the other departments that have an issue with me has been because of me being Latino, or openly gay, or both. So that's been a challenge, because these are the people I have to go to get things fixed in the building, these are the people that have control over the residence hall building, to get one built, and so they have control. I’ve had to shuffle and change how I speak to them and almost bend over backwards to make them feel comfortable versus, “I thought that we're here to work together for this goal.” So, that's where I have to pull in my other
resources, like, “Donna, I'm having this issue, can you go talk to them?” or “What's the best way to talk to this person?” and they'll set it up for me in a sense.

I didn't start supervising people until 2010, because we were always supervised by the director. When I was promoted, I was assistant director; So I didn't actually supervise the staff. Then, I got into a supervisory role when I was promoted again to associate director. It shifted just that one year where some of them were my peers and all of a sudden, I was supervising them and that was a little difficult. I would say it was more difficult for them than for me, because I was still myself. I approached it as, “We're a team and we're going to help each other.” For some of them, it was hard to see me as their supervisor, because we started off at the same time. That solidified my view that when I started supervising them is that we're still in this together and I have a title, but we have the same amount of experience, and also putting clear expectations that I am now responsible if something happens.

What I'm realizing more when I was in a position of supervising other staff is about being a mentor and being a gatekeeper, a person who has the ability to open doors for others or hold back access, for others. You have policies to help support your decisions and you have procedures and all that and you follow those, but there are no policies or procedures on how to supervise other staff, and how to see that potential in someone else, and how to either help build someone up so they can eventually take over your job, or how to help guide someone out into something that better fits who they are as staff members. I see a lot more of my role now as a mentor or as a confidant, as someone who just can help support, help people be accountable, help learn about it, because I hold this profession very passionately; I love this kind of work. And especially with newer professionals, they get mixed messages about how long you should be in a
position and what's the next step and you need to hurry and move up quickly, and for me it's the 'old school way' of take your time, learn as much as you can, and you're not going to get everything right away. It's also conflicting with what they're being told in grad school.

I'm also preparing them as well for the same thing. The gatekeeper part is a big one for me, because I didn't have the educational background to do this kind of work. I didn't get my master's till way later, until I was actually here at Dean did I work on my master’s. Knowing that for some people of color and some GLBT people (although I found that GLBT people seem to have more support in the field than professionals of color), they may not have the educational background or the experience. My role is figuring out how I can still bring them in and get them that experience and give them those opportunities. So, as a gatekeeper for the profession, it's my responsibility to provide as many of those opportunities and push back when HR, or other professionals in our field, say, “You need your master’s to do this type of work.” Well, I believe that you don’t. I think they can work on it while they're here. Others say, “Well, they need to have these certain experiences or qualifications” and I say, “No, they don't. They have to have the passion; everything else they can learn.”

One of my memorable moments as a supervisor, well, I think of two things. One, I do have a staff member now who is struggling with visa issues and immigration stuff. We're trying to see if we can keep him here, but what I noticed with him is that we've built a relationship where he not only sees me as his supervisor, but he sees me in a father-type role where he comes to me with a question about his personal life and asks, “What do you think about this?” and “What should I do there?” He works hard not to disappoint me. That's a good and a bad thing. I mean we're all going to do things that will disappoint someone.
So, I think that's been one significant relationship with someone that I've supervised. He has sought that out. He wants that and other people have been like, “We’re good with just having this relationship,” and they’re very professional and there’s not much mixing of personal and professional. I'm fine with that, too. And he's also person of color. So he sees me in the same way that I see other professionals of color, like, “You are my mentor and you can help me understand and navigate all of this.”

The other person is another male of color, and they're both straight, actually, too. He's my newest staff member and he reminded me a lot of me, because he didn't have the traditional education background. He only has his Bachelor's degree and I saw potential in him. So, when we approached him to interview with us and to hire him, I had asked, “So what's your final decision and what's going to bring you to Dean?” He said, “It's honestly you. It's the way you presented yourself; You allowed me to be myself. You know that I don't have the background that others’ do, but you're willing to take that risk on me.” Because I see myself in him, I'm like, “You're the reason why I'm a gatekeeper; I want you to come in the field and be able to succeed.” That experience, along with a couple others like that, have really let me know that I am making a difference in that sense, and in the field as well.

Also, my role as a supervisor has been shaped by my past experiences with professional dress and attire. My newest staff member is a mixed guy, black and white, and he has very big hair. I hear others say, “He needs to do something…” and I’m like, “No, he doesn’t.” If there's a time when we’re going to be in a meeting with the president or parents, I'm like, “John, we’re going to be in the in a meeting with the president and parents, so you do need to dress up more professional.” Great, and he does that, but he also should be able to be himself. I'm not going to
let him not know that and then me later go and tell someone, “Is John dressing right, now?” Why would I do that to him? So that's about attire and appearance for my staff.

You know I think I've been telling my story so often and so much that a lot of it just comes naturally. I share it wherever I can. Whenever there's a topic of intersectionality for me, being a person of color, identifying as gay, and being a person who is not really represented in my position, I like to share that story because it's one of my goals to be a mentor to others. There's just a way to be able to provide that narrative that will hopefully aid others as well and I think you get some self empowerment too when you go to share your experience as well.

There are certain challenges to being in a mid-level role. For example, the person in charge of the Facilities area is always talking about, “Students come first,” and I’m like, “Which students are you thinking of when you say that? I have these groups of students who want this and this change makes them feel more welcome, more comfortable, more like home.” I think of our gender-neutral bathrooms; that's something our students wanted and the Facilities person said, “Well, we can’t do that.” I asked, “Why not?” They said, “No, that's not how we're set up.” I tell them, “We don’t need to build something new; we can work with what we have” Finally, I just made the change in the Residence Halls. I decided we're going to have a gender-neutral bathroom, here’s how we’ll promote it, here’s what we have available, and when the time comes, if it’s a battle, I’ll fight that battle. I'm just going to do what I have to do without going through the proper channels to do it, and that's a battle I’m okay fighting, because I have the support of students behind me and our constituents are students; they're the ones paying the rent here and this is what they want.
Regarding supportive spaces, I'm trying to think where I don't feel like myself. It's interesting, because I've integrated so much of who you see at work with who I am at home now, that there's really no difference in that sense, which is a good feeling, to finally be at that place with myself, with my security of my job and things like that. At the conferences that’s been interesting, because I stay very involved, because I want other professionals to see me and say “okay, well now he is in that position,” because I didn't have that when I was in the field. So, that's a little harder because this is now the field of Student Affairs or field of Residential Life in general and I'm on stage as president of the organization and so I have to be a good mentor, so I have to present myself in a professional way.

My support, really, is small because I have merged so much of my personal and professional life. I used to be an ‘open book’, like anything you wanted to know I'd share anything with you. As I've gotten older, I still will do that, but only with a small select few people. So, my support network of people has grown smaller, because these are people I know that I can trust. We don't need to always hang out, it’s just, “You’re my support network.” These are people that I can go to, these are people that I can share things with. I can say, “Here is what my frustrating day was.” From these people, what I need from them is that listening ear, being very honest with me, too, because that honesty helps me to know if I’m in the wrong or not, and they’re coming at it from a place that they care about me; not from a place of trying to set me up for failure. I am one of those people that I can take 99% of criticism given to me; the only thing I don't take is when people question my credibility or professionalism; that’s where I'll fight tooth and nail. When they tell me, “Joshua, when you said that, that didn’t sound right”; to me, that’s supportive.
Other ways that support comes in is that people let me be my authentic self. You know, at work here, we share what happens in our personal lives and knowing that I can share, “I was out with Jeremy last night and here's what we did and Christopher was with us,” but I also let others share that with me as well. So that brings in a good feeling of support as well.

How I have needed and sought support has changed over time. Before, I needed people in different parts of my life, like when I wanted to go out and have fun, here's this group of friends and people; when I needed my family and friends, here's this group of people. I separated a lot of who I was. When I think of college life when I joined the Latino fraternity, there was the aspect of me being Latino in this circle of friends, and the aspect of me being gay in this circle of friends, and so they were always separate and I never felt that I could merge the two. As I've gotten older, that's who I am and every person around me that I allow into my world, in my life, they know all these aspects about me. With my partner, if I start talking about issues of racism and everything, I don't need to explain and justify why it affects me in a certain way, because he has that understanding.

Here at work when I talk about homophobia and things like that, or say, “I think it's more because I was a person of color,” they have that understanding that this is who I am and this is why I’m talking about it. So that support is that people need to accept all of who I am and to not be afraid to tell me if I’m in the wrong. For the very few very close friends, they know what I need sometimes and they’ll say, “Oh well let's go off campus” or I’ll just go to vent and they know they just have to listen to me. There are very few people who know me in that way, where everyone else might say, “Well, what do you need from me?” and my close friends listen and say, “Okay” and they leave it at that.
Early on, up until maybe eighth grade (because we didn’t have middle school, just K-8), my main source of support was my family; it was my parents. They were the ones where it was all about us; then, when I started high school, it became all about my friends, because that was where I could start to be more of myself. I was in the closet up until my sophomore year in high school when I started to come out to some friends. There were some friends that accepted and some that didn’t. Those that did, then I got to explore what it meant to be a gay man, a gay guy at that time. I remember my mom even asking me, “Why do you care about your friends more than you care about us? You do everything for your friends, but you won't do this for us.” My friends really became my best support system.

In college, support was mostly from my friends as well because the circle of friends that I hung out with freshmen and sophomore year, although they weren’t necessarily from my neighborhood, they came from the same environment as me. They were racially mixed, but we were all from working class families, from the city. We knew what it meant when you had to do a work study job, or take out all the loans you could, so that became my really close knit support. It really became about my friends; everything I did for them, they did for me.

I'm a first generation college student. So my parents don't really understand what I do, because they're always asking, “So, is this what you do?” I'm always trying to translate to them the kind of work that I do. That's the biggest source of how I get to explain what I do with them and it’s being able to share with them. There's a pride that I hear in my parents about the work that I do. They're divorced, so it's separate conversations. I spend more time with my mom and she says, “I don't understand anything that you’re doing, but whatever you're doing, I'm proud of you.” When I call and tell her, “I just dealt with a student last night who was suicidal and this is
what happened,” she wonders why I had to be there. I tell here that the student’s parents left them in our care and that's part of my job. Because it's been almost 20 years in the field now, she's getting even more used to it now when I’m just checking in with her and talking and I can tell her I dealt with this, and she gets that. What she doesn't get is when I call and I talk about being frustrated with the other people who challenge my position and not have that respect for my position. She’s like, “Don't they know you're in charge?” and I tell her, “There's always someone else in charge of me.” She always tells me to be careful.

She comes at it from a perspective where she immigrated to the U.S. Her English isn't the best and she was always on watch, and so her concern is more about, “Don't get the wrong people mad, because they'll fire you.” My perspective is, “I have the support of my supervisor and I know how much to push and challenge.” She knows how I can get too riled up, so she reminds me to be careful. She's also concerned, even with students, about whether they can hurt me or if they're going to hurt me. I tell her, “Yeah, but I think I know enough now to navigate those things” and she says, “Just be careful.” So it's interesting for her to have come around to at least have an idea of what I'm doing now, but she doesn't know how to help. If I do call with all that’s happened and she asks, “How can I help you?,” I tell her, “I just need to talk to you, that's all.”

My supportive social spaces have changed a little. One place that used to be an actual space that was supportive was our Multicultural Office here on campus. When they used to be in this other location, it was a place where students of color would come, and I could go there and they would be like, “Oh my God, this happened today!” and there was no need to explain or go into history. What I would tell them as a staff member is, “This is also safe place for me, because
I can come in and share what’s going on as well.” Their location moved, so it created less of that ‘that space’, the physical space.

It doesn't happen much anymore, but I know that I can go in that office and if I talk to the person in charge there (we’re friends), I still get that relationship, but it's less with the students now. I think what used to be good about that is the students would then see, “Oh, you’re also going through it as well, but you're also succeeding.” It was that unmentioned mentorship that was happening for students, and then for me to be able to hear from students about the new strategies, the new ways they were doing things, or handling things. I would think to myself, “I’m not going crazy, because they're still going through it.” That space would offer that.

The previous location of the Multicultural Office was in space that was a lot bigger and the colors were very warm. There was a few couches that people could come in and lounge in. It was only the office of Multicultural Affairs, so already it felt like you don’t have to come in there and be careful of who is listening. Their office shifted and now they're sharing space with other areas. One, the space is smaller and it's very institutional, it has egg shell-white walls and nothing, it’s just the chairs, and the person in charge has made their office comfortable, but because it's so cramped, everything's everywhere. Also, it's a shared office with someone else, so you don't know if you can trust them or not. That physical space really makes such an important difference, because you don't feel comfortable going there. It's not the people, but the space, you can't get comfortable.

Unfortunately, when people moved into that office, they did ask, “Can we put this on our walls?” and they were told, “No, that has to get approved.” They would ask, “Can I put this on my window?” and the response was, “No, you can’t cover up the window.” You can only do so
much for students of color, that’s not how they function. I think it increases retention, it increases how you feel about who's around, and so you don't want to spend a lot of time there, but you have to as well then. They want a place that's warm and welcoming and that's not what has unfortunately been created there. So that’s a whole different dynamic there.

Now, my space has really become my office. One, being the person in charge, I've created the environment and the culture that I want a very open, very ‘come on in’ and ‘this is your place of refuge if you need it’ space. I get to have fun here and I get to joke around. We also know when we have to be serious and get the job done. When things are crazy at home, I come to my office, because it brings comfort to me. I only hire people that bring comfort to me in that sense as well. So it's interesting though a lot of people say, “Work is overwhelming and I don't want to go to work,” I created a space where when I come to work, I feel comfortable now.

My three main supervisors throughout my career have been David, Joseph, and Donna. The very first one, David, that hired me on, he was very supportive when I didn't know if I would have a job. He tried to tell me, “Okay, here's what your next step can be” and “Here's what you need to know” or “Here's what you should do.” He supported me in that way and that was very helpful, because it was my first professional job.

Joseph, my second supervisor, was able to talk to me as a person of color who was also gay. He prepared me, “Here's the battles you may need to fight” and “Here's how you present yourself” and “Here's what it means to have a good work ethic.” He was coming from the perspective of a person of color, not from someone who identifies as white, where I’m thinking, “You have an advantage when you talk about that”; Whereas, someone telling me “Here's what it's really like.” Knowing that Joseph went to bat for me and that he took that risk,
knowing that his reputation was on line if he didn't fire me, when other people thought that I
should have, and he fought for me in that way. He was definitely someone who really went out
of their way to help me out.

Donna has been another person looking out for my best interest as well. When we were
going through restructuring here in the Dean of Student’s Office, I go to her and ask, “Donna,
what do you know?” and she says, “Well, here's what I've heard and here's what I know.” She's
very honest with me, even if it's not in my favor. She’ll say, “Joshua, here is what you need to
start thinking of.” I can go openly to her and say, “I'm thinking of doing a job search. I don't
want to leave, but…” She replied, “Great; I don't want you to leave, but what can I do to help
support you? I don't want you to go, but I also understand if you're looking to leave.”

All three supervisors have played very important roles. The first one was about what it
means to be in this field. The second supervisor was about what it means to be a person of color
who is gay and working in this field. And my third supervisor was how you really build
that authentic relationship with someone and be an ally to them as well.

While at River Mountain College, I had a ‘come to Jesus experience’ with my supervisor,
Joseph. What I loved about him, too, is he was a black man as a director of Housing, who was
also openly gay. That for me was like, “Wow, someone who kind of looks like me, has the same
identities as me, and has the same sort of philosophies with me as well.” So, we had a very great
connection that way. He was a person that was very honest and upfront.

Because I didn't have the previous training or education around this position, I was
making a lot of mistakes around what it meant to have a personal life and a professional life. The
college was located in a small town, so it had a lot to do with going out, partying, and that kind
of thing. In a small town when you have your RAs that are there and your students that are there, and I wasn't making the best decisions that represented me as a professional staff member. For example, I would go to the club and wouldn’t really care if students or RAs were present.

The last straw was two events that happened. The first was when I went out to the Spectrum Dance, the school’s GLBT group in which I was the group advisor. They held the dance at a bar because that’s the only place that they had. At the bar anyone over 21 could drink, and under 21 couldn’t. All my RAs came to support. I walked up to the bar to get a drink and one of my RAs was there. I asked her, “Do you want something to drink?” She replied, “A beer” and I didn’t think anything about it. We went to the table and the assistant director was there as well. She asked me how much my drink cost and I told her, “Eight bucks” and she said, “Oh, for one drink?” and I said “No, for mine and for Valerie (my RA).” She had this look, but I didn’t think about it. The next day, she said, “Joshua, you said you bought a drink for your RA and she’s under 21.” I said, “Oh, crap. I didn’t realize that,” or I did, but I didn’t even think about it because we were so intermingled in our relationships with our students and RAs.

The second thing that happened at Rural Mountain College was my very good friend was applying for an assistant director position at the college and I was on the search committee. We were discussing her candidacy in the committee and they said how she was going to be cut from the pool. I was like, “Who's going to tell her?” I said, “Well, I could tell her; I’m her friend.” It was never confirmed that I should or shouldn't go talk to her. I went to her and said, “You're being cut from the search.” In context, she had applied for a job somewhere else and the way she was told was too direct without any care. That wasn't my place to do that and she took it very hard because of her previous experience, so she went and talked to the director. She said,
“Joshua shared this with me and I’m not sure why.” I broke confidentiality. So Joseph called me in his office on a Friday and said that these poor decisions have been happening and that he was having a hard time justifying keeping me on staff. He would let me know on Monday if I still had a job or not. I left very upset and scared. On Saturday, he called me and after I was in tears and everything, he says, “You are going to stay on staff, but you are going to be ‘on check’. You’re going to have all these checks and balances.” From then on in, I was meeting with him weekly on every Monday to check-in, talk about my decision-making, things that were happening, how I was responding to this, and how I was rebuilding relationships of broken trust. He told me the reason he didn't fire me was because he did see potential in me of doing some great things in this field. I was very thankful. That set the tone for me in how I would see myself being a professional. We're in this position and our life is in a fishbowl and you really have to be conscious of how you're behaving outside of the job.

Years later, I found out Joseph did fight a few small battles of people asking him why I was still on staff. As the director, he had that decision, but he had to explain why he kept me on. So he was a very good ally as well and I think he understood my background and not coming through this field, to understand some of the unwritten rules about ways you behave and don't behave in these positions. Today, Joseph is a very good friend and mentor of mine.

Professional associations are one place where others can see someone with my identities in a leadership role. It’s just so important to be that person at least paving the way for that, because I think of my housing association when I became president. I was the only the second person of color in 41 years of existence to be president of this association; and I was the only male Latino, because the other person was a black female. What got validated for me is when I
am on that stage, I have control of what’s being shared. For example, when I am up on that stage
giving the welcome and giving the charge, I can share my personal story, share about my
identity. I enjoy making people cry sometimes, so I could see people crying in the stories that I
share and it just shows they’re emotional; they’re emoting, and they're connecting. Two big
things happened during our opening banquet; one, I had another male Latino come up to me and
say, “You’re up there, meaning I can be there too, one day right?” and I said, “Of course you
can.” Again I didn't have that when I was entering the field, but I knew that once I got there it
would help others.

I didn’t really realize another impact that it would have. Whenever I get in front of a
group, I try to acknowledge through my Native American spirituality, the little bit I do know,
just to acknowledge whose land we're using. I do that every time I can by saying, “This is Lakota
land and this is Dakota land…” you know, that kind of a thing. At one event, I had these two
women in the catering staff come up to me afterwards and ask, “So you're in charge of all this?”
and I replied, “Well we have a team…” and they said, “No, no, no – but you’re in charge of all
this?” I’m like, “Yeah.” They replied, “But, you're brown.” They added, “We have worked a lot
of events and no one has ever acknowledged that this is native land and no one has ever gone up
there in front of a predominantly white group and spoken Spanish. Thank you.” These people
are not connected at all to Housing; these are the catering staff there and they felt empowered in
a way as well.

That's why being involved in professional associations is so important to me. I go to the
conferences and I don't get much out of them anymore, usually because the workshops tend to be
g geared for entry-level professionals, but I go there because I want other people to see me there. I
have to be visible; I have to be seen. It gets tiring and sometimes I would rather be at home, but I need to be there for that. After being there at conferences, it’s also a nice refresher as well, because I am seeing more professionals of color, more openly GLBT people, and they know they're welcome and supported there just by me being there. Professional associations are very important, because that's who determines who's in our field; that's where they get support and mentorship, and knowing I never got that, I have to make sure I can provide that everywhere I can.

When you're one of the few, and your face is there, they can't ignore it. Our regional association has gotten better, because they are seeing a few of us there. Now, when they're talking about policies or when they're talking about topics at the conference or themes, they can’t ignore that you're sitting right there. It gets to the point where you don't have to bring it up; hopefully you’ve established that, “Joshua is always going to bring this up, so we might as well address it before he does.” Now we've had another woman of color that became president and that happened because a few of us kept encouraging her, “You need to do this and you'll be great at it,” and she finally did it. She understands now why as well. But it just increases numbers when you're visible and you're there, and it gets the point where then you don't have to say anything; it's just your presence that impacts it.

For me, resilience has to do with perseverance. You get so many ‘hard knocks’, or so many barriers or roadblocks, that you just you have to keep moving forward. I think that when you are a person with identities from under-represented groups and especially when there are intersections of identities, the reality is you deal with it so often that you just you learn to get around certain things. You learn the system in a good way, to get things done. The resilience is
that you don’t let it get you down; you keep moving forward and understand that you do have power in some areas and when you don’t have the power, that is when you draw upon your allies – that’s why building relationships is so important.

There are similarities to the ways in which resilience shows up in my personal and professional life. As a gay man, you are always cautious and careful how and where you show up, just for issues of safety, and the older you grow, you don't even put yourself in that situation. You just know not to, but you're always cautious, you're always watching your back, and things like that. I think that’s the same with work; how you’re always watching your back and you just have to do that.

I hear this is more of a struggle for newer professionals, because they want to have it like, “This is work and this is personal” and “I want to have two separate lives.” They don't like ‘the game’. They have to play the code-shifting game and you hear that maybe with people of color trying to integrate into white culture, but it’s that code-shifting and they want to have those two separate lives.

As I've grown older, my personal and professional selves have become one for me. Some may say that’s not fair, because you shouldn't always have to navigate life that way, but that's the way life is; once I accepted it and once I knew how to do that, it just becomes second hand and it isn’t tiring. When Jeremy and I go out somewhere… and he's from this area… and he is going to show me a new place, I'm like, “Where are we going? Are there brown people there?” It’s interesting that I go to ‘brown’ first, because I figure, “Well, you’re already gay, so you’ll know where it’s safe to go if we’re gay, but you're not a person of color. For example, I’ll say, “So
we're going your mom's in up north… great. Is it going to be okay for me to be there? Am I going to encounter anything? I want to prepare for that before we even step foot there.”

So, that part comes and again with work you're already preparing, “Okay, I have this meeting coming up; how do I need to prepare for it?” One example is I have a meeting with a student staff member today. She asked me, “Do you have a half hour today? I need to talk.” I said, “Sure, but can you tell me what it's about?” I want to know ahead of time; I don’t want to be caught off guard. So yeah, I just prepare for it. If the student wouldn’t share with me, then I start thinking about what it could be. Those meetings tend to be a very much of a listening session, where it’s like, “Okay, say what you have to say. If you need an answer, then you're not going to get an immediate one.”

I've also told people, “I wish you would have told me what this was about, so I could prepare. Since you didn't and you have these issues or these questions, I need some time to think about it.” I don't really give them a direct answer unless I'm comfortable with it. If it's about their workload; Okay, great - I can deal with that. If they say, “Joshua, there’s a staff issue going on,” then I say, “Okay, well let me see what I can find out about that.”

When I think about how resilience has shown up in my experiences growing up, I think in general, the big one is just growing up in a Latino family, in a Mexican family, and coming out as gay to my parents when I was 20 or 21. That time in my life, that was a big challenge for me, because you have your parents who have a certain view and vision of where they want you to be, and then you break it in any way, and that's a disappointment for them. It's interesting, because I just told the story at a conference.
Both my parents took it very differently, very hard. My dad was the first person to find out and we had a huge argument about it and he struggled with it quite a bit. He took it really hard; it was a three-day ordeal where he asked me one day and I said, “No, I'm not gay,” and then he asked me the next day and I said, “I am,” and then the third day I said, “I'm not.” I was at a community college at the time, because I got kicked out of school, it’s so interesting I’m sharing that story and not the story about getting kicked out of school, but I got kicked out of school and I was at a community college and I talked to one of my professors and he was the one that helped me in how to talk to my dad about it. My dad brought up religious issues, and family, and this and that, and he said, “We're Catholic” and I said, “You're not Catholic; You don’t go to church, so don’t bring that up to me.” It went on for a year and he asked me not to tell my mom or anyone else.

The year passed and my dad struggled a lot in that time, so I did decide to tell my mom. Of course, I took her out to dinner and do all this at a nice restaurant and make her cry. She said that same statement I hear from a lot of other GLBT folks, “Well, I always knew.” I asked her, “Why didn’t you say anything?” There were a lot of tears and when we got home, she was still in tears. My dad said, “What did you do now?” I said we're starting off the year right and I told my mom.” He said, “I told you not to tell her.” With my dad, it was interesting, because it was a lot more yelling and arguing; with my mom, she was upset and crying and concerned more that I won't be successful, that I’m going to grow old alone, I’m going to die of AIDS, you know, all these things she grew up with.

So, my two parents were very upset in different ways. That was really hard. Luckily, when I came out to my mom, I was getting ready to go back to college; I got re-admitted, so I
was able to leave, just to go away. That space allowed for some of it, because I had a home to go to in college. That was a really hard time, because I didn't know what was going to happen from there. Your parents love you, you want their love, you want their acceptance, and I disappointed them even though I thought to myself, “How did I disappoint them?” I don't know how long I stayed away from home during that time, but it was never really discussed again. It would come up once in awhile with my dad, because they actually got divorced, and we talked about it. In the home with my mom, it was never discussed up until I was ready to introduce her to my current partner.

I explained to him the whole history of the cultural stuff. He’s white, but he’s worked with a lot of Latino people, a lot of Mexican people, so he’s integrated himself in the community and understands some of the values and traditions. When the time came, before I brought him, I told her, “I’m bringing a friend and I want you to meet him.” She had this look, but she said, “Okay,” and we stayed at a hotel because I didn’t want to assume we could stay in my house. We've been together six years and that was probably five years ago. So for all that time, I'm this person, I have this life, and it was never shared with my family. We got closer once I came out to them, but there was this feeling of, “We don’t discuss it until my partner was in the picture” and then still she didn't say, ‘your partner’, she's would say, “How is Jeremy?” or “How is Christopher?” She’ll send a Christmas present or a card or she’ll invite us for Thanksgiving, so they're integrated, but she told me once, “I’m always going to see him as your friend.” I told her, “I'm fine with that; I'll take it, because it’s better than nothing.”

Resilience has shown up in my professional experience as well. More recently, it’s just working here at Dean, just because I’ve been here so long that I have a lot of great relationships,
but there are some relationships that aren’t the best. People in positions of power still view me sometimes as that entry-level person. So, you are not afforded the respect or the respect of the position to be able to do your job. For me, it’s been about trying to do certain things, make certain decisions, and these individuals in other positions of power are the ones that can allow this to happen or not. I have to stay persistent with them; you always have to frame it in the sense of the students and the battle is never about me. It’s about finding ways to get them to hear, “This is not about Joshua asking, it’s about the parents or these are the students asking.”

At work, the difference from my personal life is that I can’t choose not to go to meetings where I feel unwelcomed. You just have to go and this is where I come in overly prepared for the meeting. When I get those kinds of meetings where I don't get a heads up, I think, “What could it possibly be about if I’m meeting with Finance?” and you just start going through everything in your head.

There was a situation last year and it reminded me I need to be doing that, because I did get called into a meeting that the dean of students and I were told was about occupancy, so I came in ready for that. The meeting was with the VP of Finance and with Facilities, and the meeting totally was not about occupancy at all; they had all these questions and allegations of all these other things going on. It caught me off guard; I just shut down. I was just taking notes and I was fumbling with my words and when I left there, I talked to the dean who came with me and I said, “I wasn't prepared for that and I didn’t appreciate that. This isn’t what I was told the meeting was about.” So, obviously I couldn’t leave the meeting; I had to sit there and take it. I had to listen to everything being said and try and give answers that they needed.
The very next time the same person called me for a meeting, I’ve asked, “What is this about?” and have said, “I need to know, so I can prepare.” I am very upfront with the fact that I won't walk into a meeting not knowing what it's about anymore, especially with this person. “Tell me what it's about so I can prepare. What do I need to bring?” and if she didn't share with me, I would have said, “Well I need some more time before we’ll meet and then I'll go talk to my supervisor and ask her, “I got called into this meeting, do you know anything about it? Can you share with me?” Donna can say, “It’s about this…” and I say, “Okay, great because they wouldn’t share with me.” You can't do that all the time, but if I can and if I'm able to, I will say, “I need more information” or “I don’t have time right now.”

Another instance that definitely stands out was a few years ago when I was recently in the associate director position and was able to hire the hall director staff. We were in the process of hiring and there was another hall director who was on staff as well; there was a person who applied who we both knew and we were both friends with, but he was a better friend to him than I was, and we were all in the same grad program as well. This person also had a disability and he had worked for us temporarily. In that time there were concerns about how he supervised and the RAs weren't comfortable with him. When his time came to apply, I was the one advocating that we need to give him the courtesy of giving him an interview at least, because he had worked for us, and he had been here, and others didn’t want to interview him. I said, “That just doesn't feel right to me; we need to give him that.” In the end, he wasn't hired. The other hall director really attacked me on that. He claimed that I was discriminating because of that person's disability; he started making all these allegations. He contacted the school paper and told them, “Joshua is doing this, this, and this…” and you should have your staff report on this. He told all of the staff
what he believed was happening and that they shouldn't go to the end-of-the-year celebration. It just started coming from students, from him, from everyone, and in the meantime I'm talking to the person that applied saying, “Here's our process and here's what's going on.” I kept him in the loop. That's my responsibility to the candidate, not to the friend, who's also on staff.

That year was really hard, because whenever you get attacked professionally, you can't really defend yourself, you have to hold yourself to what your position is, what your credibility is, and what you've shown. To be attacked from students and from staff, you don't know who to trust and so I was coming in everyday thinking, “Who's around me that I can talk to?” All these things are going around and so for me, it's about having to come in every day anyway, to do your job, and to hold your head up high; to be able to say, “I'm here to do this and I can do it well.” I just remember that time period was really hard and my colleague, the office manager, who was here at the time, said, “That was a horrible time, because I was trying to talk to you and you were very short with me; you wouldn't open up with me or anything and I was on your side.” I said, “But I didn't know that. I couldn't be going around like, “Are you on my side or are you on his side?”

I just remember that it could have been easy to quit. It could have been easier to just call in sick and not come in. I'm supervising this person as well and having to deal with a person that there is no respect anymore with, and so having to cover your bases and having to just make sure there's someone else witnessing every conversation. You know, it was just a really hard time and it taught me how you have to hold your ground; You have to rely on what you've established yourself to be, and obviously I made it through it. It did ruin some relationships, but then to keep persisting and keep moving forward with it…. I think in the end the people that I cared about
what they thought, and they saw the truth about what happened. What was interesting is I was
the one advocating for the person to got hired and even my boss was saying, “we're not hiring
him.” I'm the one getting attacked, but I’m the one who supported him. So, that was a really
hard time.

Within this, because the other hall director was a straight white male, someone else
pointed out by saying, “You’re attacking the wrong person.” They brought up the question,
“How is race playing into this, especially race? The people that you should be calling or talking
to or criticizing are all white, yet you're attacking him. Now, is that because of a relationship
with him? Is it because of his race?” The minute that got brought up, he got enraged and he's
like, “I'm not a racist and this and that…” but I thought, “ Well, look at your actions…” Again,
this was coming from other people; I just stayed away from it and I didn't get involved with it. It
was interesting to see how he claimed to be a very open-minded, very liberal person, but the
minute he got called on his behavior, on his actions, he was like, “No; You’re wrong.”

Throughout this situation, my supervisor, Donna, knew some of it, but she didn't know all
of it, because again I needed the staff to be able to go to someone that was impartial, that didn't
just hear one side of it. She knew a little bit of what was going on and she knew only to a certain
extent, because obviously she was busy with her own job, but even though there was a lack of
trust overall, I did trust that if there was an issue, she would talk to me. She never once said,
“Joshua, what you're doing is wrong.” So, I felt safe in that part; I knew that I wouldn't lose my
job over this because my supervisor was okay with me. So, we just kept that communication
going, but again I was also that lack of trust with people is a way that affected that.
I was talking to the dean because as they are restructuring his position and there might be a VP position. He asked me, “Are you applying?” and when I told him, “No,” he asked, “Why not?” I said, “With the current people that are here in your similar positions, I would not be successful; the position would not be successful. You need someone that can either come in new, where they are going to give them that respect, or someone who is here that they respect already.” He asked me, “Do I regret it? No. I don’t know that I would want to do that job anyway, but I wouldn’t be successful.” He said, “The president may want to hear about that.” I told the dean, “I don’t mind sharing it.” I don’t share that to say, “Do something about it!” I say it because that’s the reality.

Strategies I practice for resilience are building relationships, learning the rules and policies, and being able to justify everything. You learn the rules and the policies and the procedures front and backwards; that way if you're ever questioned on it, you can say, “Here’s what we do.” As a person with multiple identities that have been historically oppressed, you learn how to be more than perfect, and you to have a ‘plan A, B, C, and D’…. You just have to be able to justify and explain everything. It is a lot for a person, but you learn to do that. That for me has been one of the best strategies. Before I even walk into a meeting, I need to find out what we are talking about, what do I need to know, what are the policies and procedures behind them, what are the facts, what are the numbers, and so on. That’s one of the strategies, you just have to be on top of your game big time.

The other strategy is covering yourself; documenting everything and that I learned the hard way. For example, when you have a verbal conversation with another professional, you assume, “We have this verbal understanding,” but when it's not in writing people will say, “I
never was told that; I don't know that.” So now it's either we’ll talk and then I’ll follow up with an e-mail with what we discussed or I’ll say, “I’d rather have this conversation in writing” or ask, “Can I have someone else present during our conversation?” It might be someone that has less positional power, like our office manager, but if I know I'm meeting with people in Facilities for example, I would ask her to come with me just to have another person there, just to confirm, “Am I hearing the right thing?” She understands why I bring her and others might ask, “Why is she here?” and I say “Well, she'll be helping me with these projects.” You learn to bring in your allies, you learn to document, and again you know the rules and everything.

Also, you never give a wrong fact, either. If you don't know, you say, “I don't know,” versus if you say something and then later realize you're wrong, and if you say something wrong, you have to admit right away that you were incorrect. There have been times where I have gone and I said something and when I come back and talk to Susan, for example, and she says, “No, Joshua, that’s not how we do it,” then, right away, I put it in writing and send it out saying, “I said this... I'm sorry, I was wrong; Here's what the dates are... let me know if you have any questions.” You will not be given the benefit of the doubt that it was an honest mistake, so you need to be on top of that as well. Those have been the biggest ways that I've had to sort of be on top of my game.

As a person of color and as someone who's gay, I also have to think a little of how I’m going to speak and the right words I'm going to use at these conferences. Because I've built my reputation now, I can be myself, so people expect when we sit down and talk, they know that I'm a first-generation student, so I'm not going to have big words to use and not that being first-generation keeps me from doing that, but I like talking with people and being authentic and real,
and I'm not trying to use fancy words if I don't have to. They expect that from me and that's a
nice feeling.

It's taken a long time to feel comfortable with that, but I now the only place I don't ever
feel like I can be myself is when I’m at the administration meetings here with some departments.
Everywhere else, this is who I am and I get to be myself, and being open to the challenge and
question and advocate. At home I get to do that as well. So, it's been interesting to see that the
more you build your credibility of the work that you do, the less you have to play some of those
games, and you get to be yourself wherever you walk in.

Credibility is important as a person with marginalized identities. Credibility is knowing
what you’re talking about and making sure people understand that you know what you're doing. I
tell all of my staff, from students to professional staff, “Don't do anything that could ruin your
credibility, because it’s your word; so that people cannot question your professionalism, your
ethics, the job that you're doing, and your intentions behind it. That's what makes you a credible
person.”

When we think of the law side, “Are you a credible witness; are your actions credible
with the police?” That holds a lot, because when you're a person with a marginalized identity,
you always have to be a credible person. You shouldn't do things to question that, because then
what arguments do you have to back yourself up? Can you walk into an office or walk in saying,
“I got this speeding ticket…well, were you speeding?” “Yeah?”…then why are you questioning
it? Versus, I can give you facts and numbers and here is everything that I did to make sure this
didn’t happened, then you can be like, “Oh, well okay.” Now you have more to validate what
you're claiming.
Covering yourself all the time can be exhausting, but it becomes second nature. What I always knew, but I realized once my partner moved in is how tiring it is. I've only had a few roommates, not many, my friend Tamera and another friend of mine, Tim, who got to see how exhausting it was. To the extent of the exhaustion, it’s not that I've had conflicts all day, but when you have meetings all day with these other individuals, when I got home I was exhausted; I shut down. I need that hour after work to just play video games or watch T.V., or do something. For every person that's been my roommate or my partner, they have said, “Well, you said you didn’t have any bad meetings.” I tell them, “No, but I've been in meetings all day.” As I am verbalizing this now, this is my first realization that that's what it is, because you're always on guard, you're always having to think about what's being said, how you’re navigating, and how you’re playing the political game in a sense. So when I get home, I’m like “Whew! I’m done,” and your mind just shuts down.

Over time, you learn how to work within the system. When you’re in an entry-level role, you typically say, “Here's what needs to be done to make it happen” and when you move to next step you learn, “Here's what I want to have happen and here are the ways we can make it happen, and what will benefit us.” You learn how to have rationale and justification behind it, so one of the other changes for example, was men and women living together. The university never wanted to do that.

Then, when we started pushing that with administrators by saying, “Well, we have some gay-identified students who don't feel safe living with someone of the same gender; they want to live with their best friend who’s a different gender,” so they said, “Okay, don't put it in writing, but we'll make those exceptions on a case-by-case basis.” Great; that was the first step. Now our
thinking is about, “How can we expand this?” so I go back and say, “What we're doing now is we're forcing students to come out and they may not be ready to,” that’s part one. The next rationales are, “We’re only allowing GLBT students to do this, but what if they’re not ready to identify and their parents are wondering why are we…?” And two, “We're losing students on-campus, because they can live with whoever they want off-campus and don't you want the money from the students living here?”

By this point, we've already opened the door a little and here’s how it's going to affect us in a good and bad way. It's been a compromise and they have said, “We’ll allow it; we just won’t publicize it.” So, we just say, “If you need an exception to our residency policies, please meet with the director.” That opens up the door for all students as well. We have had brothers and sisters live together, we've had GLBT students live with someone of a different gender, we've had friends that want to live together, and those are all individual conversations I have, but I just needed the one little entry way, then I can find other ways to expand it. With the university, you have to sell it as, “Why it’s in their best interest” or “You’re losing money if you don’t…”

For students, and for entry-level people, that's hard, because you want immediate solutions. I think a lot of students think, “You’ll just wait until I graduate to make this change, then you can ignore the issue.” What I've learned through moving up in the system now is that not everyone is about waiting; they want to get it done the right way, so they question, challenge, or take it away. It can be a long process and I have to help staff and students understand that they have to think of this as ‘not about them’; It's about people coming after them, because it may never happen while they’re here. If it’s only for one student, then we can see what we can do only for that student, but once you create a system and once you create that policy and
procedure, then they can't go back and change it for those that are coming after them as well. I tell students, “This is your legacy; what you can create for everyone, and not just for you…you may benefit from it, but think of the impact you are going to have for other people.”

Looking back, I would have taken advantage of my college education so much more – I never studied abroad, I never did an internship, I never realized how important the GPA would be to get a job in Residential Life to prepare me for the field. Maybe if I had gone the traditional route, maybe I would have gotten the support and mentorship that I didn’t get. Maybe that would have influenced it. At the same time, the reason I didn’t take full advantage of it is because I was exploring who I was and understanding who I was as a gay man, so that definitely played a big role in it.

I waited a long time to get my master’s, then my doctorate. For me, it’s fine because the education has never been about my job or for my career advancement; it’s been about me personally. What I appreciate now having completed the doctorate is that it has opened up other doors should I choose to leave, so I don’t feel trapped, for example, if I do something so bad here and I am asked to leave, then I will have other options. I don’t want to leave and I don’t have any intentions to leave, but it’s nice knowing that I can choose to leave.

My choice to apply for a doctorate program is a pretty funny story. The person I talked about earlier that co-created all this stress in my life, we had a competition. I remember he came to a staff meeting and said, “I’m going to get my doctorate, because I want more interactions with students and I want to be faculty.” I thought, “Then, I could probably get it, too.” I applied without telling anyone and I brought my letter to a staff meeting and said, “I have something to
share: I got accepted into a program.” And he said, “When did you apply?!” and “Why did you apply?!” He didn’t get accepted, but I did. So I thought, “Well, I’m in the program now, so…”

It started as a challenge, a competition, and then it became a personal challenge. I started it and now I needed to finish this for myself. Having a master’s degree, then a doctorate degree was never in my plans. I was tracked for public education, I failed out of college, and I didn’t have these mentors…by no account should I be getting this degree. There were times where I thought, “I think I could be ABD” and other people around me would say, “Joshua, why would you do that? You’re so close; just finish it.” The real close people around me knew just how to get me to finish it. They would say, “Well, if it’s too hard…” and I said, “Fine. I’ll just finish it.”

When it came time to do my doctoral research, I realized my research could be about me. It could be about my experience, my identities, about a social issue. I got to explore my experiences as a Latino in higher education, whether they were unique to me, were a cultural issue, a societal issue, and I got to put it in that context. That was really cool as well. Education became a personal challenge and it also became a mentorship tool as well. When I meet with students and staff, students, especially that get the bad grades, I get to talk to them and their parents from experience by saying, “Yeah, it’s going to cost you money now, but it’s not the end of the world. I got kicked out of school; I graduated in five and a half years, it’s not ideal, but it’s doable, and I have my doctorate now. If I could do it, then you can do it yourself, because you have so many more tools and resources available than I did.” My whole professional life has become about mentorship; that’s why I get involved, that’s why I talk about my doctorate by saying, “If someone like me can get it, then someone like you can as well.”
Professionally, I would not change a thing, even getting in trouble, even having those ups and downs with the past staff members, they have all prepared me for my senior- and mid-level positions. I don’t want to ever forget that negative experience I had with the other staff member, because that taught me lessons but I was getting to a point where I was forgetting it. It’s a good reminder of, “You did go through that and you always have to remember that, because that will prepare you for other stuff.” Without those experiences, everything I’m dealing with today would be totally new to me and I wouldn’t know how to survive that; I would be struggling so much with that now.

When I consider the possibilities for creating supportive systems for mid-level administrators, I think of funding resources, professional development opportunities, and teaching opportunities primarily. I would create as many funding opportunities to get people to conferences, professional development opportunities, even if it’s outside of your functional area. I would put people into the classroom teaching, being able to let students see you as that educator, but also let mid-level GLBT people of color see that you are also an educator; you are a teacher, a researcher, a scholar, and you’re a learner. I would want them in the classroom influencing other students as well.

I would remind mid-level people that you are becoming the gatekeepers. You cannot forget that you will have that power and influence, of who you let in the door, of who you are going to hire, who you select as the RA. I’ve been criticized for hiring people that are very ‘green’ to the field, because that was me; so, if I see potential and I get the opportunity, I will bring someone in to do that and you have to as well. You cannot forget the help that people need to get there.
For future mid-level administrators, I would advise them to not be afraid of who you are, but always remember that you have to get your foot in the door somehow. I’m not saying to compromise who you are, don’t ever do that, but you have to get your foot in the door first. Do what you can to get in there and then create waves, then make changes; do everything you can to build those allies and build your social capital. Always be yourself, always be your authentic self, but just know unfortunately the way the systems are, we have to play the game. That’s where some people struggle with me, because some students have called me a ‘sell-out’ and said, “You’ve given into the system.” If they really knew me, they would know I wouldn’t do that – there are different ways of making change and making waves.

Can you imagine being the person at the table and just because you’re at the table, other white people, other straight people, can’t use these terms anymore because Joshua’s here? By your presence there, you are influencing and changing things; they can’t deny that anymore. My advice is to be yourself, but do what you have to do to get in the door as well. Don’t compromise yourself, or your values either.

My second supervisor, Joseph, taught me about the ‘pioneers’ and ‘settlers’, but not in the traditional sense. He said, “In our field, the ‘pioneers’ are the people that go up beforehand; they are the ones struggling with the most headaches, being put in their place, and things like that – that’s a good person to be, or you could also be the ‘settler’. Settlers come in and you’re going to keep that foundation going, but choose to be one or the other. You can’t escape it because of who we are as people with our identities.”

If you have the internal strengths, and some can’t because they’ve been beaten down so much, but if you have the internal strength, go out here and push buttons and do what you can. If
you can’t, at least be the ‘settler’ – don’t end the fight there; know that you have to keep it going.
I see myself as a ‘pioneer’; you always have to go out there and push buttons. I still do it today. I
don’t know if I’ll ever be in the role of a ‘settler’; it’s just not in my nature and it’s just not who I
am.

Regarding my future vision, I hope that I see the confidence in myself that I see that I
should be in a higher up position. I’m playing with the idea right now of applying to a VP
position, and I use it as an excuse to an extent, because I ask myself, “Am I really ready for
that?” In five years, I want to see myself at that next level, and that it happened because I
believed in myself and was ready for it.

I’ve also grown comfortable where I’m at, which is a good place to be in, because I don’t
have to continue battling these things if I don’t want to. For personal reasons, I envision myself
more financially secure and owning my own home. Professionally and personally, I want to be
uncomfortable, but to be in a better place to feel uncomfortable, not to have to worry about some
of the life-supporting things that I need in place. Finances is the big one, because right now I
can’t buy a home, and if I want that, I need to move up and pay more money, and to do that I
have to feel like I’m ready to do that kind of work and job as well. The furthest I saw myself
career-wise is the director of Housing and that’s all I ever wanted to do; I’m fine doing that.
Everything that has come after that is both about me saying, “I can do that” and other people
saying I can do that. It wasn’t that I set my limits and thought I couldn’t do more, it was more
about what I saw that my ideal work was. As I see more opportunities, I say, “Wow, I could do
that.”
It’s also about the social benefit, so if I do move up to the VP position, can you imagine the influence you would have and the possibilities to shape how other people experience that office? At my current institution, should I choose to move up, the only two roadblocks are these administrators. I’ve built enough relationships with everyone else, where these two individuals would be the only roadblocks. If it were at another institution, it would be starting over, but I wouldn’t have a problem with that, with building those relationships. I would automatically be given a certain amount of respect and ability to do the work, because they would assume you’re in the position for a reason.

In sharing my story and reflecting on my experiences, I believe some self-awareness comes out of it. I’ve never shared it openly that the reason I don’t want to move up is because of self-doubt. To say that out loud reminds me I need to get past that. I have enough people telling me that it’s not an issue with me, and I need to believe that myself and look at what keeps me from applying. We get to tell these stories and share this narrative; it supports my belief that it empowers the person - not only you the researcher, the data that you’re going to share, they’re going to get something vital out of it, but as a person being interviewed, it’s also empowering for me as well.
Chapter Five: Discussion

The first chapter provided an introduction and an overview of the problem, as well as the purpose of the study. Chapter two included a review of pertinent literature for mid-level administrators, transgender, and QPOC professionals. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the lived experiences of mid-level Student Affairs administrators who identify as QTIPOC?
2. How do QTIPOC mid-level Student Affairs administrators experience support?
3. How do QTIPOC mid-level Student Affairs administrators develop resilience?

Chapter three provided a detailed discussion of the design and implementation of this study. Chapter four included life stories for Justine, Kalia, Hillary, and Joshua. This chapter is comprised of the results for the three major areas of focus for this study: experiences in the mid-level administrator role, experiences of support, and experiences of resilience. Next, I will discuss the findings using the theoretical framework discussed in chapter three, which includes: feminist standpoint theory, ecological systems theory, queer theory, and intersectionality. Finally, I will discuss the implications of these findings for higher education environments.

Introduction

The context surrounding the timing of the study’s implementation includes the new presidency of Donald Trump, heightened bias incidents based on race, the aftermath of NODAPL protests and indigenous rights battles, anti-transgender bills and anti-LGBQ bills taking place during the legislative session, and the appointment of an inexperienced Secretary of Education. The political context directly overlaps with the social conditions in which
professionals in this study are impacted, as well as the students they serve, and their families.

The timing of this study also coincides with a time of exhaustion, disheartened communities, and deep divisions in the country based on race and religion. Asking for time in the schedules of these busy professionals who simultaneously hold multiple identities currently targeted in the media and politics, involved a tremendous time, energy, and capacity contribution on their behalf. The fact that they stepped forward to participate echoed each person’s belief, value, and commitment to mentoring other professionals to move through and move beyond higher educational pipelines.

**Discussion**

**Advocacy in Mid-Level Role**

Advocacy and creating positive change were main focal points for participants in their mid-level roles. Justine observes that she’s been “at the table” where decisions are made, but now she sits “at a different section of the table” where her voice has more impact. Joshua leverages his role and influence to hire, onboard, and mentor new professionals, in which his class and first-generation college student experiences shape how he advocates for their success. Justine notes again and again that “lifting as we climb” is interwoven into everything she does and extends that philosophy to the work of her department as well.

Each participant also expresses an awareness of who their allies are and are not. They invest consistent time and energy into these support networks as highly relational leaders, investing in the “human capital” and “social capital” of their networks. Joshua noted how his approach to advocacy is no longer on the frontline of student protests and teach-ins, but his contributions now take place at the policy level of the institution. He knows the systems, as well
as the people in the systems, but also provides an example of establishing gender-neutral restrooms when students expressed their needs, although he encounters resistance to cooperation when seeking this solution within the protocols of the system.

**Identities in Mid-Level Role**

Each mid-level administrator expresses significance pertaining to their presence in their professional positions as a mechanism to role model for students and colleagues. Their visibility in a leadership role, such as assistant director, director, and associate dean are all important indicators to increase access of future professionals into these roles. Joshua notes that he doesn’t see Residence Life professionals with similar racial and sexual orientation identities, until he entered the field, then there were few noted throughout his career in mid- or senior-level roles.

Participants note experiencing both positive and negative aspects of their intersectional identities. For Joshua, he is aware that white male colleagues enjoyed access to resources and decision-making environments while he is not equally privy. Hillary observes that in his director of LGBT Affairs position, his identities were very clearly an asset. Conversely, he “paid a price for being a gay Black man” at Urban University. Kalia notes the micro-aggressive and micro-invalidating comments and behaviors of colleagues at Public Midwest University, as well as discriminatory actions on behalf of her supervisor regarding housing benefits for partners in LGBTQ relationships versus heterosexual relationship. Kalia also notes that the farther up the administration reporting line, the Whiter it gets. This awareness of ‘outsider/within’ status is also expressed by Joshua, however, it manifests itself in his development of a ritual or hyper-preparation and always “being on top of his game” that becomes “second nature” and is still quite exhausting for him.
Kalia observes that in the institutions where leadership includes promoting intersectional feminist praxis, they themselves hold minoritized identities; she experiences a liberatory nature of identity-based dialogues and critical social justice. In these environments where identities and corresponding social dynamics are discussed directly and openly, her identities as a queer womxn of color are an asset. At Public Midwest University, she perceives these parts of her identities to be received in a hostile and dismissive manner, “We get it…but leave that shit out of it.” Justine recently won an award at Jesuit University and had the opportunity to highlight her identities, while recognizing she might be perceived as “too political” and to be asked to “lighten up”.

Justine’s experiences in Student Multicultural Services provides a context in which she is hired to do women of color work specifically and applies intersectionality to her work in this field. She perceives her department to be a queer, intersectional, and supportive space. As she moves into the assistant director role, she uses this opportunity to move forward an intersectional approach, at a “different section of the table” to advocate for students of color.

Lastly, the institutional ideologies trickle down to the daily experiences of these QTIPOC mid-level administrators, particularly, their cultural identities can be perceived as aligning, or contradicting, institutional culture. Hillary noted the regional influence, including the “boundaried” and formal professional culture, whereas he believes, “Southern people don’t have enough boundaries.” He expressed not feeling comfortable as a professional in this part of the Midwest. His cultural context and identities conflict with Midwest professional norms, where “work is work” and “we don’t need to be friends”.
Kalia’s Toishanese cultural influences are most directly represented in her grandmother’s childrearing practices. Kalia’s practices of walking through the halls at Public Midwest University are not culturally acceptable, both within the regional and institutional context. She perceives the competitive institutional environment to both boast of her identities as a form of ‘tokenization’ and also request that she leave her identities out of it.

**Degree of LGBQ Outness in Institutions**

The level of visibility and the strategies used to communicate LGBQ identity manifest differently for each participant. Joshua visible piercings and tattoos, as well as Kalia’s colored hair, piercings and tattoos, mark that “something is up” and denotes their uniqueness. Justine and Hillary note that the institutions knew of their LGBQ identity before selecting them for professional roles at their institutions. Kalia shares her strategic decision-making pertaining to interview responses in order to secure her current position for the financial security of her family, noting that she covered her tattoos and had less color in her hair at the time of the interview. LGBQ identity came up differently for Hillary and Joshua, who have been in the field of Student Affairs for more than 20 years. This identity was very salient for Justine and Kalia, who have been in the field less time as professionals.

**Campus Multicultural Centers as a ‘One-Stop Shop’**

Kalia and Justine are both assistant directors in Campus Multicultural Centers. Both describe messages they received about the role of Multicultural Centers in serving as a “one-stop-shop” for the entire institution. Kalia is encouraged to attend any and all multicultural-related campus events, and observes that students of color are referred to her Center for an array of support-related questions, even when it is not related to the work they do as a Center. Justine
is experiencing increasing requests for staff and faculty trainings and consultations, although the scope of her department is for students. There is a dynamic of being the tokenized department for students of color and the tokenized leaders of these departments who hold multiple minority identities.  

**Emotional Labor**

Emotional labor was a term that described the experiences of both Justine and Kalia. Justine emphasized that students “come for her double” because of her identities, where her White and straight colleagues can just “close up shop at the end of the day.” Kalia similarly notes the exhausting series of stereotypical expectations others place on her as a womxn, as an Asian womxn, and the caretaking and passive nature she is expected to encompass. She also communicates the emotional weight she carries as a supervisor enacting a more cultural or transformational approach, where she is met with resistance and a lack of mutual engagement by supervisees.

Joshua and Justine both experience a level of exhaustion at the end of their work days that doesn’t leave energy for much else. Joshua spends his days in meetings where he is carefully preparing beforehand and advocating for staff and students with administrators who might not give him respect. They both describe their arrival home to involve video games or television, respectively, as a way to disengage their minds.

Kalia and Justine invest time to mentor and meet with students specifically. Justine communicates that her programmatic responsibilities stretch her capacity in consideration of the additional meetings with students and, “building meaningful relationships” with them. Kalia’s position does not directly involve frontline student services, but she notes that she still has coffee
with students who share similar identities. These students communicate that they don’t see people like them succeeding in the institutional environments. Justine and Kalia’s efforts to fill this gap on top of their administrative duties has emotional impacts given their emotional investment in these students. Additionally, their efforts are intended to address systemic professional pipeline issues, and hostile institutional environments, and it is time in addition to their administrative responsibilities to mentor students.

There dynamics experienced by Kalia and Justine are not shared by Hillary and Joshua. Although this study does not aim to generalize beyond the scope of the participants’ experiences, it is interesting to note the caretaking and emotional weight these two womxn carried. They perceive messages regarding the expectations for them and how to invest their professional energies in these realms. In addition to being womxn of color, Kalia and Justine also work in Campus Multicultural Centers, which has it’s own unique role in respective institutional environments.

**Messages in Mid-Level Role**

These mid-level administrators receive numerous messages about professionalism, emotions, and wellness. They learned from mentors and supervisors as early socializers in the field of Student Affairs. They also receive messages from their personal, spiritual, and academic communities that counter, buffer, or sometimes align with these professional messages. Prior to entering the field, Joshua notes the absence of Latino gay men in Residence Life professional positions. Justine and Kalia were mentored by womxn of color in the early stages of their Student Affairs journey. Each participant communicates in different ways the messages they received about who should be in professional college leadership roles, and correspondingly
sought awareness for themselves to fulfill these roles where fewer of them occupied. Justine observes who is in the room with her “at the table.”

Professionalism and professional appearance were prominent themes for Joshua and Hillary. Hillary observes that relationships are formal and people are more guarded in the Midwest. Joshua received messages early on about “dressing like a student” and how to behave professionally through his Rocky Mountain College ‘come to Jesus’ moment. Today, he is very comfortable in his professional appearance and demeanor, and he mentors other professionals on professionalism using more inclusive and tactful approaches.

The role of emotions and appropriate management of emotions are another set of messages received by all participants. Justine and Kalia learned from mentors the role of anger and the necessity of emotions in their work. Kalia’s supervisor promoted the healthy function of anger when confronting inequity and “administrator violence,” as two examples. Justine’s life mentor, Sherri, offered a listening ear, true accountability, and also de-stigmatized the act of crying for Justine when she needed each of those things. She wasn’t shamed or made to feel guilty, only to feel human as someone who was having an emotional response. Joshua describes a very difficult time in his professional career when he wasn’t sure who his allies were during that time. He mentions, “When you’re attacked in a professional setting, you can’t defend yourself.” Although he doesn’t explicitly address the use of emotions, what he describes is a reaction or strategy derived from the messages he receives about professionalism, as well as not getting “the benefit of the doubt” his White colleagues receive.

The final area of messages received pertains to wellness and self-care. Each participant noted the ways in which they integrate or keep separate their personal and professional selves.
Justine’s early lessons regarding self-preservation and burnout manifest today in her supervisory efforts to prevent the burnout of her coordinators and her self-advocacy for her own financial and personal wellness. Justine observes senior-level administrator’s schedules and seeks to strike a personal and professional balance where a life partner and family are her primary sources of energy investment.

Kalia practices art, calls on her ancestors and her spirituality, as well as her personal and professional community for support. She communicates that preserving her “life force” for her family and loved ones is essential to her self-care today. Hillary took a “self-care sabbatical” after he left Midwest University. He also has solid personal and spiritual support systems, many of which are also working in higher education professional roles.

Support in the Field of Student Affairs

Professional Associations

Joshua sees professional associations as places of visibility and mentorship for gay professionals of color. Justine views them as professional development vehicles for her public speaking and presentation skill capacity-building. Kalia approaches these organizations as sources of validation in the field of Student Affairs. For Kalia, professional associations are a source of validation through receipt of awards, participation in leadership opportunities, and engagement with mentors and other leaders in the field of Student Affairs. For her, professional associations provide much needed support, particularly in times of hostile experiences within institutional environments. Joshua participates in his regional and international associations according to his functional areas. He sees professional associations as an avenue in which he can provide newer professionals a visible role model and create space for them.
Institutional Support

Supervisors

Supervisory support is noted as essential for each participant at various professional stages. Some note they have current supervisory support and their supervisor is engaged in mentoring or supportive efforts to advance their academic, personal, or professional goals. Hillary shares that the support of his current supervisor is not the same level of political awareness and the mentoring component he had become accustomed to in previous roles. Kalia noted that she is often expected to be the “caretaker” for her supervisor and staff, and seeks mentorship outside the institution and peer support within the institution. Justine and Joshua noted their supervisors provide ongoing support in their professional advancement and assist them in navigating the political context of the institution through open and honest communication channels.

Each participant notes an exemplary supervisor who they worked with early in their career and the importance of that person in each of their lives moving forward. Each of them is in contact with at least one supervisor, whom they refer to as a mentor, many years later. Justine emphasizes the importance of straight allies in supervisory roles for her as well as queer supervisors. They demonstrate actively and persistently their commitment to LGBTQ-inclusive practices.

The role of support and advocacy of supervisors is crucial to short and long-term success and wellness as QTIPoC mid-level administrators. Many of the supervisory experiences developed into long-term mentoring and confidant relationships. Supervisors model accountability, transformational supervision, and open communication. Sherri role modeled for
Justine how to hold a supervisor accountable while providing support and offering strategies and expectations to prevent a recurrence of the issue in question. Sherri also taught Justine about self-preservation during graduate school, an early career lesson that stays with Justine today.

Kalia had unique takeaways from each womxn of color supervisor, and describes her experiences today where she seeks that support elsewhere. Participants told a story of their own supervisory philosophy as mutually reciprocal. Joshua shares two stories of men of color professionals “who sought out” a supervisory relationship that had elements of mentoring and sought Joshua as a confidant. Joshua also describes the dynamic of authority Donna establishes so he can exercise autonomy in his role.

Justine names the opportunities and responsibility supervisors have to “hire wisely” and provides details about how she practices this, and that she observes this philosophy practiced by her mentors and supervisors. Kalia told a story of her most memorable supervisory experience, including the lessons she learned in the process that resulted in a lifelong mentee who “gets her.” This process was described as a “mutual exchange” that allowed for the supervisee to transform throughout their time together.

**Identities of Mentors and Supervisors**

Justine notes the importance of two life mentors on her pathway. One was a woman of color and not LGBTQ-identified and the other was a woman of color and LGBTQ-identified. Kalia has had women of color and queer women of color supervisors in her experience. Hillary doesn’t mention the race and sexual identities of his past or current supervisors. Joshua has had one gay male of color supervisor that had an important role in his career, as well as his current straight white female supervisor. The identities of their supervisors were often noted, although
what was also prominent was the intentional advocacy each of the supervisors exhibits around their social identities. For example, Justine’s supervisor explicitly advocates for LGBTQ issues, although she is not LGBTQ-identified. The same explicit acknowledgement is expressed by Hillary’s previous supportive supervisor, who observes that Hillary, “paid a price for being a gay.”

**Career-Mapping**

Justine acknowledges the importance of professional development plans as a vehicle in which she and her supervisor can map and create actionable plans to allow for reflection and assessing her career plans. Through her professional development plan, she creates a plan to utilize professional development associations to practice her public speaking and presentation skills, as well as reflecting on her academic and professional advancement goals. She ultimately decided to apply and enroll in a doctoral program in higher education administration. Additionally, she seeks the guidance of life mentors at each stage of her academic, personal and professional journey.

The same can be said for Kalia, who reaches out to her ‘family’ of mentors when making important life decisions and celebrating life events. Joshua communicated that he is communicating frequently with his supervisor about possibilities for advancement and is aware of the barriers within institutional leadership that would prohibit his success in a senior-level position. Through conversations with his supervisor and past mentors, he has been able to discern when and where the right opportunity for advancement might exist. Joshua has worked with Donna over the span of many years and established open and trusting relationship to discuss pathway and career exploration.
It’s important to note that each participant, although receiving messages of encouragement from others in their network to advance professionally or attain a terminal degree, balanced a willingness to explore both realities of staying in a mid-level role or advancing to senior-level leadership. Hillary shares that his aspirations were always to have a director role. He is very clear in the opportunities and autonomy of this role; however, he is also open to a senior-level role that provides similar context to do social justice work in Student Affairs, if the position cultivated room to be able to do that work.

**Mentoring**

Each participant emphasizes the importance of mentoring, both as something they are seeking at various stages of their student and professional lives, but also as an essential role that they play in mentoring students and professionals in the field and in their institutions. Mentoring manifests itself in the form of one-on-one appointments with students who have similar identities, whether they are LGBTQ and people of color, or they hold intersectional gender and sexuality minority identities. Justine mentions that as a queer women of color, students “come for her double,” not only as a queer mentor, but one that is also a person of color. Kalia expresses her informal mentoring with students, although her position does not entail direct student support. Students see someone with similar identities and reach out for mentoring and support, because there are fewer professionals they can relate to with these identities.

Mentoring also hold significance in each of the participant’s professional socialization. Many supervisors from their early career and undergraduate experiences provided support beyond that of a traditionally defined supervisor. Providing materials for higher education graduate programs and walking her through the application process was instrumental for Kalia.
Joshua’s early supervisors also invested in him in ways that moved beyond a transactional supervisory role and performed a mentorship role. His early supervisors imparted lessons about the unwritten rules of the profession, keeping Joshua on staff after multiple incidents of unprofessional boundary-setting. Justine mentions Dr. Love and observing support practices that she would replicate one day when given the chance. Dr. Love encouraged her as a queer woman of color to pursue graduate school, gifted her formal attire and paid for her attendance and hotel to attend NASPA as an undergraduate student. Hillary beams when he speaks about the impact of his first supervisor and how she taught what how relational leadership and professional advocacy looks like. Many of these supervisors, framed as mentors by each participant, are still in the lives of the participants today.

**Identity-Based Affinity Spaces on Campus**

Justine and Kalia stress the importance of the presence of campus-based opportunities to be in community with professionals of similar identities. For Justine, this manifests itself through the monthly Black Women’s Lunch Group and notes that the institution currently was not sponsoring any affinity spaces. Multicultural departments and departments serving identity-based student populations are also a source of support for staff. These departmental leadership roles not only offer professional opportunities for others with minoritized identities, they also provide drop-in supportive spaces for professionals to engage cross-departmentally with peers. Justine communicates that her department is full of professionals with similar identities and also shares that her sub-unit within the Student Affairs division is also an extended network of professionals advancing social justice efforts.
Joshua notes that the Multicultural Center at his institution was previously a supportive space, although it no longer holds the same sentiment for him given it’s new location, aesthetics, and multiple offices existing within the same physical space. He no longer feels welcome and comfortable in the new space, noting that the staff member in charge of the Multicultural Center was of similar identities, but the new space is “sterile” and doesn’t promote open exchange between staff members, or student and staff member exchanges. Kalia takes daily walks through the basement of her office building to interact with other QTPOC professionals and to build community with them. These professionals also work in identity-based departments in the university.

**Definition of Resilience**

Each participant shares unique definitions of resilience. Kalia offers a creative interpretation of resilience in the form of images she sees when she thinks of resilience. She shares images of cicadas and shelled organisms, both embodying a tenderness and toughness simultaneously, as well as the ability to keep showing up despite harsh conditions. She shares a current strategy that entails preserving her “life force” at work, so she has enough energy for her family. Justine sees resilience as many things, one is to surround herself with positive people and to be in community. This sentiment of collective or communal resiliency is a source of strength for Kalia as well.

Perseverance shape how Joshua and Hillary understand resilience. Joshua describes resilience as “…perseverance. You get so many ‘hard knocks’, or so many barriers or roadblocks, that you just you have to keep moving forward.” Hillary’s spirituality offers him a mindset that encourages him to persevere. The way in which he frames his time spent at Urban
University determined his ability to get through that challenge. By framing his life experiences as, “going where love is calling you next,” he is able to move through challenging life circumstances, such as a cancer diagnosis, as well as other personal and professional challenges while working in Philadelphia. Participants saw resilience as both a process and an outcome. Their strategies shed more light on these aspects.

**Cross-Cultural Resilience**

The socio-political context of the U.S. shapes how participants experience their institutional roles. Kalia notes the issue of an institutional grant that is funded by a financial institution that supports the Dakota Access Pipeline. She uses her mid-level position to voice her concerns and request a response, but is silenced. Justine notes that her current primary focus is supporting undocumented students, as well as responding to the campus and national racial climate that has been an increasing area of student and social concern. She notes the Black Lives Matter movement and it’s influence on students and campus community members. Joshua observes a student-led sit-in on campus where administrators didn’t know how to respond to a student speaking about Black Lives Matter issues, and the student’s use of profanity inhibited their ability to validate the student’s concerns.

Joshua also communicates the significance of now having a Black woman in leadership at Dean University and communicates some of the distinctions in her level of understanding of intersectional identities compared to the previous president. Justine also describes her efforts to fend off staff and faculty regarding LGBTQ and racial identity education and consulting work as it increased recently. She reiterates that student support and education are within the purview of her department, and staff and faculty services are not.
Resilience Strategies

Participants demonstrate several resilience strategies. Strategies include practicing self-care, sharing their story with others, and establishing a supportive community. Self-care strategies encompass a broad range of practices. Whereas Kalia engages daily in creative artistic expression, she also makes time each day to have lunch, and makes a concerted effort to locate opportunities for relationship-building. Justine describes one summer where she was able to “…sleep, eat, drink…whatever I wanted to do.”

Joshua and Kalia mention that they shared their stories recently. Joshua shared his on stage at a Father Conference and referred to other stories he’s shared from the stage of professional association convenings. Kalia notes sharing her story often as well. This strategy leverages the experiences of the participants, including their successes and challenges, from the place of authority they have as leaders and mid-level administrators. They share these stories because they are one of the few people in these positions with their identities. In a sense, these stories are meant to uplift and empower others with similar identities and experiences.

The second area of resilience strategies involves establishing supportive communities. Justine describes how she thrives when she’s around people with similar identities. She accesses campus affinity spaces, personal social spaces, and even describes how her department is a place where they can mutually support and uplift one another. Joshua notes the benefits of having positive affirmations from his community members about his professional capabilities. In moments where he doubts his current or future potential, he has positive influences to counter this self-doubt so that he can move forward fully.
Building Social and Cultural Capital

Each participant notes the importance of relationships, or social capital, in their role today and throughout their career. Justine, Kalia, and Joshua refer to this using language of ‘cultural capital’, ‘finding community’, and ‘knowing your allies’. Social and cultural capital is something that not only is developed, but it is also maintained over time through relationships, then leveraged in particular situations to advocate for students, colleagues, or for their own role. Justine notes finding community was not only a strategy that she found difficult in graduate school, but also being in community creates a sense of individual and collective support for her personally and professionally. She notes her search for a church home in her process of faith identity development and her excitement at exploring a new women’s bible study group.

Kalia’s art and community involvement are sources of support and active engagement with community members. She notes that the cultural capital of her mentors preceded her arrival to the Midwest as well as throughout various stages of her career. The reputation of her mentors results in other higher education professionals acknowledging her reputation as well.

Story-Sharing as Tool of Resilience

Participants note the importance of their identities in moving forward Student Affairs work. Justine, Kalia, and Joshua observe that they share their stories in interview settings for professional roles and also share their stories at student events. Each communicates that sharing their story and promoting visibility of their identities, even if it means just being physically present at conferences or in their institutions, is an essential tool to lift others up. They ensure that others advance into influential professional roles or to empower and support students, peers, and colleagues around them.
Integrating Personal and Professional Selves

Each participant integrates their personal, spiritual and professional selves differently, although it is something each one shares. Justine seeks spiritual community, although she notes that her personal and professional support networks overlap significantly. Kalia similarly calls on her spiritual knowledge and her personal support systems to navigate the professional context, although she also expresses the need for and the presence of colleagues with similar identities and values to “get through the day” and to “survive.” Hillary currently is lacking the type of colleague and mentor support that he has experienced in past institutions. He notes that his personal and spiritual communities are big sources of support for him both personally and professionally, yet is trying to navigate feelings of isolation without the daily colleague and mentor support at his institution.

This section offered a discussion of themes emerging from the life stories of Justine, Kalia, Hillary, and Joshua. These lived experiences offer deeper insight into the institutional and environmental context as it pertains to QTIPOC Student Affairs mid-level administrators. The subsequent sections will include an overview of the limitations of this study, areas of future research, as well as the implications for research, theory, and practice. This chapter will conclude with recommendations to enhance the support and resilience of QTIPOC Student Affairs mid-level administrators.

Limitations

It is important to discuss the limitations of this study. Limitations primarily include geographic proximity to participants. Not only did participants from the Midwest opt-in to the study at higher rates than those anywhere else in the US, Kalia actually noted this was an
essential requirement. She did not feel comfortable sharing her experiences over video conference calls or with someone she did not already know and trust. Also, I saw two of the participants outside of the interviews. Each interaction was unique given that one was by surprise and one was planned. I did not want to risk outing the participant who might have to explain to others how we know each other, so I offered a brief greeting and eased us out of a deeper engagement in front of a mutual colleague. I later emailed the participant to communicate that I was there to work with a student group and to alleviate any concerns that we had to reveal how we knew one another.

**Future Research**

Future research should take into consideration the level of comfort regarding in-person and virtual interviews given the noted sensitivity of their stories. There were some experiences shared by QTIPOC mid-level administrators in this study that produce some fruitful areas for future research. The first area pertains to the physical and mental health impact of being a QTIPOC mid-level administrator. To answer the question, “Are institutions making QTIPOC mid-level administrators sick?” is vital to encourage the holistic wellness of these professionals and could inform any potential interventions at the institutional and individual levels to correct harmful affects.

A second area of future research pertains to an examination of the liberatory approaches to departmental leadership, such as the intersectional feminist praxis, mentioned by Kalia. If we can begin to envision and enact models of better practice for these professionals, even if they are at the department level to buffer or counteract institutional oppression, then we should start to look at the models QTIPOC professionals feel supported by and within. A future examination of
specific strategies that promote thriving, successful, and healthy QTIPOC mid-level administrators is needed.

A third area of future research pertains to QTIPOC mid-level administrators in Academic Affairs. Information about the complexities of their experiences isn’t adequately discussed in current literature. Providing perspectives within academic contexts would add a dynamic understanding of these mid-level administrators.

Lastly, although this is not directly in dialogue with QTIPOC mid-level administrators themselves, it would be interesting to explore the dynamics that inform their supervisors’ approaches to mentoring and supervising them. There is richness in creating space for this collective re-telling of historical and contemporary experiences in these roles, the meaning-making of each, and the influence of social identities as well.

The areas of future inquiry mentioned in this section are by no means all-inclusive. In the first two chapters, I alluded to the absence of literature on the QTIPOC Student Affairs professionals and this void is wider when we consider mid-level administrators with these intersectional identities. The future areas of inquiry are vast and it is my hope that we can continue to add to this literature and carve out space for these administrators to share their stories.

**Implications for Research**

The subsequent section includes implications for research. Themes of individual and collective resilience permeate the participants’ lived experiences, through their practical strategies, mindset and framing, as well as interpersonal efforts to ameliorate institutional violence. The use of theories as tools by QTIPOC mid-level administrators, the role of individual
finances and debt, as well as the role of institutional messages in shaping their personal experience on campus. Additionally, I will discuss participants’ use of code-shifting as a navigation strategy, as well as themes of violence, safety, and survival as expressed in the study.

Use of Theories as Tools

In Student Affairs graduate preparation programs, one major curricular component is Student Development Theories. We are socialized to “meet students where they are.” These theories provide a lens we can use to formulate approaches to student-centered development. One interesting finding relates to the function of theories, such as intersectionality and racial formation theory, as tools that participants use when comprehending and coping with institutional dynamics, as well as interpersonal dynamics with colleagues. These theories offered a lens in which participants could understand, buffer, and respond to incidence of racist micro-aggressions or violent institutional environments. This use of theories with professional peers is surprising given that these theories are framed as student development theories. In reality, they offered an effective mechanism for processing and coping with environmental factors.

The use of intersectionality as a lens to understand their own identities and experiences contributed to their ability to navigate institutional context and to assess institutional culture. This effort to frame their experiences using a theoretical lens that centers power, privilege, and oppression was an act of reclaiming their power in a sense, a powerful facet of resilience. Hillary expressed an intersectional understanding of his identities, stating, “synthesized all my identities; you can’t separate one out.” Kalia’s first supervisor helped her understand who she was as an intersectional person. Her supervisor also promoted a culture characterized by the principles of intersectional feminism, which were important socialization experiences for her. Kalia also
shared that there is an absence of spaces for her to discuss her intersectional identities as a mid-
level person.

Justine mentions intersectionality consistently as a framework used in her work in
Student Multicultural Services and also to understand her identities. She expresses pride in the
intersectional communities she is part of given her identities as a queer women of color. She uses
examples of intersectionality and inquires about the institution’s approach during job interviews.
What’s unique about her professional experience is that she actually held a position that directly
stipulated intersectional student identities as her primary job function. She receives tremendous
support in her intersectional department and notes how fortunate she is because this is not the
case in all Campus Multicultural Centers. Joshua mentions being drawn to the study given that it
is intersectional and this was one platform to share his story.

The second set of theories pertained to Critical Race theory (CRT) and racial formation
theory. Kalia notes a sense of identity and community with others who apply a CRT lens to
education systems. This approach informs her understanding of these systems and how access
and norms are established within systems of power, privilege, and oppression based on race. She
also expresses a sense of collective bonding or community given these shared ideologies. Kalia
also mentions racial formation theory as a tool to understand the behaviors of her colleagues of
color and their internalized racism, imposter syndrome, as well as other related oppressive
dynamics. This theoretical lens also acts as a shield or a buffer to her experiences of lateral
hostility within colleague of color groups. Individuals use various lenses to frame and shape their
daily experiences, as well as responding to interpersonal violence. They use the theoretical tools
at their disposal to navigate, survive, and thrive in higher education environments.
Role of Finances and Debt

The role of individual finances and education debt is an area of importance and a set of resilience strategies for participants in this study. In navigating their support role for students, they express the need to acknowledge the financial realities of mid-level professionals that are also paying off student loan debt, are the sole provider for their families, and the influence of their own class identities on their journey in higher education, both as students and as professionals. Justine experienced financial strain given her newness to paying bills, rent, and other living costs after working in Residence Life in her early adult years. Her immense education loan debt added another layer of stress and financial instability to her life. Joshua also mentioned that he looked forward to being financially stable enough to purchase a house and alluded to living paycheck-to-paycheck during his professional tenure in Residence Life. He also leverages his authority as a mid-level administrator to advocate for students and professionals regarding their financial situations. He acts to buffer institutional policies and provide alternate payment plans or payment options to accommodate numerous ways in which they possess resources.

Kalia, as the sole provider in her household, mentions the significance of this role in her decision-making overall. She decided to take the mid-level position at Urban University in part due to the salary it provided for her household. She also mentions experiences of discrimination regarding meal plan benefits typically granted to the unmarried partners of her straight colleagues in Residence Life. These employment benefits are stressed as significant factors in the quality of life experiences and psychological stress of balancing or sometimes straining financial stability, in addition to the role and responsibilities of their mid-level position.
Class identity is a particular influence for Joshua and Kalia. Their stories reiterate the core sense of self that they have in relationship to their socio-economic class identities growing up and today. Joshua notes the intersection of his identities as a child of immigrant parents, being a first-generation college student, and very early experiences of bussing to school in a predominantly White and affluent neighborhood as a young Latino boy. Kalia’s socio-economic standing was particularly present in her undergraduate experience. She was determined to finish her degree early so that she could work and earn money. Graduate school did not align with her income-earning aspirations after graduation.

**Role of Institutional Messages in Shaping Individual Experience**

Kalia notes the distinction of an institution that applies an intersectional feminist praxis versus one that applies transactional, white supremacist institutional ideologies. Joshua notes an incident that took place on Facebook and the difference in response of the previous president and the current president in their potential value systems and awareness. Justine’s institutional leadership often use language of “priorities” when de-valuing the LGBTQ student communities she is advocating for. Additionally, institutional responses to current sociopolitical issues are noted for Hillary, Justine, and Kalia. Hillary expresses disappointment when his current institution does not respond to the recent election results and the Orlando Pulse Massacre that took the lives of 49 LGBTQ people. Justine’s institution clarifies it’s marriage policy to prohibit LGBTQ couples from using their services or their campus space for marriage ceremonies. Kalia notes that an institutional grant is managed by a banking organization that is invested in the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) and the lack of response or action to remedy this unethical banking practice.
**Code-Shifting**

Participants note an awareness of navigating distinct spaces within their campuses. Justine shares her experiences in the Still I Rise group and the openness in which she can share openly and the perceived room she has to be herself in her department. Kalia notes how differently she is perceived based on her race, gender, and sexuality and the corresponding interactions of colleagues. She practices code-shifting based on altered appearance and language in the hiring process with the awareness of how oppression manifests in the selection process. Joshua experiences a contentious situation with a student when sharing a similar post using distinctly coded language and framing on his personal and professional profiles on social media. Code-shifting is an important strategy for QTIPoC mid-level administrators in order for them to navigate higher education contexts more effectively. These dynamics occur differently based on the environment, social and political context, their positional role, and their identities, and demonstrate individual agility and adaptation on their behalf.

**Violence, Safety, and Survival**

Participants each note physical and emotional consequences given their higher education institutional experiences. Kalia uses language of “survival” and “violence” as experienced in an institutional culture that favors individual competition and ideologies derived from “White Supremacist” cultural context. She mentions the negative impact on her health and shared a comment her friend made, stating “this place is making you sick”.

Joshua describes the decision-making process used in his personal life to determine if he was safe to navigate particular contexts due to his racial identity and gay identity. He utilizes different strategies in the workplace and communicates that he can’t avoid potentially hostile
environments or meetings in his professional role. Justine reiterates the role of finances and financial education pertaining to higher education loans as a way in which she advocates for her own basic needs. Justine experienced burnout, which isn’t “…Just a word. It’s like a physical feeling on your body. It was a physically and emotionally exhaustive state.” She also communicates multiple layers and systems of support in her identities and mid-level role. There is something to be said for the negative physical and mental health impacts these participants encounter in their respective higher education environments.

**Implications for Theory**

Implications for theory are provided given the theoretical framework applied in this study. First, the insights provided by feminist standpoint theory (Atkinson, 1998) are discussed. Next, I will provide observations based on ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Lastly, I offer connections of the participant experiences using queer theory (Jagose, 1996; Watson, 2005) and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991).

**Feminist Standpoint Theory**

Feminist standpoint theory offered insight into the lived experiences of these QTIPOC mid-level administrators. It allowed participants to speak from their socially situated locations at a particular historical point in time. We reduced the need to filter, code-shift, or translate insider language and this encouraged participants to speak more freely given some of our shared identities as QTIPOC professionals.

When I was designing this study, I couldn’t have imagined the social and political context surrounding participants during it’s interview phase. During the final interviews, the current presidential administration threatened institutions receiving federal funding for non-
compliance with the Executive Ban, released a letter revoking transgender-inclusive protections under Title IX, and college campuses encountered a resurgence in hate crimes and White power symbolism and rhetoric. I was asking for time out of these very busy administrators’ schedules at a time when many people in LGBTQ and POCI communities were exhausted. I knew I was asking for more than simply time, I was asking for them to share their stories and experiences at a time when they could potentially have met their own capacity for self-advocacy and advocacy for students in light of the current environment.

Given this social and political context, participants noted a shift in focus of their mid-level roles to advocate for undocumented students, to support student protests and teach-ins with Black Lives Matter proponents, or simply to offer a message from the institution or department after incidents like the Orlando Pulse Massacre and the election of Donald Trump. I believe they were able to share these experiences and concerns because of our shared “outsider-within” status. We were able to minimize the influence of language and norms of dominant culture within the interview spaces.

I believe the participants and I mutually benefitted from participating in the study. It created a space for them to share their stories, which Kalia notes as absent in her institution. It created opportunities for me to engage with professionals more advanced in the field of Student Affairs than myself. Sharing their stories bolsters significance and power, individually and collectively. Sharing their stories in this social and political time is an act of resistance, and simultaneously a potentially dangerous act. Sharing their stories could have consequences in a community that is so small, in institutions that communicate conformity or adherence to hierarchies that reinforce power disparities as a function of institutional efficiency.
Given the feminist standpoint theoretical lens, I also realized my inclination to say “our stories” and discovering the benefits and the harmful impact of that language for others. For instance, I made the mistake of using “our” when asking Joshua about his experiences as a gay man of color and he paused ever so slightly before responding. It wasn’t until I journaled about our interview, did I take a look at the dynamic this created within the interview. When I completed all the interviews and read through each story, I had the realization that although I hold identities as a lesbian person and a multiracial person of color, that Joshua and I had enough distinctions in our identities and experiences that using “our” could potentially invalidate his experiences, identities, or both.

Additionally, I had to balance what information I previously held about each participant in an effort to remove some of my assumptions, but also to ensure I asked for clarification about their meaning and experience. I was cautious about my knowledge of each person as fellow community members (as I mentioned, QTPOC communities are small and QTPOC higher education communities are even smaller). Interestingly enough, interested participants were mostly those who were also in the Midwest or we had common people in our networks. Kalia mentioned that she would not have participated if I was not also located in the Midwest, because her sharing is too vulnerable to do over the phone or internet. In this sense, my relationships prior to the study benefitted the study.

These findings reinforce the importance of using a feminist standpoint theoretical approach to the design and implementation of studies in QTPOC professional communities. Given that participants navigate higher education institutional environments daily and receive specific messages about their identities, their stories, and the systems of power, authority, and
voice in these systems, the interview space was a place to reduce those power disparities. Shared language, identities, and socio-political context created enough similarities among the participants and myself to uplift more authentic story sharing opportunities.

**Ecological Systems Theory**

When applying Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1979) to the findings of this study, in combination with queer theory and intersectionality, it allows a nuanced understanding of the interplay of professionals and their environments given their multiple social identities within systems of power, privilege, and oppression. The participants received various messages about the expectations and norms of the Student Affairs profession, as well as the goals of professional success as measured by advancement, over achievement, or the ‘hamster wheel’. Given the influence of their social identities in these administrator roles, they perceived corresponding stereotypical messages received regarding expectations as womxn of color in Campus Multicultural Centers, or as gay Latino men in Residence Life, within a predominantly white regional and institutional context, or even as a Southern gender transgressive gay Black man in political institutions. This theoretical framework examines these professionals as members of multiple social networks in which they interact daily and the salience of race, gender, sexual orientation, and other identities as primary influencers of their experiences. For each of the participants, they noted the significance of having strong personal networks, whether they were spiritual, familial, or social, as well as relationships with lifelong mentors and role models in their personal and professional realm. Kalia’s awareness of the dissonance between her personal communities and their views of the institution she works for provide us a particular set of micro-systems she is straddling as a QTIPOC mid-level administrator. The socio-historical
context, or the chronosystem within Bronfenbrenner’s theory (1979), allow us to contextualize the environments in which these professionals have been and are situated within. This influences their perceptions of their role within institutions, their role within their families and personal communities, as well as any alignment or dissonance between these expectations when they navigate between all of these networks and environments.

**Queer Theory**

Queer theory (Jagose, 1996; Watson, 2005) centralized the gendered sexuality identities of QTIPoC mid-level administrators in their experiences within higher education. Kalia and Justine remarked that they were sometimes perceived as straight because they are cisgender, or because their peers lack the awareness of LGBQ identities to know the difference. They both experienced a level of tension due to institutional policies and practices given their queer professional identities. Kalia experienced discrimination early in her career due to benefits for live-in partners in Residence Life because it was presumed straight couples would one day be married when living together. Justine’s institution released a communication after same-sex marriage was passed at the federal level that implicitly denied access to same-sex couples for marriage services on her campus. Joshua asked himself when confronted with hostility or resistance, “Is it because I’m gay? Or is it because I’m Latino?” He isn’t able to untangle the complexities both social identities and their socio-historical context have for his experiences.

**Intersectionality**

Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) was a lens used explicitly by some of the participants in this study. Additionally, their awareness of intersectional identities and the implications for their lived experiences was present, even if the theoretical concept of intersectionality was not
explicitly expressed. Each participant noted that they are not single-identity people. Joshua and Hillary expressed a synthesis of their identities, or a fusing of them over time. Kalia and Justine consistently spoke to their identities as queer womxn of color as an intersectional experience and a basis of self-understanding. Participants also noted experiences of tokenism in the hiring process, as well as their daily experiences on campus. Additionally, the rise of student protests centered on intersectional issues that raise concerns of racial injustice, such as the Movement for Black Lives, these professionals communicate that other administrators often lack the understanding of these issues in order to adequately respond. It could be said that each of these professionals, given their intersectional identities, have wisdom from their daily experiences that students and institutions could benefit from in having these identities present in institutional leadership roles.

Joshua adds that his working class background and experiences as a first-generation college student shape who he is today. His class identity is also a basis for his mentoring and advocacy today. Justine mentions countless times that there is a need for financial education for people considering higher education’s professional pathways, preferably before they make decisions about education loans. Justine, Joshua, and Kalia all mention finances as an important consideration in their efforts toward a balanced life. Intersectionality permits the incorporation of these identities and the corresponding social and political context attached to these various identities.

Implications for Practice

Based on the lived experiences of Kalia, Justine, Joshua, and Hillary, I will provide implications for higher education practice. These practices have the potential to promote the
support and resilience of QTIPoC student affairs mid-level administrators. Implications include hiring practices, as well as advancement and promotional opportunities for QTIPoC mid-level administrators. Additionally, implications to support these professionals include providing platforms for sharing QTIPoC stories and the role of professional associations. Lastly, I will discuss the negative experiences of participants as some of them describe institutional culture as a source of violence or support.

**Hiring Practices**

Justine and Kalia note the influence of QTIPoC supervisors hiring other QTIPoC professionals; Joshua shares his stories of influence at the hiring and onboarding of professionals applying a lens of class to this process as well. Hillary notes concern at having an all-white professional staff when serving women of color predominantly. He notes the relief of having recently hired a woman of color on his team. Hiring practices and overall practices for recruitment and selection of professionals are emphasized as an essential component of supporting QTIPoC professionals. When asked for additional participants to participate in the study, most notice the absence of QTIPoC professionals who occupy mid-level administration roles and supervising professional staff are even less present in the field. The impact of more intentional practices for the hiring process could move more QTIPoC Student Affairs professionals through the pipeline to occupy mid-level administrator roles.

Joshua brings forth a strategy of hiring professionals who are more “green” to the field of Student Affairs, or specifically to his functional area in Residence Life. He sees this as his role and responsibility to mentor and invest in the growth of new professionals. He resonates with their experience, as he wasn’t adequately socialized into the field’s norms of professional dress
and behavior. Once these professionals are hired, he advocates for them by buffering institutional systems that assume a level of financial security or resources are available. His role in the hiring process is active throughout the selection and placement process.

Hillary seems relieved when he notes he recently hired a woman of color on his staff team. Previously, their frontline professionals providing direct student support have all been White. He communicates the positive impact this has on the student population he serves, which is predominantly women of color. As echoed by other participants, visibility of professionals in each positional level in the institution impacts students positively. Hillary also notes the impact for students due to the visibility of his identities as Southern, Black, gay, and a transgressive male. Hiring practices hold great potential for impacting current and future students and professionals across numerous gender and sexual identities.

Lastly, identity-based campus centers and departments offer professional leadership opportunities for mid-level administrators. They advocate for students based on shared and distinct identity-based experiences, as well as have a role that permits them to center these identities and experiences. These hiring pipelines should be examined for their potential to increase the advancement of QTIPoC mid-level administrators in combination with needed supervisory support, affinity-based spaces, and mentorship.

**Advancement and Promotional Opportunities**

Justine, Joshua, and Kalia share their experience promoting from within their departments and institutions. This advancement experience from new to mid-level professional offered them a unique learning curve for the new role they occupied. They are able to step into new professional roles already having experienced the climate and norms in their previous role.
It also offers a sense of validation for their contributions to the respective department and institution, given that they are offered promotional opportunities given their previously demonstrated accomplishments and abilities. Justine actually interviewed at other institutions, but states she was not likely to find an intersectional Campus Multicultural Center like the one at Jesuit University. Promoting within this environment where she experienced affinity with her identities as a queer woman of color was important to her, which is an important consideration given the financial strain she was experiencing in her coordinator role.

Justine also notes that she had first-hand knowledge of the experiences of coordinators because she held the position previously within her department. This led to her understanding of the potential for burnout and the unique emotional labor that can arise within a coordinator role, and one specifically that is designated to intersectional identity-based work. She is able to advocate for coordinators on her team and provide a sounding board for coordinators in other departments as well.

Hillary received messages early in his professional experience, that in order to advance in the field of Student Affairs, he should be open to moving around to various locations, which are possibly remote locations. In hindsight, moving around to different locations and geographic areas was one of the best decisions he ever made. He benefitted from learning from people in different regions and also about the locations.

Joshua has advanced within his role at Dean University and is currently receiving messages, actively and passively, about his candidacy for a senior-level promotional opportunity. On one hand, his supervisor is very supportive of his professional advancement and encourages him to apply if that is what he wants. On the other hand, he perceives the individuals currently
occupying senior-level positions, who would be his peers when he advanced, to inhibit his success in this role. He communicates that the position in question would benefit from someone who would be “set up for success” as a newcomer to the institution, given the culture that these senior-level professionals have created. Given this context, he is simultaneously aware that he would be more successful in a new institutional environment while these professionals occupy peer senior-level positions.

**Platforms for Sharing QTIPOC Stories**

Institutions and professional associations can create opportunities for mid-level administrators to share their stories. Sharing stories with students, new professionals, peers, and senior-level administrators has different implications for the impact of this story telling. For students and new professionals, these stories can indicate to them that advancing to administrative positions is possible for them.

Sharing their stories with other mid-level administrators serves a couple of purposes; the first, given that the mid-level range of titles and responsibilities is so broad, sharing these stories between assistant directors and directors or even directors and deans of students can bridge this gap. Participants noted that they hold some decision-making authority, but not full decision-making authority or influence. With this extra layer of bureaucracy between themselves and policy-making decisions, upper mid-level administrators can learn how to best support these professionals reporting to them. Sharing stories between senior-level and mid-level administrators can serve to bridge the understanding of one another’s identities and values in their respective roles. Mid-level administrators might not have a clear idea of the expectations and experiences of senior-level administrators, and vice versa, adding the complexities of
institutional and social dynamics given the influence of LGBTQ and people of color identities in these roles.

**Role of Professional Associations**

Professional associations were important to the participants. Joshua carved out leadership spaces to make his identities visible and connect with new professionals in Residence Life associations. Kalia experiences them as a source of validation of her professional abilities and connected with other like-minded professionals in Student Affairs. Justine is able to overcome her anxiety of professional presentations and build her capacity regarding public speaking at professional conferences. None of the participants mentioned a program, conference, or convening for QTIPOC mid-level administrators. There exist mid-level manager institutes and programs within professional associations, as well as mentoring programs for professionals of color and also for LGBTQ professionals, as well as a recently established LGBTQ college president’s organization. Where do QTIPOC mid-level administrators receive support, mentoring, and capacity building internal and external to their institutions? To my knowledge, this does not yet exist.

**Institutional Culture as Violence or Support**

Institutional ideologies consisted of messages received by senior-level administrators, peers, and particularly other people of color within institutional environments. Institutional dynamics were described as something participants needed to survive, as daily back-stabbing and violence. These messages and interpersonal dynamics reinforced to participants decreased levels of respect, authority, and legitimacy granted by institutional systems and individuals. Participants
located micro-systems of support to ameliorate negative ideologies experienced in broader higher education environments in order to cultivate personal resilience.

How can institutions work to ‘flatten’ complex bureaucratic reporting structures? Supervisors and administrators in respective departments can create smaller environmental ecosystems of support for QTIPoC mid-level administrators to buffer daily experiences of invalidation, micro aggressions, and tokenism. Participants noted the importance of support and advocacy of supervisors. Relational approaches to supervision and non-transactional supervision resonated with participants in this study. Open and honest lines of communication, mutual care for the whole person, attention to self-care and balance, and mindfulness of capacity to prevent burnout, are just a few of the practices that promoted success for QTIPoC mid-level administrators.

Campus Multicultural Center professional roles of two of the participants, Justine and Kalia, created unique institutional expectations and dynamics in their mid-level role as queer womxn of color. Their identities are in one sense, assets. They are encouraged to promote services and support for students with intersectional identities; however, they encounter institutional cultures where they perceive inconsistency in the value of their identities as LGBTQ and as people of color, in addition to their gender identities as womxn.

This dissonance appears to be buffered by supportive upper mid-level administrators and senior-level administrators, as well as the policies and practices of the institution at large. For example, an institution’s messages that LGBTQ people will not have access to the religious institution you are employed by as a QTIPoC person created much dissonance for Justine. Her individual values came into question when presented with this action on behalf of her institution.
In addition, an institutional policy or message such as this had implications for the LGBTQ students, in which professionals in Campus Multicultural Centers are then sought out for support and advocacy. Stepping in to advocate for LGBTQ students when these professionals, themselves, feel harmed by or disagree with an institution, is not just professional support; it’s very personal work. Keeping open lines of communication and paying close attention to the personal and emotional work these professionals are asked to do, in addition to advocacy and ally-ship of non-LGBTQ professionals and non-people of color professionals is important to buffer these institutional cultural dynamics for QTIPOC mid-level professionals.

**Recommendations**

Recommendations arising from the stories shared by QTIPOC mid-level administrators in this study are related to hiring practices, supervision, identity-based spaces, and employing feminist ideologists. Participants noted their current practice of particular strategies, as well as their future aspiration to employ these strategies. These recommendations are provided in order to enhance higher education institutional environments for the support and resilience of current and future QTIPOC mid-level administrators.

**Hiring**

Each participant noted the impact of hiring QTIPOC professionals at entry and mid-level roles in higher education. The impact of having colleagues with shared identities and experiences resonated strongly with Justine’s experiences and was a source of community and support for Kalia as well. Having numerous QTIPOC professionals rather than a smaller group holds potential for mid-level administrators seeking support, validation, and community in their professional capacity. The onus is on institutional hiring committees to effectively outreach to
QTIPOC professional communities and eliminate barriers within the selection and hiring process to retain prospective employees at each stage.

**Supervision**

Implementing relational supervision models of practice can enhance the professional support delivered to mid-level administrators. As previously discussed, Singh and Sim Chun (2010) reiterate the importance of a resilience-based model of supervision for queer professionals of color that centers empowerment, critical self-reflection, and reciprocal engagement and benefit for both supervisor and supervisee. This includes moving away from transactional models of supervision to a more multi-directional model that incorporates awareness of self and others.

Participants emphasized the significance of supervisors who have mentored them at early stages of their careers in Student Affairs. Today, they are in touch with many of them. This lifelong holistic supervision greatly impacted the style of leadership and supervision these mid-level administrators integrate into their own practice. Kalia’s cultural leadership style, Justine’s ‘lifting as we climb’ philosophy, and Joshua’s relational approach to supervision all hold potential for supporting QTIPOC mid-level administrators. Their experience of empowerment, authentic care for the whole person, and investment in their professional development could be actualized within their supervisory relationship. Subsequently, mid-level administrators model this with their professional teams and students as well.

**Campus Identity Centers**

Campus identity centers and departments provide professional opportunities to diversify higher education administrator pathways. These roles provide personalized experience in which
to engage campus communities and advocate for campus concerns based on many of the social identities and experiences of the QTIPOC mid-level administrator. Scrupulous hiring practices to ensure professionals with multiple minority identities are recruited into these positions and others will increase advancement and promotion into more senior-level positions.

**Identity-Based Spaces**

The availability and endorsement of identity-based, caucus, or affinity spaces hold promise for building communities of support for QTIPOC mid-level administrators. These groups range on a wide spectrum of formal to informal, programmatic to supportive, and institutionally endorsed to institutionally hosted. Given the context of each institution and its corresponding geographic region, the appropriate identity-based group will vary. These spaces provide consistent avenues for affinity and validation. They also provide the potential for tight-knit bonds to connect QTIPOC professionals to the broader institution. Combining efforts of recruiting QTIPOC mid-level administrators into campus identity centers, as well as support and engagement opportunities provided through identity-based spaces can help to recruit and retain these professionals in their respective institution and in the field of Student Affairs.

**Employing Feminist Ideologies**

Higher education institutions should continually assess the institutional messages QTIPOC mid-level administrators receive through each of the ecological sub-systems they interact with. Implementing cultural practices across the institution that center relational aspects of professional engagement empowers QTIPOC mid-level administrators in this study. Practices of open and honest communication, check-ins that incorporate personal wellness, and those that critique or buffer white supremacist and patriarchal systems can amplify the voices of these
professionals. Such efforts can start from departmental leadership, or bottom-up, as well as from the most senior leadership, or top-down.

**Conclusions**

This study examined the lived experiences of support and resilience for mid-level LGBTQ mid-level Student Affairs administrators of color, centralizing their multiple identities as POCI and LGBTTQ. In this chapter, I provided a discussion of the findings in relationship to the literature and conceptual framework, limitations of the study, and the implications for research, theory, and practice in the field of Student Affairs. Recommendations for practice are in the areas of hiring, supervision, identity-based spaces, and employing feminist ideologies.

To echo the idea of Trickle Up Social Justice promoted by Dean Spade (2001), when QTIPOC professionals’ conditions improve, so too will this effect trickle up the hierarchies of higher education administration. This examination and effort to improve conditions for holistic well-being should start at the “bottom” of the reporting lines, with students, graduate students, and new professionals. This study shed light on the experiences of professionals in the middle of higher education professional pipelines, a rather telling story for the possibilities and consequences of efforts to prepare and support newer professionals.

In the design, implementation, and analysis of this study, I gained tremendous value and insight as the researcher. I was empowered by the stories of these QTIPOC mid-level administrators and resonated with many of their experiences. Their leadership presence and advocacy efforts in the field of Student Affairs are invaluable. I learned a lot about strategies to navigate institutional culture, mentoring other professionals, and the compromises individuals often have to make in bringing their whole selves to their administrator roles in higher education.
The strength of self and personal power each embodies is inspirational and it gives me hope for tomorrow’s leaders pursuing advancement opportunities in Student Affairs, with these individuals paving the way.
References


Appendix A

Recruitment Email

Hello,

My name is Saby Labor and I am a doctoral student at St. Cloud State University in the Higher Education Administration program, as well as a member of your association. I would like to ask your assistance in sharing my research invitation with the members in your association. I am studying the lived experiences of resilience and support for mid-level Student Affairs administrators who identify as both LGBTQ and people of color or indigenous people. This dissertation research study is the final phase of my doctoral program.

Participation Details:
1. Participate in three 60-90 minute interviews (one interview takes place in-person and two take place on video conference calls)
2. Review final transcripts for accuracy

If interested in participating, please complete this brief survey.


If you have questions, please contact Saby Labor at Las1205@stcloudstate.edu or Dr. Christine Imbra, faculty adviser, at Cmimbra@stcloudstate.edu.
Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

FACULTY ADVISOR: Prof. Christine M. Imbra
St. Cloud State University, Higher Education Administration
(320) 308-1689
cmimbra@stcloudstate.edu

STUDENT INVESTIGATOR: Sabrina (Saby) Labor
Higher Education Administration
(323) 287-6663
lasa1205@stcloudstate.edu

You are invited to participate in a research study of the lived experiences of resilience and support of LGBTQ Student Affairs mid-level administrators of color. You were selected as a possible participant because you indicated your current role as a mid-level administrator, LGBTQ-identified person, and an indigenous or person of color. This research project is being conducted by Saby Labor to satisfy the requirements of a Doctoral degree in Higher Education Administration at St. Cloud State University.

Background Information and Purpose:
The purpose of this research study is to understand the lived experiences of resilience and support of LGBTQ Student Affairs mid-level administrators of color.

Procedures
If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to partake in three interviews via video conference call, each 60-90 minutes in duration. At the conclusion of the three interviews, you will have the opportunity to review all interview transcripts for accuracy and completeness.

Risks
There are no known harms or discomforts associated with this study beyond those encountered in daily life. Participants may withdraw from this study at any time.

Benefits
The possible benefits to educational research, practice, and society resulting from your participation in this research may be a greater understanding of how Student Affairs mid-level administrators identifying as both LGBTQ and people of color or indigenous, experience resilience and support.

Confidentiality
A pseudonym will be used for each participation and their names will be confidential. Any information that could potentially lead to the identification of the participant or their institution, can be modified by the participant up until the final review and approval of transcripts and narrative. All data for the study will be stored under password-protection. To prevent identification of research subjects, data will be presented in aggregate form or with no more than 1 – 2 descriptors presented together.
Research Results
Participants will receive an opportunity to conduct a final review and approval of their story before publishing. The published dissertation will be emailed to participants and will be available in the St. Cloud State University electronic resource library.

Additional Resources
If you need assistance or would like to talk with someone about the experiences of LGBTQ people of color, the following services are available:

- GLBT National Hotline 1-888-843-4564 [http://www.glbthotline.org/] free and confidential
- GLBT National Resource directory [http://www.glbtnearme.org/] find local support services

Voluntary Participation/ Withdrawal
You can choose whether or not to be in this study. It is strictly voluntary. If you volunteer in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. Participation is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. Cloud State University or the researcher. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. You may refuse to answer any questions you don’t want to answer and still remain in the study.

Compensation, Reimbursement, Costs:
You will not be compensated for your participation in this research study. While there are no financial benefits for participating, your participation will help educational researchers and practitioners better understand the lived experiences of resilience and support for LGBTQ Student Affairs mid-level administrators of color.

Contact Information
If you have questions right now, please ask. If you have additional questions later, you may contact me at (323) 287-6663 or Lasa1205@stcloudstate.edu, or my adviser, Dr. Christine M. Imbra at (320) 308-1689 or Cmimbra@stcloudstate.edu.

Acceptance To Participate:
Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age, you have read the information provided above, and you have consent to participate. You may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty after signing this form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Researcher Signature</th>
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AUDIO AND VIDEO RECORDING:
I give my consent to allow myself to be audio-recorded and video-recorded during participation in this study, and for those records to be reviewed by persons involved in the study.

☐ Yes, I agree to allow the researcher to audio record my interviews

| Participant Signature | Date |
Appendix C

Pre-Screening Survey

1. Name: ______________________
2. Preferred email address: ________________
3. Which of the following video conferencing tools do you prefer to use when participating in this study?
   a. Skype (username: _______), b. Google Hangouts (username: _______),
   c. FaceTime (username: _______)
4. Position title: __________________
   Southeast US Other: ______
6. Type of Institution (circle all that apply): Public Private For-Profit 2-year 4-year
7. Does your current position have a reporting line to the chief Student Affairs officer?
   Yes No
8. Do you currently supervise professional staff? Yes No
9. Do you identify as a LGBTQ person?
   a. Which identity label(s) do you use to describe your sexual orientation? ______
10. Do you identify as a transgender or gender nonconforming person?
    a. Which identity label(s) do you use to describe your gender identity? ______
11. Do you identify as indigenous and/or a person of color?
    a. Which identity label(s) do you use to describe your race and ethnicity? ______

Thank you for expressing interest in this study. If selected for participation, the researcher will contact you at the email address listed above. Please contact Saby Labor at Lasa1205@stcloudstate.edu or Dr. Christine Imbra, faculty adviser, at Cmimbra@stcloudstate.edu with questions or concerns about the study.

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Meets criteria ___Yes ___No
Accepted to study ____Yes___No
Pseudonym ________________
Appendix D

Pre-Survey Cover Letter

Thank you for your interest in the LGBTQ Mid-Level Administrators of Color study. My name is Saby Labor and I am a doctoral candidate at St. Cloud State University in the Higher Education Administration program, and have been a Student Affairs professional for the past 10 years.

I am seeking participants who meet the following criteria:
   a) Self-identity as a member of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two spirit, and/or (LGBTQ) community,
   b) Currently hold a mid-level Student Affairs administrator at a higher education institution,
   c) Currently supervise professional staff, and
   d) Self-identity as a person of color and/or indigenous person (POCI).

Please answer the following questions. If selected to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete three 60-90 minute interviews, one taking place in-person and two via video conference software. Additionally, participants are involved in the review and approval of interview transcripts and written results. Several measures have been put in place to ensure confidentiality and your identity will remain confidential at all phases of the study.
Appendix E

Interview Protocol #1

(Introduction text: introduction to study, explain life story focus, recap focus of the study is LGBTQ midlevel managers of color)

Introduction
1. (Asking questions from pre-survey regarding identity labels and meaning-making of these labels)

Life Today
2. Please tell me about your life today…
   a. Prompt: personal life (family, friends, hobbies, etc.)
   b. Prompt: professional life (position, institution, professional associations, professional development)
3. Is there anything else you would like to share about your personal and professional life today?

Mid-level Administrator Experiences
4. Tell me about your pathway to your current position…(positions, institutions, duration, graduate school, etc)
   a. Follow-up: Please provide examples of the impact of your identities and your pathway or experience in higher education.
5. How would you describe your mid-level administrator role? (nature of the role, responsibilities, reporting line, overall institutional organizational structure)
6. What do you feel are the unique opportunities or benefits of being a mid-level administrator?
   a. Follow-up: What do you feel are the unique opportunities or benefits of being (LGB/TQ) and (POCI)?
7. What do you feel are the unique challenges or disadvantages of being a mid-level administrator?
   a. Follow-up: What do you feel are the unique challenges or disadvantages of being (LGB/TQ) and (POCI)?
8. How would you describe your experiences as a supervisor? As a supervisee?
   a. Follow-up: What does it take to be a successful supervisor?
9. Is there anything additional you would like to share about your midlevel management experience we haven’t yet discussed?

Ideological Messages
    a. Follow-up: Where and from whom do you receive these messages?
    b. Follow-up: What are the areas of congruence regarding these expectations?
    c. Follow-up: What are the areas of dissonance regarding these expectations?
11. Is there any other information about your present experience you would like to share?
Appendix F

Interview Protocol #2

Introduction
1. What else has come up for you pertaining to this study since our first interview that you would like to share?

Interacting with Environment
2. Describe those spaces where you feel like you can be yourself (virtual, physical, and groups, etc)…
   a. Prompt: Spaces in your personal life (home, spiritual places, community events, etc).
   b. Prompt: Spaces in your professional life (campus, conferences, professional events, professional groups, etc.)

Personal and Professional LGBTQ People of Color Experiences
3. What skills or strategies do you use to overcome adversity or challenges in your life?
   a. Follow-up: Are there similarities and differences between those used in your professional and personal life?
4. Where do you receive support in your personal and professional life?
   a. Prompt: Personal life (In the community, family, peers, church, etc.)
   b. Prompt: Professional life (Institutional support, professional associations, colleagues, and in the profession)
3. In your online survey, you indicated you identify as _____ and ____. Can you describe how you experience and understand these identities simultaneously and/or independently?
   a. Follow-up: salience of one identity or more, same or different across environments and context, intersection with Student Affairs professional identity
4. Please tell me about your connection to others with similar identities...
5. Can you share your coming out story or experiences coming out as LGBTQ? How did your POCI identity influence your coming out experience, if at all?

Growing Up
6. Tell me about what it was like growing up…
   a. Prompts: mentors, influential experiences, significant decisions, opportunities, historical events, life events, neighborhood experiences
   b. Follow-up: would you have done anything differently? Kept the same?
7. What family or cultural celebrations, traditions, or rituals were important in your life growing up? In your life today?
8. Where did you receive support growing up? (as a child, as a teenager, and as a young adult)

Wrapping Up
9. Is there anything else about your past or present experience you would like to share?
Appendix G

Interview Protocol #3

(Introduction text: thank you for meeting with me. This interview will last between 60 and 90 minutes. The interview will be recorded as discussed in first interview. Do you have any questions before we begin?)

Introduction
1. What else has come up for you pertaining to this study since our last interview that you would like to share?

Experiences of Resilience
2. How have you experienced resilience in your personal life?
   a. Follow-up: Does this experience share similarities or differences in your professional and personal life?

Personal and Professional Experiences
3. Given who you are and what you know today, what would you have done differently if you could do it over again?
   a. Follow-up: What advice would you give to future LGBTQ people of color Student Affairs mid-level administrators?

4. If you had endless resources available to enhance the support for mid-level LGBTQ people of color administrators, what would you change?

Envisioning the Future
5. Where do you see yourself in 5-10 years? How do you see yourself getting there?
   a. Prompt: Can you tell me about the support you will need to get there?
   b. Prompt: Can you describe the strategies and skills you will use to get there?

6. Is there anything else you want to tell me about your future?

Wrapping Up
7. As we are wrapping up our interviews, are there things you would like to add?

8. Throughout our time together, you have had the opportunity to reflect on your life. What has it been like for you to go through this process?

Thank you for your time. Timeline and process for review of all three transcripts. Indicate which areas to omit from the study, provide clarifications and revisions.
Appendix H

IRB Approval Letter

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

720 4th Avenue South MC 204K, St. Cloud, MN 56301-4498

Name: Sabrina Labor
Address: USA
Email: lasa1205@stcloudstate.edu

Project Title: LGBTQ Mid-level Administrators of Color in Student Affairs
Advisor: Christine M. Imbra

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol to conduct research involving human subjects. Your project has been: APPROVED

Please note the following important information concerning IRB projects:
- The principal investigator assumes the responsibilities for the protection of participants in this project. Any adverse events must be reported to the IRB as soon as possible (ex. research related injuries, harmful outcomes, significant withdrawal of subject population, etc.).
- For expedited or full board review, the principal investigator must submit a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated on this letter to report conclusion of the research or request an extension.
- Exempt review only requires the submission of a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated in this letter if an extension of time is needed.
- Approved consent forms display the official IRB stamp which documents approval and expiration dates. If a renewal is requested and approved, new consent forms will be officially stamped and reflect the new approval and expiration dates.
- The principal investigator must seek approval for any changes to the study (ex. research design, consent process, survey/interview instruments, funding source, etc.). The IRB reserves the right to review the research at any time.

If we can be of further assistance, feel free to contact the IRB at 320-308-3290 or email ri@stcloudstate.edu and please reference the SCSU IRB number when corresponding.

IRB Institutional Official:

__________________________
Dr. Latha Ramakrishnan
Interim Associate Provost for Research
Dean of Graduate Studies

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