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Cultivating Resilience and Resistance in Trump’s America: Employing Critical Hope as a Framework in LGBTQ+ Centers

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President Donald Trump's infamous tweets have become almost commonplace in our current era. Every day, we wonder who he will offend, what human rights he will attempt to compromise, or who he might further marginalize. Nowhere is this as prevalent as for LGBTQ+ populations, who have been oppressed historically and whose status remains precarious. For example, in July 2017, Trump (2017) tweeted, “victory cannot be burdened with the tremendous medical costs and disruption that transgender in the military would entail.” As the leader of the most powerful nation in the world, Trump has the upper hand. Under his administration, the Department of Justice is protecting taxpayer-funded federal agencies, government employees, and government contractors who legally discriminate against LGBTQ+ employees for religious reasons, and the Department of Health and Human Services is eliminating LGBTQ+ communities’ health needs from strategic plan for 2018-2022.

These actions are harsh and unsettling, especially since Trump’s rhetoric and such policies give license to others to oppress and to continue to uphold a legacy of homophobia and transphobia in the United States. Since his election, we have seen a rise in hate crimes; the Southern Poverty Law Center, for example, “found 867 cases of hateful harassment or intimidation in the 10 days after the Nov. 8 election” (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016). To be clear, is not solely Trump himself that is the problem we identify. Rather, his taking office has leveraged an ideology that oppresses LGBTQ+ peoples and other marginalized bodies. His presence has awakened, catapulted, and most importantly legitimized a host of negativity in social spaces. The visibility of White Nationalists, for instance, has dominated the media in the last year, reflected in instances such as Charlottesville, Virginia or the appearance of swastikas across college campuses. This is surely not a coincidence.

It might seem then, that in such a political context, resistance and resilience would be futile. We believe, however, that just the opposite is true. This milieu necessitates response, on all fronts, now more than ever. In the space where we work, higher education, there are numerous opportunities for such efforts. One such arena is through LGBTQ+ centers on college campuses.

Our current political climate, which resists diverse bodies, makes the need for such centers and their work of cultivating hope, and thereby a commitment to struggle and change, even more urgent.

Resilience is a term operationalized in multiple fields; however, we employ Nicolazzo’s (2017) reconceptualization of resilience as a verb, as “not necessarily something that one has or does (e.g., an ability) but a practice” (p. 88). Formulating resilience as an action helps us to construct how LGBTQ+ centers can themselves and can assist students) employ strategies “to overcome individual enactments of trans* oppression,” (Nicolazzo, 2017, p. 88) and determine “where and with whom one can best be successful and, thus, best navigate the collegiate environment” (Nicolazzo, 2017, p. 89).

And, just as we expand resilience, we also note that the manner in which one resists can vary. We recognize resistance broadly because we wish to validate each person’s agency in resisting in this tumultuous political climate on their own terms. Resistance, then, could be voting or protesting, or it could be writing to a congressperson, or it could be sharing factual news on social media. It could also encompass a combination of these or even something different. Resistance cannot have a one-size-fits-all definition because people must be able to resist within their given social contexts. Furthermore, individuals must be able to step back when they need a break, when they feel overwhelmed by emotion, exhaustion, or frustration. Resistance means they still return to the cause, but it understands that battle fatigue exist as a result of a host of oppressions, such as racism, cisgenderism, or sexism. Additionally, resilience cannot be left to those who find it convenient or, conversely, to those who are most affected. It should be assumed by anyone who wants to fight against the dangerous rhetoric of Trump and his supporters and who wants to hope for a better world.

In this article, we posit that a critical hope framework (Duncan-Andrade, 2009) employed by campus centers can help foster resistance and resilience with LGBTQ+ students. While we focus on LGBTQ+ centers, this framework could be adapted to other centers that serve marginalized students. Additionally, LGBTQ+...
centers cannot be the only campus entity to foster resilience and resistance in LGBTQ+ students. However, we recognize that by the type of work that LGBTQ+ centers engage in on a daily basis, the space created allows for centers to cultivate resiliency and resistance in LGBTQ+ students. In what follows, we explore the history of university centers for LGBTQ+ populations, describe the meaning and manifestations of critical hope, and offer five areas for critical praxis that allow for the disruption of the systemic oppression which we are witnessing today. It is our goal to demonstrate tangible ways that concerned citizens, staff, and faculty can better support university students and be agents of change in what may seem like dismal times.

LGBTQ+ centers

LGBTQ+ centers emerged after the Stonewall riots to support gay and lesbian students, and later shifted to include all diverse gender identities, expressions, and sexual orientations. The first center opened in 1971 at the University of Michigan, and today there are nearly 200 centers located at all types of institutions nationwide (Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Professionals, n.d.; Marine, 2011). The opening of many of these centers occurred as the LGBTQ+ rights movement began in the 1970s and aligns with a more visible LGBTQ+ rights movement (Marine, 2011; Stryker, 2008). Post-Stonewall riots, many believed that the emergence of what are now known as LGBTQ+ centers began in the 1970s and aligns with a more visible LGBTQ+ rights movement (Marine, 2011). The opening of many of these centers occurred as the LGBTQ+ rights movement began in the 1970s and aligns with a more visible LGBTQ+ rights movement (Marine, 2011). The opening of many of these centers occurred as the LGBTQ+ rights movement began in the 1970s and aligns with a more visible LGBTQ+ rights movement (Marine, 2011).

LGBTQ+ centers assess campus climate for LGBTQ+ students, faculty, and staff (Damshroder, 2013; Marine, 2011). These assessments can then be used to argue for more resources, such as staff, funds, or space. Additionally, these assessments can offer evidence about harassment or microaggressions that students, staff, and faculty experience with the goal of targeting the cause and location of these issues in order to eliminate them. Centers also conduct assessments to assist with telling their story (Damshroder, 2013). This storytelling is imperative when most institutions do not track LGBTQ+ student retention through quantitative methods like other student services units. Therefore, LGBTQ+ centers cannot show impact easily from already collected information, which impacts the ability to demonstrate their benefit to students.

LGBTQ+ centers offer support to students who are experiencing turmoil or who need community (Damshroder, 2013; Marine, 2011). LGBTQ+ center staff are experienced in helping students in their coming out processes and navigating the institutional bureaucracy. Students who frequent the centers also offer support to their peers, sharing strategies that have worked for them and empathizing with students’ lives. These interactions create and cultivate community amongst LGBTQ+ students and their allies. This community is important as many students, especially those from more rural areas, may not have had this type of community in their hometown.

However, these can be condensed within the four functions that Marine (2011) posited: assessment, support, education, and advocacy. The functions of what are now known as LGBTQ+ centers have changed over time, mainly due to student activists (Marine, 2011). Now most centers focus on all diverse gender identities/expressions and sexual orientations. These changes signify that centers and their staff recognize that as times and political climates change, the centers must change to adapt and meet the needs of the campus community.

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Critical Hope

Attributed to the work of Duncan-Andrade (2009), the concept of “critical hope” denotes cautious optimism and progressive action in the face of structural oppression. Duncan-Andrade outlined several forms of hope that he does not wish to forward, offering instead more realistic and achievable styles. Those that he admonished begin with hokey hope, “an individualistic up-by-your-bootstraps hyperbole that suggests if . . . youth just work hard, pay attention, and play by the rules, then they will . . . live out the ‘American dream’” (p. 182). The burden this places on a singular person is unfair, given that forces at work in institutional structures, much larger than any individual, often exist as obstacles preventing a person from reaching their potential at no fault of their own.

Mythical hope is the second form against which Duncan-Andrade (2009) warned, explaining this as the type that results when an opportunity for a certain population is won or a person from a marginalized group achieves success. This, he stated, is a “false narrative of equal opportunity emptied of its historical and political exigencies” (p. 183) and “depends on luck and the law of averages to produce individual exceptions to the tyranny of injustice” (p. 184). Grand erasures of history cannot occur simply because one person ‘makes it’. Finally, the third type of impractical hope, hope deferred, is an extreme opposite of hokey hope. Rather than solely seeing the individual, hope deferred instead is paralyzed by systemic oppression,
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Audacious hope, therefore, keenly discerns a challenging and potentially discouraging situation, such as living in the era of Trump and being a member of LGBTQ+ communities and strives for change. We now turn to specific examples of current policies and marginalized structures and explain how LGBTQ+ centers can employ the forms of critical hope that Duncan-Anrade theorized.

**Critical Praxis**

In this section, we posit a host of issues and actions reflective of Duncan-Anrade’s (2009) critical hope in order to facilitate students better capable of responding to their immediate local, national, and global contexts. We begin by focusing on one instance of an LGBTQ+ center that is under attack. We then explore Title IX, immigration, bathroom bills, women’s rights, and healthcare while recognizing that this list is neither exhaustive of the issues and rights targeted within this current administration nor are they completely separate. For each issue, we highlight its history and how it impacts students in LGBTQ+ centers. We then discuss how critical hope can be embodied to cultivate resilience and resistance to Trump’s oppressive rhetoric in each area.

One quick note before we discuss critical praxis: it can be easy to get trapped in what Duncan-Anrade (2009) labeled as hope deferred, described above. For some, especially those with privilege, telling others to wait it out or that it will get better is a sound solution. Practitioners might assume that things will change in the next president’s administration. However, those who are not immediately affected cannot tell students who are experiencing tremendous pain or concern for their safety or immigration status that it will get better. This deferred hope is neither helpful, useful, or socially just, nor does this approach instill critical hope or resilience in students. Without resilience and resistance, things will not get better. Practitioners must therefore offer students prompt support and ways to protect themselves and their rights.

**Center Existence**

As centers continue to perform their daily functions in our current political era, at least one has already come under attack. In 2016, the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UT) had the funding for its Office for Diversity and Inclusion rerouted due to budget cuts. The department included its LGBTQ+ center, rerouted to majority engineering scholarships by the state legislature for one year (Ohm, 2017b). Then in 2017, the UT Chancellor, Beverly Davenport, decided to hire a coordinator to lead the UT Pride Center (Ohm, 2017b). Several state lawmakers criticized this decision. Mae Beavers, a Republican gubernatorial candidate and former state senator, released a statement in which she said: ‘It is disappointing that the new Chancellor has decided to ignore the clear intent and legitimate concerns of the Tennessee Legislature which defunded the Office for Diversity and Inclusion’ after it became evident that bicker funds were being used to promote a radical agenda that did not reflect the values of the State and our citizens. (Ohm, 2017a, para. 2).

Beavers disagreed with the diversity office’s shift to inclusive holiday parties that did not mention Santa Claus or Christmas (Ohm, 2017a). While this is one example of an LGBTQ+ center under attack, the brazen condemnation on support services in one conservative state could create a ripple effect and impact other states.

The functions of an LGBTQ+ center have long been considered vital in cultivating resilience in LGBTQ+ students. The mere existence of centers, as in the case of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, is considered radical by some. The existence of centers is therefore a form of audacious hope. Space on campus is important for those students who need to feel heard and to share their pain with others. This LGBTQ+ community is just as important to those who need to process the hurt and struggles they may experience in the world as it is for those who are in the midst of their coming out process. This space should include those in who are angry or ‘disobedient’ because they often need the space the most (Duncan-Anrade, 2009).

Prior to this Obama-era clarification, the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown expelled Seamus Johnston, a trans* man, because he used the men’s bathrooms and locker rooms (Jaschik, 2015). The judge did not believe that Title IX prohibited discrimination based on gender identity (Jaschik, 2015). After the guidance was issued in 2014, the OCR declared to an Illinois school that making a trans* student use a private bathroom and changing facility was a violation of the student’s rights under Title IX (Smith & Davey, 2015).

Title IX

Title IX was enacted by the federal government in the 1970s to assert that no one would be excluded due to their sex in any education program or activity that received federal funding (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Title IX has long been employed to ensure equity in athletics, but, more recently, policymakers issued clarifications to the policy, including how to respond to sexual assault and how to support students who are pregnant and/or are parents. In April 2014, the United States Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights (OCR) issued the statement: ‘Title IX’s sex discrimination prohibition extends to claims of discrimination based on gender identity or failure to conform to stereotypical notions of masculinity or femininity and OCR accepts such complaints for investigation’ (Lhamon, 2014, p. 5). This clarification allowed for trans* students to file complaints with the OCR for investigation on whether or not an institution was in violation of Title IX.
Immigration

Immigration, often viewed as a political issue, is perhaps one of the most salient needs in the current political landscape. The Trump administration has taken a hard line on immigration, with a focus on deporting unauthorized immigrants and restricting access to legal status. This has led to a significant increase in deportations and the separation of families. The administration has also placed restrictions on the ability of unauthorized immigrants to access legal aid and other services.

In response to these changes, many communities have established or expanded their immigration assistance services. These services include legal assistance, counseling, and community support. These services are crucial for providing support to unauthorized immigrants and helping them navigate the complex legal system.

Despite the challenges, there is a growing recognition that communities must work together to support unauthorized immigrants. This includes providing legal assistance, as well as creating a welcoming and supportive environment.

Nonetheless, it is imperative that the raw, sometimes unfathomable, often times uncomfortable truth be told. But one of the most taxing aspects of revealing these truths is that people believe we exist in a "post-racial" society.

Bathroom Bills

In recent years, so-called "bathroom bills" or legislation attempting to regulate the facilities to which trans* individuals have access have increased and incited much public debate. As mentioned previously, the Obama administration issued protections for trans* students under Title IX. As these student rights were secured, some were overturned.

The Trump administration rescinded protections to trans* individuals, leading to many reactions from different groups. The battle over bathroom bills has been fought on many fronts, including in the courts and on social media.

Opening the door for public and private policing and creating difficulty in implementing such policies, pundits have noted how dangerous the bill could be. And, as Samara (2016) wrote, "use of a bathroom or locker room isn't only about excretion or changing clothes. Both involve the individuals’ intersection with the dominant culture and the ways that culture reflects on either supports or rejects the deeply felt identity of the user." (p. 38).

Given the political precedent of Title IX, it seem that these bills are in violation of the federal government’s stance. However, as noted above, the landscape was complicated by the fact that in 2016 the Trump administration rescinded the Obama administration’s guidelines that Title IX’s ban on sex discrimination should be interpreted to include gender identity discrimination. (Davis, 2017, p. 2). This led to a Supreme Court to return to lower courts deliberation on a case in Virginia in which a high school precluded a trans male from using the bathroom that matched his gender. And, although HB2 was technically later repealed, the so-called "transgender populations are not feasible under this guidance. While HB2 is only one example of a bathroom bill and other states have officially passed similar legislation, the introduction of such policies, the public support they have garnered, and the federal government’s reaction is threatened by these populations at large. On college campuses, especially in states without specific policies protecting trans* individuals, using a public facility is a fearful experience for many. In Herman's 2013 survey of "self-identified transgender people living in Washington, DC, 70% of respondents said they had been "physically or verbally attacked or physically assaulted in public restrooms." (Davis, 2017, p. 7).

The fear that trans* individuals may feel, then, is therefore warranted. Furthermore, research
has shown that trans* people may avoid using the bathroom while in public, causing serious health problems (Herman, 2013). Neither of these consequences is what we should want for our university students.

How then, can LGBTQ+ centers and practitioners who work within the face of this widespread debate and against the backdrop of Trump’s legislative move? First, LGBTQ+ centers can offer all-gender bathrooms if possible, and they can help students locate across campus, mapping out where they are in relation to students’ classes. In 2016, Time magazine reported that more than 150 U.S. colleges and universities have gender inclusive restrooms on their campuses (Steinmetz, 2016). This is a positive move, and staff in centers can advocate for more all-gender bathrooms on their campuses, since “schools are obligated to protect the safety, both physical and emotional, of all their students” (Watkins & Moreno, 2017, p. 170). This is, in essence, the cultivation of material hope—students are being provided with tangible resources they need to live productively and healthily.

As Watkins and Moreno (2017), noted, however,Sadly, many schools have no specific policy in place, relying on state legislative language, which in many cases does not protect the rights of transgender students. Schools will be better served by crafting policy using a comprehensive policy model that safeguards all students (p. 169) Therefore, staff in centers must always listen to the voices of those affected, empathize, and develop appropriate responses.

Healthcare

Healthcare, deemed by many to be a human right, is constantly under siege by the Trump administration and Republican congresspersons. While there are myriad issues in healthcare that impact LGBTQ+ communities, HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment is one of the most salient. HIV/AIDS has long been coupled with the LGBTQ+ community. In the early 1980s, President Reagan did not acknowledge the burgeoning epidemic, and his press secretary infamously disregarded the disease in the audio documentary. When AIDS Was Funny (Calonico, 2015). The earliest cases were linked to gay men, and thus were deemed not worthy of public concern (Calonico, 2015). HIV/AIDS has not only affected gay men, which was recognized later, but it nonetheless still greatly impacts the LGBTQ+ community.

At the end of 2017, the Trump administration dismissed the remaining members of the HIV and AIDS Council (Guarino, 2017). This Council has advised the White House on HIV/AIDS policy since its inception under President Clinton in 1995 (Guarino, 2017). Additionally, Trump’s administration has threatened the Affordable Care Act (ACA), which is imperative for those who receive coverage and are living with HIV/AIDS. Under ACA, individuals cannot be dropped or denied coverage because of a pre-existing health condition, such as HIV or AIDS (n.d.). Administratively, the ACA required most plans to cover certain preventive services, such as HIV testing for those between the ages of 15 and 65 (HIV.gov, n.d.). According to UNAIDS (2014), worldwide trans women are 49 times more likely to contract HIV. In the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2017) estimate that 70% of new HIV infections were among gay and bisexual men.

These statistics clearly demonstrate that HIV/AIDS is very much a LGBTQ+ issue. The Trump administration’s desire to change the ACA and dismantle the HIV and AIDS Council are direct attacks on the LGBTQ+ community. Currently, only 34 states and the District of Columbia mandate HIV education, but there is not a requirement for all of these states to be medically accurate (Guttmacher Institute, n.d.). In addition, few states require conversations around sexual orientation, and of these states, three allow for only negative information on sexual orientation (Guttmacher Institute, n.d.). Thus, with, limited, and, sometimes false, information being taught in K-12 schools, college students may be misinformed about the necessity for HIV/AIDS testing or how HIV is contracted.

Due to this misinformation or lack of information, LGBTQ+ centers can provide education, and if necessary, work with other groups to offer preventative services. These entities should be based in audacious hope because the history of the United States is rife with oppression and injustice. HIV/AIDS is a painful reminder of the past and how little elected officials care about LGBTQ+ communities as they were dying. Practitioners can demonstrate audacious hope by talking about this painful memory by using the numerous documentaries that either foreground HIV/AIDS or have HIV/AIDS as an important plot component. Additionally, Duncan-Andrade (2009) wrote, “Audacious hope staves down the painful path; and despite the overwhelming odds against us making it down that path to change, we make the journey again and again” (p. 191). While the perilous path is eerily similar to that of years ago, there is significantly more information and medical interventions to help prevent and treat HIV/AIDS. Therefore, LGBTQ+ centers, as reflective of critical hope, can also employ material hope working when initiating new programs around safer sex, advocating for HIV testing, pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), and post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) at campus health centers, and hosting events that explain the past of HIV/AIDS. PrEP is a daily prescription medication for those who are at high risk for contracting HIV. PrEP can prevent an HIV infection. PEP is also an antiretroviral medication that one can take if they have potentially been exposed to HIV. These centers can offer education by helping students learn more about health and wellbeing than they, most likely, would have learned in high school. They also provide resistance and resilience by allowing students to learn the past of HIV/AIDS and history, and resilient, and how often resist-
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In this cultural moment, LGBTQ+ centers can be spaces of support for women’s intersecting identities. First, they can provide an opportunity for women to share their experiences on campus with sexual harassment or assault. Witnessing and validating students’ hurt is a form of Socratic hope, and through listening to those who are surviving sexual assault, centers can embody this form. Exhibiting Socratic hope also means understanding the anger a survivor might feel and affirming those feelings. Second, staff at LGBTQ+ centers can assist students in documenting and reporting any instances that may arise, accompanying them to the proper authorities if desired. In one sense, the staff member is also a form of material hope simply by being with a student. As a resource, having another human to believe a person’s testimony and facilitate reporting is invaluable. In another sense, the act of support also reflects audacious hope. It helps the student navigate the system, which one often oppresses women and silences their voices in situations of sexual misconduct, especially when the perpetrator is in a position of power.

Conclusion

Almost daily, the media reports new policy implementations or rollbacks that target the most vulnerable populations, in particular, LGBTQ+ individuals.

In these turbulent times, LGBTQ+ centers are more vital to cultivating students’ resilience from hate and resistance to oppressive systems. As practitioners, we can employ critical hope as a framework to help cultivate students’ resilience and resistance to Trump’s omnipresent oppressive regime. By amplifying student voices, building relationships, and assisting with material needs, LGBTQ+ center staff have the ability to instill hope when the world becomes more precarious every day.

*References:
Can be found at the end of this special issue.

Case after case of sexual assault and harassment continues to emerge. Matt Lauer was fired from his twenty-year run on the Today show upon evidence of sexual misconduct and Dr. Larry Nassar, Michigan State University and USA gymnastics physician was sentenced to up to 175 years in prison for his crimes against women. Students on university campuses, as part of the general public, are witness to these atrocious stories and the movements that are ensuing as a result. Many college women are also part of the response, taking part in protests and marches. And, many have stories of their own to tell. The Bureau of Justice Statistics found in a 2016 study of nine campuses that 21% of men reported experiencing sexual assault since the beginning of their college careers, with higher rates reported by non-heterosexual college women (Krebs, et. al. 2010). Every school, under Title IX, should have a coordinator responsible for acting to ensure the safety of the student if sexual misconduct or discrimination occurs. Yet, we know that “because the great majority of sexual assaults are not reported to campus or law enforcement personnel, formal crime statistics grossly underestimate the scope of the problem” (Gray, Hassija, & Steinmetz, 2017, p. 5). Thus, more needs to be done on university campuses to address women’s rights, especially as they pertain to the problems of sexual misconduct.