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Dreaming Qontigo: Imagining Possibilities

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Dreaming Qontigo: Imagining Possibilities

david alexandr cervantes
Leadership Studies
University of San Diego
2015-2018



DREAMING QONTIGO: IMAGINING POSSIBILITIES

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Leadership Studies
University of San Diego

Original Artwork by my Nana, Belia Leyba

Dedications

To all the black and brown transgender women, non-binary, femme and queer people of color who have died because of hate, violence, and suicide. I'm sorry this world was not ready for you.

To all the black and brown transgender women, non-binary, femme and queer people of color who who adapt everyday for survival.

To all the young black and brown transgender women, non-binary, femme and queer people of color who who are struggling with who they are. You are beyond beautiful and your existence is resistance. Your leadership transforms our world.

To Roberta my Mom, David my Dad, Gabriela and Ramona my sisters, and Robert my partner - thank you for your unconditional love.

“Why am I compelled to write?... Because the world I create in the writing compensates for what the real world does not give me. By writing I put order in the world, give it a handle so I can grasp it. I write because life does not appease my appetites and anger... To become more intimate with myself and you. To discover myself, to preserve myself, to make myself, to achieve self-autonomy. To dispel the myths that I am a mad prophet or a poor suffering soul. To convince myself that I am worthy and that what I have to say is not a pile of shit... Finally I write because I'm scared of writing, but I'm more scared of not writing.”

- Gloria E. Anzaldúa

“I believe that telling our stories, first to ourselves and then to one another and the world, is a revolutionary act. It is an act that can be met with hostility, exclusion, and violence. It can also lead to love, understanding, transcendence, and community. I hope that my being real with you will help empower you to step into who you are and encourage you to share yourself with those around you.”

— Janet Mock,

Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More

“Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world.”

-José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*

“Create your own committees, build your own institutions, give your friends awards, award yourself, and be the gold you wanna hold my g's.”

@SaintRecords (Solange Knowles)

“We do this because the world we live in is a house on fire and the people we love are burning.”

-Sandra Cisneros

“How are we living out the liberation we are trying to create?”

-Miski Noor

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INTRODUCTION

*“We gotta prove to the Mexicans how Mexican we are. and
We gotta prove to the Americans how american we are.
We gotta be more Mexican than the Mexicans and more
American than the Americans both at the same time.
It’s exhausting. Damn. Nobody knows how tough it is to be a Mexican-American.”*

*We gotta prove to straight people how human we are.
We gotta prove to lgb people how human we are.
We gotta be more
forgiving of others and ourselves,
understanding of others and ourselves,
compassionate to others and ourselves, and
more aware than the straights and all lgb people all at the same time.
It’s exhausting. Damn.
Nobody knows how tough it is to be a Queer Chicanx.*

You might know the beginning stanza of this poem. it’s from *Selena*, the 1997 biopic starring Jennifer Lopez (Puerto Rican American). I remember being ten years old when this movie came out and going to Grossmont Center in San Diego, CA to watch this with my Mom. Not knowing much, if anything about Selena at that time, (spoiler alert) I remember the tears flowing from my eyes as the movie came to an end as I learned that she was murdered. I remember going to the stores looking for Selena books, cassettes, cd’s - anything I could find. I

can't remember specifically why though. Was it because her music was magical and made me want to dance? Was it because her on-screen family looked similar to mine? Was it because she was from Corpus Christi, Texas, like my Dad? Was it because her brown Latina femininity made me want to be like her?

I have a feeling it was all of these things and more.

As a 30 year old something brown, Chicax, Queer, catholic me, I find myself curious what our world would be like if she was not murdered. Would seeing a visible Mexican-American woman being celebrated, adored, admired have helped me come to an understanding of who I am sooner (Paredes, 2009)? What would our world look like for black and brown transgender women, non-binary, femme and queer people of color if Marsha P. Johnson, transgender activist, was not murdered in 1992 (when i was only in kindergarten)? How would our world be if slavery and colonization never happened? Would the people structurally in the margins today be in the margins? Would there be margins? These are a few questions (not all) that I find myself riddled and paralyzed with when I think about identity and leadership.

Being a first-generation student, I recognize my immense privilege to be a member of an institution of higher learning and I want to take this privilege to not rely on the stories of others but on mine. For this reason, I borrow from the tradition of autoethnography (Chang, 2008; Boylorn & Orbe, 2016) and from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1993) to offer and weave my own story in order to explore the LGBTQ+ & Allies community at the University of San Diego (USD), current LGBTQ+ & Allies and gender diverse campus resources, to learn how to nurture and co-create an intersectional and queer environment for our students in order to meet the vision of being a contemporary Catholic institution that develops ethical leaders to confront

humanities urgent challenges (University of San Diego, 2017-2). I use LGBTQ+ as shorthand for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and “+” to include allies, and other sexualities and genders we do not have language for yet. My story is situated within the context of the University of San Diego, where I was an undergraduate student beginning in 2005, graduated with a degree in Sociology in 2009, began full-time employment in 2010, and where I started my journey in the Department of Leadership Studies in 2015. My experience as queer Chicanx at Catholic institution has been challenging, heartbreaking and cleansing as I continue to come find peace in my identity, family, community, and university community. As I have often come out in many spaces, this paper serves as a coming out to “carve out” (Gutierrez-Perez, 2016) space in academia for more people who might find parts of themselves in my writing.

Contigo in Spanish translates to “with you”. Qontigo is my play on words that takes the “Q” from Queer for a new spelling, my spelling. All that I am, do, accomplish, and create was not and will never be done alone. To claim individual ownership would not honor those Queer and Trans People of Color who have come before me and who will come after me, the classmates and friends who have had to put up with me and pushed me to better, the ancestors who struggled and dreamed for a better future, and loved ones that have stood conmigo.

BACKGROUND

David Alejandro Cervantes

Throughout my time spent in Higher Education Leadership and Leadership Studies in the Department of Leadership Studies (DLS) and School of Leadership and Education Sciences (SOLES), I often have found myself desiring more about theory as it relates to sexuality, gender identity, equity, inclusion and diversity. A concrete example where I recall LGBTQ+

identity being directly discussed was in a course called LEAD 569: Making Meaning and the Collegiate Experience. In *Student Development in College: Theory, Research, and Practice* (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton & Renn, 2009), the chapter on Lesbian, Bisexual and Gay Identity Development offers that the “that intersection of multiple social identities—gender, ability status, social class, spiritual identity, race, and ethnicity, in addition to sexual identity—is critical in overall identity construction” (Kindle Locations 6953-6954), and I argue that these multiple social identities are critical in overall leadership understanding and development. LGBTQ+ identity as not an identity to be weighted more than all the dimensions of identity because for me, I am as brown as I am queer, as I am catholic like my Nana’s faith, like my Mom’s faith. - there is no separating any of those things. However, in my context diverse sexualities and gender identities are often made invisible.

This absence is especially significant to me because of the context of the DLS and SOLES being situated in the University of San Diego, a Catholic institution. As an individual who has been a part of the USD community since 2005 as an undergraduate student, then again in 2010 as a staff member, and again as graduate student in 2015, this absence in the course materials was honestly not too surprising. Currently USD does not have any institutionalized or formal resources to support LGBTQ+ & Ally students (del Río, Krist, McLaughlin, Yang, 2016), at least none that have been available during my thirteen years, so it is understandable how this community would be left absent in course curriculum across disciplines. Having been born into a Catholic family, raised Catholic, student of Catholic school and university, I find misalignment in the espoused values of social justice for the marginalized and the enacted values of silence and invisibility, especially regarding people with diverse gender and sexual identities. This is

highlighted in Martin's (2018), *Building a Bridge*, where he shares that "the institutional church bears the main responsibility for the ministry of dialogue and reconciliation, because it is the institutional church that has made LGBT Catholics feel marginalized, not the other way around."(pp. 3-4). While the institutionalized church may have this responsibility, I learned at a young age that the people are the church as so thus I also have a responsibility. I began to come out to friends and family starting in 2008 when I was about 21 and 10 years later, I am finally able to understand and reconcile my resentment towards the Catholic church and this is in large part due to my experience in DLS. While I desired and desire more specific content, my time at SOLES has served as the reconciliation I needed to be able to begin to envision an intersectional and queer future at USD and our society.

The unintended consequence of not finding myself specifically in the course materials was the offering myself through my reflections, writings and assignments. Through this work I began to emerge ideas, theories, analytical critiques and possibilities for leadership. They are imperfect writings, imperfect like me but along this path of writing and co-creating with peers and friends, I uncovered blind spots that hold me back from my own capacity to effectively lead in professional and personal contexts. As a dear friend shared, "it is when we propose to ourselves to become fully present in all dimensions of our being, that we will manifest authentically and fully into any action" (Andrade, 2017, p. 19). DLS challenged me to continue pushing forward what was offered to me, to acknowledge and silence the voices of judgement, cynicism, fear and resentment to be able to be able to discover and connect to my self and my work, to let new intentions set, to link my head, heart and hand, and to begin performing with the whole of who I am - all dimensions of me. (Scharmer, 2013).

Generally, action planning and goal setting make me uneasy but are key in the action of leadership. Give voice to words and beliefs out loud about possible paths or movements forward does not come easily for me, it never has. I attribute this to a lack of self-knowledge and self-worth and not being able to believe in a future where I am possible. This reality and truth became even more clear to me throughout my time in the Leadership Coaching sequence of classes. I struggled with my clients in helping them identify their own goals and actions needed to accomplish their them because this was and still is a developmental area for me. What I unearthed in coaching, LEAD 550, LEAD 551 and LEAD 559 was that in helping others discover their desires/goals and by simply being present to witness them provides energy and courage to go forward. This has been my work - to be my own witness and light, academically, professionally and personally - to pave my own way.

When Joining SOLES in Fall 2015, to pursue my Master of Arts in Higher Education Leadership, I was excited yet I soon realized how that choice was informed by fear. Fear of not being valued or valuable to my current work system. Throughout the rest of the 2015-2016 academic year it was becoming apparent that I needed something different, that my drive was for the academic degree was partially extrinsic rather than fully intrinsic. I accepted the offer into the Higher Education Leadership program for many reasons but *I* was not one of them. I made the choice based off the story that I constructed, that this will help me get promoted, that I will be taken more seriously, that I will be able to better serve the students I care about. The last part of the that is true - wanting to better serve student I work with in the Filipino Ugnayan Student Organization (FUSO) was a driving force in applying for graduate school. As I deconstructed

that story I knew that if I was going to devote the amount of time and energy to a master's degree that it needed to be in service of my healing.

david alejandr cervantes

As the Spring 2016 semester came to an end I found myself stressed, uncertain, and alone with this learning and what to do, and also not wanting to disappoint everyone who had supported me throughout that first year. With all this energy, towards the end of May 2016 I found myself in a situation where I had unprotected sex with a man. We randomly met at a bar and had *pleasant* conversation. He invited me over to his place and we made choices and did not not ask many questions about sexual health or HIV status. After we were done, I left. *Catholic shame*. Why did I do that? Why didn't I ask? I know better. These were all the questions I was asking myself as I drove up to Los Angeles the next day to visit with some friends. I never saw the man or connected again. In the moments before we began, I did not have the courage to ask a simple question that might have changed the course of the following months and year. While I did not exercise leadership in the moment that night, with-in the next 72 hours I found myself returning from home from Los Angeles, and at Kaiser asking for a HIV test and PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis). My nurse was kind, he was patient and he listened to me recount my experience. I told him that I felt lost, ashamed, scared, and he simply told me that I had nothing to be ashamed of and that he was going to help me. *Tears*.

After that night, I found myself on an antiretroviral regimen through mid-June. Regardless of the results, I was changed and I am changed today. I committed myself to being more open about this experience and how taking care of myself is still an ongoing and learning process. A step that I took to better care for myself if I was going to be living a sexually liberated

and sex positive life was to be adherent to taking PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) and finding the courage to ask questions through quarterly counseling with a medical provider and routine STI testing; questions that were never asked in my upbringing from family, at school, or at college about sexual health. This experience forced me to re-examine the silent stigma I carried about how I think about sex and HIV/AIDS, and also redefine my boundaries and understanding of sexual ethics (Smith, 1994 and Díaz, 1998). I stayed on PrEP from June 2016 - October 2017 and chose to finish taking the medication after meeting and discussing it with my current partner. To say the least, I was broken but piecing myself together. This piecing together was shattered again as that summer continued.

On June 12, 2016, 49 individuals were murdered and lost their lives, which at that time was considered the most deadliest shooting in modern day history (Martin, 2018) at Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, Florida.

Stanley Almodovar III, 23 years old
Amanda L. Alvear, 25 years old
Oscar A. Aracena Montero, 26 years old
Rodolfo Ayala Ayala, 33 years old
Antonio Davon Brown, 29 years old
Darryl Roman Burt II, 29 years old
Angel Candelario-Padro, 28 years old
Juan Chavez Martinez, 25 years old
Luis Daniel Conde, 39 years old
Cory James Connell, 21 years old
Tevin Eugene Crosby, 25 years old
Deonka Deidra Drayton, 32 years old
Simón Adrian Carrillo Fernández, 31 years old
Leroy Valentin Fernandez, 25 years old
Mercedez Marisol Flores, 26 years old
Peter Ommy Gonzalez Cruz, 22 years old
Juan Ramon Guerrero, 22 years old
Paul Terrell Henry, 41 years old
Frank Hernandez, 27 years old
Miguel Angel Honorato, 30 years old
Javier Jorge Reyes, 40 years old

Jason Benjamin Josaphat, 19 years old
Eddie Jamoldroy Justice, 30 years old
Anthony Luis Laureano Disla, 25 years old
Christopher Andrew Leinonen, 32 years old
Alejandro Barrios Martinez, 21 years old
Brenda Marquez McCool, 49 years old
Gilberto R. Silva Menendez, 25 years old
Kimberly Jean Morris, 37 years old
Akyra Monet Murray, 18 years old
Luis Omar Ocasio Capo, 20 years old
Geraldo A. Ortiz Jimenez, 25 years old
Eric Ivan Ortiz-Rivera, 36 years old
Joel Rayon Paniagua, 32 years old
Jean Carlos Mendez Perez, 35 years old
Enrique L. Rios, Jr., 25 years old
Jean Carlos Nieves Rodríguez, 27 years old
Xavier Emmanuel Serrano-Rosado, 35 years old
Christopher Joseph Sanfeliz, 24 years old
Yilmery Rodríguez Solivan, 24 years old
Edward Sotomayor Jr., 34 years old
Shane Evan Tomlinson, 33 years old
Martin Benitez Torres, 33 years old
Jonathan A. Camuy Vega, 24 years old
Juan Pablo Rivera Velázquez, 37 years old
Luis Sergio Vielma, 22 years old
Franky Jimmy DeJesus Velázquez, 50 years old
Luis Daniel Wilson-Leon, 37 years old
Jerald Arthur Wright, 31 years old

This particular night was Latinx themed night where most black and brown queer, trans and LGBTQ people were out, simply enjoying their lives and dancing. The pain reading and watching the news that morning was indescribable, pain I still feel today. Not knowing a single individual from Pulse that night, a part of me felt like I had just lost 49 siblings - siblings I would now I would have possibility of knowing posthumously. The convergence this tragic loss of life because of hate with my experience and learning how to better take care of my sexual health, I spent the following summer devastated but trying to piece together my understanding of what happened to me, what happened in Orlando, and how it was connected to the U.S. born bigotry

being spewed through the campaigning for the 2016 presidential election. I will not mention this campaign or current 45th administration of the United States again as it has already frighteningly occupies too much of my emotional labor, time here in this paper, and in the countless lives of many people in this country and world.

The relationship of all these factors began to make some sense after transferring into the Master of Arts in Leadership Studies program. This choice was seemingly personal but it was also political. Finding myself feeling with a loss of agency personally, professionally and socially, this move aligned with my critique of higher education and systems developed by the United States government. Schuh, Jones and Harper (2010) claimed “to attempt to grasp the 370-year history of American higher education in a single glimpse is both unwieldy and unwise (p. 3). However, a full grasp is not necessary to understand that the system of higher education was created during the period of colonization where the humanity of Native American and African peoples was erased. I offer this here because when discussing equity, diversity and inclusion there seems to be a historical amnesia about the origins of our society which cannot be continued to be forgotten or erased. Exploring leadership without an analysis of the past, present and potential future sociopolitical climate and context of the United States is irresponsible.

I could not have anticipated this synchronization of life events. Choosing to transfer programs was informed and influenced by a lot that was happening personally, desiring more and through the encouragement and support of a dear friend, Moe, who was also a Leadership Studies student at the time. This desire was heard loud and clear because I had silenced it for so long. To claim the title of Master of Leadership Studies, means I must claim myself and my narrative. For this reason, I have realized that my methodology for an applied project was not

something I needed to choose because I had already been participating in it throughout my three years in the program. Every class has required me as a student to share, uncover, and detail my story and identity as an individual in connection to the greater collective of humanity. This process has been messy but yet creative; a beautiful mess..

The impact of discovering this path into Leadership Studies has been profound and I have had trouble making peace with the continual centering of myself in this work. In finding Ernesto Martinez' (2013), *On Making Sense: Queer Race Narratives of Intelligibility*, he shares that “queers of color have been developing a decolonial realist understanding of knowledge acquisition in oppressive contexts” that deserve further attention. (Kindle Edition, Location 495) and my concerns were lifted; I felt validated and like I belonged in some edge of the universe. It is quite fascinating how the institution I critique, I also subconsciously crave validation from and constantly seeking writing to validate me and my experience; to believe it. Recognizing this relationship of my writing, of this project, and myself to a collection of other queers and trans people of color has given me the nourishment I needed to continue this project.

A piece of art I had come across over a decade ago but I was not aware enough yet to comprehend it or make sense of it then was Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) *Borderlands: La Frontera*. In continuing to search for inspiration, for solace, for home in my readings and my writings like I did with Martinez (2013) - I stumbled across Jotería Studies literature, and refound Anzaldúa. Jotería Studies is the exploration of queer Latinx/Chicanx and indigenous people and their relationship to power and colonization which is different from LGBTQ identity. Additionally, Jotería Studies is a space/home to explore sexuality, homophobia, transgender identity, religion, HIV - anything that is considered taboo (Bañales, 2014). Stumbling across Jotería Studies in my

quest for belonging, rediscovering Anzaldúa (1987), and learning from Martinez (2013) and Bañales (2014) was either serendipitous, or rather just really meant to be - and I believe that.

In *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa (1987) describes a “Shadow-Beast” and her definition reminds me of how often I have felt it’s presence but also silenced it like my desire; covered it up with a smile and disgruntled compliance or withdrawal.

There is a rebel in me - the Shadow-Beast. It is a part of me that refuses to take orders from outside authorities. It refuses to take orders from my conscious will, it threatens the sovereignty of my rulership. It is that part of me that hates constraints of any kind, even those self-imposed. At the least hint of limitations on my time or space by others, it kicks out with both feet. Bolts. (Anzaldúa, 38)

Not acknowledging my Shadow-Beast for so long has only bred resentment in me. Reading about the Shadow-Beast, I am reminded my Pearl, a small precocious white Chihuahua who passed away in Fall 2017 - we met when she was first born in Fall 2004. Nothing could constrain and she always refused any rulership, not from me, my sisters, or my parents - she had her own will and refused any direction. Instead, she commanded often commanded and ruled me. With the right gesturing, voice, and intent, Pearl was not a beast but a loving pet and friend. With the right gesturing. Voice, and intent my Shadow-Beast can be a guide and lead me in the directions of my needs and hopes. Mastering my Shadow-Beast allows me to write - to breathe.

Anzaldúa (1987) captures the existence of Chicanas/os (Chicanxs) and the experience of the invisible walls developed by the various and different cultures we exist in and out of. While her text refers to a specific ethnic people, I believe this concept of existing between many cultures extends to many peoples. Through her generous self-sharing (self as instrument) as a mestiza and lesbian, she carefully developed a masterpiece that resonates deeply with me, and with many others as evidenced by the thousands of works that have cited *Borderlands*. The

borderlands can be described as the place that exists in all of us the expands as we “cross” borders and engage in different cultures. This is also known as a “nepantla” or a space where transformation is possible to change the current reality (Keating, 2006). The nepantla is not an easy place to be in for those that work in it (neplanteras) as it can bring feelings of chaos and isolation. The in-betweenness/nepantla is an organic occurrence always happening if we allow ourselves to be aware of it. If we intentionally work to cross the invisible borders within us and between us to discover and create new meaning, we each have the capacity to co-create new cultures and ways of being and thriving.

The nepantla is something familiar, a place I know, a place I have lived in and continue to live in at home and at work. Understanding my place at the University of San Diego as an alum, employee, current graduate student who is connected to several USD subcultures: Filipino Ugnayan Student Organization, Latinx Graduate Student Association, Graduate Student Council, Student Affairs, Student Wellness, and LGBTQ+ at USD, I have committed myself to the nepantla in aiming to change the reality of our campus context. This realized familiarity helps me understand and name the Neplantera facet of my identity, and the ability that I have to understand my existence in many worlds and cultures. This lived reality and experience, if I can command it (and not be commanded by it) affords me an opportunity to help facilitate the revolution of self in others or rather help others see the revolution that already exists within their being. In sharing that “the mestizo and the queer exist at this time and point on the evolutionary continuum for a purpose”, Anzaldúa seamlessly stitches together the disconnect and significant source of my loneliness and affirms my existence, “we are a blending that proves that all blood is intricately woven together, and that we are spawned out of similar souls.” Not only does she

affirm this identity she encourages me to “listen to what [my] *jotería* is saying” (p. 107). My *jotería* has told me that I do not need to create anything to be valued, that everything I need is within me and what I have done, currently and will continue doing. Figure 1: Qontigo Timeline, shows the work I had found myself involved in related to supporting the LGBTQ+ & Allies community at USD from 2008 - Present.

Figure 1: Qontigo Timeline

March 2008	Coming out to friends at USD
May 2009	Graduated from USD with a B.A. in Sociology
June 2010	Hired as USD Student Wellness Executive Assistant with-in Student Affairs
December 2010	Coming out to work supervisor at USD
January 2011	Coming out to family
September 2011-Present	Invitation to be Filipino Ugnayan Student Organization (FUSO) staff advisor
May 2012	Invitation to participate in LGBTQ Action Group, grassroots group
March 2013	Presentation to LGBTQ Class Cluster 1
September 2013 - January 2014	Co-developed content for Identity & Study Abroad LGBTQ webpage
March 2014	Co-presenter at Association of American Colleges & Universities: Diversity Learning and Student Success Conference Addressing Campus Climate for LGBTQ Populations Through Grassroots Multi-Level and Department Approaches
June 2014	Attendee at California Institute of Integral Studies, Expanding the Circle Conference
February 2015	Presentation to LGBTQ Class Cluster 2

September 2015	SOLES: Higher Education Leadership M.A. program
October 2015	Changemaker Hub Social Change Corps pilot cohort: co-advisor for Pee in Peace advocating for gender inclusive restrooms on campus
May 2016	Potential HIV exposure through unsafe sex and post exposure prophylaxis treatment through end of June. Continued Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) HIV prevention medication through October 2017.
June 12, 2016	Pulse Nightclub Shooting in Orlando, Florida
August 2016	Transfer from Higher Education Leadership to Leadership Studies
September 2016	Pee in Peace, co-advisor

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

University of San Diego

Through the analysis and crystallization of my values of justice, love, truth, hope, and forgiveness, mostly truly informed by Catholic upbringing, I have come to realize that an applied project cannot be contained within one time determined period. Framing myself as my own “applied project” has sharpened me to think critically about how to capture the embodiment of my work. As my experiences are constantly in flux and my reflections flowing and ebbing as challenges and needs arise, this has been no easy task. Using the narratives of others through research to advance myself, socially, educationally and potentially economically was not a practice I could align with (yet). I realize this evaluation of research is a critique on the institution of higher education as whole and yet it is a struggle I continue to persist with as I find myself quite situated in an institution of higher learning. In scanning the USD environment and literature for a gap, I realized I was the gap. I have yet come across anything as specific as a

brown queer Chicanx' place in a Catholic institution of higher learning and why I offer myself in this way.

I wonder about LGBTQ+ & Allies and QTPOC at USD whom I have had the privilege to meet, know, interact and work with at the university, and their ethic and commitment to the university - myself included. This commitment and service is an interesting phenomenon to me as there is not institutional or formal support for our community at the student, faculty or staff levels on our campus. The first public university announcement regarding LGBTQ+ people that I recall in recent history was after the shooting at Pulse in Orlando when president Dr. Harris shared, "it has been described at the worst mass shooting in American history and it targeted our LGBTQ brothers and sisters to whom we are called to embrace in love, respect and dignity." (J. Harris, personal communication, June 13, 2016). That same week, we also received a message from Vice President Carmen Vazquez, with her sharing her sorrow and extending an invitation "to get together to pray, talk or just be." (C. Vazquez, personal communication, June 14, 2016). When I returned to campus on June 13, the day after learning about Orlando, I honestly did not expect any communication from the university and so just seeing Dr. Harris' message sitting in my inbox brought me to tears - I had to close my door. Then the next day to receive another message from a VP, I was truly moved and touched. I replied to VP Vazquez and took her up on the offer to share space with her. I share these examples here not to critique their actions but to say thank you and to share my hope that one day in the future, we might receive an email from the president celebrating the vibrant LGBTQ+ & Allies community at the University of San Diego.

There is not much published data about the LGBTQ+ & Allies community at USD or our

history as a community before 1990, other than the 2014-15 Diverse Learning Environment (DLE) and National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) surveys, and *Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ) Student Experience* (2016). With the College for Women, College for Men, and School of Law merging in 1972 (University of San Diego, 2017-1), right after the Civil Rights Movement, and during the Women's Liberation and Gay Rights Movement (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton & Renn, 2009) I find alarming. Were there no LGBTQ+ people & Allies at USD before 1990? This is not intended as full dive into USD's history however it is important to know the past, to understand the present reality, to be able to envision the future.

In 1990, the Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian Law Students Association (BGLLSA) was founded with the intent of providing support, socializing, and networking. Later in 2000, BGLLSA changed its name to Pride Law and are still a registered organization at the School of Law today continuing to provide networking opportunities and advocacy for the LGBT community (School of Law, 2018). More recently, members of Pride Law in collaboration with the San Diego LGBT Community Center helped develop a Transgender Legal Clinic to help provide legal aid and assistance in regards to name and gender identity changes (Bowen, 2018). In 1991, shortly following the School of Law, undergraduate student Peter Fajkowski, after taking a sociology class "Social Problems", organized with other undergraduate students and created the Student Alliance Embracing Sexual Orientation or SAESO. Their purpose was to support each other and socialize. They had the motto "If you support gay rights at USD, SAY SO!". SAESO later changed their name to PRIDE in 2000, where they began to publicly meet at the United Front Multicultural Center and gained further visibility through holding a seat on the Associated

Students' student senate. (LGBTQ+ at & Allies Community, 2018). I do not know what happened in that sociology class in the early 90s, or what motivated Dr. Judith Liu to teach what she taught that semester or what stirred students to action. What I do know is that this occurred shortly after the AIDS/HIV epidemic of the 1980's and the march and rally in 1987 in Washington D.C. that made visible the epidemic killing the gay community (Morris, Date unknown; Signorile, 2003; Smith, 1994; Williams, 1987) and injustices the community was experiencing.

From inception and through the past 28 years PRIDE and the LGBTQ+ & Allies community has continued to grow and flourish with the addition of the sexual orientation and gender identity to the university non-discrimination policy, with school sponsored social activities like a dance and drag show, and the development of co-groups to PRIDE such as LGBTQ+ Womxn of USD, Gender Friends and QTPOC, just to name a few (LGBTQ+ at USD, 2017). Mostly, if not all of this growth is contributed to the passion, determination, persistence, resilience, and commitment of students with accompaniment of faculty and staff but not a formal office or staff member to help co-develop these efforts.

While formal institutionalized resources are not a current reality it would be remiss to not highlight here the several partnerships and collaborations that have developed: University Ministry, Student Affairs, United Front Multicultural Center, Center for Inclusion and Diversity, the Women's Center, the Counseling Center, Student Wellness, Student Health Center, Residential Life, and countless other offices and individuals. USD has been a steward of social justice in providing support and services to students with offices and staff such as the Disability and Learning Difference Resource Center, Office of the Tribal Liaison, Black Student Resource

Center, Women’s Center, and United Front Multicultural Center. This is directly connected to who we are as institution.

USD is primed to support students of diverse backgrounds and has been committed to this work. Is the time right to bring the partnerships, collaborations, student, faculty and staff passion and commitment out of the “closet” and develop institutionalized support? I believe that answer is yes. This simple act challenges even the concept of the closet. When organizations and individuals work to enhance the visibility of resources and support they slowly dismantle the construct of the closet and help cultivate an environment where people are free to simply be, unapologetically.

Figure 2: SWOT Analysis

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Student, faculty, staff passion for LGBTQ+ & Ally student development ● Resilience and Persistence ● Grassroots legacy and persistence ● Diverse Institutionalized inclusion and diversity offices 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No institutionalized financial resources ● Lack of collective vision as organization in relation to supporting LGBTQ+ & Ally students
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Catholic Identity and Catholic Social Teaching ● Envisioning 2024 Strategic Plan: Pathway for Access & Inclusion ● Ashoka Changemaker Campus 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lack of staffing resource to organize and coordinate campus stakeholders ● Alumni

LGBTQ+ AT USD INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE

Learning to integrate all aspects of my experiences, passions and hopes these past few years and to be able to understand that while I originally left the Higher Education Leadership Program that this is where my work indeed resided and where I might be able to provide any

positive influence; a mantra I learned in high school about thinking globally but acting locally comes to mind. During this chapter of my graduate student career, I have been trying to learn if there are roles on a college campus that align with my interests and if there are roles that align with my values. With the combination of my experiences with-in Student Affairs and at USD, I find my awareness of the politics involved in the purpose of developing students difficult to come to terms with. Understanding the reality that politics are inherent to higher education (Bolman and Gallos, Chapter 5, 2010) both formally and informally, and any organization for that matter, developing my leadership to work through these dynamics would benefit me and most importantly the students and communities I hope to work with and support. With the constraints of being a full-time employee, I understood I would not be able to participate and gain other experience on-campus through a graduate assistantship, especially when there is not a LGBTQ student office or center.

Having spent roughly most of my professional career trying to slowly “chip away” and make “incremental change” (Starzyk, 2013, p.131) through my role, I found myself at a loss. Honestly, my time and efforts often feel invisible. The glass labyrinth is a concept that describes the experience of mid-career female administrators as knowing that advancement is possible but not knowing necessarily how to get there (Starzyk, 2013). My experience truly connect with the imagery of the glass labyrinth and the notion of the “sticky floor”, of being in a low to no mobility position as an executive assistant. As a queer person of color at a private Catholic institution, my experience much more resembles that of an hourglass, where instead of a sticky, the floor is quicksand. Regardless of progress, learning, accomplishments and overcoming of challenges, advancement is not possible as the hourglass is flipped over and all is reset; my

growth, passion, persistence, resilience lost to time. Being aware of this reality has helped me to strategize on how to knock the hourglass over to break the glass.

I am understanding more that education cannot exist or be cultivated without passionate individuals. I do see myself as an educator because I believe in the capability that people and students possess to navigate uncertain terrains and implement change for themselves and their communities. The business and political context of higher education makes me question my strength in navigating these political complexities while remaining true to my values. Beyond strength, am I willing to negotiate my values to be successful in this system? Is this a sustainable path for me, for my family, for our future?

As I further think about this reality, the more I wonder about whether this field and area is for me. This is not a question of my ability specifically but my desire to be political and the fact that I would be constantly negotiating aspects of my identity and needing to adapt. To survive and hopefully thrive I would need to further develop the competency of setting boundaries in order to take care of myself and developing mutual relationships with partners across campus. These boundaries are not necessarily set to keep others out but also a way to invite others in. This can be understood through the Tempered Radical Leadership Framework (Meyerson, 2003). Tempered Radicals are university administrators or staff members who identify with their university but are also equally committed to a community or cause that can be at odds with their university (Kezar, 2010). While they might be bound by their roles, their informal connections allows for their ideals and hopes to be shared with others to be able to create change. Stitching together my experiences and understanding of tempered radicalism, I realized a potential way to free myself from the hourglass to be able to further develop my

growth and support for students. As highlighted in Figure 1: Qontigo Timeline, I have been committed to the USD LGBTQ+ & Ally community throughout the years. While this work was in the “closet” and always something I did because I cared, I needed to bring it into the light and integrate into my graduate studies as an internship experience for my own development.

Having come to this new understanding toward the end of Spring 2017, I explored this further with Dr. Evelyn Kirkley, professor of Theology and Religious Studies, director of the Women and Gender Studies minor, and proud PRIDE advisor since 1997. With the emerging needs of the LGBTQ+ & Allies community and new initiatives and projects, I was ready to take up this work, to learn how to balance and navigate my various campus roles, responsibilities and tasks, and be seen.

Figure 3: Qontigo Timeline, Part 2

May 2017	QTPOC at USD, potential PRIDE co-group development
January 2017 - Present	Latinx Graduate Student Association (LGSA), co-director
June 2017 - Present	<p>LGBTQ+ at USD Internship with Dr. Evelyn Kirkley, THRS professor and PRIDE advisor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Continuous: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ sandiego.edu/LGBTQ maintainer and Google Drive architect ● Fall 2017 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ High School Outreach Initiative planning member ○ LGBTQ+ & Ally Leadership Development Retreat planning member ● Fall 2017 - Present: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Gender Friends Co-Facilitator: USD’s community of folk identifying as Trans, Genderfluid, Genderqueer, Gender Non-Conforming, Non-Binary, and/or Beyond the Binary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Monthly Discussion Groups

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Queer and Trans People of Color (QTPOC) Co-Facilitator: Newly-formed and supportive community of LGBTQ+ identified people of color <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ World AIDS Day – 1st USD Memorial Blanket ● Spring 2018 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Gender Friends and QTPOC collaborative Dinner and Movie outing in Hillcrest, San Diego with 15 USD community members to watch Oscar Award Winning film <i>Una Mujer Fantástica</i> (2017) ○ LGBTQ+ & Ally Space Proposal Team Efforts and meeting with Administration
<p>August 2017 - Present</p>	<p>Graduate Student Council (GSC), Operations & Communications Coordinator</p>

This experience is weaved into my overall identity as a USD community member as an employee in Student Wellness, staff advisor for FUSO, graduate student, member of graduate student organizations and alum. I belong, operate in, and contribute to many USD subcultures in addition to the cultures of my family, friendships and emerging culture with my partner. While I highlighted several connections to curriculum and literature, I also had the privilege outside of my time at USD to develop friendships with an amazing group a queer and lesbian women of color who showed me and taught me what queer love could look and feel like. Their compassion, realness, humor and love has nourished me and nurtured me to continue fighting forward. Their individual and collective friendship is what encouraged me to be open to love and all its possibilities, and this project.

When the 2017-2018 academic year began, I met someone. Having a 10 year track record of situationships, hook-ups and whatever else you can think of, I had thought my time for anything lasting had passed. After almost a month of chatting, I asked when we could “hang out”

and he replied with something like, “are we hanging out or this a date?” That question alone made me look at my screen and blink several times. I replied back, and said “a date! I like that). We met up and went out for our *date*, where I was constantly wondering if someone was playing a joke on me or if this was an episode of MTV’s Prank’d. He was handsome, smart, funny, kind, a family person, motivated... - and I could keep going here. We talked about our favorite food, movies, Anzaldúa, school, music, and about the future and in those moments I kept feeling the tug of a future together. After that night, I would say we have been inseparable and still are. As you read this, you might be wondering “how did you start a relationship with everything else?” And that’s a great question and I have no idea. My intuition was telling me not to be an idiot and that everything else was going to have to figure itself out somehow. Has this year been challenging in trying to make everything happen: volunteer, student, work, family - definitely. If I could go back and change anything, would I? Definitely not. Choosing to be vulnerable and love, and discover how to grow a future together with you has been the best decision I will ever make. I love you.

The culmination of learning the past three years (and decade) has opened my eyes to my capacity, my role, and my responsibility to accompany, challenge and support others in recognizing the innate beauty of their lives, realizing their goodness, and claiming their truth. This was the place (USD), time, and space that I needed to learn this; I could not have discovered myself anywhere else, not like this. I never truly understood Sister Mother Rosalie’s intention, co-founder of the USD, that “beauty will attract them; goodness will lead them; but the truth will hold them” until now (University of San Diego, 2017-3). To all the trans, queer, non-binary, lesbian, bisexual, and gay students at USD who have struggled and are struggling because of the

beauty of their uniqueness, know that you are not alone and that your resilience leads me everyday.

IMPLICATIONS

USD PRIDE recently held Supreme Drag Superstar (SDS) 7, an annual event to highlight and promote gender identity, gender expression, and love which always sells out of tickets (Tebor, 2018). This event also coincides with Sexual Assault Awareness Week (SAAW), a week that is coordinated through the Women's Center to raise awareness about sexual assault on college campuses and provide resources and education. SAAW works to collaborate with SDS to help highlight the impact of sexual assault in the LGBTQ+ & Allies community. This year, during the show, a video was shared called "Your Voice Has Power" with clips from community members answering questions to various prompts. In it a community member shares, "When we are first learning to speak as children we know everything and then the world crushes that out of us so that we can join in the game. It's simple to reverse that programming, but it's not easy." (Your Voice Has Power, 2018).

This deeply resonates with me as I reflect on the type of leadership needed for our current and future society and the continued learning needed about power, privilege and oppression, especially during our current times. The more structurally and systemically marginalized a person is for the many dimensions of their identity, the more "programming" or coding there is for individuals to decode. While the speaker noted that the reversal is simple but not easy, I would add that it depends on the context and circumstances individuals find themselves as context will always matter; what environments where a person is

physically/emotionally/spiritually situated and also the sociopolitical climate (past and current).

How we work through the reversal of the "programming" I think is dependent on a few things:

- Awareness of the existence of the programming
- Ability to come to terms with the reality of the programming and it's origin
(understanding of power dynamics)
- Humility to recognize need to continue learning more about the programming as it is complex, complicated and in a constant state of change
- Courage to confront and decode the programming
- Willingness to "co-write" new coding with others

Near the end of the video, the same speaker notes, "if you are sitting here thinking this [sexual assault] doesn't affect you then you are wrong because it affects every human being on the planet" (Your Voice Has Power, 2018). This is the confrontation of the programming; confronting the story that sexual assault only affects certain people. The co-writing would be bringing people further into understanding of how the experience, trauma, oppression of sexual assault is interlocked with the experiences of race/ethnicity, religions, sexuality, gender identity, disability, socio-economic status, family systems. To expand on this, this particular closing sentence could be shaped million times with different variables and it would always be true:

- If you are sitting here thinking HIV doesn't affect you then you are wrong because it affects every human being on the planet.
- If you are sitting here thinking Racism doesn't affect you then you are wrong because it affects every human being on the planet.

- If you are sitting here thinking Homophobia and Transphobia doesn't affect you then you are wrong because it affects every human being on the planet.
- If you are sitting here thinking Environmental Justice doesn't affect you then you are wrong because it affects every human being on the planet.
- If you are sitting here thinking Hetersexism, Patriarchy, and Colonization doesn't affect you then you are wrong because it affects every human being on the planet.
- If you are sitting here thinking Black Lives Matter doesn't affect you then you are wrong because it affects every human being on the planet.

The implication expressed throughout this paper and the reflection from SDS is that the leadership needed today and for our collective future always requires an intersectional analysis, no matter the context or organization, no matter the time, no matter the risk. If an intersectional analysis is not present, can the action of individuals, organizations, communities be considered leadership? Leadership requires understanding of structural power dynamics, compassionate and temporal inspection of identity; past, present and future, and the centering of those who are most marginalized in our work. Asking some simple questions can help:

- How did I come to be in this society and how and who do I want to be?
- What do I already know about me and others and what do I still need to learn?
- What am I missing and Who is missing?
- Who can I go to for support and guidance?
- When can I apologize, seek reconciliation and let go?
- When can I take action?

CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

Since my context is the University of San Diego, a Catholic institution, a few recommendations I have to further this work are:

- Research on the resiliency of Queer and Transgender People of Color who are undergraduate, graduate students, and faculty and staff at private, religiously affiliated, and predominantly white institutions of higher learning.
- Enhanced and visible institutionalized support for Queer and Transgender People of Color and LGBTQ+ & Allies that provides space for dialogue about sexuality, race and ethnicity, gender identity, spirituality, and religion
- USD Leadership Studies to hire QTPOC faculty and enhance core curriculum with Critical Race Theory and Queer Theory to ensure thorough learning about equity, diversity, inclusion, and intersectionality.
- Requiring Gloria Anzaldua's (1987) *Borderlands: La frontera* as Leadership Studies course material
- Development of a Queer Leadership Program through community partnership at the SOLES Conscious Leadership Academy
- Comprehensive sexual health education and promotion on-campus with PrEP Education
- In-Depth Interviews and Oral History Project with the founding students and advisors of Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian Law Students Association (BGLLSA) / Pride Law and Student Alliance Embracing Sexual Orientation (SAESO) / PRIDE
- Reviewing, updating, and changing how the gender binary is present in communications, syllabi, lectures, programming, and every day common language

- Working every day to make the environment around you, yes you, safe for Queer and Trans People of color, non-binary people, and LGBTQ+ people & Allies

These are a few of my considerations for the future. If you are a researcher reading or reviewing this, I invite you to analyze, conceptualize, and theorize about anything I have written (or not written) and to recognize that I was here, and that Queer and Trans People of Color have always been here - anything to continue uncovering injustice and cultivate truth.

CONCLUSION

If an aspect of adaptive leadership is “taking yourself out of the dance, in your mind, even if only for a moment” (Heifetz, 2002, p.53) to get a grasp of the current reality to make a choice and take action, then enslaved African and Black people and Indigenous people who lost their lives and survived the genocide of colonization laid the foundation of what it means to “adapt”, and to lead lives to survive for themselves and their communities. In the context of today, leadership runs through the veins of marginalized people who do not benefit from white supremacy, hegemonic patriarchy, and capitalism or the master history/narrative. Queer and Trans People of Color are warriors of this; always needing to be aware and watchful and vulnerable to the potential pitfalls of being *heard, seen, known*. “One of the powerful dynamics of leadership is being visible. One of the vulnerabilities of being visible is that when you’re visible, you can be seen. And when you can be seen, you can be touched. And when you can be touched, you can be hurt” (Whyte, 2016). This reality is too real and evidenced by Pulse in Orlando, and the numerous Black trans women who are continuously murdered.

Maybe you read everything, maybe you only read pieces, or maybe you think this is not your cup of *tea*. Whatever conclusion you come to, it is your own and I cannot judge that. All I

know is I have a responsibility and privilege to ensure my story is available for other people similar to me, to people who are not like me, and available for a younger version of myself in a different dimension to find, to read, and to feel like they belong. Expanding Ourstory for queer and trans people of color has been a journey of reconciliation and of letting go to prepare me for communion with myself, and more importantly with others. Now, like my ancestors, I find myself dreaming about future worlds and their possibilities.

mariposas/brown lives/queer lives/trans lives
we fly in our dreams
brighten skies still know the sun for flight
the wind for guidance
yet sometimes we're invisible

may our souls linger over fields/prayers
our names/stories remind them
we are worth love
know god

There is beauty in darkness, in the night sky,
in the eyes of *mi gente*
Beautiful is our love
Splendid is our survival
Our history is sacred and worth remembering

Excerpt from "Sometimes We're Invisible" by Emanuel Xavier (2016)

GRACIAS

When I began this journey, I was not sure where I was going. Much like the work and communities I am connected to, my ideas and mind were everywhere - there was no possibility for me to be able to narrow my “research”. I was overwhelmed with ideas and crippled feeling like there was just not enough time. I had moments where I wanted it to all stop, where I wished I could just walk away, drop-out and be done. With the support of so many people, I can say that this journey is not ending, we’ve only just begun. I will never find the right words to express my gratitude for the joy you have provided in my life to help me continue *resisting*. Thank you.

Mom & Dad	Diana	Alaina	Caitlin
Lela & Mona	Briseida	Luisa	Kayla
Nana & Tata	Judith	Adriana	Ansley
Robert	Tanja	Dina	Aly
Chile, Pearl, & Layla	Rama	Jem	Alisa
Tia Stella	Regina	Edmon	Vineza
Matt W.	Mariann	Maxine	Maureen
Moe	@ChicanoEats	Maile	Alessandra
Andrea and Tony	Evelyn	Kozue	Marguerite
Ashley	Josen	Jordan	Baby
Matt B.	Greg	Jessica	Selena
Melina	Zachary	a. t.	Gloria
Debbie	Mari	Moisés	Marsha

Filipino Ugnayan Student Organization
Higher Education Leadership class of 2017 and 2018
Leadership Studies classes of 2016, 2017, and 2018

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