

Jesseanne Pope ~ 2015 OSU Students of Color Speak Out

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Bio: At the time of the interview Jesseanne Pope was a recent alumnus of Oregon State University. During her time at OSU, she worked in various positions, including the Hattie Redmond Women and Gender Center (previously called the Women's Center) and the Social Change Leadership Programs, and she described her participation in the Examining White Identity retreat as transformative. Pope was one of the three students – along with Haniya Ferrell and Jasmine Armas – who organized the 2015 Students of Color Speak Out at Oregon State University. Pope was born in Roseburg, Oregon, and was brought up in Grants Pass, Oregon.

Interview Summary: Jesseanne Pope discusses what it was like growing up in the Southern Oregon town of Grants Pass and how their community shaped them. Pope explains the process of their decision to attend Oregon State University and explains how they got involved with social justice work on campus. Pope goes on to explain their involvement in the planning of the Speak Out event, the demands of the Speak Out, and the reaction of the Oregon State University administration. Pope also details the campus climate that sparked them into co-organizing the Speak Out with two other students. Pope details their view of how the university decentered the voices of students of color. Finally, Pope concludes the interview with their advice to future Oregon State students.

Interviewee: Jesseanne Pope

Interviewer: Lyndi-Rae Petty

Date: May 26, 2017

Length: 01:04:34

JP: Jesseanne Pope 2

LRP: Lyndi-Rae Petty

[00:00:00]

LRP: My name is Lyndi Petty and I am conducting an oral history for my undergraduate thesis at Oregon State University. Today is May 26th, 2017 and the time is 5:10 p.m. And our interviewee will introduce herself, or, themselves.

JP: Hi! My name is Jesseanne, I am an alumnus of Oregon State, graduated last June 2016. Did I say my last name? Jesseanne Pope.

LRP: Thank you. So, to get started, where were you born and raised, and what was it like growing up there?

JP: I was born in Roseburg, Oregon, but I grew up in Grants Pass, Oregon, and it was pretty shitty. It's a terrible place, so I wouldn't recommend going there. Growing up, I was, I guess I sort of... How I would describe it is [Laughs]... How I would describe it is. Okay, so what I'm trying to say is I grew up in Southern Oregon, and it was not very inclusive or diverse place. And so, I struggled a little bit in middle school and in high school, not having anyone that I could talk to that was feeling similar things to me and not having really any communication in my family about anything of depth really. So, I grew up in a single parent home, and my mom worked a lot, and I have a lot of siblings, and so a lot of time was spent doing things that you don't usually expect a child to do. And I experienced a lot of trauma in my childhood, and so I just had to mature really quickly. And so, growing up, I don't really think about, much about, what it was like to be a kid, but just about how I self-medicated with overworking myself and being over involved. And so the majority of my childhood, growing up, in my community was really people constantly praising me for being so involved and working so hard and no one really understanding that I was doing that so that I didn't have to deal with what was going on inside of me or the things that I was feeling that I couldn't really express. The community, like I said, the main thing that shaped me was the lack of diversity in Southern Oregon as far as pretty much every social identity that you could imagine, so a lack of diversity as far as race and ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender presentation, and pretty much everything else, so.

LRP: So, you kinda mentioned this but, describe the community you grew up in. How did your community shape you as a person?

JP: Should I look at you or the camera? [Laughs]

LRP: Whatever you're doing now is perfect.

JP: Okay [Laughs]! So how it shaped me, I think, and obviously when I say these things, I can say them now, but I wouldn't have been able to voice them at the time. Now I have much more language and awareness to talk about these things, but I think the biggest thing was that I didn't have representation of people who talked about or who I knew felt the same things that I did, especially around sexuality and gender presentation. And my family, like I said, we didn't really, I don't know if it was, for what reason it was that we didn't really talk about deep things or how we were feeling. And I really very much closed myself off emotionally, and I hid that by acting very extraverted and being super involved and doing pretty much everything that you could probably do. I mean, I took a class during my lunch period in high school so that I was always doing things. And I took advanced weight training before school, and then I had athletic practice after school, so I was, I had no free time, and that was exactly how I wanted it. And I think the

biggest way that my community shaped me is pushing me out of there. You know? It was so, it was such a bad experience for me that I had no choice but to leave, which was exactly what I needed.

LRP: So, you came to OSU, and why did you come to OSU in particular?

[04:45]

JP: Yeah, so when I was in high school, my plan was to go to University of Oregon. I really don't know why. I just wanted to get out of Southern Oregon. But, I actually, so I enrolled, and I went there and went to orientation and really hated it. I felt super disconnected. And I think the biggest thing for me is that all the people I met and spent time with were really not nice people. They were nice to me, but they weren't to other people, specifically people who were different than them. So, as I spent a couple of days there and I watched how they talked about other people and treated other people, it just felt really, I just had a lot of really bad feelings inside. So, I actually ended up going back to Grants Pass and going to our community college there for a little bit, as in one year [Laughs]. And then I came to Oregon State actually because my brother was attending here, and so I moved in with him, and that's kinda how I started at Oregon State. And I would say the difference for me between how I felt when I walked on to U of O's campus and how I felt when I walked on OSU's campus was very different, just in the sense that when I walked onto Oregon State's campus and looked at people and smiled at them and talked to them, I got some sort of response back, you know? People were helpful and people were nice. And the campus is, I think, constructed in a way that it feels connected, which is not something that I felt on U of O's campus. And so, I think it was a really good change for me, that I felt more of, that it was a community and that was something that I needed.

LRP: So, was that your first impression of OSU, was that this sense of small-town community? Was there anything else you would add to that first impression?

JP: So, when I came to Oregon State I was definitely not, I was very, at a different place that I am now. And I would say that when I first got here, I would fall into that category of "White Feminist." I was very ignorant of the majority of social issues, but I had had some experiences with protest and with social justice, mostly through the fact that I am a survivor. And so, I got involved with Take Back the Night and Sexual Assault Awareness month at the end of high school and stuff, thanks to my sister-in-law and my Brother. And so that was kind of my introduction into it, so I was like, "Oh all of these issues are so fucked up." Am I allowed to say that? Okay, well, I already did, so [Laughs]. And, you know, I was really passionate about that kind of stuff and I'd never met another person who I knew experienced sexual violence of any kind and or definitely not

people who talked about it. So that was my entrance into social justice, but I was super unaware of all the other things. So, when I came to Oregon State, I wouldn't say that I saw issues right off the bat because I'm white. And I definitely didn't feel like there were spaces where I couldn't go into or where I didn't belong. I was definitely welcomed. And I have, by the time I got here I had, I guess like 20-21 years of experience hiding my social class and assimilating into middle and upper class, just, culture in general. That allowed me to fit in here as well, because I think there definitely is that expectation that you understand how to navigate these sort of circumstances, and so I already had experience doing that. And that, I think, allowed me to fit in okay. And so, my first impressions, I think, were just that there was a community, that there was always stuff to do and people to meet. So that was really important to me, because like I said the way I self-medicated was overinvolvement and staying busy and not having any down time, so.

LRP: So, you seem to be somebody who got really involved at OSU. What organizations did you get involved with, and what led you to get involved with them?

JP: Yeah. So, it definitely started out with my need to work to afford living. So I actually, I got a job at OSU before I even, ever, came to campus. So, I was living in England with my family in the summer, and, before I came to Oregon State, and I got a job just by sending in my resume, I guess, just working in an office on campus as an office assistant. And, so that's how it started because I started working in the School of Psychological Science, and as I started doing that, I started meeting professors and I started doing childcare for them. And then I started serving on tenure committees within the school, and just started getting more opportunities through that. And then, it was during that year that I found out about opportunities for diversity work, which like I said I still didn't really understand at that point, but I heard about the position, Community Relations Facilitator in UHDS, and that was, and I applied for it. And that was the first position that I had that was diversity related, and it's the position that I was working in when I found out about Examining White Identity Retreat, the social justice retreat that Oregon State offers. And I attended that my second year at Oregon State, and that is the moment that changed my life and my trajectory both at OSU and in generally everything. EWI was the, easily, the most transformative thing that I did in my life or at Oregon State. And it wasn't until EWI that I really even had much awareness of issues outside of, I mean I would say as far as structural and systemic racism and institutionalized oppression and intersectionality. These things weren't really on my radar very much until I attended Examining White Identity. So that is what kind of pushed me into diversity and social justice work. Did I answer the question?

[11:26]

LRP: Yeah, no, totally! I thought you were going to keep going.

JP: [Laughs] Well I could, trust me. I'm trying to let you ask your questions because I'll probably answer them if I just keep rambling.

LRP: I mean if you have any other organizations that you feel you want to highlight, go for it. We're only at eleven minutes.

JP: As far as involvement wise? Yeah well, so after EWI, my plan was to continue working as a Community Relations Facilitator, but I actually, I had some family things going on and I ended up leaving to go back to England. My grandparents lived in England my whole life, and then my Grandfather passed away right after I left England the first time, and so that left my Grandma there by herself. They were together for years like thirty years, and they were one of those couples that did everything together, so she had a really hard time. And so, my sister, my mom, and I took turns being there with her and getting her ready to come here. So I actually, I wasn't able to continue being a CRF and I left there. And when I came back, I heard about this opportunity to work at the cultural resource centers, and I didn't, at that point I didn't know that much about them. And I wanted to work at the Pride Center, but I was not, definitely not out at that point. And I'd been in the Pride Center a couple of times, and there were some folks who were working at the Pride Center and who were involved in Diversity and Cultural Engagement who I had... How do I describe this? I guess I definitely felt the desire to be around them because they had a sort of authenticity that I didn't and that I wanted to have. But at the same time, I didn't feel, I didn't know how to exist in an authentic space when I'm not being my authentic self. And so, I ended up working at the Women's Center, which was also a very important part of my time at OSU, specifically because of the people that I worked with and because of Whitney, who's the AD at the Women's Center. And from the very first time that I started talking to Whitney, and all of the times that I was in her office crying, and just all the things that I experienced in the time that I worked with her, and all the ways that I grew, she was with me through my entire coming out process, and even much before that. And there was something about the way Whitney would talk with me. It's like, she knew that there were things that I wanted to say that I wasn't saying, and she very much created a space where I could navigate that and I didn't, and there wasn't pressure. And there were other folks too, like Brandi Douglas and Teresita, who I would end up in their office and I would be crying and I would say, you know "I'm crying because I'm stressed," but it's not really why I was crying, or not really why I was having a hard time. It was because I couldn't say the things that I wanted to say because I didn't know how. And, I think also just, I need to say, it's really hard to do social justice work when you're not being your authentic self. It's really hard to give a workshop on, you know...

LRP: Identity and stuff...

JP: Yeah! On identity! Literally I would be like, “Here’s an identity wheel, let’s talk about your identities,” and just, yeah.

LRP: I could imagine that would be really difficult.

JP: Yeah, difficult is one word, yes. It was difficult and it was, I didn’t feel like it was okay for me to do. I felt even more fake than I did just existing. So, I struggled with that a little bit. And when I started working at the Women’s Center, I think I got the opportunity to do more intersectional work and to talk about other things. On track, okay. The question is involvement. So I worked at the Women’s Center and then because I worked for Diversity and Cultural Engagement, is how I found out about Social Change Leadership Programs, which was a new office on campus that had three, well I mean it had new student staff positions. There were supposed to be two of them for dialogue educators, and they ended up hiring three – Haniya, Jasmine, and I. And the reason was because Miguel and I had talked about, I was going to graduate and they both were going to stay and it was an opportunity for us to kind of bring all of our strengths and experiences together and to really make, to build a foundation for this office, this is really ironic, but to really build a foundation for this office. And, you know, and so they decided to bring on three of us, which I’m super thankful for because that changed my life and, I don’t know. Anyway, so that was the other involvement. Okay, I think I answered your question.

LRP: You definitely did...

JP: [Laughs]

LRP: Thank you for explaining. So now moving into talking about the Speak Out, how did you become involved with organizing the Speak Out? Why was it important for you to create a platform for students of color to voice their concerns and experiences?

JP: So, Haniya, Jasmine, and I had an interesting time in our positions in Social Change Leadership Programs because we were without a supervisor for quite a long time. So, this meant that the three of us spent a lot of time in this office kind of [Laughs] trying to figure out what our purpose was both in the office and in that position. And we didn’t really have much structure or guidance just because of the situation, without having a supervisor for a while, and we all had experience in different ways, as far as diversity and social justice goes. But I think for me, well, okay, so there wasn’t necessarily a

specific catalyst on our campus. Haniya talked a little bit about Mizzou and the fact that that was sort of how it started, and what happened is that... So, everything was happening on Mizzou, and conversations were definitely happening on our campus as far as how are similar structures in place on our campus and what's going on for students of color on our campus. And I ended up in someone's office in Diversity and Cultural Engagement, just talking about how I felt that what was happening at Mizzou was really similar to what could potentially happen at Oregon State, and that the experience that folks were talking about at Mizzou are experiences that I have heard my coworkers, and my colleagues, and my friends talk about at Oregon State. And I just felt a lot, I have a lot of emotions. I felt a lot of different things, and I guess it kinda culminated in a frustration of 'Why isn't this happening?' And there were also, there were a lot of other things going on in that students of color were experiencing a lot of barriers within Diversity and Cultural Engagement and as far as being shut down and not being heard. And I was witnessing this happen. These were all of my friends. All of the staff within DCE, we were not only coworkers but also friends, and I spent a lot of time with staff across all of the cultural resource centers and was just hearing a lot of things that were really fucked up. And so I started talking about this, and the really shitty thing is that all of the things that I said in this office at the beginning of this whole, how this whole thing got started, students of color had been saying for a long time, to the same person that I was talking to, and to staff within DCE, to their ADs, to each other. Students of color had been saying it for a long time. And when, the fact that it makes a difference when I say it speaks to the whole issue of why we had to have it to begin with. And so, when I was saying these things and this person was like, "Okay, well yeah, let's, you know, what are we going to do about it?" I'm like, "Okay well, what we're going to do about it is that we're going to give students of color a voice." Haniya and Jasmine, bless their little hearts, I came back into our office fuming and raging, and I was like, "This is happening!" and I remember the conversation, it just started out with, me being like "I'm so sorry! You've said this, and you've said this, and you've all said this!" There were other folks in the office as well, students of color, students who work for DCE, who had said all of these things, and I just said, "What can we do?" And for people who, I don't know, yeah, who will watch this, for people who don't know, Haniya, Jasmine, and I, I don't know, we [laughs], we have a very unique, [to off camera] you distract me. Okay, we have a very unique, we're a very unique team, this is what I would like to say. We're a very unique team, and I think when you get us together, a lot of things happen. I don't know what it is a combination of, our personalities and how they complement each other, or the passion that we have or what it is, but I think people knew as soon as we came together in this office, and shout out to Miguel for making that happen, there's intent there. And even if we didn't see it in the beginning, we quickly did. And so, we came together, and I came to them and I said, "What can we do?" and that's kind of where it started. And from, I think that the other thing that's important to say is, Haniya mentioned this and I just said too, I may have started these

conversations, but I just really need people to understand that I literally utilized white privilege to make it heard, and that was the whole point of the Students of Color Speak Out. Is that, if the same words are coming out of my mouth, why does that matter more than when they're coming out of other students' mouths, like students of color who've been saying the same things? And why is it that I'm allowed to navigate these spaces when they're not even my experiences, you know? And so, we talked about that, and honestly, we talked about so much. I could never say it in one interview, all the things that Haniya, Jasmine, and I talked about. But I think instantly, especially the staff in DCE, they saw that shit was happening and we were not messing around. And, I forgot what your original question was.

[23:12]

LRP: It was just why was it important for you to create the platform?

JP: Okay, so, I'm trying to stay on track here because I can talk about this for a long time but there's not really, okay....

LRP: Do you want me to move on to the next question?

JP: Did I answer that question?

LRP: Yeah, you definitely did!

JP: Okay, yeah, go ahead.

LRP: You already answered that there wasn't really a catalyst moment per say, but more of like...

JP: I would say that the catalyst moment was Miguel hiring Haniya, Jasmine, and I.

LRP: And can you expand on who Miguel is? Position?

JP: Well, he doesn't work here anymore, but he was the coordinator for Social Change Leadership Programs for a little bit. What did Miguel do before that [asking someone off camera]? Okay, yes. For how long [asking someone off camera]? Two? Two years? So, I think that, from what I remember Miguel was the graduate assistant for the Centro for two years, maybe more, and then transitioned into SCLP [off camera unintelligible murmuring]. I don't know; stop messing me up [telling someone off camera]. Okay, sorry.

LRP: We might need to get that part.

JP: [Laughs] So Miguel was our supervisor when Haniya, Jasmine, and I got hired and then transitioned to a different position at a different university, which was why we were without a supervisor for a little bit, but Miguel was the one who hired the three of us and kinda made that decision. We also had other positions. I was still working at the Women's Center. And so, you know, that ability to have us work a little bit less hours allowed us to have three of us versus the two that they had intended to hire, so yeah.

[25:04]

LRP: Thank you for explaining. So, what did you hope to achieve from the Speak Out?

JP: [Laughs] I will give a concise answer to that question. Well, we did create a list of demands. Haniya, Jasmine, and I kind of, we sat down and we talked about what are some of the things that we're seeing and experiencing, and what is the root cause of them? And so, some of the things that we talked about were really similar to Mizzou and to other universities that had put forward demands that, who's, primarily students of color at other universities had put forward demands. So they were things like hiring more faculty of color, faculty and staff of color, which is something that OSU does not and has not and still doesn't do - is have a more diverse representation among staff and faculty of color, and that is so vital and important because a lot of the experiences of students of color are having in the classroom is a result of ignorant professors who aren't aware of institutional racism or who refuse to address microaggressions in the classroom. And so, you know, that was an example of one of the things, and another one was about bias reporting, how transparent the university was being. So, one of the things we demanded was that they release information around hate crimes on campus and make it more accessible and so that is why they started listing it more directly on the website, so you can access that information. So, reporting and bias incidents and hate crimes and stuff like that is definitely one of them and making the process more accessible and less harmful for students who are reporting these things. And then also hiring a Chief Diversity Officer. So, after the Speak Out there were some adjustments in departments on campus and staff, and the first, well the first permanent CDO is supposed to be starting in June. I mean it's been two years since the Speak Out and the first permanent CDO will be starting in June, and in the meantime, Angela Bautista has been serving in that interim role. But you know, that just speaks to the fact that this is how long it's taken. So those were some of our, I mean, does that...

LRP: Are there any other demands you can think of? Were those the couple big ones?

JP: Yeah, so the faculty and staff was definitely a big one. The reporting and transparency was definitely a big one. And also, it was about creating a platform and accessibility for students of color to share their experience and to talk about it and to be heard, and so that's kinda where the town halls came from, which were not accessible for students of color, or, yeah. So, that was one of the other requests, was creating that space, so.

LRP: So, where there other folks involved with organizing the Speak Out? Were there any people in administration or staff who really were kinda crucial to helping you or not helping you?

JP: [Laughs] Yeah, those are two different questions.

LRP: Yeah.

JP: So, I worked as a student employee at Oregon State for quite a long time, and the messages that I constantly heard, and even now as a student affairs professional, the messages I still hear are something like, "Tread carefully," or "Navigate," you know, "Navigate the system. Navigate this. Navigate that." Which really what those messages mean is that you need to assimilate, and you need to be compliant and you need to work the system that you have. And so, when Haniya, Jasmine, and I started the work on the Speak Out, this was the reaction that we got. It was a lot of like, "Whoa, slow down. Did you think about this?" Kind of like, how do we make this, how do we make this work within our systems, which was the opposite of what we were intending. So, I wouldn't say, I would say that I had never, before the Speak Out I had never felt... [video cut]

[30:00]

LRP: So, when we started planning the Speak Out, we definitely felt like, we really leaned heavily into each other because we didn't have support from faculty and staff, especially in the beginning. And I think that, you know what, I'm not going to make any excuses for it. We felt very abandoned, and a lot of folks were concerned for what it would look like and what it meant for us to be doing this work when we were employees of Student Leadership and Involvement and Diversity and Cultural engagement, because our positions were kind of within both of those departments. And so, a lot of folks were concerned about what that means and how that projects onto their office or to themselves. We got a lot of what I would consider, you know what, I don't even know the word for it. We end up in a lot of meetings where I felt extremely belittled, and where I lo-, where faculty and staff that I had really looked up to, I felt like I could no longer trust them. And, I heard messages from them that I really was shocked to hear, especially around the idea of "You need to navigate the system and you need to be smart

about this.” And I think, first of all, there was the underlying assumption that we weren’t being smart about it, that we hadn’t thought about how best to go about this, and the reality is that folks just didn’t agree with our methods. And so, I wouldn’t say that there was someone. There were definitely people who wanted to support us and who tried to support us, but the reality is as student employees, as students, we had more flexibility than they felt that they had as staff on campus.

LRP: So, you kinda spoke to challenges that have arose, or that did arise during. Are there any other major challenges to organizing something as big as this?

JP: I mean, yeah, there were a lot. So we were employed by Social Change Leadership Programs, which I mean, if you would think about the title of that office, you would think it aligns pretty well with what the Speak Out was about, but other people did not believe that it did, or that it was something that we could align with our positions in the office. So, we had to create a very clear distinction between the work that we were doing as students and the work that we were doing as employees. And so that meant that when we were at work we couldn’t talk about or do work for the Speak Out and that we just needed to do our things. And I think the hardest thing is that we carry all of our identities with us everywhere we go. Obviously, we don’t, we can’t separate that, and the experiences that we have as students impact us as employees and vice versa. So, it was really hard for us. And also, the fact that everyone wanted to talk to us about the Speak Out when we were working, so we were losing significant amount of hours, which impacts, obviously, how much we’re getting paid, and the fact that we work to survive. And so it really got very stressful and very intense, as far as how we had time to plan this and to make everything happen, because it took a lot of time for us to continually talk about it, and to figure what space we were going to use, how we were going to create the environment that we needed for the Speak Out to happen, and also how we were going to make people aware of it. So, it was a lot of time and effort and energy from all of us to kinda make that happen, yeah.

LRP: How long did it take? Like, weeks, to actually, from start to finish?

JP: I think about a week.

LRP: Oh!

JP: So that’s, okay, so, from the initial conversation that I had until the Speak Out, maybe a little bit more, but the reality is that we spent all day of that time, between when we had our conversation and when the Speak Out happened, talking about and planning this. It invaded every single minute of our days. In trying to do self-care to support each other, to involve the people that we needed to be involved, and that stuff,

that might sound like it was a short amount of time, but it was a lot of work within that time. And also, the reality of it was that we just felt these demands that we're putting forward are not things that we can wait for, and they are things that should've already been happening. And so, every minute that we put it off is just more time that students of color are not being supported on our campus. And so there definitely was a sense of urgency. And also, you know, everything at Mizzou was happening at the same time, and so there definitely was a national climate that was behind us, that was supporting us, maybe pushing us was a better word, and yeah, I mean, a sense of urgency because our campus was not one that was created for us and we needed, we wanted to change that. And that was our motivation to kinda just make it happen.

[36:14]

LRP: Thank you for expanding. Were there other strategies that you considered, or was the Speak Out kind of the best way you felt to create a platform?

JP: Well I mean we - Haniya, Jasmine, and I - all did and do social justice work, and, you know, in employment, like in our jobs, but also outside of it. And, I mean, I think every day that is something like another avenue. And, I mean, honestly, students of color existing on this campus is an avenue of creating that environment. And for me specifically, I definitely considered other things, as far as what I can do and also navigating, understanding what it means to be a white person trying to do anti-racist work and to have these conversations, and in what ways I can find my place in that. And so there were a lot of things that I thought about doing, but it's a very, it's a very fine line of navigating how I can use my white privilege and how I can access the spaces and then use my voice in that so that I can lift up students of color's voices and create that space. So at the Speak Out, an example of that is the fact that, Haniya talked about that white man getting up to talk, but I, the only thing that I said at the Speak Out was that white people were there to listen. And the whole point, that was very intentional. Haniya, Jasmine, and I talked a lot about what that looked like and how to show up in the space, because like I said, when this all started it was the fact that people were willing to listen to me when students of color had been saying the same thing, and we needed to shut that down and to stop that. And that was kinda what we were hoping to do with the Speak Out, and with my words that were said at the Speak Out. And other avenues for making this change, I think for me is.... After the Speak Out, Haniya and Jasmine were, you know, asked to be on all these committees and to do this and to do that, and the reality is that OSU is addressing, did address and is addressing the issues by creating situations that continues to make students of color do the work. And so, I think when I'm thinking about other avenues, you know, it's about supporting students of color and stop the systems and the paradigms, especially on campus and within the administration, that are like, "Okay, well, where are the students of color? Why aren't

they doing this or why aren't they doing that?" and really kind of trying to reframe the conversation and putting the responsibility and the accountability on staff and faculty and administration.

LRP: So, what was the campus climate like prior to the event? Were there certain needs that the university wasn't addressing?

JP: [Laughs]

LRP: And maybe just try to be specific about....

[39:50]

JP: Okay. So, I mean, I'm obviously not a student.... I shouldn't say obviously, I'm not a student of color, and I, so I mean, I'm going to try and answer this question, but I also don't wanna speak for students of color, and, you know, my awareness and my perception is really only based on students of color who have been vulnerable and shared these things with me and also things that I've witnessed and seen. For example, the first class that I ever took at Oregon State was a history class, and my first day in that class, the professor was giving an overview of everything we were going to cover that term, and the professor asked a student of color in that class who, on a visual scan, was probably the only black person in that class, and the professor looked right at the student and asked them if they'd be willing to share their opinion and their experience when we talked about the Civil War. And I was so in complete and utter shock, that I got up and left that class and I never went back. And when I think about that now, it really frustrates me that I didn't do anything else, and I didn't do better, because I didn't take it upon myself to understand it to get the tools that I needed to navigate that. Which would be different now, but I think that just speaks to, as soon as I got here that was one of my first experiences in recognizing that one, there is virtually, the diversity at OSU is not what it talks about. OSU talking about having an inclusive and diverse environment, but it's not the reality when you're here and when you're navigating it. And so, you know, that was a way for me to recognize that that's not the reality, and that was before any of my social justice work or anything. And so, I think that the environment was definitely one where everything is catered to protecting white student's feelings and protecting the administration. And so, you know, when an incident, a bias incident, would happen, it was very much like, "Okay, well, how can we contain this so that people don't get aware of it?" and it was always talked about like, "We don't want to scare people." or "We don't want to make people feel unsafe." But by not making that information accessible, first of all, that is not a choice that the administration should be making for students of color. All of the information should be accessible, and, well yeah, just period. And so, I think that was one of the things definitely that they were doing, is

not making the information accessible. And then not addressing and naming the root issues of hate crimes. So, if something were to happen, never, you don't hear the words white supremacy. You don't hear the words institutional racism. These words were not coming out of the administrations mouth, which is, I think, one of the issues, and how the university was not including, not living out their values of diversity and inclusion and supporting students of color, because they were not naming the issues, which allows it to just be like "This person is just not a good person and that's why they did that." Well, that's not, we're not talking about the issues that are systemic in the university. So, I think that was definitely one of them. And, you know, and then my, one of the other biggest ones was faculty making racist comments in class or not addressing microaggressions or, you know, creating environments in their classrooms that were not safe for students of color. This was happening on a regular basis, but at the same time, when it was brought up there was always such shock of like, "What do you mean that happened? This doesn't usually happen." but it does happen all the time. And so, I think that that was definitely one of the things that was on my mind as far as something that the university was not doing, was addressing that.

LRP: So, during the Speak Out, what was that like for you personally, being in that space? Was it, did it end up being like you expected, like the outcome of it?

JP: I wouldn't, I don't know if I had that many expectations going in. I tried not to. I knew my role, and.... I think for me, it was a process of understanding my role and understanding what I needed to do and how I could support. Students of color in general, yes, but there were a lot of people in that room that I love very dearly, and for me, knowing how to navigate that, and how to support them, and not to reproduce the issues that we're trying to address, and to not bring my voice into a space where, that was create not, that was not created for my voice, you know? I joke about how much space I take up, but it's a real thing. And I talk a lot. And we - Haniya, Jasmine, and I - had talked a lot about how my voice is more welcomed in a space. And so, I didn't, what was on my mind the whole time was not doing that, and just looking around and seeing and being physically with these people that I loved so much, and also thinking about the impact that what's being said is having on all of them was really kind of where my mind was at, as far as feelings. Yeah, I was having a lot of feelings, and frustration was definitely one of them, because, you know, one of the first people that got up to talk was a white man. And, you know, I was just so, I was a little bit disappointed in that moment because I was like, "How is this already going to happen?" And then there was some logistical things that were going on with the live broadcast, which never was brought to our attention, and we were never told that there was going to be a livechat. And so there were a lot, there were a lot of extremely racist comments being made and things like that being said on the live chat, so I was also trying to deal with "how do we get this shut down?" and trying to communicate with them, and physically being up and moving

around trying to make that happen during it, which was another thing that was going on in my mind. I think overall the experience for me was, yeah, I mean, I don't know if there's anything else I can say about that.

[47:03]

LRP: Oh no, that was good.

JP: Okay.

LRP: So, post Speak Out, after the Speak Out, describe the immediate response from OSU administration regarding the Speak Out. Did they invite you to future conversations? If so, did you feel that your voice was heard?

JP: So, some of the immediate reactions, we had some faculty, groups, publish letters in support of us. I'm just going to leave that there. And *The Barometer* wrote some articles, which just continually perpetuated the exact things that we were talking about. They centered my voice in the articles, which was one of the first articles that came out after the Speak Out quoted me eight times in the article, and one of the first things I said to them was not to do that. And so, that just felt really shitty. And, you know, and then I published a response to it because I was so blown away that they really dismissed the entire thing. And then their response to me was like "Oh, well, we weren't really able to get students of color to say much." And really, that just points to the exact issue that we're putting all of this weight onto students of color and asking them to do all of this work to continually relive their trauma and to lay it all out for white people to learn and to grow. And that is just, that was really shitty for me. And so I, that was one of the things that we, the three of us, were trying to navigate after, was like, "How is this situation being reported on?" and "Whose voices are being heard?" and that kind of thing. And then the, OSU's response was also in the letter format. I think they really do like their published letters. So, we received some of those, and then we were asked to come into spaces and to be, yeah, involved in committees. And we did meet with President Ed Ray and other staff members, who I don't know exactly who they were. But, what it felt like to me was that the point of us being invited into those spaces was to sort of make us feel like they were serious about the things that they were saying they were going to do, but then when it came to asking questions like, "Well when is this going to happen? What's it going to look like?", we got answers like, "Well we're still unsure. We're still figuring it out." You know, and the leadership council for diversity, or, I don't know the official very long name, at OSU that was formed, you know, their statements are very vague, which is the issue in the beginning. You know, like "We want to work to create better systems," you know, or, "We want to encourage faculty to be more inclusive and to be more diverse." And it's just like, there are no numbers. There are no dates. There are no specifics. And that's really kind of how everything was

addressed and is still being addressed, as far as “What are we doing? Well this is our hope.” So that’s kinda the reaction. And then from students, I had a lot of, I had a lot of white students who wanted to talk about.... I would say there were a couple of groups. There were some white students who wanted to meet with me to tell me how extremely racist I was, and then tell me about all of their times when they experienced racism as a white person. And then there were another group of students who wanted to know like, “What can I do?” You know? And so, I would say that there was a balance of responses from students. There were definitely students who took to, took to online avenues to express their feelings, had a lot of feelings, so, online as far as the Speak Out and students of color experiences on campus and etc. So, I spent a lot of time talking with people who didn't appreciate me or the work that we had done for the Speak Out. And, I think that for me it was really good to kind of understand and to see where some of these students are at compared to the people that I’m usually around, because I am working for DCE, and my friends, all of us do social justice work. And so, you know, it's important for me, I think, as a white person to remove myself from that and to engage with other people who are not at that level, because it shouldn't be on students of color to be educating white students all the time, especially at Oregon State, a predominantly white institution where a lot of folks come here from places in Oregon and other states and have never interacted with people of color or never thought about the fact that their white. You know? And I think it’s important for me to navigate that so students of color don’t have to.

LRP: [Unintelligible] Thank you for that. You kind of answered several of my questions in that, inadvertently.

JP: [Laughs]

LRP: Did anyone reach out to you personally from the OSU community or even Corvallis community, for that matter? You said students did.

JP: Yeah.

LRP: But anyone else?

JP: Well I have some mentors on campus that I worked with for a long time who did. Some of the folks I mentioned earlier, just to kind of check in, with all of us - Haniya, Jasmine, and I. But like I said, we were very much on edge after being so, after feeling so unsupported, and being kind of left out on our own. We were a little bit on edge, I think, and very emotionally and physically exhausted after that week. And so, I think, there were folks who were like, “Hey, is there anything we can do?” or whatever, but we didn't. We were just tired. And then, I, I mean there were definitely some that I remember.

There were folks that told me that I was making a mistake, because I want to go into student affairs. I work in student affairs. I want to continue to. And so, there were folks that told me that I was making a mistake and that I was making decisions that would impact my career, and that I would not be hired by OSU because I'm too radical. And those conversations were, I mean at the time I shrugged them off, but they have very real impact. But, I think for me, what I tell myself and what I would tell students who are doing social justice work and also wanted to go into student affairs, that if you feel like or are told that you need to navigate a system in a work environment or that you can't bring your experiences into a work environment, that that's not somewhere that I would want to work, and that's what I just keep in my mind and would tell anyone else who is doing social justice work: is that there needs to be space for you to exist in all your identities, wherever it is that your working. And these people who are saying these things to me obviously are not representative of the entire Oregon State community, but I think it speaks to the culture that is among staff members here, that you have to assimilate. And as student employees, we see staff members that we know, maybe from personal work or that we know, as, just on a, on a more human basis, and we see them assimilate and not be themselves to survive in a work environment, and that is part of what we wanted to fight against and to work against, because it's hard to not, to not be able, you know, to say, "these are the things that we need as students" but also we see that staff members need these things too.

[55:56]

LRP: For sure. [Laughs] I don't know if I'm allowed to agree with you or not. Because part of me wants to.... We can cut this out. I want to talk with you, but I know this is an oral history. It's not a dialogue. But anyway, so every time you say something I'm like [something off camera].

JP: I know! I know! You're over there [something off camera]. [Laughs]

LRP: Gonna cut that part out. I only have a few more questions here. Let's see, I know you mentioned that *The Barometer* decentered students of color. Were there any other ways that the university did that after the Speak Out, or was that really the only event that you're aware of?

JP: So, the other, I mean, the other part of it too was that I... what? Was that I, I was getting ready to graduate, you know? Where I was on my way out and Haniya and Jasmine had a little bit longer in their careers here at Oregon State. And so, I think my experiences as far as what the conversations that I was having with staff and administration and such were a little bit different. What was the question again?

LRP: Were there any other ways that students of color were decentered?

JP: I mean, I can only speak from my experience and my awareness, not what the students of color felt at that time, but I think that there definitely was a sort of... I felt like, how I perceived it was that faculty and staff, specifically staff within Diversity and Cultural Engagement, continually used me as an avenue to get to or talk about Haniya and Jasmine, or us as a group. And so, when the Students of Color Speak Out was happening, I was just kind of also starting my coming out process. And prior to coming out, I definitely was a very safe person for staff to, kind of, bring into a space or to use as a representative. So, I, there were situations when I called out staff when they asked me to speak in a space, or whatever, you know? I recognize that you're asking me to speak here because I'm a safe looking person for people to listen to and feel comfortable with. After I came out, I kind of threw some of that out the window and stopped hiding some of, well, I mean, being authentic in myself meant that I wasn't censoring my radical views or opinions either. And so that, some of that definitely changed in the way that I felt like staff talked to me. And, you know, I definitely had staff within DCE and other departments on campus that, you know would contact me and be like, "Can you, Haniya and Jasmine, you know?" and I'm just like, "Well why aren't you contacting us all together?" or, you know, something like that, or students saying, "Oh, hey, can you talk about the speak out for this thing?", and I'm like, "Well *we* can talk about the speak out for this thing." You know? And just little things, and I say little.... [Video cut]

[01:00:01]

LRP: Describe the current campus climate. Is it different than it was two years ago?

JP: So, I've been away from campus for most of this year, since I graduated last June, so I'll describe it as I left it, as it was when I left. But I think that, since the Speak Out, there definitely are more conversations. If you work on campus, if you're involved in social justice work, you definitely are hearing more conversations about changes, things that are coming. But as far as the campus climate in general, from a student's perspective, I don't think that it has changed much, except for the fact of the impact that the election has had on it, and with people who are hateful and who regularly practice discrimination, feel more openly able and safe to do so. And so, I think that there is that impact. But I think that generally, the campus climate is built on a lot of apathy and on a lot of ignorance. So most students, I mean most students are white and most of them can go through out their days still without ever having to think about that and without it impacting them in any way. So I think that there's still a lot of apathy and just, you know, "Well it's not my issue to deal with," or something like that, and I think there's also a lot of, "Well someone else is going take care of it." And what that means is that students of color are going to continue to have to do the work. So I think that, in that

sense, the campus climate is similar, but I think that, from my perspective, the Speak Out did allow the folks who work in social justice to feel a little bit more empowered and connected. And also, it was a big learning process for a lot of us, so, yeah.

LRP: Thank you. So my final question for you is, do you have any parting advice for future viewers or students who are watching this video?

JP: Yeah!

LRP: Or trying to navigate being at OSU?

JP: [Laughs] That's a word, yes. Navigate. I think for students who are finding themselves, for students who are at OSU and who are wanting to do social justice work, diversity work, or who are just wanting to survive and be in a safe environment, I think that some advice that I would have definitely is utilizing the things that do exist already, so, like the cultural resource centers, even if they themselves are still working to being a really safe and an environment that actually supports students in the work that they are doing. But the people that are there, the other students, is the main advice that I would give is to connect with them. And to see what ways you can get involved in a way that makes sense for you, and also finding the places on campus or the people on campus where you can re-energize, and who you can spend time with that re-fuels you, especially because social justice and diversity work on campus is extremely tiring, even more so when you are someone who has a targeted identity and who is trying to do work from that place of still experiencing oppression every day. So when you're doing that, it's really important that you find whatever it is or whoever it is that you need to re-energize yourself and take care of yourself. And, I would say, you'll hear a lot of things like the word "navigate." You know, a lot of people who are like, "Well, you need to learn how to navigate the system," etc. And I think what I wish I would have known or someone would have told me is just to stay true to myself and to really allow space to understand how I feel and what I believe to be true and use that more so to navigate rather than, off, basing it off of what other people say is the professional or the acceptable thing to do, finding a balance between living your truth and existing in a place like OSU.

LRP: Thank you!

JP: Yeah!

LRP: I have no more questions for you. That wraps up your oral history, and I appreciate you!

[end of interview 01:04:34]