

Cast study 3

The individuals most central to this case are Connor, Tonia, and Jim. Connor is a white, transgender man, in his second year of college working as a Resident Assistant (RA). Tonia, Connor's direct supervisor, is a Black, cisgender woman working on a graduate degree who has a huge interest in social identities and social justice. Jim, Tonia's supervisor, is an Asian, cisgender, gay man with several years of work experience in nonprofit education and higher education. After making a crucial duty mistake and subsequently being placed on job probation, Tonia's supervisee resigns abruptly from the RA position. Three weeks into the fall semester, Tonia, Jim, and fellow colleagues are scrambling to find a replacement that can smoothly transition into the role. After about two weeks, Connor is hired and expected to begin working promptly. As his direct supervisor, Tonia must onboard Connor by introducing him to the staff team and residential community and providing him with continual quasi-training that will help him be successful in the position. Tonia worries that Connor may struggle forming bonds with his fellow RAs because they have already established relationships after summer training and a month and a half of working together. The majority of the RAs are white, cisgender women and men and some of them identify as gay, bisexual, or questioning; Tonia is aware that none of them identify as transgender, and she worries that this will be a barrier for Connor feeling understood and accepted. In addition, Tonia recognizes that as a Black woman, her desire to make systemic changes within her role will breed resistance due to the oppression internalized by her and those she works the closest to. While meeting with her supervisor, Tonia requests that she and Jim reconsider who her direct supervisees are, after three weeks of working with Connor. Tonia is seeking to switch supervisees because of multiple challenges she has been experiencing with Connor. She informs Jim that she has been unable to build trust and develop a relationship with Connor because he refuses to acknowledge her presence or communicate with her in any capacity. Tonia describes feeling completely rejected and disrespected by Connor; she notes previous times when he has only taken direction when given to him by Jim or masculine presenting individuals. Jim wonders if there are other social identities, such as disability, that are contributing to Connor's perceived unwillingness to engage or perform job responsibilities. In addition to the difficulties she has been having with Connor, Tonia mentions that RAs have come to her reporting negative interactions that they have had with him. Some of these interactions include racist comments about Black individuals and affirmative action, criticisms about survivors of sexual assault, negative remarks about people with disabilities, and comments expressing disgust for poor and working class individuals. As a member of each of the communities Connor verbalizes distaste for, Tonia fears that holding him accountable may make her appear irrational, angry, and incompetent as a supervisor. Although she wants to address Connor's behavior, she worries about the impact it will have on her, the RAs she supervises and the numerous students she serves. Addressing Connor's behavior can out RAs who shared concerns confidentially and create mistrust, further marginalize/isolate Connor, and open Tonia up to be harmed. Tonia wants to remain engaged by supporting everyone's growth and learning, minimize potential harm to residents, and maintain her positive reputation as a professional in her department and field.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. With harm already occurring across positions of power because of varying dominant identities, what might be the most effective way to address/repair hurt without further marginalizing involved parties and creating a dynamic of mistrust?

2. It is discovered that Connor has a connection to a couple of the identity groups he voices disdain for, meaning that he may be dealing with his own internalized oppression. How might you as a supervisor provide support to his educating and unlearning processes?

3. Do you hold an employee accountable (via job action) for differing but harmful views that don't align with the department's values? If so, what steps should be taken to hold them accountable? If not, how should their behavior be properly addressed if it continues?

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Robert Brown, et al. *Identity-Conscious Supervision in Student Affairs : Building Relationships and Transforming Systems*. Routledge, 2020.