Exploring the effects of addressing social injustices as a student affairs professional

by

Laura Bestler

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Program of Study Committee:
Nancy Evans, Major Professor
Peter Englin
Ellen Fairchild
Patricia Leigh
Robert Reason

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Table of Contents

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I dedicate my dissertation to my sister Jessica's daughter, my niece, Ruth Francis.

Ruth, you can do anything in this world; just believe in yourself.

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ABSTRACT

This autoethnographic study is an intimate exploration of how student affairs professionals may be affected by working with students experiencing social injustices on campus. As subject and researcher, I used my unique story, along with interview responses from three university community members, to guide the reader through an examination of the culture of student affairs. This study illustrates how student affairs professionals may be transformed personally and professionally while advocating for students' equitable rights. To collect the stories, I transcribed the university community members' responses and my personal experience from audio voice digital recordings. In addition, data collection methods included reflecting upon personal email correspondences, written reflections, campus studies, newspaper articles, and research memos. Although each student affairs professional has unique experiences, the self-reflection and analysis within this autoethnography provides an overview of the personal and professional transformation that occurs when advocating for students facing social injustices on campus. Findings indicated the significance of role models, professional boundaries, and social justice advocacy in the culture of student affairs. Furthermore, student affairs professionals may experience empathic distress and compassion fatigue when witnessing students facing social injustices. The themes extracted from the findings indicate the importance of role models, barriers discovered while advocating for social justice, and a possible connection between student affairs, social justice, and compassion fatigue. Finally, the implications of this study strengthen the need for student affairs professionals to be aware of their emotional health and for institutions to embed inclusivity for students within the campus environment by shedding hegemonic practices.

CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW

The sidewalks were strewn with hate as the October morning sun shattered through the clouds. Hate-filled words in chalk exclaimed violence against lesbians and gays on my undergraduate campus. Obscene phrases like "Get a gun and shoot them," "Kill the fags," and "Gays must die" were sketched hastily over the 10% Society's (a lesbian and gay student organization) National Coming Out Day celebratory words.

From 1987-1992, my undergraduate campus was my home away from home and my friends and I were violated by these hurtful phrases chalked on the cold concrete sidewalks. This written violence became a significant event prompting my personal journey towards social justice. It would not be the last time I would feel frustration about biased actions on a campus.

I was, then, an over-involved undergraduate student leader at a Midwestern public institution of higher learning. Campus was close to home and my new found family included both students and student affairs staff. Those staff members (parental in their actions) helped me as I worked through my personal frustrations with these hateful words and actions. Each staff member played a significant role in guiding me by providing me with opportunities and challenges. My respect for the wisdom they shared with me is still an integral part of my ethical palette of practice. Little did I know when one of these advisers introduced me to a profession in which I would be involved for over a decade. I failed to recognize then that these student affairs professionals may have experienced a multitude of unique emotions while helping me, the student, as I dealt with my angst.

Student affairs professionals are a part of a university's power structure and are uniquely positioned to advocate for students within the constructs of the centuries-old higher

education systems of practice (M. J. Chang, 2002). Because of this power structure, the role of the student affairs staff member may be rich with diverse experiences and complexities associated with the informal out-of-classroom interactions between students and student affairs professionals.

Higher education, as we know it in the United States, was built upon Eurocentric roots tied to a hierarchal system within the colonial foundation of higher education (Altbach, 2001). The current system continues to privilege the White Euro-American heterosexual Christian student population, and has not yet adapted to a steadily diversifying student body (M. J. Chang, 2002). The Eurocentric perspective is considered the universal truth; as such, it fails to take into account the plurality of cultures or a world of multiculturalism (Jung, 2009). As a student affairs professional, I was often stretched between policy, people, and purpose while working towards creating an equitable campus environment. I refused to lose focus on the needs of students, and the incessant political and social pressures took a toll on me, both professionally and personally.

Social justice is a process and a goal (L. A. Bell, 1997). The social justice discourse presently taking place on college campuses is a multifaceted transformational opportunity for people, institutions, community, and society as a whole. Practitioners strive to include appreciating viewpoints and social responsibility for all, equity in procedural systems, access to and sharing of resources, and a feeling of being safe and protected in society as a whole and within higher education environments (Goodman, 2001; Reason, Broido, Davis, & N. J. Evans, 2005). While the slow transformation of college campuses to adapt to their students' diverse needs may be providing a unique opportunity to hone more equitable experience, the old power structures continue to test even the most seasoned staff in their attempts to provide

a safe campus environment (M. J. Chang, 2002). Currently, there is a lack of information available about how student affairs professionals working towards social justice are affected personally and professionally by their experiences.

Problem

Student affairs professionals cannot be fully prepared for the multiple roles they have to juggle in their efforts to create an equitable and conducive living and learning environment for their diverse student population. They are held accountable for supporting the current policies, procedures and programs, while adapting to the myriad new demands on campus with continually decreasing resources.

University and college student affairs professionals interact with students through programs, orientation, student organizations, recreation centers, peer training, and on-campus living. These student affairs professionals may advocate (directly or indirectly) for students confronted by social injustices that directly (or indirectly) affect individual students and their community of fellow students. Supporting campus policies while advocating for students requires a tenuous balance for many student affairs staff, even in the most homogeneous environments. The balance between following campus protocols and being supportive employees, while maintaining a healthy working relationship with students, is difficult. Maintaining this balance may create stress within the personal and professional lives of some student affairs practitioners.

During my training to be a student affairs professional and subsequent career experience, I was not taught how to handle difficult situations involving unjust treatment of people on campus. Instead, there seemed to be an expectation that I would just "know" how to cope with these challenges during my 13 years as a student affairs professional. I did not

understand the extent to which helping students would affect my personal well-being. There is a dearth of information regarding how student affairs professionals can often times be affected by their experiences of working towards an equitable campus, while simultaneously fulfilling their job responsibilities and attempting to maintain a healthy personal life. Figley (2002) defined compassion fatigue as "resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized person" (p. xiv). Identifying the cost of caring as a personal issue and determining how to cope with this symptomatic characteristic of compassion fatigue presents a difficult challenge for professionals (Figley 1995a, 1995b, 2002); it was certainly a difficult challenge for me.

Purpose

The purpose of this autoethnographic study was to explore my personal knowledge of social injustices on a university campus by sharing stories that affected me personally and professionally. As subject and researcher, I illustrated my personal story of vicarious injustices and oppression of students during my 20-year transformation from undergraduate student to seasoned student affairs professional.

I believe sharing my story may help new and seasoned professionals to become more aware of their personal and emotional boundaries when working in student affairs. These boundaries may become twisted and torn as student affairs professionals help students overcome social injustices, and crises on campus. My story may inspire others to discover how to find the skills to navigate the delicate balance between underrepresented students and institutional politics.

Research Questions

In my personal analysis of my experiences as a student affairs professional committed to working towards eradicating social injustices, I explored the following questions:

1. Upon reflection, how did I respond to social injustices and oppression of students on campus?

2. What hurdles did I face in striving to cultivate an equitable campus environment?

3. What effects did working to address social injustice in higher education have on me, both professionally and holistically?

4. What are the implications of my experiences for other student affairs professionals?

Theoretical Perspectives

Transformative learning theory and social justice theory served as the foundational theoretical perspectives for my study. Using both of these theories guided my research questions. Mezirow (1990) stated, "Learners who share a transformative learning experience can effect social change in a variety of ways, by affiliating with like-minded persons who are devoted to change within an organization, by changing interpersonal relationships, or by collective political action" (p. 356).

Transformational Learning Theory

Transformative learning theory provided a framework within which I explored the effects of social injustices as experienced by a student affairs professional. In transformative learning, one may develop the ability to evolve to new levels by reflecting on one's personal experiences with unjust situations (Mezirow, 2000). Therefore, transformative learning involves an experience in which deep learning takes place, identified by a metamorphosis in ways of thinking, conceptual understanding, and feelings that result in a rudimentary shift in an individual's understanding of oneself in relationship to others (Mezirow, 1991).

Transformation is defined as a significant change that usually leads to an improvement. I was able to construct my transformative learning (Kegan, 2000) from my time as a collegiate undergraduate to my life as a student affairs professional working with social injustices in higher education.

My highly personal story served as a foundation from which I explored the dimensions of knowing, understanding of oneself, and creating a more inclusive campus environment. Mezirow (2000) stated,

> The justification for much of what we know and believe, our values and our feelings, depends on the context–biographical, historical, cultural–in which they are embedded. We make meaning with different dimensions of awareness and understanding; in adulthood we may more clearly understand our experience when we know under what conditions an expressed idea is true or justified. (p. 4)

The opportunity to have critically reflected on my experiences gave a voice to my personal beliefs, provided a new dimension of knowledge, and enriched meaning-forming through self-awareness (Kegan, 2000; Mezirow, 2000). How I positioned myself regarding social justice informed how I may further transform myself and the community through this autoethnography. To begin my transformative learning journey I needed to understand my own experiences within a social justice context.

Social Justice Theory

Social justice in education is more than educating students about injustices; essentially it is a commitment to work towards creating equity both locally and globally (Kincheloe, 2004). It is recognizing that education is not neutral (Ng, 2003). Educational settings often enable the construction and reestablishment of social inequalities, and

acknowledging this challenge would initiate equity on campus (Ng, 2003). Social justice means going against the grain and traditions of an institution. It is a collaborative partnership between learner and educator where the hierarchy of titles can be shed and individuals can learn from one another.

In social justice theory, each person, no matter what the title, plays an integral role within the community, in this case higher education. However, getting rid of those in power is not the only answer (I. Young, 1990). As an individual engaging in social justice work, one must acknowledge relational stratification, how differences operate within the structures, and their relationship to power (Ng, 2003; Orr, 1991). It is about tearing down those power dynamics while continually questioning one's own privilege and oppression while society is reconstructing itself (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Ng, 2003; Orr, 1991). In theory, using a social justice perspective will enable transformational learning to occur through the action of storytelling in my autoethnography.

Methodology

My epistemological framework for this autoethnography was subjectivism. I sought to understand my knowledge by interpreting the meaning through my stories, and from the interview responses from key university community members about social justice in higher education (Crotty, 2003). Through autoethnography, I studied student affairs, social injustices, and myself within the culture of higher education. As described by H. Chang (2008), autoethnography is "ethnographic in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretive orientation, and autobiographical in its content orientation" (p. 48). This reflection upon my experiences, along with the interviews from university community members, placed me within the social context of student affairs, the field that I left in 2006.

It presented how I viewed my student affairs experience and the impact of culture on the decisions I made during my tenure; my stories and memories reconstructed my past self and my understanding of the student affairs culture in higher education. I shared stories about my transformation from a collegiate student leader to a student affairs professional and how social injustices affected me professionally and personally.

How did autoethnography become my primary methodology? This methodological decision occurred when a colleague in my dissertation course asked, "What is it about Hoffman's (2000) empathic distress theory that gets you excited about your research?" I replied, "It is finally something I personally can relate to regarding my experiences within the field of student affairs." The professor who was facilitating the class asked, "Have you considered doing an autoethnography?" I explained, "It had crossed my mind; yet, I have always thought it was a cop-out." Another colleague said, "I would definitely read your story based upon our previous discussions." I sat astonished. The professor eloquently stated, "Anyone can write a dissertation, it is how well you write it that truly matters."

Autoethnographies are generally written in first person, and the researcher uses lived experiences reflexively as a means of looking in-depth at the interactions between self and others (Ellis, 2004). In this case, others were represented by the interview responses from three university community members with whom I worked as a student affairs professional. The process "functions as a vehicle of self-examination, a means through which to construct self-knowledge through recourse to the familial other" (Renov, 1999, p. 141). With autoethnographic methodology, the process of writing and the finished text are bound rather than disconnected. Autoethnographers strive to present multiple voices and layers of consciousness in the text, which according to Richardson and St. Pierre (1994), "releases the

censorious hold of 'science writing' on our consciousness, as well as the arrogance it fosters in our psyche: Writing is validated as a method of knowing" (p. 929). It is important to emphasize that the purpose of autoethnography is to link the self to culture within a social context (Reed-Danahay, 1997). As a qualitative researcher, I was the storyteller who illustrated my experience as a student affairs professional in the culture of higher education.

Storytelling gave me voice and a way to heal from my past experiences with injustice on campus (Berger & Qunney, 2005; Kovach, 2005). My voice was expressed as "*my experiences that I chose to share with you*" (Ellis & Bochner, 2002, p. 15). My autoethnography was written to offer a platform for readers to construct their own knowledge for meaning-making through a reflective process (Belenky & Stanton, 2000). This collaborative relationship will potentially provide a foundation to heal, and to inform the readers about the social injustices in higher education. This story was only the beginning as it may encourage readers to reflect upon their own experiences with social injustices (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Significance of the Study

The intention of this study was to share my personal journey as a student affairs staff member, and my personal and professional transformation resulting from advocating for social justice within the field of higher education. I explored the potential relationships among empathic distress, compassion fatigue, and my work as a student affairs professional. The telling of my story may offer insights about the importance of supporting diverse campus communities, developing professionally as student affairs staff member, and taking care of oneself.

Implications

As a student affairs professional, critically reflecting upon experiences of social injustice gave a voice to my personal beliefs, provided a new dimension of knowledge, and enriched meaning-forming through self-awareness (Kegan, 2000; Mezirow, 2000). I believe my research and story will inspire student affairs colleagues and incoming new student affairs professionals to enable them to develop healthy characteristics that allow them to enhance campus communities by creating a sustainable climate in which social justice may flourish (Figley, 2002).

Not during my academic graduate coursework nor in my in-service student affairs professional development was I ever taught how to cope with what happens to others with respect to social injustices. Instead, I was expected to just *know* how to cope with the incidents. Because of the complications I faced, and will face, I believe that learning how to cope with compassion fatigue and secondary trauma is important in the field of student affairs. Not only are student affairs staff members faced with daily challenges all professionals experience, but they are also confronted by crises and incidents of social injustice that directly impact students and the higher education community.

Graduate programs could better prepare incoming professionals by helping them gain an understanding of how working towards social justice may affect a student affairs professional's daily life (Reason, et al., 2005). This training will be equally important to educate all staff members about these skills of understanding and acceptance because not all student affairs professionals participate in a graduate program before working on campus. According to Freire (1970), "In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find

themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (p. 83).

Limitations

As an autoethnography, the use of myself as the primary source of data in this study may be questioned (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Sparkes, 2002). The study was limited to my knowledge of my career in student affairs, and to the interview responses collected from three university community members with whom I have worked. Some researchers may claim that my design lacked rigor (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) because I chose to tell my own story. Autoethnography is often discredited with claims of narcissism (Coffey, 1999). Rather, I believe that my use of autoethnography demonstrated a deeper systematic self-reflection upon my personal journey to yield ultimately a life account of transformative learning (Kegan, 2000; Mezirow, 2000).

I recognized the extent to which I open myself to criticism and indifference regarding my story; in a parallel manner, this journey illustrated the barriers my students and I experienced on campus. My autoethnography had limitations. I potentially could have left out some stories that may have more meaning to the audience than those I share. My perspective was one among multiple potential perspectives. Instead of going into detail and depth, I maybe only highlighted a story. I may not have always remembered the celebratory moments, and dwelled on the disheartening events or disappointing outcomes. I recognize that there may have been some things I am unable to explain, not even for myself, out of, for example, self-preservation. However, I intended to focus on the hope I have that my story and research will provide inspiration to others.

Delimitations

Because this study only involved myself, it challenged the norms of scholarly discourse (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). My research was limited to the university community members' responses during a 90-minute interview and my work as a student affairs professional. My primary focus was to provide the audience with my autobiographical story, which "displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). These connections were based on personal observations and making meaning from this data within the institutional settings in which I worked as a student affairs professional.

Definitions

For the benefit of this autoethnographic study, the following definitions apply:

- Artifacts: Unique data sources that document and record important aspects of a person or culture (Norum, 2008).

- Autoethnography: A highly personalized genre of writing and research where the author uses personal experience to extend understanding of a particular sociocultural context (H. Chang, 2008; Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

- Compassion fatigue: Compassion fatigue consists of the intuitive actions and emotions resulting from knowing or learning about a person's experiencing a secondary response to an unjust or traumatic event, and the connections between caring for the individual, and little for oneself (Figley, 1995a, 1995b, 2002).

- Diversity: A Eurocentric word used to describe many groups and categories of underrepresented people. The word diversity will be used in my research as a descriptive word. I use this word, with hesitation, due to research examining how the word "diversity"

minimizes the continued oppression of communities of color and issues of racism in the

United States (Cobham & Parker, 2007).

- Empathic distress: A vicarious emotional effect based on the apprehension or

comprehension of the emotional experiences of others; indistinguishable to what the other

person or group is feeling or would be expected to feel (Eisenberg, 2000; Hoffman, 2000).

- Eurocentric: a perspective considered to be the universal truth that fails to take into account

the plurality of cultures or a world of multiculturalism (Jung, 2009).

- Role model: is a person who is thought to be an example to be emulated by others and may

also be a mentor, supervisor, or adviser (Schmidt & Wolfe, 2009).

- Social justice: a perspective that strives to include appreciating viewpoints and social

responsibility of all, equity in procedural systems, access to and sharing of resources, and a

feeling of being safe and protected (Goodman, 2000, 2001; Reason, et al., 2005).

- Social justice allies: Brown (2006) explained, "They [social justice allies] challenge

exclusion, isolation, and marginalization of the stranger; respond to oppression with

courage; empower the powerless; and transform existing social inequalities and injustices"

(p. 711).

- Transformative learning: "The process by which we transform our taken-for-granted

frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more

inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they

may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action"

(Mezirow, 2000, p. 8).

Summary

Ultimately, I believe that my autoethnography may encourage discourse concerning the impact of diversity, support for underrepresented students, as well as the often overwhelming demands of being a professional working to achieve social justice within the field of student affairs (M. J. Chang, 2002). Reading my story may illuminate the importance of teaching each other how to cope with emotional dilemmas along with taking care of oneself. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stated, "Telling stories of ourselves in the past leads to the possibility of retellings" (p. 60).

In this chapter, I provided information on my background as the researcher. I described how I will position myself on the topic of the social injustices in student affairs, having been affected personally and professionally by these experiences. I stated the purpose of my study and my proposed research questions. Additionally, I identified the value of this study. I also provide a summary of the subsequent chapters below.

In Chapter 2, I review literature from several disciplines regarding themes that guided my research on my experience with social injustices in higher education. These themes include the context of higher education; student affairs history, philosophy and practice; social justice; compassion fatigue; and empathic distress as they relate to professional transformation resulting from advocating for social justice within the field of higher education. I begin with a short history of higher education followed by the relationship between student affairs and social justice. Finally I end the chapter with a discussion of how compassion fatigue and empathic distress may be caused when contending with difficulties surrounding social injustices.

In Chapter 3, I present the methodological framework for my autoethnographic study. I incorporate the theoretical perspectives of transformational learning and social justice to

guide this study. I describe the methodological principles used and the methods employed to collect and analyze data from my story and the interview responses from key university community members. I also discuss the trustworthiness and the criteria for the evaluation of this study.

In Chapter 4, I present my autoethnography to invite the reader into my lived experience. The main purpose of this chapter is not to analyze or interpret but to understand the influence of the inner voice. I reveal the interview responses from key university community members from my past; my reactions are woven within their stories.

In Chapter 5, I consider the results of my research in light of themes emerging from the literature, my autoethnography, and the university community members' interview responses.

In Chapter 6, I provide an elaborate discussion of my research. I consider the implications regarding social justice in higher education, and possible ways to help student affairs professionals affected by compassion fatigue and empathic distress. I consider the scope and limitations of this study and the possibilities for future research. Additionally, I explore the implications this autoethnography may have on my future in higher education.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The overarching purpose of this study was to tell my story of how being a student affairs professional working daily with students and promoting social justice on campus affected my life. As I am both the subject and the researcher, I sought perspectives from the higher education and student affairs literature to develop and support my research questions. In this chapter I examine literature focusing on the growth of diversity and social justice-related policy in higher education, student affairs as a profession, and social justice advocacy. I conclude the literature review with a discussion of empathic distress and compassion fatigue and how these concepts informed my autoethnographic study.

The Growth of Diversity and Socially Just Educational Policy

A subject important to my research is the historical growth of diversity in higher education in the United States and its relation to the development of socially just educational policies. In the following sections, I briefly explain higher education's roots and notable events related to the growth of diversity and social justice-related educational policy, the power of knowledge, and promotion of just educational environments.

The Roots

Religion played a significant role in the creation and funding of the first colleges in the United States (Altbach, 2005; Thelin, 2004). Harvard College was founded in 1636, and a combination of religious and secular leadership shaped Harvard and other early colleges based on the English-style university organization model (Altbach, 2005). Early higher education was established to educate like-minded individuals to serve as leaders in society with the ideals set forth by religion serving as its foundation. Although religion was at the

fundamental base of these colleges, religious tolerance was not exhibited by the faculty or the students (Thelin, 2004). In fact, higher education was only open to privileged young men with money, political ambition, or both of these traits (Thelin, 2004). This original collegiate characteristic is still found today, as society continues to favor access to higher education for those potential students with money or power while students without these benefits have a more difficult time gaining admittance. Therefore, inaccessibility to higher education began at its roots and continues to this day.

Since the founding of post-secondary education, there has always been a social compact between colleges and society in the United States. This social compact is that higher education exists to educate citizens for the betterment of society, and society supports higher education because the educational process helps the common good through teaching the morals and values of society (Thelin, 2004). As our society changes, this social compact should evolve to meet the needs of all rather than just the chosen few. To create an equitable environment on campus, and in our society, a dramatic shift in the ways higher education promotes the greater good for society must occur to include all people and all knowledge.

Notable Moments

To help ensure the social compact between society and higher education, throughout its history the United States government has enacted legislation to administer and regulate educational policy. These notable acts of legislation outline changes in governmental expectations--some have been initiated to support greater equity and accessibility for students from increasingly diverse backgrounds and some have been introduced to maintain control in the hands of the privileged. In addition, colleges and universities themselves have enacted organizational and policy changes in response to the increasing diversity of the student

population that have had similar positive and negative effects related to creation of socially just campuses.

The Morrill Acts. The Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1867 were first and foremost land grants to expand the United States westward by giving land to eligible states; higher education was not a primary objective (Thelin, 2004). Both of the Morrill Acts, however, helped to cultivate the growth of universities, as America began to build for the future by spurring economic growth and expanding the western territories of the United States (Thelin, 2004). Both acts were instrumental to how higher education would teach students in the United States, in addition to providing land grants, and demonstrating the usefulness of education to citizens (Geiger, 2005). The Morrill Acts introduced industrial arts, home economics, and agriculture as academic fields of study (Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, 2012). Each of these majors intentionally connected the agricultural and industrial students to these growing business sectors of the United States (Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, 2012). The development engaged students in research, on-campus coursework, and extension fieldwork in the surrounding communities (Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, 2012).

Under the 1862 Morrill Act, if a state was eligible it was given 30,000 acres of federal land to enhance or establish post-secondary institutions (Thelin, 2004). If a state had seceded to be a part of the Confederate rebellion against the United States during the Civil War, it was ineligible to receive the land grant (Thelin, 2004). However, as long as race was not an admission criterion, the 1867 Morrill Act extended the grant to southern states (Thelin, 2004). The United States government added an addendum in 1890 allowing these states to create a separate land grant institution for people of color (Thelin, 2004).

Many of the states awarded these additional grants, however, neglected to provide funding to these Black land grant institutions, thus creating inequitable learning environments for people of color (Thelin, 2004). Even with these financial discrepancies, Black land grant institutions were innovative in helping their surrounding communities by developing extension programs (Thelin, 2004). Thelin (2004) explained, "Black land-grant colleges pioneered a feature that would eventually diffuse to the entire Morrill Act Legacy: the extension program of providing direct advice on crops and home economics to local farm families" (p. 136). Many of the Black land grant institutions evolved into the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) that still exist today (Thelin, 2004). The United States government may have intended to create equitable educational opportunities for people of color with the 1890 Morrill Act, but instead it divided education by allowing states to propagate segregation through poorly funded Black land grant institutions. This action is an example of how the U.S. government has authorized discriminating acts throughout the development of higher education in the United States.

The establishment of land grant colleges, along with adoption of the German-style university model, built the foundation of what became the modern American university model for higher education. The Germany-style university model was built upon academic freedom, combining research and teaching, provisions for advanced studies, and the separation between technical and theoretical academic studies (Thelin, 2004). Although the German-style educational system brought research and a strategic academic framework to post-secondary schools in the United States, it also provided an institutional infrastructure based upon the Christian ideals that laid the foundation of U.S. education. While these ideals may have served the homogeneous student population (i.e., male, white, Christian, and

wealthy) of that time, these hegemonic structures no longer meet the needs of all of today's students (Williams, Berger, & McClendon, 2005; Woodward, 1998).

Prestige and philanthropy. In 1900, the Association of American Universities (AAU) was founded and membership in the organization quickly became a measure of prestige (Thelin, 2004). The association initiated a set of standards for membership and as a consequence those benchmarks influenced the expansion and development of state and private universities (Thelin, 2004). This period also saw a growth of philanthropic endowments from wealthy businesspersons who rivaled each other in order to create the ideal university (Thelin, 2004). While high standards and business investments benefitted the institutions, they deepened inaccessibility for those who did not possess the money or upper-class connections to fund higher education attendance. Those in power, who were White and wealthy, set the agenda for the institution and what knowledge would be taught--even though academic freedom was an espoused value of American higher education at this time.

Women in higher education. During the last part of the nineteenth century, even though it was unpopular, at least 45 United States institutions of higher education began to allow the attendance of woman (Graham, 1978; Thelin, 2004). Thirty-two percent of the undergraduate students were women by 1880; 40 percent in 1910; by 1920 "women were 47 percent of the undergraduate enrollment" (Graham, 1978, p. 764). Interestingly enough, the undergraduate enrollment of women began to decline in the 1930s (Graham, 1978). However, by 2009, enrollment of women increased to 57 percent in U.S. undergraduate institutions (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012a).

Because many of the traditionally male campuses felt uneasy having women on campus, the position of dean of women was created to nurture the needs of women

(Schwartz, 1997). While Oberlin College hired the first woman to supervise students as the "Lady Principal of the Female Department" in 1833 (Bashaw, 1999); in 1892, Alice Freeman Palmer was selected as the first dean of women in the United States (Schwartz, 1997). By 1927, there were 17 deans of women, primarily in the Midwest (NADW, 1927 as cited in Schwartz, 1997). Schwartz (1997) noted that deans of women were responsible for "the housing of women students, training in etiquette and social skills, women's self-government, leadership opportunities for women students, and women's intercollegiate athletics" (para. 7).

The deans of women also built "the foundations of practice for student affairs and higher education administration, including graduate study, the development of professional associations, research on students, college environments, and student guidance and counseling" between 1890 and 1930 (Schwartz, 1997, para. 9). However, in 1937, the deans of women began to disappear as campuses began to follow the recommendation of the American Council on Education, which was based on a proposal by William H. Cowley, to combine the activities within student personnel services (Schwartz, 1997). Generally, deans of men were given the opportunity to serve as the dean of students; whereas deans of women either retired or became full-time faculty (Schwartz, 1997). By the 1970s, the dean of women position on campus was almost completely extinct (Schwartz, 1997). While the combination of student services under a Dean of Students appears to enhance equitable services to all students, it also resulted in women students losing a major advocate on campus and professional women losing an important role in student affairs administration.

G. I. Bill. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act, popularly known as the G. I. Bill, was passed by Congress in 1944 (Thelin, 2004) and contributed to a thriving student

population enrolling in higher education after World War II. The government, as well as society, saw college as a way to create opportunities for the average U.S. citizen, particularly veterans (Thelin, 2004). The G. I. Bill helped to open campuses to men and women who were previously unable to attend due to their lower socioeconomic status and the perceived elitism of college (Thelin, 2004). College was now accessible to all veterans regardless of cost and social status (Thelin, 2004). Because of resulting high student enrollments, institutions identified the need for improved management techniques and organizational design (Thelin, 2004), which led to the further development of the student affairs profession (American Council on Education, 1937; American Council on Education, Committee on Student Personnel Work, 1949).

Civil rights. Segments of society began to question who should and should not be allowed to attend college (Thelin, 2004). These arguments usually revolved around the concepts of access, equity, and excellence (Gaston-Gayles, Wolf-Wendel, Nemeth Tuttle, Twombly, & Ward, 2004; Geiger, 2005). College campuses became a symbolic focus and battleground for civil rights in American life due to racial segregation and other forms of discrimination (Gaston-Gayles et al., 2004; Geiger, 2005). College students across the country joined these conversations for equality and rights in higher education (Geiger, 2005). Civil rights legislation was enacted beginning with Brown v. the Board of Education in 1954 and continuing through the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and Title IX of the Education Amendment of 1972 to increase access to education. The intent of these equal opportunity acts was to increase accessibility for all students; however, researchers have concluded that these acts also should be considered interest convergence (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson- Billings, 1998; McCoy, 2006, as cited in Hiraldo, 2010), where Whites

actually benefitted more than the intended equity recipients: underrepresented people.

Brown vs. the Board of Education benefitted those in power (who were White) because the

decision itself made the U.S. seem friendly and open to all people (D. A. Bell, 1980). At the

same time, the majority of White families could send their students to private schools or

move out of the desegregated school districts (i.e., "White flight"; Bell, 1980, p. 518). Thus,

economic and educational superiority continued for Whites.

Three additional pieces of legislation addressed needs for people with disabilities: the

Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which protected and provided support for people with disabilities

who participate in higher education; the 1975 Education for All Handicapped Children Act,

which made it easier for qualified students with disabilities to enter postsecondary education;

and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990 that provided additional protections

in school and work settings (Geiger, 2005; Thelin, 2004). Each act helped create

opportunities for students with disabilities from an environmental perspective; however, the

societal construction of the disability identity still needs to be deconstructed to create an

equitable higher education experience since society determines what is normal or abnormal

for a person (N. J. Evans, Assadi, & Herriott, 2005). The creation of a socially just campus is

not just about enhancing the operational and learning environment; it is also about

deconstructing how society interacts, works, and learns with and from people with

disabilities (N. J. Evans, et al., 2005).

Current Demographics on Campus

The student population on today's campus continues to diversify in the United States

(U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012b). As of

2010, full-time undergraduate student enrollment was reported as 62 percent women and 36

percent men (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012a). According to the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2012a),

> The percentage of American college students who are Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Black has been increasing. From 1976 to 2010, the percentage of Hispanic students rose from 3 percent to 13 percent, the percentage of Asian/Pacific Islander students rose from 2 percent to 6 percent, and the percentage of Black students rose from 9 percent to 14 percent. During the same period, the percentage of White students fell from 83 percent to 61 percent. (para. 6)

As the student population changes, the need for the demographics of staff and faculty to reflect the student population will continue to be of great importance. To have an "embedded diversity" (Fusch, 2012, para. 9) where social justice is a part of the campus culture and not just wording in a mission statement is also of critical importance.

Competition and the Power of Knowledge

The United States continues to adapt to global economic competition and cooperation; socioeconomic challenges, technological evolution, environmental issues, and terrorism have all led to unsettling changes in society and in higher education. Given the global economy, institutions have had to develop business models to become economically relevant, with their export being academic knowledge (Geiger, 2005). Competition among institutions has increased with the implementation of multiple institutional ranking systems and because the numbers of typical students who have attended higher education--those who are White, age 18-24 years old, and have access to higher education—have decreased

(Zusman, 2005). Despite their increased numbers, African Americans and Latino Americans continue to be underrepresented in 4-year institutions of higher education (Zusman, 2005). These shifting demographics, economic pressures, and the continued debate over who should be allowed to attend college, continues to perpetuate inequalities in higher education (Zusman, 2005).

Being the United States's primary export, knowledge possessed by students and the campus community must be shared to help the world with its present challenges (Apple, 2007). A campus does not exist without students, since they are both the primary product and the consumer (Apple, 2007). Recognizing how the past is still having an impact on the status of higher education, it will be vital to shift societal expectations of who should attend college to include all underrepresented people (Zusman, 2005). One of the fears that may be prohibiting this transformation is how knowledge production may be changed by the diverse demographics of the potential student body. Higher education influences all of society because the knowledge it produces is shared with more than just the enrolled students (Apple, 2007; Calhoun, 2006; Gildersleeve, Kuntz, Pasque, & Carducci, 2010). Educational institutions reproduce the official knowledge known as social reproduction, which maintains our society (Apple, 2007). In a recent article, Gildersleeve, et al. (2010) stated,

> Social reproduction becomes a guarded and trusted function of education,
> based on desires to protect one's social status and to reward individualism.
> The protectionist and individualist values that in many ways fuel conservative
> modernization reinscribe racist, sexist, and classist human relations, justified
> by particular religious convictions and effectively curbing freedom for entire
> cultural communities, often demarcated along racial and ethnic lines. (p. 89)

Foucault (1982) illuminated the relationship between power and knowledge, which is unavoidable in the realm of education. Foucault (1980) stated, "The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and conversely knowledge constantly induces effects of power … it is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power" (p. 52). Considering this statement, one may conclude that because higher education institutions are in a position of power, they hold the knowledge, therefore supporting the power relationship. Although society may choose to accept knowledge as truth or not, the act of denying education will inevitably end up reinforcing the power of some and restricting the power of others (Foucault, 1982). Society continues to allow those in power to determine what is and is not taught in education; therefore, it sustains the current production of knowledge to reflect those in power, and not those without a voice. If society begins to give voice to the underrepresented and oppressed, knowledge sharing will change and lead to a metamorphosis of society into a socially just world.

Promoting Equitable Educational Environments

According to Freire (1970), in a safe environment, students "come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (p. 83). If higher education intends to adapt to societal needs, it will have to work towards an inclusive campus community by transforming its Eurocentric roots. To accomplish this goal, higher education will have to take steps to attract and retain a diverse student population while changing the funding paradigm (Calhoun, 2006). The talents of underrepresented students will go unused unless higher education takes on the responsibility of investing in critical student support resources: staff, faculty, financial support, and programs to create equitable environments

(Zusman, 2005). Institutions will also have to work collaboratively with the government to increase accessibility for students from socioeconomically challenged communities (Zusman, 2005). The creation of a safe socially just environment on campus is needed so that students will be able to explore their societal role regarding power and privilege without repercussions (Ayers, 1998). The profession of student affairs was originally created to help support such an environment (Hurtado, 2005).

The Student Affairs Profession

Colleges and universities are expected to prepare students from different backgrounds to live and work in a diverse society (Hurtado, 2005). Originally, the position of student affairs professional was created to support students while in college; address their needs, particularly outside of the classroom; and prepare them for their future as citizens of society (American Council on Education, 1937; American Council on Education, Committee on Student Personnel Work, 1949). In today's colleges and universities, this charge includes supporting and preparing students for living in a society that is much more diverse than previously. Student affairs professionals accomplish these goals by orienting students to campus, coordinating student activities, operating residential facilities, organizing living arrangements, addressing disciplinary needs, and providing involvement opportunities using the university or college's mission as a guide to its core values while supporting students.

While working as a student affairs professional for over 14 years, I was continually reminded of the history and philosophy of student affairs and the importance of diversity in my work with students. These constant reminders occurred through my education, role models, institutional missions, and affiliated professional associations. In the following

sections, I discuss the history and philosophy of student affairs along with the mission to support student diversity on campuses.

History and Philosophy of Student Affairs

Originally, faculty members not only taught students, they also supervised all activities of students until the instatement of educational officers (i.e., student affairs professionals; American Council on Education, 1937). The American Council on Education met in 1937 to officially formulate a plan and philosophy to help develop students as whole persons and not just intellectually (American Council on Education, 1937). The creation of the student affairs position provided a means for faculty to concentrate their time on research, as stressed in the German model of higher education that U.S. universities were attempting to emulate (Nuss, as cited in N. J. Evans & Reason, 2001).

In 1949, the American Council on Education updated the 1937 report with the expectation for student affairs professionals to help individual students become "an integrated whole--as a human personality living, working, and growing in a democratic society of other human personalities" (American Council on Education, Committee on Student Personnel Work, 1949, para. 7). The American Council on Education (1949) report continued,

Individual development is conditioned by the kind of society in which a person lives, and by the quality of interpersonal and group relationships which operate around him [*sic*]. He is constantly affecting society; and society is constantly shaping him. These relationships constitute the cultural patterns with which higher education must be concerned in its efforts to stimulate and guide the development of each of its students. (para. 14)

Dewey (1938) argued that taking the time to learn by observing students would help educators to plan the best way to meet students' needs. Dewey (1938) advocated for educators to trust their experience and knowledge and to recognize that they were not just teaching curriculum but also shaping society. Student affairs professionals shape society through the coordination of every program, enacting of each policy, and implementation of each procedure that, directly or indirectly, would affect students' experiences. Therefore, observing, knowing, and understanding the needs of the students should influence the development of procedures and policies.

Ever since the early 20th century, national professional associations have been developing reports to shape student affairs philosophy. Each report outlines the importance for student affairs professionals to shape the whole student by establishing a supportive campus environment (N. J. Evans & Reason, 2001). N. J. Evans and Reason (2001) compared many of these reports and summarized how each report demonstrated the significance of "educating all students about diversity, appreciation of differences, and respect for all people, regardless of background" (p. 372). The philosophical statements addressed learning, development, and service to students, but omitted student advocacy as one the foundations for student affairs professionals (N. J. Evans & Reason, 2001).

Supporting Diversity on Campus

Higher education institutions are uniquely situated to encourage interactions among students from diverse backgrounds (Pettigrew, 1991, 1998). Research has found that students' out-of-classroom interactions with diverse peers have positively influenced educational outcomes for college students (P. Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & G. Gurin, 2002). Educators should consider these interactions as an asset for student learning because there

currently are no other societal environments that promote diversity in the same manner (P. Gurin et al., 2002). Promoting student diversity could be considered a niche for higher education in that diversity contributes to the creation of just environments, which enable students to learn and prepare them to be more successful in the evolving complex society of today (P. Gurin et al., 2002).

Student affairs professionals are often acknowledged as diversity experts because of the relationships they have built with diverse students as well as the peer-to-peer relationships they have encouraged (Sandeen, 2004). Therefore, student advocacy should be an official part of the philosophical foundation of student affairs because of the unwritten expectation that student affairs professionals provide students with a supportive campus environment in which diverse interactions may occur (P. Gurin et al., 2002; Hurtado, 2005).

Because of the current unwritten expectation for student affairs professionals to serve as the primary diversity champions for campuses (Caple, 1996; Sandeen & Barr, 2006), it may be concluded, rightly or wrongly, that they are social justice advocates. Student affairs professionals hold a unique power position between the institution's administrators and the students (Broido & Reason, 2005). It is a responsibility of student affairs professionals to advocate for students while influencing positive change on campus to develop a more equitable environment (N. J. Evans & Reason, 2001). Advocating for all students on campus will eventually help transform society. The report Practicing Diversity Leadership in Higher Education (2006) stated, "Leaders can challenge the dominant discourse that marginalizes diversity in higher education, making it powerless as a social force and change agent in society and higher education" (p. 86). Due to the significant Eurocentric roots of higher education, change does not come easily when working towards socially just environments on

college campuses (M. J. Chang, 2002; Gildersleeve et al., 2010; Osei-Kofi, Shahjahan, & Patton, 2010). Being a social justice advocate is complicated because of institutional politics affecting student affairs professionals' ability to act on the behalf of underrepresented students (Sandeen & Barr, 2006).

Social Justice Advocacy

Many student affairs staff fight for students to have equitable rights on campus, not because of history, but instead because it is the right thing to do for students. Being a social justice ally who advocates for students may have positive rewards when it is successful, but such actions are often met with challenges in higher education. In the next sections, I define terminology related to social justice work and then explain the challenges surrounding student advocacy in higher education.

What is a Social Justice Advocate or Ally?

I find the terms advocate and ally to be of equal importance in my research; therefore I use them interchangeably. Washington and N. J. Evans (1991) defined an ally as "a person who is the member of a dominant or majority group who works to end oppression in his or her personal and professional life through the support of, and as an advocate for, the oppressed population" (p. 195). In contrast, Jenkins (2009) defined the meaning of ally by summarizing Reason and Broido (2005): "Allies reside outside of a community or group and may have some of the privileges of the dominant group. Though they are not members of the target group, they actively support the group's struggles" (p. 28). Jenkins (2009) proposed that student affairs professionals use the term *ally* in relational terms, *advocate* when giving voice to underrepresented students, and *agent* as one who acts or has the power or authority to act. For my autoethnography, I continued to use ally and advocate to describe the work I

attempted to do on campus while hoping to be an agent of social justice. In some ways I did social justice work to help others while in other situations I was attempting to reconnect to my own sense of humanity (Edwards, 2006; Freire, 1970). These actions may be attributed to the need to distance oneself from the privileges experienced as a member of the majority (Edwards, 2006). One may learn how to be a social justice ally by disassociating from the privileges gained as a part of the status quo (Edwards, 2006). The act of separation from the majority by reconnecting with the oppressed provides a way to dismantle the power of oppression (Edwards, 2006; Freire, 1970).

Challenges

The boundary between student affairs professional and social justice ally is fragile (Harrison, 2010). Professionals who identify as social justice allies are often pulled between the administration's dictates and students' needs (Harrison, 2010). Student affairs professionals must support the needs of students while balancing the professional consequences of having feelings of isolation, little training, and the potential for job loss (Harrison, 2010; Jenkins, 2009).

Feelings of isolation. Being an advocate often means speaking up against the very people you work for in order to create systematic change. This action may alienate student affairs professionals from their colleagues, thus leading to feelings of isolation and lack of support (Harrison, 2010; Reason & Broido, 2005; Reason & Davis, 2005). Finding like-minded professionals and community members who can listen, support, and work together is important to create a campus culture of equity and to help remedy feelings of isolation (Reason & Broido, 2005).

Minimal training. A struggle student affairs professionals face in advocating for students is a lack of training (Harrison, 2010). In academic preparation and professional development programs, and through membership in national associations, student affairs professionals are trained and educated to help students. However, Harrison (2010) found there was a lack of training regarding the consequences if professionals overstepped their boundaries while challenging the status quo on campus. The lack of training in this area forced student affairs professionals to work against the system using trial and error strategies or do nothing at all (Harrison, 2010).

Potential job loss. When challenging the institutional system, some student affairs professionals may worry about their careers (Harrison, 2010). Harrison (2010) found that if student affairs professionals had experienced negative job consequences previously, they were less likely to continue to engage in advocacy to confront oppression. Although the consequence of job loss is extreme, it is important for student professionals to understand the campus dynamics before challenging the status quo.

Student affairs staff members, because of their role, have the opportunity to break down barriers in order to shape and cultivate a socially just campus (Bell, 1997). Some of the barriers experienced in attempting to do so may be related to the following components of the environment: "relationships maintained between people, bureaucratic procedures, structural arrangements, institutional goals and values, traditions, and the larger sociohistorical environments where they are located" (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen, 1999, p. 69). Each person plays an integral role within the college's or university's power structures. Because of the core relationship connecting student affairs staff with students (N. J. Evans & Reason, 2001), finding the appropriate balance between power,

position, personal life, and policies is essential for a healthy life balance (Manning, 2007).

To create a just environment, the transformation must begin within oneself to become a

social justice ally (Reason et al., 2005). Sometimes being a social justice ally or advocate

leads to emotional distress, however.

Hoffman's Theory of Empathic Distress

The culture of student affairs is empathic in nature because of how a person (or

group) is helping, supporting, and caring for students. Goodman (2000) stated, "Empathy

allows people to connect with others who are different, see their common humanity, and

begin to care about the situation" (p. 1067). The arousal of empathy can occur with or

without the victims being present; it can happen when a person imagines, reads, discusses, or

hears about issues that involve people, groups, or animals suffering (Hoffman, 1978, 1989,

2001). While social justice allies see the reasoning behind creating change; those in power

may not see its significance (Goodman, 2000). Systematic pressures may take precedence

over the students' need for equity on campus (Zusman, 2005). For student affairs

professionals, "empathic distress" (Hoffman, 2000) may then occur due to the lack of

resources to support students (Zusman, 2005). In the subsequent areas in this section of the

literature review, I explore the meaning of empathic distress, prosocial behavior, and

challenges from empathic distress.

What is Empathic Distress?

Hoffman (2000) discussed the complexity of empathic distress: "One not only feels

distressed but knows this feeling as a response to something unfortunate happening to

someone else and to what one assumes to be the victim's feeling of pain or discomfort" (p.

63). Empathic distress exceeds the respective situation and eventually matures to empathic

distress regarding whole groups who may be exploited, oppressed, or otherwise treated unfairly (Hoffman, 2000). Empathic distress may take many forms, occurring both locally and globally; intermittently with groups in times long past; and beyond familiarity, when empathizing with other ethnic groups, races, or species (Hoffman, 2000, p. 80). While maintaining institutional protocols, student affairs professionals may confront social injustices and these experiences may contradict their personal moral structures, behavioral norms, rules, sense of right and wrong, images of hate, and associated self-blame and guilt (Hoffman, 2000).

Prosocial Behavior

Hoffman (2000) viewed empathic distress as a form of prosocial behavior. Prosocial behavior is defined as someone doing good acts for others without concern about external benefits or penalties (Eisenburg, 2000; Gibbs, 2003; Hoffman, 2000). Compassion is the action oriented feeling that drives the desire for one person to help another who is suffering (Goetz, Keltner, & Simon-Thomas, 2010). People who engage in prosocial behavior should work together and steer away from those who would take advantage of their compassion (Goetz et al., 2010). In other words, the emotional form of prosocial behavior is empathic distress, which leads to the reaction of being compassionate for another person, group, animal, or place (Goetz et al., 2010).

Challenges of Empathic Distress

One of the challenges when handling difficult situations while exhibiting empathic distress is over-arousal where a person is so overwhelmed by their own feelings that they are no longer able to empathize about a person, group, or issue (Hoffman, 2000). Empathic distress may be gauged on an action continuum with one end of the continuum being

"individualistic or me-oriented with self-interest" and "selfish concern," the midpoint described as a "relational view of self-interest with benefits for both you and me," and finally, an "interdependent perspective [that] has a greater relational view between you and me to see 'us'" (Goodman, 2000, p. 1074). "Self-focused role-taking" (Hoffman, 2000, p. 34) is when persons experience empathic distress because they place themselves within the context of the situation, thus creating the same feelings as the victim or group. Because caring for others may make a person feel good, the cost of empathic distress may be disregarded by the helper (Hoffman, 2000).

Persons may avoid or distract themselves from helping another when they are stimulated too much or too often by a victim's suffering (Hoffman, 2000). Empathic over-arousal occurs when individuals' personal distress surpasses the victim's suffering and overwhelms persons so much that they center their attention on themselves and not the victim (Hoffman, 2000). Hoffman (2000) explained that "one way to deal with it [the pain] is to turn off emotionally" (p. 200). This form of empathic distress (Hoffman, 2000) may lead to compassion fatigue (Figley, 1995a, 1995b, 2002).

Compassion Fatigue

In theory, student affairs professionals, because of the nature of their position caring for students, may experience a degree of compassion fatigue (Figley, 1995a, 1995b, 2002) simply from learning about tragic events (traumas and/or social injustices) directed towards a student. These occurrences may interrupt the ability of student affairs professionals to cope with challenges surrounding social injustices on a campus, blocking their ability to perform their respective duties and interrupting their personal lives (Hoffman, 2000). According to Figley's (1995a) secondary traumatic stress (STS) theory, "People can be traumatized

without actually being physically harmed or threatened with harm. They can be traumatized simply by learning about the traumatic event" (p. 4). There is limited information available in regards to how student affairs professionals cope with stress factors created from coping with social injustices. In the next sections, I define compassion fatigue and explore how caring for students may cause this effect in student affairs professionals.

Defining Compassion Fatigue

Compassion fatigue consists of the intuitive actions and emotions resulting from knowing or learning about a person experiencing a secondary response to an unjust or traumatic event, and the connections between caring for the individual, and caring little for oneself (Figley, 1995a, 1995b, 2002). Burnout may occur if a caregiver continues to help people without therapy or support from colleagues, peers, or family friends (Figley, 2002). According to Rank, Zaparanick, and Gentry (2009), common symptoms of compassion fatigue include:

- Intrusive symptoms: thoughts, images, and dreams associated with work experiences; obsession and compulsion to help; work encroaches on personal time; inability to *let go* of work-related matters; inflated sense of power or importance

- Avoidance symptoms: silencing response; depression; loss of energy; loss of hope or sense of dread at work especially with people; loss of competence; relational dysfunction; secretive self-medication

- Arousal symptoms: acute and chronic anxiety; impulsivity/reactivity; increased frustration/anger; increased perception of demands/threats; sleep

disturbance; difficulty concentrating; change in weight/appetite; somatic

symptoms

- Burnout symptoms: exhaustion; depersonalization; decreased effectiveness;

  diminished interest in activities; isolation; diminished spiritual connection;

  increased perception of demands; decreased perception of resources;

  imbalance between work and personal life. (p. 45)

Whether an incident facing a student affairs professional is violence against oneself or others,

a hate crime, social injustice, a natural disaster, or a terrorist attack, it is in the best interest of

student affairs professionals to learn about compassion fatigue and how to support

themselves through appropriate training and understanding.

How Compassion Fatigue May Affect Student Affairs Professionals

Student affairs professionals who serve as the first contact for students are often

called to respond to student and campus incidents of social injustice, or to discuss incidents

with students; student affairs professionals may be negatively affected by their contact with

these events. Although staff may feel a positive effect associated with their ability to help,

they may experience secondary negative effects, in the form of compassion fatigue (Figley,

2002). Professionals who have a wide range of responsibilities and work in an overtaxed

environment may experience these symptoms in more advanced stages. Figley (2002)

proposed that the combined effects of the continuous barriers faced by professionals when

hearing stories of injustices and trauma can create a condition that progressively debilitates

the caregiver that he has called "compassion stress."

While professionals may be able to cope with the stressors involved in overcoming

various social justice barriers, they may not be able to sustain themselves without intentional

attention to creating a healthy life (Gentry, 2002). Most importantly, Gentry (2002) encouraged, "Making best use of available resources to establish respite and sanctuary for ourselves, even in the most abject of circumstances, can have an enormous effect in minimizing our symptoms and maximizing our sustained effectiveness" (p. 47).

Summary

In this chapter, I have reviewed literature to address my research questions with respect to how student affairs professionals are affected by social injustices professionally and personally. I began this literature review with a brief history of higher education and its relation to social justice. I followed it with a discussion of the philosophy of student affairs and how diversity informs the work. I then reviewed social justice advocacy in higher education. I concluded with an introduction to the concepts of empathic distress and compassion fatigue, as they inform my autoethnography exploring the effects of coping with students who are dealing with traumas and social injustices.

The examination of literature regarding higher education, social justice, and its relation to the culture of student affairs provides a foundation to support my autoethnography, in which I am both the subject and the researcher. This study also addresses potential connections between empathic distress, compassion fatigue, and how advocating for students experiencing social injustices affects student affairs professionals.

In Chapter 3, I present the methodology for my autoethnography. To help explore my research questions for this study, I introduce transformational learning and social justice as my theoretical perspectives. I discuss how I analyzed my own story, along with the interview responses gathered from university community members. I complete the chapter with a discussion about the trustworthiness and criteria for evaluation of my study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this autoethnographic study is to present a personal narrative exploring my student affairs experience. In this chapter, I provide a rationale for using autoethnography informed by transformational learning and social justice theoretical perspectives. Next, I discuss the methods of data collection and data analysis, as well as ethical considerations and design issues, which conclude the chapter.

Epistemology

Subjectivism was my epistemological framework for this autoethnography. By using a subjectivist perspective, I sought to understand the effect of social justice in higher education by interpreting the context of my own experience (Crotty, 2003). By sharing these experiences, I explored the culture of student affairs along with my understanding of the field. As with all subjective approaches to research, I established my own reality. This general outlook has been called the "person constructs reality" paradigm, as opposed to the "reality constructs the person" paradigm that is aligned with objectivism (W. J. Evans, 2000, p.739).

I created my reality though writing, as a way to feel, interpret, and make meaning from my experience in student affairs. My experience–autoethnography–was fragmented through this process and I created multiple levels of my *self* from these pieces and their complex meanings (Richardson, 1995, 1997, 2000). My background, prior experiences, and value system were crucial to creating meaning (Crotty, 2003).

In addition, I interpreted the connections between my story and the university community members' responses in relation to the culture of student affairs. I sought information from three university community members with whom I interacted at various

institutions during my time in student affairs. I interpreted their responses to gain an understanding of their experiences and perceptions of social justice in higher education. The use of university community members' stories about social justice in higher education were informative in relation to my story, and critical analysis of their perceptions deepened my understanding of the complexity of autoethnography, my lived experience, and the culture of student affairs. As Pratt (1998) pointed out,

> Knowledge and truth are created, not discovered; the world is only known through people's interpretations of it…truth is arrived at not by seeking correspondence, but by seeking consensus; not by looking for a perfect match, but by finding a reasonable fit; not by assuming detachment but by assuming commitment. Truth, therefore, is relative rather than absolute; it depends upon time and place, purpose and interests. (p. 23)

I explored my reality, along with the university community members' stories, through the process of creating my meaning (Pratt, 1998). My objective was for this dissertation to create a narrative that helped to form a social reality regarding the culture of student affairs, as well as to construct a meaningful transformational learning framework that would draw the reader into my autoethnographical text. As a subjectivist, I believe my knowledge cannot be free from bias since all information is continuously filtered through my beliefs (Crotty, 2003). The three university community members who served as participants had a certain way of viewing their perceptions of me within their life story and I, in turn, interpreted their responses to create my story. The telling of my story was the principal pathway to understanding how my *self* was transformed within the culture of student affairs.

Theoretical Perspectives

My autoethnographic study presented the opportunity to explore the culture of student affairs by finding my *self* created from my experiences within a framework made up of transformational learning and social justice theoretical perspectives.

Transformational Learning Theory

Using transformational learning theory provided a framework for me to learn about myself, and my experience by creating meaning derived from my lived experience in student affairs. Transformational learning is the process by which one reinterprets or enhances previously existing personal knowledge and perceptions from lived experiences to guide future actions (Mezirow, 1990). Transformational learning theory addresses how experiences may change and transform persons in ways they and others may recognize (Merriam, 2004). These unique learning experiences may have an impact on a person's particular frame of reference; thus, the learning may change a person's opinions, feelings, or assumptions about a person, people, or events (Mezirow, 1997). Self-reflection is one of the key components of personal transformation. As individuals develop their own critical reflection skills, they are encouraged to become "autonomous thinkers" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). Transformational learning through critical reflection does not mean there is a right or wrong answer; rather, persons use their own knowledge to interpret what they are learning (Mezirow, 1991).

Mezirow (1981) coined the transformational learning concepts "meaning perspectives" to refer to a person's overall world-view, and "meaning schemes" to suggest the smaller elements that hold distinct pieces of knowledge, values, and beliefs about one's experiences within the world (p. 293). Mezirow (1991) proposed a theory of transformational learning that explained,

How adult learners make sense or meaning of their experiences, the nature of

the structures that influence the way they construe experience, the dynamics

involved in modifying meanings, and the way the structures of meanings

themselves undergo changes when learners find them to be dysfunctional.

(p.xii)

Meaning perspectives are nurtured in our youth, and are the focus of transformation during

adulthood (Mezirow, 2000). These meaning perspectives may evolve and act as lenses to

determine how we will interpret the meaning of our life's experiences. This process is

especially true for moments that may provoke intense emotional reactions in a person. It is

these meaning perspectives that Mezirow saw as the raw material of the changes that occur in

transformational learning.

Transformational learning helped me to focus on how I found my voice (McGregor,

2008; Mezirow, 2000). Through self-reflection I gathered knowledge by exploring my

"meaning perspectives" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 293) from my story and "meaning schemes"

(Mezirow, 2000, p. 293) from the responses I received from the university community

members with whom I worked at various points in my career. The meaning perspectives

were the lenses through which I viewed the world (Cranton, 1994, 2000, 2002). As I used

transformational learning theory to guide my writing, I identified meaning perspectives that

reflected how I came to expect certain outcomes throughout my lived experiences. These

perspectives are the direct result of the way one grew up, the culture in which one lives, and

what one has previously learned (Mezirow, 1991).

When I was remembering an experience or transcribing a university community

member's story that could not be reconciled into my meaning perspective, the experience had

to be rejected or a perspective had to evolve to accommodate the new experience (Taylor,

1994). Once I transformed this new knowledge, I recreated and responded to it in a different

way (Taylor, 1998). Adaptations in these meaning perspectives were essential when I was

presented with circumstances where my past did not correlate with this new knowledge.

Disconnects incite individuals to adapt their meaning schemes and perspectives to make

sense of their world (Mezirow, 2000; Taylor, 1994). The acceptance of the ideas, diverse

cultures, and understanding of social justice were some of the key elements that supported

my growth through critical reflection while writing this autoethnography (Mezirow, 2000).

Critical self-reflection could arguably be said to be based on "knowing the inside of

people's minds" (Foucault, 1982, p. 214), since its explicit intent is to externalize people's

innermost reflections. Critical reflection provided a structured way for me to transform my

knowledge by purposefully questioning my beliefs to enable me to grow personally and

professionally (Herod, 2003). The opportunity for me to reflect upon my knowledge

encouraged me to intentionally interact with the ever-changing world (Mezirow, 1995).

Mezirow (1995) argued that the educational task of critical reflection involves helping people

to become aware of oppressive structures and practices, developing tactical awareness of

how they might change these, and building the confidence and ability to work for collective

change. Mezirow (1991) viewed rational discourse as a means for testing the validity of

one's construction of meaning.

Upon exploring my new knowledge by writing this autoethnography based on critical

reflection, I found others who share similar perspectives, and moved towards collective

social action (Freire, 1970; Mezirow, 1990; Taylor, 1998). The transformational learning

process develops a wider "equity mindset" (Love & Estanek, 2004, p. 211) for building the

multiple dimensions of knowing and understanding oneself, to create a more inclusive

society. As Reason et al. (2005) affirmed, "Teaching others about power, privilege,

oppression, and the actions to counteract them requires a thorough understanding of the role

these constructs play in one's own daily life" (p. 82). Viewing the way in which we position

ourselves with regard to our work will inform how we can transform ourselves and the larger

community in which we live and work.

Social Justice Theory

I used social justice theory as a theoretical perspective while working on this research

to create meaning from my experience in the culture of student affairs. As a student affairs

professional, I was encouraged to promote diversity on campus. However, I could have been

considered a privileged higher education administrator, by the students with whom I worked,

because of my actions or lack of action that perpetuated social injustices on campus. Social

justice theory is intended to guide learning and action about privilege, understanding self,

inspiring action, demonstrating the realm of influence, providing support for victims of

injustice, and implementing aspects of social justice education advocated by Reason, et al.

(2005).

Social justice exists as a goal, a process, and a stance (Grant & Agosto, 2008). It is

not only paving a path to equality for all, it is also a means for deconstructing oppressive

systems and policies, and the ability to question and critically reflect on viewpoints and

actions (Bell, 1997; Friere, 1970; Foucault, 1980; Grant & Agosto, 2008; Ng, 2003; Reason,

et al., 2005; Yosso, 2005). Social justice involves being willing to tear down preconceived

notions to build a better world (Bell, 1997; Friere, 1970; Foucault, 1980; Grant & Agosto,

2008; Ng, 2003; Reason, et al., 2005; Yosso, 2005). Social justice theory promotes a

mutually equitable and safe environment (Bell, 1997). Social justice is about how we as a people can live together without oppressive structures and systems (Bell, 1997).

A vital part of social justice is finding a voice, and giving voice to the oppressed: The voice being purpose, change, and action. Social justice is about using those voices for discourse and action to understand power and privilege while removing societal barriers (Friere, 1970; Ng, 2003). Those people and groups who make societal decisions and have an impact are in positions of power (Freire, 1970). The power of a group or individual may sometimes be used for influential good and sometimes for oppressing others (Friere, 1970; Ng, 2003). As Foucault (1980) explained, "Power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives" (p. 39). Privilege is an "unearned entitlement" for a group who has access to something of value and refuses to allow others to have it only because of the group to which they belong, and not because of anything measurable (McIntosh, 1989). Those who are in power and use privilege remain in these dominant roles because they are the ones who create the knowledge and have access to it (Apple, 2007; Foucault, 1980; Yosso, 2005).

Encouraging the exploration of existing structures, challenges, celebrations, policies, and practices are all a part of the social justice discourse. The discourse is not an easy one, and has been made even more difficult given current societal structures (Friere, 1970). Why is the discourse difficult? Differences are often exploited as weaknesses by the dominant group, who creates and places individuals in additional non-dominant groups over which they have power (Ng, 2003). This distinction promotes the hierarchal structures within the society (Ng, 2003). Thus, social justice is a means to recognize the imbalance, deconstruct it,

and remove power and privilege. Gewitz (1998) explained, "A politics of recognition or an ethics of otherness involves not only a commitment to respond to others and otherness but also a commitment to avoiding practicing the power of surveillance, control and discipline upon others" (p. 476).

Using both transformational learning and social justice theoretical perspectives provided a means for me to share my personal story. My autoethnography explored my transformational learning from campus social injustices that may encourage others to critically reflect upon their perspectives. It is my hope that this story may break down barriers to help create positive change leading to the creation of socially just campuses, while fostering healthy student affairs professional experiences.

Methodology

This study was based on my story of my experiences while working in student affairs, therefore using autoethnography as my methodology enabled me to make meaning of my experience. Reed-Danahay (1997) explained autoethnography as a writing practice consisting of a highly analytical, personalized account drawing extensively from personal experiences to broaden knowledge of a particular way of life, discipline, or phenomenon within a social context. Its adherents maintain that writing about and through oneself can be done in a scholarly manner (Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

Autoethnography provides a way to show "multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to cultural" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). Employing autoethnography gave me the opportunity to write myself into the studied culture of student affairs by sharing the story of my unique connection to societal issues as a student affairs professional. This process was deeply introspective as I reflected on my role in the often

oppressive environment of higher education and my experience within the student affairs culture. This personal narrative was written as critical reflection; I used my vulnerability, personal feelings, and emotions as a form of knowledge-sharing and as vivid illustrations of cultural phenomena to explore and portray "feelings," "motives," and "contradictions" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 738).

Therefore, the added significance of this study is that it used the autoethnographic method as an interpretive and autobiographical approach to elicit the depths of my own biases, my own ethical orientation, and my own accounts of the cultural interaction in dialogical exchange with university community members. This goal was accomplished by interviewing three university community members who I viewed as essential players in my experience in higher education. They each participated in a 6-question interview about their perceptions of social justice in higher education. The participants' responses, personal reflective writing, and journaling all served as unique entry points for research. These data sources also allowed me to examine my own personal ethical, moral, and philosophical views or principles through examining my past. This autoethnography reflected my life experience by connecting me as a researcher with the cultural contexts existing in higher education (Holt, 2003).

With myself as the writer and performer within this narrative, the reader will become the audience. The possibility to become a part of the story by engaging in the story line morally, emotionally, aesthetically, and intellectually is a benefit of autoethnographical studies (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Reading this dissertation will potentially provide an opportunity for readers to understand the experiences of a student affairs professional within the higher education system.

Methods

There has been little research conducted that illustrates how student affairs professionals are personally and professionally affected by social injustices. The intention of my autoethnography was to explore my experience with social injustices while professionally engaged within the student affairs culture. The following sections describe the methods I used to collect external and internal data, and to analyze these data for this study.

Data Collection Procedures

I developed a protocol to be used for both my story, and the stories of the university community members I interviewed. Specifically, the questions used for the university community members' interviews (see Appendix D) were also used for my own unique story.

To collect my story, I recorded myself through the use of audio voice digital recording software and then transcribed the data. This form of data collection allowed me to create a more organic construction of my story. I also reflected upon my primary personal artifacts, including email correspondences and personal written reflections during my time as a student affairs professional.

Because the university community members' interview responses informed my story, I recorded and transcribed the participants' interviews. In addition, I wrote memos about my initial reactions to the participants' responses. A unique aspect of a qualitative autoethnographic study was my ability, as the researcher, to let the data emerge as the research and writing progressed while composing this dissertation.

For my autoethnography, I collected data from internal and external data sources. The internal data was derived from my lived experience. External data were constructed

from participants' interview responses concerning perceptions of social justice and injustices in higher education.

       Internal data sources. Since autoethnography is the study of oneself as a member of a culture, I was the primary participant. Following autoethnographical data collection methods, I emotionally reflected upon past events within my experience as a student affairs professional (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). I employed the observation of myself, the oneself. This data collection method required that I, the researcher, look back on specific, memorable episodes and experiences, paying particular attention to the emotions and physical surroundings during the recollection and record them. Emotional recall is expressed through writing that includes thoughts, events, dialogue, and physical details of the particular event.

       External data sources. To explore social justice in higher education, I invited five university community members to participate, and three agreed to take part in the interviews. I collected three university community members' responses (H. Chang, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, 2008; Ellis, 2004; Fontana & Frey, 2000; Spradley, 1979; Wolcott, 1994) during a 90-minute interview (see Appendix D). I interviewed three participants who were staff with whom I interacted as a student affairs professional at various points during my student affairs career. Their interviews served as additional sources of data for my autoethnographic study. This intentional sampling provided perspectives based upon their experiences with social justice in higher education (Jones, Torres, & Armino, 2006).

       Creswell (2003) stated that "the idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants…that will best help the researcher understand the problem" (p. 185). These participants were selected based upon the significant interactions I had with them while I was a student affairs professional. Since the interview involved the participants

disclosing their personal perceptions about social justice, student affairs, and higher education, my knowing and purposely selecting them allowed me to connect their responses to my story. The collection of their stories added to the credibility of my research findings.

Prior to contacting the University Community Member respondents, I received approval from the Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A). I first contacted participants through written email correspondence (see Appendix C), and followed up with a phone call, if necessary. Participants were sent an informed consent form, which included a contextual summary of the study (see Appendix B), through the online survey tool, Survey Monkey, hosted on a secure server.

Each participant completed one interview that took around 90 minutes to complete. This phone interview was audio recorded. Upon completion, I transcribed each interview. Participants were allowed to skip any of the following interview questions (see Appendix C):

• How do you view the role of social justice on campus?

• How do you view the role of a student affairs professional as a social justice advocate on campus?

• What hurdles do/did you face as a student affairs professional in striving to cultivate an equitable campus environment?

• Do you recall a time when you took a stand towards social justice on campus? If yes, what happened? How did you feel afterwards?

• Have you noticed any effect working to address social injustices in higher education had on yourself, professionally and/or personally?

• Is there anything else you would like to share about your higher education experience and social justice?

To ensure confidentiality to the extent allowed by law, the following measures were taken: participants were able to select their own pseudonym, which was used on data collection forms and in analysis instead of their names, identifiers were connected to the Informed Consent document only, and I was the only individual with access to the study records that were kept in a secure, locked filing cabinet, password protected computer files, and a password protected mass storage device. External reviewers and my major professor, Dr. Nancy Evans, had access to data analysis with pseudonyms only. These individuals were interviewed to confirm themes and analysis of the data. In addition, each participant received a copy of the interview transcription and, later, my data analysis, to confirm themes and emerging descriptions of the participants' experiences. These interview responses served as additional artifacts for my study. Each participant's response triggered additional memories, and the participants' perceptions aligned with my own lived experiences.

Data Analysis

In this study, data were gathered from three participants' interviews and my own recollections about social justice in higher education. Through data analysis, I explored my experience by deconstructing my text and the participants' responses and then creating a subjective summary to capture both perspectives and how they related to my research questions (Mautner, 2008). I used the research questions to guide my analysis of data, and I placed heavy emphasis on each of the following issues as my study unfolded. These questions were consistently a part of my thought process:

• Upon reflection, how did I respond to social injustices and oppression of students on campus?

• What hurdles did I face in striving to cultivate an equitable campus environment?

• What effects did working to address social injustice in higher education have on me, both

  professionally and personally?

Analysis of the data began with traditional qualitative methods that employed an

inductive and iterative approach (Lichtman, 2006, p. 161). Open coding was the primary

process used to analyze the data. I looked through the data without any preconceived notions

and coded the data as I read. I color coded all of the data (internal and external) to highlight

initial themes. I reviewed the color codes to identify larger themes, listed these themes,

thought about these themes, modified the themes, collected new ideas, added new themes,

reflected about the new themes, and continued this process until no new themes were

identified in the data.

The emotions I felt during the coding and analysis of the data were real, and affected

the way I categorized the stories. A distinct feature of this qualitative study was my ability,

as the researcher, to allow the data to transpire as the research and writing were developing.

I summarized the key themes found based on the meanings I extracted from both the

participants' responses and my story.

Setting

Because this is an autoethnography, my personal, educational, and work settings set

the stage for my story about the culture of student affairs. I grew up in a middle class, White,

Christian neighborhood in Minnesota, United States. My education and work backgrounds

both took place at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) in the Midwest region of the

United States from 1987 to 2006. I received my Bachelor of Science degree in studio art at a

university with just over 5000 students, and my Masters of Education degree in educational

leadership at a Midwestern institution double the size of my undergraduate school. Upon

graduating with my Masters, I worked for two years at a very small, private, liberal arts, religiously-based college. I followed that experience with working for almost ten years at a four-year, large, research-focused, public university.

Participants

I am the primary participant for this autoethnography and the university community members serve as secondary participants. The following describes my background, and I provide a brief overview of the university community members to maintain anonymity.

About Me

I was born in 1968, and put up for adoption by my biological teenage parents. I was adopted by my parents and raised in a Catholic household, attending Catechism every Wednesday and Sunday until I graduated from high school. My mother stayed home to care for my younger brother and me until I was age 11; then she went to work full-time. My dad started his own home business around that same time. My parents divorced while I was a sophomore in high school. My mother moved out, and married my stepfather during my senior year in high school. My stepfather has two daughters, and a son. My mother gave me the high school graduation gift of hiring a private investigator to find out information about my biological parents. During my first semester in college, my mother came to visit me and read a letter my biological father had written. I was blessed to meet my biological parents when I was 18. They are married, and I have a biological younger sister who has a daughter. I am reasonably close to all of my family who all live in Minnesota. As I write this all of my parents are reasonably healthy, along with my biological maternal grandparents, and fraternal grandmother. All of my other grandparents who were part of my life when I was growing up have long since passed away. (Since I originally wrote this section in early July 2012, three

of my biological relatives passed away: my maternal grandmother on July 24, 2012, my sister

on September 20, 2012, and my grandfather on October 5, 2012).

Over-involved undergraduate. I attended an undergraduate college that was

approximately 80 miles away from home and earned a degree in art. I became involved on

campus within the first week of attending college when I was elected to serve as the floor

representative for the residence hall council. Then I was elected by my residence hall to

serve as the residence hall association representative during my second semester as a

freshman. These roles snowballed me into many more leadership roles throughout college:

president of residence hall association, sorority vice president, Panhellenic council president,

Greek council president, homecoming queen, student newspaper advertising director, and

even a radio deejay. During my last year of undergraduate college I was elected to serve as

the Student Senate President. I did all of this while working three different part-time jobs.

While I had every intention of becoming an art director or creative director for an

advertising agency, my love of organizations and involvement often distracted me from that

dream; not because of relationships, but because the only coursework I felt confident in was

art. The other courses just did not seem to click, and professors' lectures seemed to fly over

my head during classes.

Redefining my career path. After graduating with my Bachelor of Science degree

in art I believed that I would be automatically given the opportunity to be a creative director

for an advertising agency. Because I was involved on campus and held many leadership

positions, I was certain I would get hired because I did everything according to the books.

Alas, the world was in turmoil as a result of the Gulf War, and I became a furniture sales

person for a year of my life. During this time, I was able to make quite a bit of money, but I

did not feel valued because I was not doing what I believed I should be doing in my life. The ethics of selling furniture also drained my spirit. I did not feel good about taking money from people with poor credit ratings. Thank goodness I had an adviser from my undergraduate college who let me know I could have a career in student affairs. I thank her to this day, and she knows how much I valued her input. She handed me a flyer for a graduate assistantship at a larger university in the Midwest. A few months later, I was living in a different state and working on a Master's degree. My experience at graduate school included working with the Greek community and the campus programming board.

Creating change. During my graduate experience, I volunteered with a national association that links education and entertainment for colleges and universities. I held various leadership positions for over 13 years with this non-profit association, including serving as a member of the board of directors. This was a wonderful opportunity to connect and network with student affairs professionals from around the country.

The professional work begins. After graduating with my Masters, I worked at a small, religious-based liberal arts college as the director of student life. I oversaw the residence halls, programming, and the Greek community for two years. The college went through major financial challenges during this time, closing departments, and eliminating various departments. My department was one of the casualties, and I had to find a new job elsewhere.

Elsewhere. Elsewhere started in 1997, as I began my role as assistant director of student activities at a research-based public university. During my tenure I had many experiences working with students who were growing as people, including some who needed guidance and support to get to their next level. I interacted with students in large groups,

small groups, and one-to-one. I worked with over 600 registered organizations, helped

coordinate major events, and directly advised a number of organizations.

Conclusion. My background information does not touch upon social justice as those

stories will be a part of my research. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) noted: "The process of

transformational learning is firmly anchored in life experience. All human beings have a

need to understand their experiences to make sense of what is happening in their lives" (p.

320). These life experiences informed how I worked professionally in student affairs for 13

years.

University Community Members' Profiles

The commonality between me and the three university community members I

interviewed is that each of us has had a unique experience within the culture of student

affairs. Through this study I identified that all of us innately believe that social justice was

and is an integral role of a student affairs staff member. To maintain anonymity of the

participants I choose to limit the demographic descriptions, as well as any positions held at

higher education institutions.

Both Mina and Gina identify as women, and Stan identifies as a man. All three are

over the age of 30 years old. All three have advanced degrees in education, two are ABD

and one has earned a doctoral degree. The three of them have each worked at least 10-20

years in student affairs. Only two remain in the field of student affairs, and one now teaches

graduate students preparing to enter the student affairs field.

Ethical Considerations

An ethical challenge was that my professional experience is limited to only a few institutions and higher education associations. To maximize anonymity, I used aliases for all students, colleagues, associations, and institutions I mention (Crotty, 2003).

Limitations

Significant personal and observed experiences became richer as I developed my voice through storytelling (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). To stay true to my story, it was important to not censor even the failures I experienced professionally as a student affairs staff member. It would also be a disservice to not discuss how my personal life was altered through the obstacles I faced professionally. According to Ellis (1998):

> A story's 'validity' can be judged by whether it evokes in the reader a feeling that the experience described is authentic and lifelike, believable and possible; the story's generalizability can be judged by whether it speaks to the reader about their [*sic*] experience. (p. 133)

Strategies such as systematic self-observation, field journaling, chronicling, inventorying, as well as data collection from participants' responses and their perceptions of their role in student affairs contributed to the validation and triangulation of data to address these potential limitations.

Validity and Evaluation

A central fact about autoethnography is that the writing process is the primary source from which to obtain data. Because there is not a universal standard for evaluating autoethnography, it will be important for readers to resist the desire to "seek universal foundational criteria lest one form of dogma simply replaces another" (Sparkes, 2002, p. 223). Instead, the evaluation of autoethnography involves a veritable, deep-rooted, and

emotional process of considering the study's emotional and intellectual effects (Richardson, 1995, 1997, 2000). Essentially, the criteria traditionally used to evaluate qualitative research should not necessarily guide the academic review process to judge autoethnography (Garratt & Hodkinson, 1999; Sparkes, 2002). Richardson (1994) suggested the following five criteria for evaluating the quality of autoethnographic studies: "substantive contribution," "aesthetic merit," "reflexivity," "impact," and "expression of reality" (p. 937). An adaptation of Richardson's (2000) personal narrative techniques serves as a reference to determine the validity and evaluation of my autoethnography method:

• How does my study contribute to the understanding of the culture of student affairs in higher education?

• How does this piece succeed aesthetically? Is the text artistically shaped, satisfyingly complex, and not boring?

• How did I come to write this text?

• How does this work affect the reader emotionally and/or intellectually? Does it generate new questions or move the reader to action?

• Does this text include dramatic recall for the readers to "relive" the experience with me? (pp. 15-16)

In addition, Feldman's (2003) criteria informed the validity of my process. Feldman (2003) encouraged researchers to provide detailed research methods of how and what is collected for data in self-study; demonstrate how the data were constructed for representation of the story; define why one source of data was used over another; and why the study itself should be valued and important. The academic review process of autoethnography will

become clearer than it currently is as more members of the academy are willing to challenge themselves within this form of research (Feldman, 2003).

Conclusion

This chapter encapsulated how subjectivist epistemology informed my use of transformational learning and social justice as theoretical foundations for this autoethnographic study. The benefits and constraints of using autoethnography as my research methodology were also discussed. I included information about the university community members who were invited to participate in a 90-minute interview about their perceptions of social justice in student affairs, as well as information about my background and the settings in which I have studied and worked. Design issues were summarized in the final section of this chapter.

In Chapter 4, I present my autoethnography to invite the reader into my lived unique experience. The main purpose of this chapter is not to analyze or interpret but to understand the influence of the inner voice. I reveal the interview responses from key university community members from my past; my reactions are woven within their stories. I consider the results of my research in light of themes emerging from the literature, my autoethnography, and the university community members' interview responses.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In 2005, I sat in my car and cried. Not an ordinary cry; this was a cataclysmic attack of tears streaming down my face. The tension of each drop pressurized as it would be weighted down by another tear. Each tear pooling on my coat. You would have thought I had lost a friend or family member. Instead, it was the culmination of work-related stress. Perhaps, in some ways, this sadness I felt was like losing a family member. (personal communication, December 5, 2009)

My experience working with students in higher education was one I cherish. However, the challenges I had while advocating for a social justice environment on campus were not always positive. In this chapter, I illustrate how my interactions with students and administrators exposed my "ethical consciousness" (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 439) and how these revelations gave me an opportunity to explore the key influences that impacted me as a student affairs professional. Key influences discovered while writing this study were the importance of role models, and campus culture in education and training student affairs professionals to do their job. The purpose of my dissertation research has been to explore the culture of student affairs to gain an understanding of how I reacted to social injustices, and the impact these experiences had on me while promoting equity on campus.

I have used the autoethnographic method to share my story and demonstrate how my experiences in student affairs had an impact on me professionally and personally. While some academics believe that autoethnography as a research method is defiant, perilous, and inventive (Ellis & Bochner, 2006), my observation has been, as I presented my findings

through this subjective journey, that I have been able to explore my involvement in student affairs by using "the control of reason, logic, and analysis" (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 433). Using autoethnography has given me a tool to challenge the status quo. I admit that using my voice in the first person has been accompanied by a degree of risk because it exposed feelings, beliefs, and attitudes. As Tierney (1998) explained, "Autoethnography confronts dominant forms of representation and power in an attempt to reclaim, through self-reflective response, representational spaces that have marginalized those of us at the borders" (p. 66).

As I conducted this research, it provided a basis for me to see, heal, and share my story to help transform future student affairs practice. My story began with this statement, "Let me preface this by saying the story I share has been an emotional one for me as the memories are ones that I would prefer to pack away; instead, I continue to grow from them" (transcribed personal recording, August 21, 2011). My intention has been to share my story, rather than to lay blame on those administrators with whom I worked during my life in student affairs. I continue to have the utmost respect for my former colleagues and acknowledge that they have their own journeys and opportunities to talk about their experiences; this story is only mine. I am telling my story using autoethnography as a way to "confront" how higher education treated underrepresented students and the impact it had on me as a student affairs professional.

The data for this autoethnographic study were obtained from personal memory, blog posts, observations, and higher education community members' interview responses. The higher education community members' stories provided me with a process to reflect upon my own experiences as a student affairs professional. Their words helped me to realize that I was not the only one who believed that student affairs professionals should be social justice

advocates. Social justice was a part of the educational curriculum in our professional

preparation programs, professional development, and professional associations; yet, when we

all advocated for underrepresented students we experienced various forms of oppressive

actions from the hegemonic administration.

In the previous chapter, I described the methodology I used to consider the effect of

social injustices on student affairs professionals. In this chapter, I analyze the results from

my critical self-reflection and higher education community members' interviews to explore

the culture of student affairs. I offer common threads that were revealed during higher

education community member interviews and my own self-reflection: social justice advocacy

in higher education, and the importance of developing coping skills. To remain true to the

autoethnographic method, I discuss how I became a student affairs professional and

characteristics learned from the culture that still affect me professionally. For my research, I

recorded, transcribed, and learned from all three university community members' stories, as

well as my own.

I discovered that my role models significantly influenced how I perceived and

performed my duties as a professional. My role models' informal guidance shaped how I

handled critical incidents, such as the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 and the death

of a student. These overcharged emotional experiences became telltale signs for me that I

did not have coping skills, nor was I taught how to manage the emotional aspects of the job.

My coping skills were taxed because I was unable to act as the idealized superhuman student

affairs social justice advocate that I once thought I was as a professional. Instead, the

culminating event of my life occurred when I observed how students experienced social

injustices. My observations made me aware of how my lack of action and/or inaction took

its toll on me as a result of compassion fatigue and empathic distress. Throughout this chapter, I have used both social justice theory and transformational learning theory as a way to inform my own exploration of the culture of student affairs. My intent in analyzing my own story in this way is to provide a guide for others to inform their own exploration into the culture of student affairs.

Becoming a Student Affairs Professional

If you ever ask student affairs professionals how they chose to be in the profession many would say, "It just happened." There are not many undergraduate students who begin college knowing that they one day want to be a dean of students, director of student life, or a vice president of student affairs. The student affairs profession is considered unique because there are no majors directly associated with it (Taub & McEwen, 2006). When students asked me how I began my work in student affairs, I explained, "I had a great student activities adviser say to me, 'Did you know you could do what I do?' To have someone who I respected as a role model ask, "Did you know you could do this for a career?" had quite an impact on me. Because of that moment, the role of a student affairs professional seemed to appear as if it were a calling for me. I liked the idea of working with students on a college campus.

In addition to going to graduate school to obtain a degree in educational leadership where I studied student development theories to explain (or not explain) why certain things occurred, I gained valuable practical knowledge from on-the-job experience. According to experts in the field, student affairs professionals should exhibit these characteristics: ability to accept differences, selfless concern for others, verity, egalitarian beliefs, collective responsiveness, and self-determination (R. B. Young, 1997). During my time as a graduate

assistant and young professional, in addition to what I learned from my coursework, my work as a student affairs professional was influenced by my interactions with role models, and from finding boundaries between myself as a staff member and the students with whom I worked.

Interactions with Role Models

Role models are prevalent in the culture of student affairs. Each senior student affairs professional, identified as a person in the field for over 10 years, exudes characteristics graduate students, new professionals, and mid-level professionals hope to inherit and mirror during their careers. The endless hours of programming, late night meetings, and bringing work home were all a part of the student affairs package. Role models seemed to do everything--from early morning meetings, to late night programs, to volunteering for leadership roles in student affairs associations—that I believed made up the life of a student affairs professional. A role model can be a mentor, consultant, adviser, and reference (Schmidt & Wolfe, 2009).

My role models, supervisors, and instructors provided me with the knowledge of what I would do and say as a professional. The advice was a foundation for the steps I would take as I carried out my role as a student affairs professional. The challenge was that no one is ever fully prepared as a young professional and the knowledge I had was based upon what my role models said and did and the primarily hegemonic policies in higher education. Because of the foundational practices in higher education, it is hard to create the change necessary to meet the needs of current students (M. J. Chang, 2002).

My role models helped guide me through many of the challenges I had as a student affairs professional. I consider myself blessed to have had people who seemingly cared

about me and my welfare: their support helped me find my spirit as a student affairs professional. My spirit was to always be there for the students, no matter what the issue. My role models' willingness to share knowledge with me was something I took very seriously. As Schmidt and Wolfe (2009) explained, "The role model provides the new professional with standards of behavior and professional activity... illustrate[ing] how a professional behaves as well as what a professional does" (p. 372).

As a new professional in my first full-time position, I served as one of the key student affairs staff members for a small private liberal arts religiously-affiliated institution in the Midwest. I learned that not all professionals work at the same pace, nor do they all remember that the students should be the primary focus. What I took away from this position is summarized in the following story,

> As a new professional, …I had a supervisor who I felt was incompetent. The Vice President on campus was a role model of mine and I talked to him—you know I was a young professional just out of graduate school; I was trying to figure out what was going on. And I ended up talking to him about how I felt about my supervisor and he basically said, "Laura, your job is to make that person look good. We know you're doing the good, we know you're doing the right thing because we know you are supporting the students, we know that you're doing all these things but you can't make [your supervisor] look bad."
>
> And so that always stuck with me and that being I always have to support what the administration is doing even if I don't agree with them. (transcribed personal recording, August 21, 2011)

This was an important bit of advice for me because I worked hard. I worked really hard to make sure the departments, staff, and students I worked for looked good. I worked hard to keep the peace. So, when conflict happened between staff, students, or community members, it hit me hard as a professional because in my past I had learned this lesson and made it a part of my mantra. This lesson would continue to make an appearance during my student affairs career.

Because my role models rarely kept standard 40-hour work weeks or took vacations, I perpetuated the practice of overworking because I felt an obligation to mirror my role models' actions. Because of the unspoken promise to always be there for the students, I would have feelings of remorse or guilt when I wanted to do something for myself. Since my role models' mission in life seemed to be only to serve students, I believed that should be my life as well. As a result, I had to disregard taking care of myself. Thus, I lost "my personal sense of self in relation to my work self" (Schmidt & Wolfe, 2009, p. 374) because of the choice I made to emulate my student affairs role models. The loss of my personal self would become so intolerable that I masked it by working even harder as a professional to take on more projects, tasks, events, and roles.

One of the most difficult things I experienced was when I shared an issue facing the students with my role models and they did not see the issue the same way as I did at the time. It was difficult not to have my role model's support. It was difficult not to know what to do. Do I help the students and deal with the ramifications of displeasing my role models? Or do I take a step back? Defining the boundaries and playing within them was something I had to experience.

Finding the Boundaries

I worked with many different students, faculty, and staff in my second professional position. It was at a large public higher education institution in the Midwest, and finding my footing was sometimes perilous. The previous institutions at which I had worked were a microcosm of what I would experience at this large institution. Everything was bigger, even the lessons. One lesson resulted when I advocated for a controversial new student organization,

My name started getting dragged in the mud and my supervisor at that time said, "You have got to be careful who you advocate for because it always can bite you back. It always can sneak up on you."

He went on to tell me, "You can trust students but you can't trust them all the way," or something to that effect. And I mean the advocating for students really came into play for me because my supervisor I considered a pretty strong advocate for students--but to [my supervisor] there's a difference between advocating and sharing too much information with them. You can advocate for them but you have to be careful because you're still an administrator. And so that was difficult for me because during my experiences as an undergrad I had a few advisers who were very open with me about what decisions were being made by the upper administration.

Anyway what my supervisor at that time was trying to teach me as a professional is that I really have to be careful, what I do and how I choose which battles to fight. Which is very cliché but it's very true. (transcribed personal recording, August 21, 2011)

The role of a student affairs staff member is larger than the traditional administrator role. Student affairs staff exist on campus to help students by providing support. As N. J. Evans and Reason (2001) stated, "In addition to being service providers and educators, to truly be effective, student affairs professionals must explicitly embrace the roles of student advocate and social justice activist" (p. 376). It was an expectation to be there as a staff member for *all* students. Not just one. Not just the majority--*all* students. Mina stated during her interview,

> There's a handful of experiences where I've been asked, "Are you a
>
> professional or are you an advocate?" And my answer was always, "Yes." So
>
> for me it was a student affairs professional is an advocate of students, and
>
> there are many opportunities to teach others that have been in the field longer
>
> than me. That's the way it needs to be. That's the way it always needed to
>
> be. (transcribed interview, August 5, 2011)

I identified myself as an advocate for students, even when the role of advocate would damage my professional reputation with senior administrators on campus--I knew that I was trying to make a difference. Overall, my experience as a student affairs professional was one of the most incredible gifts I could have ever asked for as a person. Over seven years ago, I attended a student rally on our campus. I was in the background watching one of my student leaders speak, feeling a great deal of pride in what she was doing as an individual to help make a difference in the world. One of my other students, who happened to be a graduating senior, looked at me and said, "What's up?" I just smiled and said how proud I was of the event and what the students were accomplishing at the rally. He smiled and said, "You taught us how to do this, Laura." That comment brought tears to my eyes. I can honestly say

that at that moment I knew I was doing the right thing with my life. I recognized that moment proved that I was making a positive impact on students. Many times, over the years, I would question myself, but when a student smiled and looked at me and said, "You helped me…," that made every other moment worth my time. The knowledge that I had made a difference was more special than anything else I could have possibly imagined in my life.

Finding the boundaries between being a student advocate and a student affairs professional was no easy task. I sought my role models' advice to help guide me in determining what would be right or wrong. As a student affairs professional, I would learn how my action or inaction might change students' experiences. My role as a student affairs professional was one of privilege because I had a choice to ignore what was happening to the students, whereas the underrepresented students did not. The following sections will illustrate the positives and negatives of choosing to be an advocate for students as a student affairs professional.

Social Justice Advocacy in Higher Education

My story, along with the responses of higher education community members, underscores the importance of how social justice was (and still is) infused within the culture of student affairs. As a student affairs professional, I developed skills to identify students' needs and advocate for them. I learned how to be a critical and reflective thinker able to use my life experiences and my role models' direction to become adept at facilitation, collaboration, and conflict resolution.

With my own understanding of social justice theory I am able to connect my empathic response to students facing inequities in a campus environment. My personal reflection and self-analysis showed the importance of social justice in guiding my

professional and personal life. Through my research, I have learned that if the culture of an organization or institution embodies a social justice atmosphere where the existing attitudes, perceptions, and expectations are inclusive and desegregated with respect to the "structural (faculty/staff/student), psychological (racialized perceptions), and behavioral (social and academic engagement) climate" (Hurtado, et al., 1999, p. 19), the culture will provide a welcoming and supportive environment in which underrepresented students will succeed. One person cannot make it happen on his or her own.

My assumption that social justice is a core principle of student affairs was validated through my interviews with higher education community members. The stories in the following sections revealed the infusion of social justice in student affairs professionals' work with students, staff, and events. They saw it as part of the purpose of higher education, which was carried out by remembering the role of social justice on campus, acknowledging privilege, becoming an advocate, establishing a line between advocate and administrator, evoking institutional change, and creating an equitable environment.

The Role of Social Justice on Campus

The need for a just campus environment is essential as student populations continue to expand with regard to the inclusion of people underrepresented in U.S. society on the basis of ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, disabilities, gender identity, and low socioeconomic status (Williams et al., 2005). The mere recognition of social justice and inclusion in a campus mission statement has not been enough to achieve a successful and equitable change in the campus environment (Williams et al., 2005). Because of the change in demographics of the U.S., it is in the best interest of higher education to transform the homogenous campus environment to better prepare students for the changing workforce (Williams, et al., 2005).

As a student affairs professional, I believed my job was to help students get prepared for their post-graduation life. I looked to my supervisors and colleagues for information on how to help create and maintain an inclusive environment in which all students could succeed. I respected each one of my interactions with senior administrators, my colleagues, and most of all students. Whether it was sharing information with students, supporting administrators, or learning when to advocate, the people I respected as my role models were my teachers. They taught me how to develop a socially just campus environment.

Part of the data I collected for this study from my interviews with my colleagues centered on their experiences with social injustices within the culture of student affairs. When I asked the question, "How do you view the role of social justice on campus?" of Stan, one of the university community members I interviewed, he stated,

> And one of the fundamental ways to make a positive learning environment is to make sure it is one that is just, to make sure it is one that acknowledges everyone and helps them know about, celebrate, and take advantage of the success that their multiple identities bring to a college campus. And there probably is not – there probably is not a role on campus more responsible for that than student affairs, save perhaps ideally the president, who should be establishing that as a priority for any college campus.
>
> But, you know, in some ways, I see student affairs as being both the conscience and the social worker of a college campus. And again, we– because of that, we cannot be absolved from our responsibility to advocate– to be advocates for all students, regardless of their background, regardless of their identities, regardless of what challenges they bring or what gifts they

have. And if there's any place that it belongs on a college campus, it is

within the field of student affairs. (transcribed interview, August 4, 2011)

When I asked Gina the same question, she said,

I think that is actually their whole purpose. I mean in whatever function area

or whatever job you are in, you should still be working toward making sure

every student has a just experience or feels at home and welcome in the place,

like even if it is in housing, if it is in financial aid. I mean everybody should

be working to be sure that this is happening, that social justice is occurring.

(transcribed interview, September 28, 2011)

Mina explained her reaction to the question,

Well, because it is student affairs professionals, our fundamental purpose in

being on college campuses is students, so the role of a student affairs

professional is to be that social justice advocate for students. And it might be

for an issue that visibly we can see students need help with, or it might be

something that students do not know anything about. It could be that policies

and procedures from a student affairs professional's prospective are

problematic. It is our role as student affairs professionals to identify, criticize

in a constructive way, and correct it. So whether the student knows about it or

not, we should be advocating from a social justice framework constantly.

Because we're about students! Not just what students raise their hand and say

they need–what we can recognize administratively we need to be providing.

So as student affairs professionals, we will be a voice for students on behalf of

students as well as with students. (transcribed interview, August 5, 2011)

Many student affairs professionals, like Stan and Gina, would state that student advocacy was an essential part of their role on campus even though it was not acknowledged in philosophical statements (N. J. Evans & Reason, 2001). Student affairs professionals are also considered social justice experts to develop equitable campuses (Caple, 1996; Sandeen & Barr, 2006).

Being an Advocate for Students

Establishing a safe and equitable environment by supporting students is a part of the student affairs culture (American Council on Education, 1937; American Council on Education, Committee on Student Personnel Work, 1949). However, when student affairs professionals advocate for students, they may not always be supported by the upper administration (Harrison, 2010). The student affairs culture and professional associations embrace social justice (N. J. Evans & Reason, 2001), yet when change has to occur on campus–are the administration and other shareholders supportive?

On several instances as a student, I would learn about potential conflict long before the upper administration had planned to share it with us, the students. I often wondered why I would learn about these incidents; now I believe it was because the advisers knew I would act strategically to address them. And whatever the upper administration was doing, my undergraduate adviser, who was a role model for me, would always share what was happening. Whether it was right or wrong for him to share the information with me from a higher administration point of view is a question to consider—however, he shared whatever he felt was appropriate to share with me as a student. Most of the time the information shared pertained to decisions made that would affect the students on campus. Thus, when I was a student, this person taught me that the students were the primary focus.

During my time as a student affairs professional, I almost always interacted positively with students, and staff would say that I always put the students first. I owe a lot to those first staff members with whom I interacted so long ago as an undergraduate. They taught me that students were the basis for which an institution existed and student affairs professionals existed to help students. As I worked on the literature review for this study, I learned similar lessons from the history of student affairs in higher education. Part of the student affairs tenets were attributed to Dewey's (1902) declaration:

> The child [student] is the starting-point, the center, and the end. His [her] development, his [her] growth, is the ideal. It alone furnishes the standard. ...we must take our stand with the child [student] and our departure from him [her]. It is he [she] and not the subject-matter which determines both quality and quantity of learning. (pp. 13-14)

Essentially, the student affairs profession was developed to help students (American Council on Education, 1937). Because of pressures from senior administration, the profession of student affairs has often had to stifle student protests and the students' demands for institutional change instead of supporting the development of individual students on campus (Gaston-Gayles et al., 2004). The difference between helping students progress and develop and preventing them from creating change is a tenuous one. This is because students may begin to resist help and support from student affairs professionals if they are continuously facing bureaucratic roadblocks. Thus, when student affairs professionals provide their support, students may choose not to listen and face consequences (e.g., canceled programs, lack of staff/financial resources) from higher administration on campus. Administrators have the power and privilege of their position over the students on campus

(Hurtado, et al., 1999). Therefore, the relationship built on trust between students and administrators is a tricky one. One of the issues student affairs professionals may need to deal with is supporting students who are promoting social justice on campus. These students may experience the negative consequences associated with challenging traditional hegemonic systems (Harrison, 2010). As demographics continue to change, so will the need to be proactive at creating and enhancing a campus environment to meet the needs of a different and diverse student population, rather than a homogeneous one (Woodard, 1998). Student affairs professionals will need to consider their own privilege in order to help support the evolving student body through these challenges (Broido & Reason, 2005).

Acknowledging Privilege

This autoethnography allowed me to examine and recognize where I found my role with regard to social justice. The act of self-reflection proved to be critical when learning how my personal beliefs were connected to my public behaviors, which in turn helped inform my future actions when striving for social justice (Brown, 2006). One of the lessons I learned as an undergraduate was that underrepresented people get treated like--shit. Perhaps some of these feelings were acknowledging how privileged I was, and am, as a White heterosexual Christian student in the Midwest.

When I was an undergraduate, I did not know what privilege was because--to be honest--everything around me seemed quite acceptable as a teenager. I was lucky to live where I lived, and go to a decent high school, and have people around me who cared about my well-being and me. I did not have much to hide, other than being a moody teenager who attempted to live a normal life. Going to college, I believed it would always be that way. I knew nothing differently, so why would my world change? How terribly naive of me.

As you may recall, in Chapter 1 of this dissertation I told of a hate-filled chalking incident that I experienced as an undergraduate. Learning from that hurtful incident, I stepped up to advocate for the gay and lesbian students on my undergraduate campus,

I was involved; I was over-involved. And so I seriously took an active stance advocating for the student group to be able to secure funding in order to inform other people about lesbians and gays... It was hard because I was advocating for something that my faith was not in support of ... I was raised Catholic, and practiced Catholicism throughout parts of college and then I just kind of stopped going. And you know when I think about it, when I reflect back on that, I actually kind of wonder if it had something to do with priests or the Pope not exactly accepting the people who I cared for and about at that time.

Anyway, so what I did was when the student leader for that group came to me, and I'm actually kind of still friends with this person, with her, and came to the student government and requested funds, I actually advocated for them, and it was a significant deal. And probably within 24 hours or 48 hours, the alumni association president at the time essentially called the student government and he said the institution was going to lose all kinds of funding because of this incident. I mean this is what I remember and I mean I was young, I was 19, 20 at the time, but I remember this respected person on campus mainly telling us that we should not fund a student group that was educating other people about what lesbian and gay is.

It was not promoting it; it was not saying, "Come on and become gay." It was literally just, "Hey we exist, we're not going to all of a sudden come on to you, and we are nice people." It was okay. Like it was okay, and it was brochures, it was printed things because the internet had not quite become a part of the higher education culture then. And shortly thereafter letters to the editor started appearing in our student newspaper basically really crucifying, and I'm using that [word], crucifying our students who were gay and lesbian and the allies (I did not know that word existed when I was an undergrad), and the allies that supported them. My name got used quite a bit of the time saying that I was going to hell because I was supporting my friends. And it hurt.

When you are young it seriously impacts you, and I lost a lot of respect for that institution. I honestly stuck my neck out. And there were only a few student affairs folks who seemed to encourage me at the time. Needless to say, the student government did fund the student group, which was great. The student leader [from the gay/lesbian organization] and I, during [our] senior year, we both received the [name of the institution's most prestigious award] on that campus for outstanding student leadership. I was proud of that because I was receiving this honor at the same time as this person who didn't have to reveal [her/his] sexuality or sexual orientation but [she/he] felt as if [she/he] had to in order to help other students become who they are and feel free and comfortable being able to determine who they are.

So it was hard, but I mean I remember alumni writing these nasty

letters to the student newspaper's letter to the editor saying, "You know the

student government's going to hell and I'm going to take all my money away

from this institution." I mean that's what I remember from that time.

(transcribed personal recording, August 21, 2011)

This story was a strong indicator of how I would address future life challenges

surrounding social injustices. I was a member of the majority on campus. I was not a

lesbian, I was not an atheist, I was not Black or Latino, I was just me--a privileged, White,

heterosexual, Catholic. Being a part of the majority meant--whatever my actions were--as

long as I did not disrupt the hegemonic systems in place, I was overlooked and a part of the

campus norm. Because of my privileged status, as a member of the majority, many of my

actions could have been considered attempting to disrupt the existing power structures on

campus, even as an undergraduate.

The only difference between being an undergraduate and a student affairs advocate

was that as a professional I was paid to help students. My innocence from my youth

continued as I always thought that nothing could be so hate-filled as vandalizing a

celebration for students on campus. The campuses I was a member of intentionally promoted

diversity as being a part of campus, and each student was viewed as sacred, honored, and

important to the mission (M. J. Chang, 2002; Lowery, 1998). However, the social reality

was that higher education often promoted and perpetuated social injustices (Osei-Kofi, et al.,

2010). Mina shared,

When I was a freshman in college I had some awful experiences happen to

me. I didn't know that student affairs professionals were out there to help me.

And so, for me, professionally taking a stand to address social injustices in higher education has given me the opportunity to find a voice for myself in situations that I experienced but also for others. So far it has helped me understand a systematic and systemic inequity. And then also to find–to understand--ways to interrupt that and address it. (transcribed interview, August 5, 2011)

The university community members' responses acknowledged how higher education provided a hierarchal structure that encouraged those privileged enough to keep power on campus (Osei-Kofi, et al., 2010). The ability to identify how we perpetuate privilege through these structures helped me to learn that my role as an administrator helped me to liberate myself from my past in order to find my voice as a social justice ally (Broido & Reason, 2005). Part of understanding privilege was to recognize that social injustices are happening on campus (and in the community). The act of breaking down the formal and informal structures of privilege and power helped create the transformational change necessary for me to promote inclusion. As a student affairs professional, the ability to identify and recognize privilege was one of the steps to understanding how underrepresented students experience campus life in and outside of the classroom (Broido & Reason, 2005).

Becoming an Advocate

From my years as an undergraduate student to my last year as a student affairs professional, I found that advocating for equity on campus was one of my major drives. It played a role in everything I did as a person, even though I maybe was unaware of it. I only started to accept the importance of social justice to me when I returned to finish my doctoral degree as a full-time student. Taking courses in social justice and having a discussion with

my peers helped me begin to understand how deeply I felt that all students (and people)
should be treated equally. My commitment to students is reflected in the words of bell hooks
(1994), who stated,

> To educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can
> learn. That learning process comes easiest to those of us who teach who also
> believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred; who believe that
> our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and
> spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares
> for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary
> conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin. (p. 13)

My commitment to social justice was evident through my recorded and transcribed self-
reflection. The ability to express and share my experience in student affairs provided an
authentic voice to my research. I was not taught how to be a social justice advocate; I only
did what was right for students. It was not only the story; it was also the dedication I had to
make things right on behalf of the students.

While working at an institution, I received an award deemed the [name of person]
Ally Award. For a few reasons, I was surprised to be receiving the recognition. First, it was
the inaugural year, and I had never heard of the award prior to 2000; second, who would
have thought I would receive such an honor as to be the first recipient of this institution's
[name of person] Ally Award. The writer of my nomination letter stated, "Laura lives and
breathes the term 'ally.' It is part of who she is. Whether it is attending a program or
developing personal relationships with students, Laura works hard to support and empower
all" (personal communication, January, 2000). The invitation to the award ceremony stated,

"[Name of institution] is very fortunate to have you on staff. Your efforts have made a difference to the LGBT community" (invitation letter, January 18, 2000). I later learned my supervisor at the time had nominated me, and I was honored with the recognition as an advocate for students. Because of this recognition, I began to realize the conscious decision to engage in knowing and understanding that I was as a social justice advocate and how my actions and leadership impacted the campus environment. Students looked to me for guidance/support, and being an advocate was not just a duty to me; it was ethically a choice to do what was right for all.

The Balance between Advocate and Administrator

One of the many complexities of being a social justice advocate while being a campus administrator is the boundary built between the hegemonic administration and the needs of underrepresented student populations wanting to attend college and study in an equitable environment (M. J. Chang, 2002; Edwards, 2006). It is difficult to break down oppressive structures if student affairs professionals do not feel supported in their attempt to create an inclusive atmosphere.

During my tenure as a student affairs professional I would often feel conflicted between being an advocate and administrator. When asking the university community members about this issue (i.e., "Do you recall a time when you took a stand toward social justice on campus, and if yes, what happened, and how did you feel afterwards?"), Stan spoke about his experience after a candlelight vigil following Matthew Shepard's death,

> But I also remember feeling afterward that it was very, very, in some ways,
> discouraging, or it was–it was a shame that we had to spend as much energy
> as we did being careful, and being political, and being worried about how we

would be perceived by the powers that be or the [institution's governing council] or the [upper administration], when in fact, 100% of our focus should have been on the issue at hand, on the issue of equity and equality and safety, and drawing attention to what had been this huge social injustice that could as likely have happened on our campus as the University of Wyoming.

And I remember, yeah, having a sense of satisfaction that we've done some of this right and that we've made some of the right moves. And you know, I still can close my eyes and imagine being at that podium, that dark night at the [landmark on the institution's campus], seeing hundreds of candles, people outstretched toward the [student union building], and just almost having to pinch myself to believe that we had been able to bring that many members of our community together and how terrific that was.

And yet, at the same time, some sense of being disillusioned at having had to worry so much and be so careful, especially in an environment of free enquiry, especially in an environment where our job is to be social justice educators. It just–there was a weird sort of irony there for me that led [me to question] if we did do the work that we needed to do and why we probably could have done it better, in hindsight. It was odd that we had to work so hard at it from a position of being worried that we might do the wrong thing or offend the powers that be. (transcribed interview, August 4, 2011)

It is discouraging to see how unsupported Stan felt on a campus that acts as if it is accepting of all. The institution promoted itself as a diverse environment; yet, Stan, a student affairs professional, felt threatened after hosting a vigil for a young person who was brutally

murdered because he was gay. Why was it that, on this campus, it was not considered a

certainty that a student affairs administrator would be a part of a vigil for Matthew Shepard?

Did the senior administration somehow sense that if a student affairs professional advocated

for this gay student and against this hate crime the campus would somehow be promoting an

inappropriate image to the general public? It is essential for student affairs to be proactive in

addressing the diverse needs of students on college campuses (N. J. Evans & Reason, 2001;

Upcraft, 1998), such as demonstrating solace for GLBT students and the campus community

through a candlelight vigil memorializing a young person like Matthew Shepard.

Evoking Institutional Change

Higher education, as a social institution, has been instrumental in "perpetuating and

maintaining the system [of oppression]" (Edwards, 2006, p. 40). The culture of higher

education has multiple levels: surface level visible elements such as brochures, commercials,

etc.; thoughts and actions represented through the myths, symbols, and traditions like well-

known stories, graduation, etc.; commonplace organizational processes and behavioral

patterns; espoused values and beliefs that reflect the embedded values and beliefs of the

institution (Williams, et al., 2005, pp. 10-11). The challenge when creating change in higher

education is to recognize that transformation is much deeper because of those multiple levels

along with the administrative hierarchies maintained by both faculty and administrators

(Williams, et al., 2005).

Many issues that affect student affairs staff include the students' perceptions of how

upper administrators attempt to solve diversity as a problem, rather than consider it as an

opportunity (Aguirre & Martinez, 2007). Student affairs professionals who promote social

justice on campus are working to dismantle the hegemonic systems that maintain this negative view of diversity (Edwards, 2006). Gina shared an experience about taking a stand,

> I remember working with [name of Black student organization], and when [name of student] was the president, and they were trying to get ready for [Swahili name used for the event] graduation ceremony. And there was this big conflict about whether or not–or how, not whether or not, but how to include Latino students in the ceremony. And so it was, again, going back to this issue of fighting between us for small resources, the [name of Black student organization] pretty much begged, borrowed, and stole in order to be able to put this event on.

> And when they kind of put their foot down and like "this is [name of event], which is a Swahili word. This is what is gonna be–anybody's welcome to participate, but we're not changing the event to, you know, make it something different. It's a [name of Black student organization] event, and we want it to be that way." But when they were challenged to make it more inclusive, they're like, "you can be a part of it, but it's still gonna be what it is." So when they decided to put their foot down, and I backed them in it, I was given the direction to pretty much calm the kids down and help them understand why they're wrong.

> And I'm like, "No, I don't think they're wrong and I'm gonna back them on this. And this is the way they feel, and this is why." Then all of a sudden, all of this money comes falling out of the sky to put on this other event that was like a more inclusive student of color graduation. Within

hours, literally hours, there was all this money from all these different places

to put on this other event. When, since I graduated in '99 the first time, the

event had been funded by students going to beg, borrow, and steal.

And so that was very, very frustrating to me, and I really felt

disheartened after that. It was kind of like, "Man, it's clear that we can make

what we want to happen, happen on this campus. And if you don't do it–if

you choose to stay behind and stand behind what you want and do it the way

you think it should be, then be ready to just get left behind and be okay with

it." I won't say left behind, but they're gonna move on around you anyway.

That was very aggravating and frustrating on the one hand, but I was very

proud of the students for sticking with their convictions and moving forward,

even when it was not a popular thing to do, and they got a lot of pressure to

change their minds. (transcribed interview, September 28, 2011)

This example demonstrated how when students felt systematic oppression, the upper

administrators attempted to solve a problem by putting money towards it. However, the issue

itself was never resolved because the administration chose the "conscious or unconscious

action" (Edwards, 2006, p. 40) to avoid the overall encompassing subject of oppression on

campus. Diversity was considered an issue and was hidden from students. Mina explained,

I do not think that higher education is an ivory tower anymore, and I think we

need to stop perceiving it as such. The solutions are not going to be just

campus based. They are going to be state and federal and local and global,

and the quicker that we all recognize how our decisions affect equity

everywhere, the better. But it does get exhausting. It does. "I can't do

everything." Yes, but you can do something, so we have to remember that it

isn't just within an institution. It's our connection to the environment, our

connection to the community, and our relationship with the world. It's a big

blue marble. (transcribed interview, August 5, 2011)

Diversity is challenged on an individual basis, instead of evoking change institutionally

(Aguirre & Martinez, 2007). If higher education changed the use of the word diversity from

a "window-dressing" (Aguirre & Martinez, 2007, p. 73) and a problem, to an approach that

truly challenged the homogenous values of the institution, social justice would be infused to

the core of the institution. Then, campuses could be considered as responsive environments

choosing diversity as a "desired feature in organizational structure" (Aguirre & Martinez,

2007, p. 87).

Many higher institutions have a campus climate audit to assess and recommend

initiatives based on practiced values (Wilcox & Ebbs, 1992). In 2004, the president of the

campus where I worked hired a firm to assess the campus climate. The results of this survey

identified social injustices reported by 48% of the participants who witnessed a hostile

environment towards underrepresented people (Consulting Firm, 2004). Following the

release of this report, the president convened campus-wide committees to address the

participants' campus perceptions. The action plan was to be a part of the institutional

mission and strategic plan. I served on the student affairs sub-committee to develop an

action plan. I felt as if I was making progress for underrepresented students on campus. I

believed that the action plan would help make critical changes for improving the campus

climate. Those action plans were submitted to the president in 2005; and the president added

a supplementary report a year later. I left student affairs in November 2006.

Six years later, other than a website linking to the original reports there is little to show what has been accomplished to dismantle social injustices on campus. There is not a progress report; nor has there been a follow-up survey to see if the campus has altered its practices. There is a difference between communicating core institutional values (Lowery, 1998) and practicing socially just values. Until institutions take a critical look at their hegemonic policies, procedures, and practices we will not be able to break the Eurocentric traditions in higher education. Underrepresented students will continue to be the primary casualty, followed closely by those student affairs professionals who dedicated their lives to supporting students (Williams et al., 2005). The diverse populations of people continue to grow and along with increasing numbers, the needs of underrepresented students also increase (Woodard, 1998). If higher education is unwilling to systematically adapt its Eurocentric roots to meet the needs of the growing populations of diverse students (Williams et al., 2005) its role as a societal knowledge producer (Apple, 2007) may become insignificant.

Creating an equitable environment should be a campus-wide community issue, and not just an issue for one department or another, as Gina summed up.

So rather than [there] being solidarity across the different groups, we kind of look and compare and worry about who has what, when we don't really try to pay attention to how we're all fighting over a crumb, and why aren't we coming together to figure out we'll have the whole cake. (transcribed interview, September 28, 2011)

Rather than working individually for a cause, social justice advocates strive to work together to bring equity for all, and not just one group or another. Social justice is a moral

principle (Edwards, 2006) because it creates an interwoven common thread between all people, and the world around us. The challenge is finding the right people who want change [social justice] to happen, and work collectively together to make it happen at an institutional level (Allen & Cherrey, 2003).

The Struggle to Create an Equitable Environment

Because student affairs professionals are at the forefront of student support on campus it is crucial to be proactive in the development and maintenance of equitable campus environments. To create, develop, and maintain an equitable campus environment, institutional administrators must understand and accept responsibility for their individual role in oppression (Brown, 2006). The act of perpetuating social injustices rang true in the following story, from one of my experiences as a new professional,

> While supervising campus events I started to see that we put metal detectors up in the [student union] for the African American groups or historically Black fraternities and sororities, but the metal detectors would not go up when we were hosting other events for student groups.
>
> I remember sitting there working one of the nights in the student union and watching people go in through this metal detector for an event hosted by one of the African American student groups. I remember asking my supervisor, well my supervisor's supervisor, "Why do we do that [put the metal detectors out]?" and the person said, "Well, we had an incident a couple years ago and it is really important for us to have it." And then I actually started questioning, "Well, I do not understand why when this student group," which happened to be majority white, "when they have events we do not

require them to have a metal detector or when even our student programming

board would have events that we did not have to have the same metal

detector," and so that really, really, really, seriously bothered me.

And so what I ended up doing was seriously questioning it, and I

think, you know, I remember the first time that we set it up for a student group

that was not historically Black and that the White students were like, "Why do

we have to do that?" Explaining to each student who asked that it is for

everyone's safety. And I mean that was quite small, but it was vital for me

because I—you know sitting in on some of the meetings that I had the

opportunity to get to know some of the African American students on campus

or students of color on campus and recognizing that they did not think they

were being heard and I just think it made it more fair. (transcribed personal

recording, August 21, 2011)

I wondered if the procedure would have continued to exist for just the Black student events

held on campus had I not noticed the differential treatment. Or, would the Students of Color

have recognized how their events were being required to have the metal detectors whereas all

other organizations did not have these security measures in place? It perhaps was not

intended to enforce the security requirement for one group and not another based upon past

events; however, it did not look that way to me as a graduate student.

Perhaps this example would be classified as a micro-aggression on campus. Sue and

Constantine (2007) defined a micro-aggression as "commonplace daily verbal, behavioral or

environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile,

derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color" (p. 271). While the

staff did not know they were acting in a biased manner, it was happening subtly as an unconscious act towards Students of Color (DeAngelis, 2009). Speight and Vera (2004) explained, "Oppression is structural, not the result of a few people mistreating others" (p. 112). If student affairs professionals are to promote equitable environments for students (Woodard, 1998) and serve as social justice allies (Jenkins, 2009; Reason & Broido, 2005), it will be decisive for campuses to identify and remedy any social inequities, and recognize the importance of the "complexity of the diverse social environment" (Hurtado, et al., 1999, para. 19) to create an equitable environment for students.

There was no correct solution when continually working and reworking the relationships between the students and administrators on campus; in particular, when the students believed their campus experience was being shunted by social injustices. They would come to me as a student affairs professional for advice on how to handle these issues. To become a stronger advocate, I needed to learn and understand the privileges I had as a student affairs administrator, who happened to be White, Euro-American, Christian, and heterosexual. However, the greater issue was how to handle my role as administrator and advocate without having the daunting feeling that I could lose my job if I took a stand against the hegemonic policies and procedures that were being played out on campus.

If the role of a student affairs professional was to create and maintain an equitable environment, it was an effort that would often go unrewarded because of the unwavering attitudes and ideologies of the administrators and faculty who were unwilling to transform themselves and the institution to recognize the changing needs of college students (Dey & Hurtado, 2005). In response to an intensive social justice experience with a group of students, Mina shared this story,

So that was a time when I tried to take a stand and help students understand

how much power they have and how much influence they have. The young

women said they would never do that again; they thought it was a horrific

experience. That broke my heart because I could not control that for them.

And afterwards I felt just beaten up. [I] did not feel like we were successful

and it was probably mid-semester the next semester when I asked my

supervisor and we were reflecting on it and he asked me what I would do

differently. I had a few things that I would probably do differently now, but

not much.

And he asked me how I felt about it and I said, "I just feel defeated."

And he very adamantly responded with, "Are you kidding? What do you think

would happen if the [campus housing department] had another mural or poster

or a flyer come up in the res house? Do you think that they would not respond

right now if another one came up?" And I went, "Oh, no. They would

probably take care of it, would not they?" And he said, "That's what you did."

Oh. I did not feel good about it because it did not feel good for the

students. Yeah, okay, so the [campus housing department] is going to check

themselves now, but the resolution for the students, from the learning

experience for those students, was not good. So that did not feel good to me.

But that was a big one. (transcribed interview, August 5, 2011)

Mina noted that although the students' actions were well-intended, their overall experience

defeated them as social justice advocates; yet, the interactions with the campus housing unit

led to the unintended reward of a reevaluation of policies and procedures. It was Mina's self-

reflection and dialogue with a colleague that helped transform the social justice loss for the students to one of possible change since a department on campus would hold themselves accountable for future actions. To come to terms with how the students' frustration created another viable action for Mina helped to give meaning to my experiences with social injustice on campus and how each problem provided another opportunity for growth. Even though the students felt defeated, Mina's immediate supervisor helped her to reflect more positively on the experience. As I reflected on Mina's story, I thought about similar social injustices and how I hoped to have the same supervisory support; however, each failure began to wear me out as a student affairs professional.

A number of years ago I discussed a social justice issue with my supervisors, upper administrators, and student center staff about the religious symbol of a cross being present in the chapel and Christmas decorations displayed in the student center building during the month of December. I explained how these Christian symbols were not inviting to all of the religions represented on campus. I talked about Muslim students from one of the organizations I advised, Jewish students I helped with events, and Hindu students in my graduate program, and how they may think about a campus community that embraced Christian holidays/symbols but ignored the non-Christian religions. I referenced how underrepresented students, staff, and faculty felt disenfranchised by these same religious symbols present in the student center building on campus and were expressing their feelings in the student newspaper. I was faced with opposition from the administrative staff with explanations such as, "It is a tradition because it was there when the building was built," and, "It is seasonal to have greenery up during the holiday season." I acknowledged that the building had the cross when it was built in the 1920s; however, the campus community had

diversified since that time. Again, I was met with words like, "Why would we need to change?" The Christmas decorations in the building were considered a custom, and to replace it for the holiday parties that take place during the winter months was considered heresy in the eyes of the staff. In their words, "We could lose Christmas parties if we do not have up the traditional wreaths, holiday lights, and Christmas trees." I found it to be against my own beliefs when asked to help decorate the building for the season. These biased acts of perpetuating the Eurocentric Christian campus filled me with dismay as I believed our job, as student affairs professionals, was to create an equitable campus environment for our students. Needless to say, even though I challenged this hegemonic policy behind closed doors, I made the choice not to share my disagreement with the campus community. To this day, the campus I worked at has the cross in the chapel, and Christmas decorations during the month of December.

I was beginning to grow exhausted by the action of inaction from my student affairs colleagues and role models on campus to promote an equitable environment for our growing diverse campus community. I had to find the meaning of my work alone because my perception was that I had to be an administrator and could no longer be an advocate. Or perhaps it was that I found no one was listening to my concerns about our students. My voice was muted. The critical incident I share in the next section illustrates the boundary separating the needs of our underrepresented student populations and hegemonic administrators found in higher education (Harrison, 2010; M. J. Chang, 2002).

Ending oppression is not an easy task to accomplish by just one social justice advocate. For change to be effective, it must occur at an organizational level (Harrison, 2010). Proactive efforts must be recognized and supported institutionally to end oppressive

acts towards underrepresented students and groups (Edwards, 2006; Reason & Broido, 2005). It will remain vital for student affairs professionals to stay unafraid to challenge the status quo since the focus of higher education has been transforming from a student-centered experience to a "corporate enterprise" (Harrison, 2010, p. 210). Self-preservation is a critical skill for student affairs professionals who advocate for social justice because of the myriad emotional facets involved in fighting for equity and continually being faced with opposition to social change (Harrison, 2010). I turn next to the emotional aspects of student affairs work, which can affect one's ability to advocate for social justice.

Empathic Distress and Compassion Fatigue

Being brave enough to be a social justice advocate for students was one problem, but being prepared emotionally to cope with the wide range of feelings and conflicting challenges that accompanied advocacy was another issue. Empathy is defined as the intuitive awareness of another person's emotional states, and the vicarious affective response to another person (Hoffman, 1978, 1989, 2001). Empathic distress intensifies with the extent of a victim's personal suffering, but empathic distress can become so severe that one's personal distress shifts from the needs of the victim to oneself (Hoffman, 1978, 1989, 2001). For example, Stan reflected, "But I can imagine if I'd stayed in places where it was actually like a voice crying in the wilderness, it could be–it could get pretty hard emotionally" (transcribed interview, August 4, 2011).

My experience of empathic distress was drawn from a number of compelling events shared with students, faculty, staff, and parents while I was a student affairs professional. These events seemed to create an unspoken bond between me and those involved in the critical incidents. The findings reported in this section stem from my personal reflection,

observations, and higher education community members' interview responses. I discuss how

I professionally and personally responded to organizational and institutional administrators'

supportive and unsupportive actions during these events. While these traumatic events are

not directly associated with social justice, the roadblocks created from the empathic distress I

experienced and the layers of compassion fatigue I discovered in these instances are

identifiable in this chapter's section on transformational learning, which in turn affected my

job as a student affairs professional and my ability to handle social injustices with which I

was faced later in my career.

Empathic Distress Roadblocks

The experiences of those who lived through the horrific events of September 11, 2001

were mortifying to many people. This story foreshadows how my spirit was changed by the

traumatic events on that day, and how those issues were amplified when I was working with

students and social injustices on campus. Hoffman (2001) stated, "Empathy can be aroused

when observers picture or read about victims, discuss or argue about victims" (p. 12232).

The characteristics that arise from empathic distress include sympathy, guilt, anger, and

feelings of injustice (Hoffman, 1989). One of experiences to which I am able to connect my

empathic emotions is the terrorist attacks that happened in 2001:

> I remember vividly going to work, being in my cubicle space with an open
>
> door. My partner, at the time, called me and said, "Are you watching
>
> television?" I replied, "No." He exclaimed, "A plane hit the World Trade
>
> Center" [a very tall building in New York City, NY] and I said, "Are you
>
> kidding me, come on." So, you know, the internet had become a vital deal by
>
> 2001 and so I jumped online and tried to get information and could not access

a television and there were about nine of us within the office space that I was in, and we were all trying to find information. Finally, kind of the game room downstairs opened; there was TV, and we watched the news unfold before us.

I just remember being--I mean there are no words. How do you describe seeing a terrorist attack and then thinking about how many thousands of people could be killed just from that impact? And I had a huge event on campus the next day, huge event, like 4,000 people usually attend this event, and lots of student organizations participate in it. And I had to prepare it, and so I go back into the space where this TV is, and kept watching television and then the towers started falling. And one of my students, who I remember particularly vividly, just looked at me, and had tears in her eyes and I remember my face being exceptionally strong. I remember not showing emotion, and she said something like, "Are we going to be okay?" and I said, you know, "Yes, we'll be fine, we're going to be fine, everything's going to be okay."

And I remember thinking in my head, "I am lying right now to this student who I adore." But I decided that I needed to be there for that student and while I could have said what I was thinking or feeling, but I did not think it was the right thing to do.

And on top of it the administration had this momentous meeting like, "Well, we're going to continue everything as planned and everything's going to be fine," and blah blah blah. And it was not fine, it was hard; it was hard

because I had to be there for students, and I could not take care of myself and no one else was taking care of me.

And so that night we had a candlelight vigil, and it was beautiful, I mean it really was, but the new president had just started not more than [a] couple months prior to that as our institution's president. And candles and it is beautiful and there's music and the president walks up, and I could see him out of the corner of my eye and I walked up to him and said "Do you want to speak?" and so I let the student leader know and the president went up and said all these fantastic things. And all I remember was, you know, "Thank God he is there for me." I felt as if the president said things specifically for me so it was kind of like he supported me for what I was going through at the time. And so I was grateful because he kind of helped calm my nerves although he did not know he was doing it; it was very fatherly I suppose.

So I did not sleep that night. I remember that I had to set up the night before this huge event. Everybody kind of had disappeared, I mean the primary student center was kind of like a ghost town that night, classes were not canceled, and the campus was unusually, remarkably quiet. And I just remember having just like--I was so exhausted by the time I got home, but it was so on the news, everything was on the news. It was media, media, media, and so I was experiencing what I saw earlier in the day over and over again, and it was that, you know, like there's no feeling. And I'm raising my hands like this, like you cannot feel it and it just was atrocious; it was an atrocious

feeling. That next day I had to put on my happy face and I wore my

institution gear and institution colors and my nametag and I had to smile.

And, you know, we normally have a lot of student groups, and I'm

saying a lot because I'm not going to put a number on it, but a lot of student

groups participate in this big event and only half of them showed up. And out

of the 4,000 students who normally would come to this event, maybe 2,200,

maybe showed up to it. And I think that is only because it was required for a

class, for a first year class. But the whole day I had to keep my smile on and I

had to be supportive and I had to listen to the students and be there for

students and just have that stoic leader look. And I just remember underneath

just feeling overwhelmed and not knowing how to cope because of those

feelings.

That night after I got done cleaning up and everything I went home

and I literally started getting sick. My body was exhausted and my spirit was

gone and the only emotion I could show was crying. I mean not crying but

just grief; it was just grief and not being able to turn off the television. That

was another big thing for me. And so as we moved forward from that, it was

just hard, it was dreadfully hard. So probably within—you know, I just felt

sick. I had to take two days off of work because my brain was just gone.

(transcribed personal recording, August 21, 2011)

As I reflected about this experience, I recognized that I was suppressing emotions, and this

action started to disrupt how I normally was able to be supportive of the students. Even

though the traumatic events were not happening to me, my concealed emotions waylaid me

from my work as a student affairs professional. Had I let my feelings show to the students,

perhaps my distress would have been not nearly as detrimental to my well-being. I felt as

though I had to be strong for the students. If I had seen my supervisors and role models

exhibit emotions during this time, perhaps I would have felt free to share mine with the

students. Instead, this emotionally charged experience was a precursor to a pattern of events

that began to disrupt me from being helpful in supporting our students. I had to be the super

human able to cope with anything.

When we keep ourselves from connecting emotionally to an incident, individual,

event, or situation, we are dehumanizing ourselves through the act of suppressing our

feelings (Goodman, 2000). At the end of each work day following this event, I would go

home and relive the day over and over in my mind. I would think about the students I

interacted with during events, or how upper administrators seem to exhibit strength during a

campus vigil by not showing emotion. Goodman (2000) explained,

> When we fail to see our common humanity with people we perceive as
>
> different from ourselves, we can more easily ignore their plight. It also allows
>
> us to dehumanize others, seeing them as less than human or unworthy of care
>
> and respect. (p. 1063)

Do key administrators choose to cloak their emotions in order to demonstrate their

role as an institutional leader? Or was this disparity between emotional and

unemotional "embedded values" (Williams, et al., 2005, p. 10) of this institution? Our

society does not train, support, or appreciate people who use their empathic abilities

to help others (Goodman, 2000). Socialization may have played a role in how the

upper administration within the institution chose to cope with the horrific events of

9/11, or perhaps the act of internalizing emotional distress was a way to "better foster and channel their energy" (Goodman, 2000, p. 1065) towards helping the campus community. However, after supporting students and the campus community to heal, I was unable to find solace because of the emotional magnitude of stress I felt following the terrorist attacks. I wanted to help because I began to feel the emotions observed on the victims from the news, and from the stress students exhibited during this time. I literally began to absorb emotions from the students I interacted with on campus and the news I was watching each day. Because of my altruistic nature to help others (i.e., "prosocial behavior," Eisenberg, Fabe, & Spinard, 2006), I learned that empathy and compassion both mean "suffering with another" (Watt, 2005, p. 188). I wanted to help the campus community to grieve, and I did this by helping coordinate a campus candlelight vigil. I thought this event would resolve the whirlwind of emotions that the students were feeling, along with my own. My suffering continued, however, because I started to perceive that to be a student affairs professional, I had to exhibit no emotion during traumatic or stressful events. My role models on campus were not exhibiting any visible emotion during the candlelight vigil, or the campus-wide memorial held for the victims of the terrorist attacks. I perceived, through their actions, that my emotional empathy was not to be shared with the students or other campus community members because the act of being empathic appeared to be unacceptable to the upper administrators.

Layers of Compassion Fatigue

Compassion fatigue is a form of burnout often experienced by caregivers (Figley, 1995a, 1995b, 2002). While compassion fatigue has not officially been associated with

student affairs, I argue that because of the caregiving role that student affairs professionals have for students, they are susceptible to the same symptoms. It is essential to note that the level of empathy exhibited by a caregiver towards the person traumatized increases the secondary trauma and compassion fatigue (Figley, 1995a). Symptoms of compassion fatigue include antipathetic views regarding life, work, loved ones, and others; as well as emotional exhaustion, extreme tiredness, depersonalization, feelings of inadequacies, self-contempt, and low job satisfaction (Figley, 1995a, 1995b, 2002; Nagash & Sahin, 2011; Rank et al., 2009). A caregiver who is exhausted from helping others may be more likely to disconnect their relationships with other people, professionally and personally (Nagash & Sahin, 2011). For me, a disconnection was created when the focus was on my own issues, rather than supporting the students through programming and services. Thus, a student affairs member suffering from compassion fatigue would potentially be unable to perform his or her duties as a professional. To illustrate how compassion fatigue symptoms arise I describe the evolution from critical incident to the emotional repercussions.

The ripple effect of an event. A singular incident has many more layers that affect a student affairs professional than just what is evident on the surface. I discuss an actual event, and how I, as a student affairs professional, responded to it. I then relate how this one incident paralyzed me and served as a precursor to how I began to directly handle incidents that were detrimental to a student, a group of students, and the campus. Eventually my spirit as a professional was damaged.

I begin with a press release, followed by an email I sent, and my critical reflection about the incident eight years later. I discovered these artifacts within my email archives. I have made the words as generic as I am able to ensure confidentiality.

The following was a press release from February 15, 2003:

[name of institution] Police are investigating the death of a [name of institution] student that occurred at approximately 4:30 p.m. on Saturday, February 15, 2003. Officers were dispatched to a parking lot near the [name of campus residence] on the report of a [man/woman] behaving in a suspicious manner. The person had been yelling outside of one of the residence halls and was believed to have had some sort of weapon. The individual then drove into Lot [number] and allegedly made threatening gestures to damage another vehicle.

As officers responded to the scene, the subject drove [his/her] vehicle out of the parking lot and turned north on [name of road]. [He/she] then pulled into a parking stall on the east side of [name of road], outside of [name of campus residence]. Officers approached the vehicle where they observed a [man/woman] slumped down in the driver's seat and holding a shotgun. [name of institution] and [name of city where institution is located] police officers secured the vehicle and discovered the [man/woman] had died of an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound. No foul play is suspected and no other persons were injured.

The [man/woman] has subsequently been identified as [name of student], age [00] of [student's campus address]. [name of institution] directory information indicates [name of student] was a [year in college] from [hometown], majoring in [name of major]. (Press Release, 2003, February 15)

The press release was concise and to the point. It explained who, what, where, when, and that they would investigate the why. In some ways, the press release represented how I was, as a student affairs professional, to portray the incident to the general public. I was the student affairs staff member on duty that weekend to handle any campus emergencies involving students. I was called in to help facilitate the needs of the student(s) involved with the incident. This was the email I filed with the appropriate campus personnel (my supervisors and key institution personnel) on Sunday, February 16, 2003 at 11:27 p.m.:

> Received a phone call as [student affairs personnel on duty] at approximately 4:59 p.m. on Saturday, February 15, 2003 from [name of institution] Police regarding a completed suicide at the [name of campus residence] parking lot. I was requested to go to the [name of campus police headquarters] to meet up with [campus police department head]. Once I arrived on-site, I printed out the [campus directory] information regarding the student, who was unidentified at that point (however, all information at the scene pointed towards [name of student]). I contacted [name of administrator] and [name of upper administrator] in regards to this information, and that I would receive additional information.
>
> I was given the information that was given to the [campus police] and was dispatched to the parking lot at [name of campus residence] area because of a vehicle ([color and make of vehicle]) was driving erratically. Soon thereafter, the then unidentified person died of an alleged self-inflicted shotgun wound ([name of campus police department head] will send out an

official press release). The [sibling], [name of student's sibling], was at the scene, and [name of institution] Police were taking statements.

I did contact [name of counseling department on campus], [name of counselor], in regards to the situation. I later had [the counselor] touch base with [name of campus police chief] with regard to any needs [name of campus police department head] believed needed to occur. I followed-up with [name of counselor] a few times during the evening, especially about [name of student's sibling].

It was decided that it would be best for someone to meet up with the parents who would be arriving at [name of local medical facility] Emergency Room. It was determined that I should meet up with the parents. I contacted [name of administrator] and [name of upper administrator] to let them know that I was going to the hospital to meet up with the parents. ([name of administrator] decided to go to the scene at this point, just in case the parents would show up there).

I arrived at the hospital and met with [names of both parents] in the family consultation room near the Emergency Room. I spent time listening to them and supporting them through this experience. [name of social worker], a [name of local medical center] Social Worker, assisted them as well. I only told them the overview of the information I had been given through [name of institution] Police. [name of the student's sibling] (name of institution student) arrived within 45 minutes and later [the sibling], and [name of the student's other sibling] (local resident) also arrived. [name of the student's

sibling] said [he/she] was at the scene, however [he/she] stated that [he/she] did not look within the car.

They did mention that [name of student] had been seeing a counselor, and that they believed [he/she] was getting better. They did mention that [name of student] seemed to be *upset* this past Tuesday evening (February 11), and that [name of mother] (mother) had eaten dinner with [him/her]. The ex-fiancée [name] was mentioned a few times in regards to some phone calls that may have been made to [name of the student's sibling] and/or the parents. They discussed that [name of student] would have graduated this year.

Once [name of student]'s body arrived at [local medical center], [name of social worker], did bring in a few personal items. The one that solidified that it was [name of student] to the family was a wristwatch (I assumed [name of student] was wearing during this critical incident).

Shortly thereafter, the family's ministers arrived. One of them did go and view the body to officially identify [name of student]. The family decided that they did not want to view the body. We then moved down to the [name of local medical center] Chapel, due to space.

[Name of campus police upper administrator] arrived and gave facts in respect to what exactly happened at the scene. There was a Remington Shotgun recently purchased in the vehicle (a receipt that was timed at 3:38 p.m. was found within the car), a box to the gun, as well as a new box of shotgun shells. That police had arrived on the scene and that [name of student] was hunched over in the car seat. The police were positive that he

did not live through the traumatic injury. [name of campus police upper administrator] then handed them [the parents] [name of student's] wallet. They discussed that there would be a full toxicology report.

The car was towed by [local company] as to make sure that there was no *gawking* [italics added] at the vehicle. The father stated that he did not want the information within the [local student newspaper], as did [name of student's sibling]. [name of campus police upper administrator] let them know that "it is public record because of the police report; however, the newspaper is very gentle with issues regarding self-inflicted incidents."

[Name of administrator] arrived shortly thereafter, and helped in regards to additional questions that the family would have about classwork, notifying professors, and finding out who was heading the research on EKGs with persons within the [name of institution]. There were some questions about Financial Aid as well. [name of administrator] and I let them know that the [name of institution] would assist with any needs.

The parents were mainly concerned about: the car (they would like it junked out as soon as possible) they do not want to see the car and [name of campus police upper administrator] had mentioned that if that is their wish that we can assist with regard to any authorization needed, [name of local student newspaper] and the press in regards to privacy, Student Loans, the professor [name of student] was doing research for, and notifying the professors.

[Name of administrator] let me know that [he/she] had made additional

contact with [name of upper administrator] while [he/she] was at the [name of

campus police headquarters].

[Name of campus police department head] will be submitting a Press

Release shortly. This will have additional specifics and details. (This email is

only to give some information). (personal email communication, 2003,

February 16 at 11:27 p.m.)

The email above was concise and to the point for the higher administrators who would need

the information for any inquiries on campus. It was my role, as the student affairs

professional, to share the information without showing any of the emotions that I was feeling

during the experience. Underneath, I was reeling from the event. Eight years later, this

incident continues to be at the forefront of my learning experiences as a professional. I

recognized how emotional it was for me to interact with the family in such a personal

manner. Having the direct experience of being present when a family learns the traumatic

way their loved one passed was and still is beyond words for me.

As I critically reflected about this incident, I recognized how my experiences were

impeding my ability to find a balance between my personal and professional life. Critical

reflection questions prior learning through reasoning and established beliefs (Mezirow, 1990;

van Halen-Faber, 1997). Critical self-reflection could arguably be said to be based on

"knowing the inside of people's minds" (Foucault, 1982, p. 214) since its explicit intent is to

externalize people's innermost reflections. Critical reflection enhances persons' ability to

use their own knowledge to interpret what they are learning (Mezirow, 1991). Mezirow

(1990) explained, "The more intense the emotional context of learning and the more it is

reinforced, the more deeply embedded and intractable to change are the habits of expectation that constitute our meaning perspectives" (p. 3). I chose to record myself for this autoethnography in order to remember my personal experience from this critical incident. Recognizing that it was eight years ago, the following critical reflection was transcribed as my personal story about this incident:

> I started serving as a primary response person for any traumatic event that would happen on campus. And one of the good and bad parts of that kind of role [is that one] does not know what to do sometimes. And one afternoon, it was a Saturday afternoon, and I received a call on the emergency phone. It was about 2:00 p.m. and I was dispatched to campus where the campus police office is and once I got there they decided they would dispatch me to the hospital. What had occurred allegedly was a student was in a pickup truck near one of the residence halls with a shotgun and was threatening to kill himself.
>
> So I knew that much. And somehow the parents had already gotten called that this was occurring or had occurred and I later would find out that the [sibling] actually had arrived on the scene because [she/he] saw the student's truck and [she/he] saw—anyway so they dispatched me to the hospital. I go to the hospital and my rule is to be kind of the person, that student affairs person that is there for the parents and I am the messenger from campus. So when something happens or they hear more information about the incident, I'm supposed to share it with the family. So I get there and in the

hospital there is this extremely small room, it is maybe eight feet by ten feet, maybe. And it is darkly lit, which I like darkly lit things.

And I knocked on the door—well I think I was greeted by the hospital social worker and I knocked on the door and I go in and there's a mother, a father, and then one sibling and someone who was younger than me but the parents were older than me, or I assume they were older than me. And they are crying and I sit down and I'm concerned because I am there for the parents and I was not trained to do that. Nobody is trained to be there for parents when their child could have killed him or herself. And so I'm in there and every so often I get a call on the student affairs 24 hour response phone and so I'd go out and I'd hear something more and then I'd have to go in and just be there for the parents. And I'm not crying, and I am sad as heck inside of my body. I felt the same feelings that I did [when I witnessed the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2011]—in retrospect I'm able to recognize that.

But I do not know what to say, I do not know what to feel, and the parents are in there. And the sibling who was at the scene shows up and then shortly thereafter I am to tell the parents—oh no, before the sibling joining us I was given permission to tell the parents that they've discovered a brown pickup truck, the person in it is white of this age and that is all we have at this point. And the body had been just transferred to the hospital and the parents had their church pastors come down to identify the body. And then the [sibling] shows up and during this whole time the mother is not showing emotion; I do not see that happening. And the father is crying, and the father

is a stocky man, he is a big, just Midwestern big man who has three [children]

and this [child] comes in and neither one of them get up to hug [the child].

Nobody hugs this student [the sibling], and all I'm thinking—yeah,

[she/he] happened to also be a student—and all I'm thinking in my head was I

want to hug this person but should not because I have to have this role and not

that role and so I'm very conflicted. And then the pastors come in because

they are about to go identify the body and there are hugs there, so it is very

strange. They did not hug their child but they hugged the pastors, which was

fine and very heartfelt. That was when I started really feeling sick and not

knowing how to feel. I knew it was the student but I was not able to say that,

that was not my job to say that it was the student. Anyway, the pastors go

with the social worker and they identify the body and they come back and

they, you know, "Yes it is him, it is him," and crying, so on and so forth.

It is a difficult situation for me because I just want to cry but I'm

supposed to be there and be the strong person. And so a few moments later a

nurse comes in and they have a little Tupperware thing, this little clear

Tupperware thing and they hand it to the parents and the parents look and it is

the watch and it is the wallet and keys from this young man and it is just in a

clear Tupperware, here you go, and I mean she did not say it like this, you

know, "We found this with the body." And all I think about is this is just a

clear Tupperware thing holding the artifacts from your child. And the father

takes it and he just looks at it and he says, "We have to get rid of the vehicle,"

that is the thing that he kept on saying.

And all I'm thinking about was that we just lost this person and I mean it just was so bizarre. Finally, a couple administrators come to the hospital and I've been there the whole time, which is fine. I'm kind of middle, you know, at this point in my career I'm mid-level professional and maybe mid-level and so it was a lot for me to handle. And I just remember seeing one of my role models and just being exhausted and so happy that they are there to help support. So someone from the campus police comes as well and we all go into this chapel and we talk about what happened and that this person was threatening to kill himself; police got to the scene.

And so I'm hearing all this, I did not have any of this information, like the details. But I appreciate that they are being realistic and they are telling me and telling the family exactly what happened. And then we find out that there's a receipt in the car that this student went to one of the local department store chains and was able to purchase a gun and bullets without any waiting period; 44 minutes later he had killed himself. All of this in 44 minutes and then take his own life and change everybody else's life around him just from his decision.

And it impacted me greatly because after we were in this room and we were in a kind of like this circle and I'm standing in the back and the police person is telling the family this and I'm in the back with my role model who happened to also be a supervisor. And I remember just being overwhelmed and not showing the emotion and having to be, you know, in the role of student affairs or the role that was taught to us. Not that there's a role taught

to you--but you are kind of taught by watching others--because of

professionals that you went to school with, or went to grad school with, they

did not show those emotions so you did not show those emotions. I mean that

is what it felt like. (transcribed personal recording, August 21, 2011)

I felt powerless from the experience. During my graduate coursework I was never taught

how to cope when experiencing these tragedies. Tragedies that occurred to our students, an

organization, groups of people, or our community were few and far between; yet when

something did occur, my inclination was to make everything appear to be normal. How was

I trained as a student affairs staff member to handle the multiple stress factors involved with

an incident such as this? How were my colleagues trained to support my empathic distress?

How was I trained to self-identify my own emotional reactions to the experience? I could

recall no formal training regarding how to handle any of these experiences. I therefore

worked with various upper administrators to develop effective practices for the involved staff

to meet and reflect upon the occurrence of a traumatic event. When faced with similar

tragedies, I hoped that group processing would provide new knowledge and support for my

colleagues.

Waves of loss. When I was on emergency duty, I had at least five traumatic

incidents, similar to the one detailed above, occur over an eight month time period. Often,

one of my role models would schedule the debriefing meeting and no one would attend, or

they did not see it as an important part of our group health. My colleagues seemed unaware

of the affect traumatic events had on me, or might have on them. I believed that because of

my personal anguish, I was alone in the group process. My sense of loss was not only for the

student who died, but also a result of how I critically evaluated my performance as a student

affairs professional. My personal experience of feeling emotionally overwhelmed was having an effect on how I felt about my job as a student affairs professional. I felt inadequate because I did not exhibit the same behaviors as my role models, the upper administrators, and my colleagues. My role models never exhibited feelings of loss in front of me, nor in a group. I, however, was losing grip of who I was professionally and personally.

My Metamorphosis

Mezirow (1990) stated, "When the experience is too strange or threatening to the way we think or learn, we tend to block it out or resort to psychological defense mechanisms to provide a more compatible interpretation" (p. 4). I avoided coping with my emotions by taking on additional roles, volunteering for more committees, advising additional student organizations, and working far more than 60 hours a week. The more I worked, the more I was able to disconnect from myself and others (Figley, 2000; Sprang, Clark, & Whitt-Woosley, 2007).

For me, the additional challenge continued to be how I would use this experience to become aware of my raw emotion directly associated with different aspects of my profession. Specifically, how I coped with this traumatic event informed me of how I would react in the future to stressful situations that were out of my control. My frame of reference (Mezirow, 1997) continued to point back to how I handled or mishandled my emotions during the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, and student death.

My ability to be empathic provided me with a way of knowing based upon other people's experiences (Mezirow, 2003). My transformational learning process was triggered by the emotions stirred by compassion fatigue from these empathic distresses I experienced.

Working through my feelings by critically reflecting upon the conflicts I was experiencing allowed me to alter my meaning perspectives. As O'Sullivan (1999) described,

> Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves with our self-locations, our relationships with other humans, and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race, and gender; our body-awareness; our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy. (p. 11)

When I experienced these critical events, my body and spirit created new defenses against any additional harm, thus using transformational learning to transform my meaning perspectives to create a new view of the world, in this case, the student affairs profession. What I did not know was that the coping mechanisms I exhibited during these times would be used again when dealing with social injustices happening to students. The manifestation of compassion fatigue I experienced from these traumatic events would reignite each time I witnessed the victimization of students. These detrimental symptoms would become more unmanageable as each trauma snowballed into the next incident.

In the final section of this chapter I subjectively look at how my actions, including taking on additional work, helped me to avoid coping with these traumas. However, I discovered that these actions only increased my chances of ultimately experiencing burnout from the debilitating effects of compassion fatigue.

Student Affairs, Social Justice, and Compassion Fatigue

In the previous sections I examined how I and the university community members I interviewed perceived the culture of student affairs. This section is a culmination of how my

perception of student affairs was influenced by the contradiction I saw between the celebration of diversity and the way in which acts of social justice designed to work towards equity on campus were being suppressed. Learning how student affairs professionals are affected by and address social injustices may expand understanding of transformational learning. Student affairs professionals may improve the ability to manage their emotions through transformational learning as they experience social injustices. I was able to gain a better understanding of my work as a student affairs professional because I used Mezirow's transformational learning theory as a guide for analyzing my autoethnography. Transformational learning, as defined by Mezirow (2000),

> refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of
> reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mindsets) to make them
> more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and
> reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more
> true or justified to guide action. (p. 8)

Writing this autoethnography was an act of transformational learning for me. I was able to reflect critically upon my student affairs experiences while I assessed my own ideas and beliefs through self-reflection (Mezirow, 1997).

The final three years of my career in student affairs were spent developing and implementing a registration policy for student organizations based on a committee's recommendations. I consider this project during this stage of my career as a culminating event because it has interwoven elements of student affairs normative practice, social justice, and compassion fatigue. Transformative learning as a theory held intriguing possibilities for examining this culminating event with a social justice theory lens. I discovered that I had

achieved the following transformational learning outcomes while exploring how this culminating event separated my personal and student affairs identities from each other: critical reflection and reforming of preexisting beliefs (Brookfield, 1987; Mezirow, 1991); new priorities based on new meaning perspectives (Brookfield, 1987; Kegan, 1994; Mezirow, 1991); a stronger moral character and adaptiveness (Cranton, 1994, 2000, 2002; Mezirow, 1991); and more inclusive and reflective frames of reference (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Mezirow, 1981).

Critical Reflection and Reforming Preexisting Beliefs

This study provided me with the chance to reflect critically on my experiences within the culture of student affairs and give a voice to my personal beliefs as a social justice advocate. I was not alone in this journey--one of the higher education community members told similar stories about his discontent between his personal beliefs and institutional practices. Stan remarked, "So I can imagine if I had stayed, or if I continued to find myself in places where it was exceedingly difficult to do the work day in and day out, that I could find it to be particularly draining emotionally, or particularly disheartening" (transcribed interview, August 4, 2011).

The dissonance between my role as a student affairs professional and my personal beliefs became unmanageable, thus creating a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 2000). With one incident after another creating a pattern of pain, empathy, and compassion so unbearable, my professional and personal life took critical turns to combat it. A critical incident is a significant moment or interaction that serves as a catalyst for self-reflection and meaning-making (Mezirow, 2000).

One of the most dramatic alterations of my meaning perspectives was initiated by a "disorienting dilemma" (Mezirow, 1981, p. 7) accompanied by, as E. W. Taylor (1997) explained, "a series of learning strategies involving critical reflection, exploration of different roles and options, and negotiation and re-negotiation of relationships" (p. 51). This disorienting dilemma was re-ignited on June 28, 2010 when I received my daily email from *Inside Higher Education.* One of the *Inside Higher Education* headlines was titled "Extra: Anti-Bias Rules Upheld" and it summarized, "The Supreme Court ruled today, 5-to-4, that public colleges and universities may require religious organizations seeking recognition or funds as campus groups to comply with anti-bias rules" (Inside Higher Education, 2010, para. 1). I remember that I started to cry, and I emailed my major professor and my best friend stating, "I could still have my student affairs job if this existed back in 2006." You may ask, "Why?"

As mentioned previously, during my last position as a student affairs professional, I was charged with developing a student organization recognition system that had been recommended by a committee. This process took approximately three years of research, writing of policy, public forums, and dealing with legal issues. The primary legal issue, on my campus, dealt with religious organizations that insisted that their religions did not permit gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender students as members. Had the Supreme Court ruling from Christian Legal Society Chapter of the University of California, Hastings College of the Law, aka Hastings Christian Fellowship v. Martinez et al. (2010) requiring religious campus organizations to comply with non-discrimination rules been in place in 2006, I could potentially still be a student affairs professional. While I will never know if this legal ruling would have changed my fate if it had been in place in 2006, it may have changed the

outcomes for students who fought for their rights and my experience watching them cope with their personal stressors.

 The following narrative explores my story related to the case Hastings Christian Fellowship v. Martinez et al. (2010) and how development and implementation of a campus organization policy created social injustices between religious organizations and lesbian, gay, and bisexual students on my campus. The original policy on campus allowed students to create registered organizations with few obstructions. If a student felt there was a need for an organization, he or she could work with another student, and an adviser (faculty or staff member) and register the organization in a short amount of time. However, after a controversial student group received worldwide notoriety for its existence on campus, the institution's president appointed a group of faculty, staff, and students to assess the organization registration policy. The negative publicity received by the institution led upper administration to believe that adding additional criteria for registering organizations would result in such organizations having less chance of gaining approval. After a semester of work, the committee recommended a stratification system for registering student organizations. The recommendations outlined different levels of organizations based on the institutional mission. If an organization met certain criteria then it would receive a certain status, and specific perks. The more support you received for the organization; the more rewards you would receive from the institution. My story begins,

> And so we [three members of student affairs staff], one graduate assistant, and
>
> student leaders from all different categories of student organizations sat in on
>
> this committee and took those recommendations to develop a new registration
>
> policy. The policy was time-consuming because [we] had to take into

consideration recommendations approved by an institutional appointed committee [of which I was not a member].

And one of the things that happened during this process was I emailed the [upper administrator] at that time. And I said, "I'm concerned that some of our unrepresented groups like our historically Black groups or our students of color groups, they are not going to be eligible for this because we do not have a staff member who is dedicated to advising those particular student groups. It is not in their job descriptions, and that is one of the things in the criteria to be a part of this upper echelon group." I would continually [bring] up that I did not think that it was fair that underrepresented groups cannot have this upper criteria recognition because they did not have staff/faculty officially recognized as advisers for their organizations. So it was discriminating, and the [upper administrator] said "Oh, no, it is fine, everything is fine. It is not discriminating; it is fine." And I just remember not knowing what I was doing, but in my head I was like, "This just does not make sense; it is not fair."

I do not think it is fair to create hierarchy when there is no need to have a hierarchy. All student groups should be treated the same, but that was my opinion. And the students' opinion; there were students on my committee who were genuinely concerned about that. Anyway, as the policy moved further, we had followed the institution's timeline on holding public forums and getting information and so on and so I'm in a public forum and I have a PowerPoint and I have the PowerPoint up and I'm showing the student groups

what the policy is, the details, and kind of what the new form will look like.

And the format has the [name of institution] Non-discrimination policy on it,

and that by signing you are supporting the non-discrimination policy.

(pause) Wow. This is what you need to know: prior to this, that same

sentence had been on the other registration forms, had been on registration

forms prior to me even becoming a part of this campus. And a religious

leader came up to me and said, "Well, we cannot support this because this has

sexual orientation and gender on it." And I was like "What?" "Wow, we

cannot support this because we do not allow gay students into our student

organization." And I said, "This has been a part of the policy since I've been

here."

And I was able to go back and get that file from that student

organization, this religious organization, and pull [it] up and they had signed

every single previous registration form. So what I'm learning is that they

were actually already breaking the rules, okay. So we have this big meeting

and at this particular meeting… with [legal team members] from campus and

our staffs and some other cabinet type of people, operative administrators.

And so we're talking about it and essentially this is what I remember

very clearly is the discussion was–these religious organizations are opposed to

this policy, it is part of the policies–it is part of [name of institution]; this

policy supersedes what those religious organizations are. Therefore if they do

not support it, they should not be recognized on our campus. That is the

discussion, end of discussion. And the [upper administrator] was, "I'm very

in favor of this, we have to support this, I mean if a woman who is married, a marital status who is not married and has a child and wants to be in this organization, they should have the right. If someone who is gay wants to be in this organization, they should have the right." That is the discussion and the [legal team members] are like, "Yes, yes, yes." And everybody is saying, "yes, yes, yes." So it is uncommonly yes, yes, yes oriented. And so I left that meeting feeling happy, as if students who were part of our gay and lesbian community were being supported by our upper administrators, and the institution.

Then we held another public forum, then lawyers from the religious groups got involved, then I had to start walking a delicate line again and having to be careful how I was advocating and who I was advocating for because these off-campus lawyers were now involved. The non-discrimination policy to me meant a lot, to be on this campus, to be on that campus at that time and having sexual orientation [and] gender identity in the policy meant a lot to me. It had race, it had ethnicity, it had religion, it had veteran status, it had all these things, all these underrepresented groups on our campus represented but all of a sudden now we cannot support it because religious lawyers got involved. Now I get the call from whomever and I do not—I could probably have figured it out but it was an [upper administrator] and [this person] said, "We really have to take a re-look at this, we're going to have to re-think it."

I just remember going, how, how am I supposed to support this, how

do I determine what a religious group is? And then the discussion was, well

the person, the recognition committee, will determine which groups are

considered religious and which ones are not. If you apply as a religious

organization you have to prove in your tenets that you are able to discriminate.

In it, I mean it was like, "Are you kidding me?"

At the same time on this campus, a group of students and administrators had developed an

institutional diversity document following an institutional evaluation of the campus climate

by a highly regarded research group. This document was developed to demonstrate that this

institution promoted an equitable environment for all members of its community. The third

ideal of the Diversity Document (2007) stated,

Freedom from discrimination: We recognize that we must strive to overcome

historical and divisive biases in our society. Therefore, we commit ourselves

to create and maintain a community in which all students, staff, faculty and

administrators can work together in an atmosphere free from discrimination,

and to respond appropriately to all acts of discrimination.

On one hand, with the institution-wide adoption of the Diversity Document I had to promote

diversity, and [on] the other, with the (title of recognition policy) I was being forced to go

against my own personal morals, and allow student organizations to discriminate against

members of specific student identity groups. When doing research for this study, I read an

article by Manning and Coleman-Boatwright (1999) that stated,

Little in history would lead a person to believe that the transformation from

one culture to many cultures occurs through a voluntary relinquishment of the

privileges and prestige of being the dominant culture. Change is resisted on

many levels. Individually, practices that base performance reward on mastery

of a dominant culture management style recreate a dominant culture structure.

(p. 371)

I was experiencing having to maintain the "dominant culture management style" (Coleman-

Boatright, 1999, p. 371) and not help the underrepresented students on campus in public.

However, outside of the public eye I was spending my time advocating for these students.

Unfortunately, the system itself was not going to change with just me, one administrator,

vocalizing to key upper administrators about the discriminatory policy we were putting into

place.

New Priorities Based on New Meaning Perspectives

I viewed my job as a professional as being to advocate for a just campus based on my

education, role models, and philosophical assumptions about student affairs. To develop new

priorities, based on these meaning perspectives, I engaged in a critical reflection of my

experience that then became a perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1991). Meaning

schemes and meaning perspectives are frames of reference based on an individual's holistic

experiences (Mezirow, 1991). Meaning schemes are "made up of specific knowledge,

beliefs, value judgments, and feelings that constitute interpretations of experience"

(Mezirow, 1991, pp. 5-6). By contrast, Mezirow (1991) defined, "meaning perspectives" as

referring "to the structure of assumptions within which one's past experiences assimilates

and transforms new experience" (p. 42).

One day, my supervisors wanted to meet with me following a staff meeting. They

frankly asked, "Have you been telling people you are leaving your job because of this

organization policy?" I was taken aback and did not know how to answer. I recognized that although I had given my resignation notice to my supervisor by the time this conversation took place, I still had to continue my role as if all was normal. I knew they were aware of my issues with the policy, and that I believed it was discriminating against GLBT students. However, based on this conversation I knew that I should not express my concern to others on campus. I did not want to lose my job--even though I had resigned I still had a month left and I wanted to have positive references for future work. Quite honestly, the conversation made me feel threatened and I said, "No. I am sorry if someone has heard something to the contrary. I believe I have been honest with you about how I feel about the policy and that [I believe] it is mistreating a number of our underrepresented students." They told me that an upper administrator had heard a rumor that I specifically stated that I was leaving because of the policy. I said, "Oh. Someone must have misinterpreted a conversation. Actually, I only shared that with a few close colleagues." Inside my voice was saying, "Yes. I totally believe this policy is in the wrong on many levels, and yes, I am leaving because of the policy." In some ways my inside voice was telling the truth; however, there was much more to the story. The complete story was that my professional life was making me unhealthy on many levels.

To address the issue of my supervisors and upper administration being aware of my discontent, I recognized that I had to adapt to meet both the students' and administration's needs while the overall experience was creating my own personal disorienting dilemma. My priorities had to become focused on the challenges surrounding the policy that I faced as an administrator, and less so on being a student advocate. While it may seem easy to adapt to the role of an administrator, it was difficult because I thought as a student affairs professional my role was to be a social justice advocate. Cranton (2002) explained, "It is easier and safer

to maintain habits of mind than to change" (p. 65). The fact that I had to change my thought processes put a strain on me professionally and personally.

Critically reflecting upon how I acted during this time period helped me to recognize how each action I took caused a reaction tied to my emotions, relationships with others, professional work, or personal life (Cranton, 2002). My transformation was not an easy one, but it undoubtedly played into who I am today professionally and personally. My story continued,

> I'm not talking to students at this point; this is, [I am] just working with
> administrators and the discussion was happening behind the doors and if the
> students did not know that all this was occurring, students were being treated
> unfairly. But I had to support what was happening from an administrative
> point of view. I had to support what the administration was doing. I could not
> advocate for students, in front of the students. I was advocating for the
> students behind the closed doors. The [legal team members] helped to rewrite
> this portion [allowing a provision where religious organizations may limit
> membership outside of the campus non-discrimination statement] of the
> policy and then another open forum happened.

> And a lot of our gay, lesbian, allies, and transgender community came
> forward; student allies, faculty allies, and staff allies came in the room. And I
> had to advocate for the policy. The policy that not more than a few weeks ago
> the student affairs crew had supported, [and] had said that the non-
> discrimination policy is crucial and valid and we value our students. And all
> of a sudden I have to change my tune. It was beyond difficult because

allegedly the freedom in religion [clause] was trampling underrepresented students on our campus.

      What happened during one of those forums is--I remember standing up and in my gut it was hurting, it was wrenching--but I was able to say, "There's a reason why the constitution exists and the constitution is important and we have to validate the importance of the constitution because that is our governing rules and policies for the United States." My gut was wrenching inside because the constitution was not meeting the needs of the students [who attended] our campus. [Those who attend] our campus [included] underrepresented groups, gay and lesbian students, gender identity, marital status; [it] did not represent them.

      But then I had a premonition like, "oh my God, if I'm in my gut upset because of religious groups and there were not many, I need to make sure I state that; there were not many religious groups; they had their rights too. And that non-discrimination policy also was for religion." So how–I could not discriminate against those religious groups. Even though I did not agree with them, I could not discriminate against them.

For me, the discrimination issue was evident; it was hypocritical of me as an administrator to say one group deserved these rights over another. Those students from the religious organizations did have the same rights as the underrepresented students on campus. Those students from the small contingency of religious organizations would be denied their rights to exclude people based on their religious beliefs. Yet, when I reevaluated the entire process of how organizations were to be recognized by this institutional policy, the Christian-based

organizations were receiving preference due to their dominant privileged status on campus. I wondered if this membership requirement [had been presented] by a non-Christian student organization if it would have received the same amount of preferential treatment by the institution?

Needless to say, I was unable to get over the fact that the institution was contradicting its own non-discrimination policy by denying the rights of the GLBT community. The upper administration members' actions of discriminating against underrepresented students negatively affected my professional work and tore my spirit from me. My morale deteriorated at work and at home. The perception of discrimination is disheartening to student affairs professionals because of the lack of perceived ability to mediate the situation (Rosser & Javinar, 2003). The issue of having to engage, literally, in a disruptive discourse that tore me apart professionally was sucking the life out of me. I felt the discrimination that the GLBT students and community felt; I was again being overwhelmed by empathic distress and compassion fatigue.

Ultimately, neither my education nor the campus Diversity Document (date) taught me how to create systemic change at the institutional level. The only thing I could do was to continue my personal mission and hope the right person would listen to what I was hearing from the underrepresented students, as well as my concerns about how this proposed policy would inhibit the institutional drive for an inclusive campus. Any higher education institution could write as many documents as it wanted to demonstrate diversity on its campus, but a document could not change the dominant infrastructures that maintain an inequitable environment (Osei-Kofi, et al., 2010).

Juxtaposition Between Self and Professional

My role as a student affairs professional, as I understood it, was to help the institution to be proactive in moving towards an inclusive campus (M. J. Chang, 2002; N. J. Evans & Reason, 2001; Hurtado, et al., 1999; Manning & Coleman-Boatwright, 1999). I believed I was doing just that. The dominant perspective, and how it would *look* to people outside of the campus, however, was outweighing the underrepresented students' needs. Because my morals and ethics were being juxtaposed between my personal feelings and my professional role, the culminating event of having to implement this organization registration policy became emotionally intense:

> I was being stretched. I was called to speak with a religious leaders group, which was comprised of community religious leaders, and then the gay and lesbian transgender bisexual advisory committee. I had to go to the separate constituencies and speak on the policy and [had] to listen to the religious group and then to the gay and lesbian students' community group. And have to be a part of the conversation. And my gut hurt because these groups were being--in particular, these students–these underrepresented students were being discriminated against on our campus--on [a] campus that I believed was safe for our students.

> And I had to support the administrative policy. I remember sitting in on the religious group and talking and listening and hearing them say, "We just cannot have those gay people in there." I'm really exaggerating a bit–but that is essentially what they were saying. And I had to listen to it. I did not agree with it but I had to listen to it. And then going to the lesbian/gay group

and sitting in on their meeting, and their fears and concerns about the religious

groups.

And having a faculty person, who to me is one of the strongest

advocates of underrepresented groups in the United States as far as I'm

concerned, really point at me and angrily (and not hatred), no hate but surely

like, "How could you not advocate?" and I said, "This is a policy and the

freedom of religion, freedom of organization and association." I said all this

'stuff.' It was rhetoric. The administrative talk is the talking point; this is how

I'm positioning myself. These are the things that I was told to say and I agree

with everything that person is saying. I agree with everything one of those

students is saying about how they should have the right to join those groups.

How they should have the same rights as everybody else; just because they

have a different sexual orientation does not mean they should not be allowed

to go to those groups.

In October 2006 one of the student government organization representatives wrote a

resolution denouncing the policy, which stated, "The [name of student government

organization] implores the rejection of the pending [name of organization policy], thus

opposing the accommodation of any violation to the [name of institution]'s non-

discrimination policy" (2006-2-22 SR, 2006). It was difficult to learn that the students did

not support the policy I was promoting. However, institutional administration was not

transparent with the policymaking. Students were unaware of the inner workings occurring

behind closed doors to accommodate the campus community within the current laws. In the

local student newspaper one student shared his/her opinion in a letter to the editor. It was as

if all the work I had put into developing connections with students on campus was being

shredded from my soul. The letter concluded as [name of student] (2006) wrote,

> If religious organizations are allowed to practice selective membership, why
>
> should other organizations be denied the privilege on the basis of race,
>
> religion or any other protected class? It sets an unhealthy precedent based on
>
> weak argument that discriminatory practices should be recognized, while
>
> discrimination of these practices should not. (local student newspaper)

The challenge was how to meet the needs of all students, while realizing that the policy itself

could potentially open the campus to future prejudicial student organizations.

The administration had the power because it held all of the knowledge. Foucault

(1980) stated, "The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and conversely

knowledge constantly induces effects of power … it is not possible for power to be exercised

without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power" (p. 52).

Supporting a policy that I believed was not in the best interest of all students was a challenge

for me because as a student affairs administrator I saw my role as always being there for the

students. It was even more difficult when I had to go to public forums and meetings about

the organization policy because of the conflicts among my role as an advocate, the policy, the

law, the administration, and the students:

> I remember sitting there and just squirming and feeling sick in my gut that I
>
> would have to be the person, the person that had to promote this particular
>
> policy that I do not agree with at all. And in sitting through–sitting in
>
> different meetings with [legal team members] about this policy, the

institution's [legal team members] explained the religious groups [would not] budge on their religious beliefs.

"Those religious groups would not budge, this is the way it's going to be, and so on and so forth and that's just what's going to happen." And then I mean I think just having an upper administrator say to me that I would have to determine which religious organizations had the right, the authority, to deny access to [specific students] based on the tenets of that group. And I mean, seriously, how could I determine what group was considered authorized to discriminate? It was tearing me up inside. During that time I had a leader of one of the religious groups come up to me and say, "I'm going to pray for you, and members of the GLBT organization."

And being Catholic it was like, "Yeah, I might be going to hell because I'm advocating for these underrepresented groups." But in my head [I knew] I couldn't advocate for them. Because I didn't want to lose my job and during a lot of these one-on-one meetings or with different advisers of the gay and lesbian group, sitting in these meetings and I actually accidentally said, and I said it more than once, "There's no way I can do this job if I have to allow this student group to discriminate against other people." And it's a part of their culture that they're going to discriminate, and the non-discrimination policy is fundamentally null and void on campus.

How [could] I be a part of that discrimination? I could not do my job. And [I shared] with my friends that the job that I love, that I worked my butt off to get, I mean I worked so hard to get to this point and I love to work with

my students and then I actually would have to discriminate against the

students and then I [would] have to advocate for the administration instead of

the students. How fair is that? It isn't fair, it was wrong. It was wrong to put

me in that position. And then [I shared] with these staff members that I didn't

know if I could do this job, and then I actually was sincerely thinking about

leaving my job because of this policy. And then I would have to be the chair

of this committee that would be making these decisions.

It was killing me. I mean I started recognizing that my health [was

affected], like I couldn't sleep at night. I was depressed, I couldn't sleep at

night, and I couldn't stop thinking about these students that came to me and

said, "How can you promote and enforce this policy, Laura?" I would think

"how can I do this," sitting across with this nice young person? The students

would ask me, "How can you ever advocate for this?" and all I wanted to say

was all the things that I was trying to do behind the doors. I was trying so

hard to advocate and I couldn't advocate for fear of losing my job. It was like

I was–it was like, I'm stuck in this box, this glass box. And I have the tool to

break out but I couldn't because I didn't want to get caught or didn't want to

cause additional complications to an already stressful personal experience. I

didn't want to lose my job; my job was so vital to me. I felt as if I had failed

the students.

I had become a member of the student affairs profession because I cared for students.

It was while I was a student affairs professional that I learned how to be a student advocate

and social justice activist (N. J. Evans & Reason, 2001), and that too had a price. I was burnt

out to say the least. I was learning that there was a toll to pay for empathizing too much (Figley, 1995a; 1995b; 2004). Caring professionals who listen to reports of drastic loss may become inundated with feelings of loss similar to those who are directly being affected (Rank et al., 2009). I was not acknowledging any of the professional events that were happening around me; in fact, my personal life was also taking dramatic turns, as I felt lost and alone.

More Inclusive and Reflective Frames of Reference

I was seeking a way to justify my actions. My intention was to be more inclusive while solving the challenges the campus was facing with this policy issue. While I know these underrepresented students were not physically harmed, the idea that the institution I worked for and the position I had as a professional were negatively affecting those students whom I cared for was taking its toll on me. I wanted to help create positive change on campus, and the only thing I felt was despair. I felt as if I had let the students down and that I did not "voice" enough of my displeasure for what was happening with the policy. I felt sorrow for not only my students, but for the job I loved:

My job was my identity; I admit it openly now when I look back at it. I remember one day when I was sitting with my best friend that I began to weep, and I acknowledged that I cannot do this job if I have to uphold the organization registration policy [as it was written]. If I have to [enforce] this policy, it will kill me. And the policy had gone into place and then it was already emotionally distressing me to the point that I was no longer able to take care of myself. Because I felt as if students are not supported, those underrepresented groups/students did not have a voice on this campus. I was talking to people who interacted with the upper administrators, hoping that

one of them would say: "You know, Laura is right about this policy." I just

wanted one of them to say it. I think one of the [legal team members] felt the

same way I did. And that summer I was wiped out. I was burnt out from a

student festival [that I advised]; I was burnt out from just watching my

students [both underrepresented, and student leaders from the spring festival]

be treated like shit. The underrepresented students were not getting input

anymore on campus. It is not OK; it is not fair how I was treated and it was

definitely not fair how the students were treated.

Because my voice, the one voice, was advocating for those students

and no one was really listening. I did not feel like anybody was listening.

And the people who were listening knew and shared but when they shared

they were like, "Oh, it's going to be fine. Everything is going to be fine." I

was like no, it wasn't fine. It wasn't fine for the student who came in to me

and said, "It's not fair. How come that discriminating policy is happening to

us?" And then [to] have a religious leader from one of the groups come visit

me and tell me that they're going to pray for me at the [student union

building] chapel. (transcribed personal recording, August 21, 2011)

A religious leader praying for me was somewhat of a kind move in my mind. However, the

fact that the person was going to pray for me within the student union building's chapel

(which had a crucifix at the time) at this public institution started my head spinning my own

theories. I wondered why the institution was reworking the policy for the devout Christian

organizations, and not for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students? I recognized

that there was U.S. constitutional law used as leverage; nevertheless, Christians created

those laws. This vexing situation became more precarious as I began to question my personal theories; I wondered if the institution chose to support the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students, if it would be discriminating against the religious students' beliefs?

The deconstruction of the policy would provide insight to future issues. When I reflect upon this student affairs experience, I can identify more inclusive frames of reference. Diversity was not just about understanding and appreciating differences, breaking down stereotypes, or providing access to a wider diversity of students; it was also about confronting systems that privilege some groups and challenging the defensive reactions to the dismantling of those systems (Pope, Mueller, & Reynolds, 2009, p. 645). Back then, the problem for me was being fair and equal to all of our students:

> And it all goes back to those established senior administrators and role models saying to me, "You need to support the people you're working for even if you don't agree with them."

> I didn't want to disappoint people. I didn't want to disappoint these students, and I didn't want to upset the staff or this institution I work for. I loved my job and I felt like I lost everything when I lost that job. And I didn't lose it, but my heart and my spirit did. Social justice was so new to me and I didn't know it was important; like I didn't know what I was doing. But I was advocating without knowing it. It hurts a lot but what I can tell you, kind of the good part of the story, is prior to all this happening, I studied. I tried to do qualitative research, actually it was kind of quantitative, qualitative, and I did a survey of some staff members in student affairs who–to find out how they dealt with stress--and I ended up learning about compassion fatigue.

So the funny thing is since I was learning about compassion fatigue,
thinking it was trauma, only trauma focused and a lot of ways its empathic
focused. And because I was empathizing [with] those students and the way
they were treated, it was causing so much anxiety and stress, and my personal
being--it was destroying who I was as a professional. And I personally was
sick, and I was emotionally a wreck. I couldn't sleep and I had to be there for
the students though, just like I was on 9/11. Just like I was for those parents
[when their child died], I had to be there because that was my job, [my job] is
to be there, to be supportive.

It was my job. The good thing that happened last year was when the
Supreme Court ruled institutions in higher education may request religious
organizations who want recognition on campus groups to comply with campus
policy and cannot discriminate. I mean, had that been in place I could still
have my job. I could still have the job where I was able to work with and be
there for students--where I could interact with these great young people who
are going to make so much difference in the world and now I don't have that.
I loved working with my students; I just couldn't do it anymore. It wasn't
fair; it wasn't fair for me to have to put in place policies that I couldn't
[support]. Wow, this is very good experience, well okay, and thanks.
(transcribed personal recording, August 21, 2011)

While these stories may seem to have exaggerated the incidents, I lived them. It felt
as if I was watching these social injustices happen over and over again, and I was unable to
do anything directly about them. I watched as students had indescribable emotional wounds

inflicted upon them because of who they were: gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. Each experience I had distorted my "meaning perspectives" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 8), adding to the overwhelming effects of empathic distress and compassion fatigue. I believe Scott (1997) stated it best:

> We incorporate the world into our Self. When we grieve we glimpse that we are grieving not only individually for what we have lost personally but for what we are losing globally. We sob for the world; the emptiness we feel is being experienced globally among all people everywhere. That is why it is so painful to grieve. (p. 49)

The symptoms of compassion fatigue that I experienced during this final incident were catalysts for positive change for me. I was a dedicated student affairs professional who learned that while I strived to make a difference for the students, the administration was unwilling to change at that time. When a person meets with an incident that cannot be acclimated into a personal meaning perspective, the incident must be discarded or a person's perspective must be adapted to accommodate the new knowledge (E. W. Taylor, 1994). I was acutely aware that I had to make a choice for myself, for "self-preservation" (Harrison, 2010), and I was exhausted.

> It is exhausting when I think about how it all happened, and where I am now compared to five years ago or ten years ago. And the reason why is that it was too late to stop what was happening to me and I wasn't able to recognize what was happening. And when I think back about it, I can actually pinpoint those certain moments that changed me. And I wish I could say it was easier than that. I wish I could say that I had, you know, this brilliant thing come to my

mind and I had all the answers but I didn't have that. And so this is what I can

say, "There are many comparisons between what I experienced as someone

watching a traumatic event on television or having to help a student or parents

deal with a traumatic event, compared to seeing students or a student treated

poorly on campus by the institution that should be caring for them." A change

must be made to take better care of our students, and ourselves (transcribed

personal recording, August 21, 2011)

I recognized, at a late point in my career, that the true realities of student affairs practice were

different from those I believed to be true as a young professional (Lorden, 1998). I became a

student affairs professional based upon the belief that I would help students by advocating for

them; instead, I was transformed into an administrative pawn. My hope to become a dean of

students or a vice president of student affairs was wiped from my slate. But I valued every

moment I had working with students and staff; these moments working with students were

precious. Mina stated,

And then over the long term personally, in being an advocate particularly for a

group that I'm a member of, there's days that I'm weary, there's days that I'm

exhausted, there's days that I feel hopeless and there's moments that I feel like

it's not worth it. I feel isolated. I feel wrong. I feel crazy. I feel like, "Why

can't I just be quiet?" And then I get a student that sends me a note or a

colleague that compliments me and says, "I'm so glad that you stood up and

said that. I was thinking the same thing." And then it's worth it. (transcribed

interview, August 5, 2011)

By taking the time to reflect critically upon my own experience, and intentionally learn from higher education community members, I discovered that explaining and exploring critical incidents was in itself a way of knowing through transformational learning. Leaving the field of student affairs was tragic for me because I no longer would have an effect on the students, their programs, new and experienced professionals, and the culture as a whole.

I was immersed in my transformational learning process throughout this research study; cognizant of how the higher education community members' stories, along with my own voice, identified the effects social injustices had on us as student affairs professionals. I experienced this learning through listening to the participants' narratives, composing a self-narrative, reciting all of the stories to myself, and engaging in continuous self-reflection during the research process. To become more self-aware, I engaged in exploring and reestablishing my preexisting beliefs about my role as a student affairs professional through critical reflection (Brookfield, 1987; Mezirow, 1991). This action provided me with a way to open myself to new priorities based on my newly formed meaning perspectives (Brookfield, 1987; Kegan, 1994; Mezirow, 1991). Identifying the challenges I faced with empathic distress and compassion fatigue provided a stronger foundation for me to address similar challenges outside of my control in other settings (Cranton, 1994, 2000, 2002; Mezirow, 1991). Finally, the act of exploring the effects of social injustices as a student affairs professional has given me a better understanding of myself, my colleagues, and the culture of student affairs.

Conclusion

This autoethnography provided a way to tell my story through critical reflection that focused on finding my own voice (McGregor, 2008; Mezirow, 2000). The study allowed me

to explore the effects social injustices had on me as a student affairs professional. People who find their voice begin to recognize themselves not only from their previous knowledge but from critically reflecting on those previous life experiences. Therefore, I was able to begin to understand why I am who I am and imagine how, if I choose, to be some other way (M. Taylor, 1987). Revealing my story empowered me to record my life as a student affairs professional, as well as share other student affairs community members' stories about social justice advocacy, thereby magnifying its importance in higher education. An equitable campus community requires training current student affairs professionals about the true expectations of equity for students on campus, training graduate students about the perils of student advocacy, and developing means to better support professionals who develop empathic distress and compassion fatigue.

While my discontent for how students were treated during these events continues, I have recognized that my activism for social justice was strengthened by my experience. I know my story was unique enough that those involved in the events may recognize themselves by words, not name. I hope that they will understand that my intention was not to defame or vilify the people--it was merely to explore my role as a student affairs professional advocating for social justice. I believe that my story was general enough that both new and seasoned professionals will be able to relate to my "self" as the author as well as gain a deeper sociological understanding (Sparkes, 2002) of the student affairs culture. The next chapter presents this study's emerging themes as they relate to the university community members' responses and my story.

CHAPTER 5: THEMES

I critically reflected (Brookfield, 1990; Mezirow, 1991) upon my experience within the culture of student affairs while writing this autoethnography. I undertook the challenge of peeling off my preconceived beliefs about the culture of student affairs to construct new meaning perspectives (Brookfield, 1990; Kegan, 1994; Mezirow, 1991) from the university community members' interview responses and my unique story. At the core of these findings were three key themes relating to the culture of student affairs: the importance of role models; the barriers discovered in social justice advocacy; and the link connecting student affairs, social justice, and compassion fatigue.

Importance of Role Models

The first theme, the importance of role models in student affairs, illustrates how the relationship between role models and staff member is a purposeful arrangement (Schmidt & Wolfe, 2009). The relationship may be informal where the staff member admires a role model's work from afar. Or the partnership may be a deliberate interaction where the role models and staff member engage each other through discussion and practice. The data analysis in Chapter 4 described the importance of the role models and staff member partnership in student affairs.

The positive and adverse effects of the role model relationship were described throughout my own story in Chapter 4. While these interactions with my role models were not always intentional, their actions, reactions, and lack thereof affected how I would respond to various problems during my career in student affairs. Role models guided staff members through troubling issues, demonstrated how to interact with students, corrected inequities, worked extensive hours, and controlled emotions during times of crisis.

Guidance

The act of guiding staff members through challenges is one of the positive strengths that role models share. Mina's role model helped lead her through a tenuous path. A group of students' attempted to get a sexist mural removed from a residence hall. Mina supported their efforts by being a part of their meetings with the senior administration and students who lived on the residence hall floor. However, the students' argument that the mural was oppressive toward women was not accepted by the senior administrators and the mural remained on the wall. Her students were severely disappointed by the senior administration's decision, and expressed that they would no longer advocate for equity on campus. Mina felt "defeated" (transcribed interview, August 5, 2011) because the students were unsuccessful in their quest. Her role model explained how the actions for social justice of Mina and her students would influence future decisions within the housing department. Because of her role model's guidance, Mina realized that while the students' efforts were unsupported at that time, their actions might affect the manner in which decision-making occurred on the campus in the future. Without her role model taking the time to engage Mina in this conversation, she might have continued to feel unsupported. Instead, Mina never gave up encouraging students to seek social justice on campus.

Trusting Students

As I discussed in Chapter 4, the act of defining the boundary between advocate and administrator is challenging for any professional. When I was a young professional dealing with a student who betrayed my trust, my role model explained to me the boundary between advocate and administrator. The role model described how caring too much about students may often lead to personal and professional disappointment. This information was hard for

me to accept because, as an undergraduate student, my role models seemed to share

everything with me. Perhaps, unbeknownst to me, my undergraduate role models followed

similar recommendations to protect themselves. Needless to say, being taught the

importance of supporting students and knowing how to advocate for students are two

distinctly different challenges. The issue is determining how to use a role model's

recommendations to help students.

Being Nimble

In one of the personal stories that I shared in Chapter 4, I described how African

American students were being treated unfairly on campus. The African American student

organizations had to have a metal detector for their campus events; however, predominantly

White student organizations were not required to use the extra security. When I explained

this situation to my role model, he acknowledged that the inequity was an issue. The policy

was changed and all student organizations were required to take the added safety measure.

This role model's reaction served as an example of moving quickly and appropriately to

resolve a social injustice on campus. In this case, the role model trusted my judgment as a

staff member in regards to advocating for the rights of students to be treated similarly.

Overworking

Role models can exhibit behaviors that are unhealthy as well as those that are

beneficial to the staff member. A described in Chapter 4 one of the issues within the culture

of student affairs is staff working extensive hours to help students. As an undergraduate and

graduate student I remember my role models attending every event, meeting, and program to

show their support of students. As a new professional I witnessed my role models exhibiting

the same behavior. Therefore, the unwritten expectation of the student affairs professional is

to do the work until it is completed. The challenge in student affairs is work to support

students is never done. The job becomes bigger than oneself (Schmidt & Wolfe, 2009) when

supporting students goes from the routine to the unexpected (e.g., student death, terrorist

attacks on September 11, 2001): there are then no boundaries to overworking.

Repressing Emotions

While I reflected on my interactions with role models in Chapter 4, I recognized that

sometimes their actions did not agree with my intuitive reaction to an incident. Another

example of adverse behavior was when my role model seemed to be unaffected by their

emotions following traumatic events (e.g., student death, terrorist attacks on September 11,

2001) or social injustices on campus. Being unemotional was "the standards of behavior"

(Schmidt & Wolfe, 2009, p. 372). The lack of emotion exhibited by my role models taught

me that professionally I had to repress my emotions during those types of incidents. Perhaps

the reason why my role models remained unemotional was because they wanted to remain

strong or did not have the time to cope with their emotions. I emulated these characteristics

because I believed my role models were emotionally healthy and in my eyes "ideal

professional(s)" (Schmidt & Wolfe, 2009, p. 373). Therefore, I believed that I would be

okay, just as I perceived that they were.

I overextended myself in several projects and volunteered for more than the average

student affairs professional. I relished the mundane moments during meetings when I could

take refuge from the effects of compassion fatigue that I was experiencing. As I explained in

the previous chapter, the act of taking on more responsibilities seemed to subdue the

emotional challenges and effects of overworking I experienced as a   professional. My job

was my identity and the act of overworking to bottle up my feelings made me vulnerable to empathic distress and compassion fatigue.

During my last year as a student affairs professional I attended a professional association convention. I was surprised to be honored by my colleagues in student affairs with a midlevel professional award. I considered receiving this award to be a privilege; however, I could not help thinking, "I had to burn myself out just to be recognized in my own profession." I thought about how my actions as a student affairs professional were potentially influencing student leaders, graduate students, and new professionals. I was not being an emotionally healthy role model for my protégés (Schmidt & Wolfe, 2009). I remedied these feelings by going to a therapist and by being more open with my colleagues about the challenges I was facing professionally.

Based on my findings, there is not an ideal role model example within the culture of student affairs. Staff members who seek guidance from a role model must recognize that the role model may not always have the answer. The staff member must be willing to deconstruct a role model's action (or lack of action) when there is inconsistency with their own beliefs. This process would be a "rational way" (Taylor, 1998, p. 8) of acting upon newly found beliefs and theories (Mezirow, 2000). This act of deconstruction incites the staff member to reconfigure or even change their meaning schemes and meaning perspectives in order to make sense of their world (Mezirow, 2000).

The Barriers to Advocating for Social Justice

One of the key themes discovered through my research was that social justice advocacy is an integral part of the culture of student affairs. However, there are some

barriers when student affairs professionals advocate for social justice, including perceived overstepping of job responsibilities and overcoming institutional power structures.

Social Justice is Everybody's Issue

Student affairs professionals' philosophy is based on preparing students for society after graduation; in other words, the development of the whole person (American Council on Education, 1937; American Council on Education, Committee on Student Personnel Work, 1949). Many student affairs professionals realize that supporting the development of the whole student is accomplished through advocating for social justice (Goodman, 2001; Hurtado, 2005; Reason et al., 2005). However, advocating for students is sometimes seen by others on campus as overstepping one's job responsibilities (Harrison, 2010).

Gina explained that helping students was "frowned upon" unless the program, activity, or event was directly part of her position description (transcribed interview, September 28, 2011). She explained that,

> So, being put in a box of the job description can be a barrier. So, if your job is
> not women's programs or LGBT programs, then you're not supposed to do
> work in those areas. Then, when you want to talk about or do things in those
> areas, people [student affairs professionals] got defensive, and people are like,
> why are you doing this? That's not your job. (transcribed interview,
> September 28, 2011)

Gina's story illustrated that when an institution decentralizes responsibility for inclusion on campus, students may feel unsupported (transcribed interview, September 28, 2011). Gina's statement also demonstrates that student affairs professionals perpetuate this division of support (transcribed interview, September 28, 2011). Mina experienced similar boundaries

when she helped a student with an academic issue and a departmental colleague felt as if Mina was treading on her (the colleague's) responsibilities, "It wasn't that what I was doing was wrong; it's that it reflected on what they weren't doing" (transcribed interview, August 5, 2011). The care and support of students' well-being should be an integral part of the campus community member's job. Gina continued,

> I mean in whatever function area or whatever job you're in, you should still be working toward making sure every student has a just experience or feels at home and welcome in [the] place, like even [if] it's in housing, if it's in financial aid. I mean everybody should be working to be sure that this is happening, that social justice is occurring. And it may not necessarily–like it's not just for the people in the Women's Center, or the people in the Minority Student Affairs Office, or those sorts of things. It should be a part of everybody's responsibilities. (transcribed interview, September 28, 2011)

Student affairs professionals must recognize that holding tightly to the specific responsibilities of their job descriptions can result in "students falling through the cracks." Student affairs staff must work to develop a collaborative approach with their colleagues on campus to ensure that students' needs are addressed, regardless of the details of specific job descriptions. It is not just professionals in specific positions who have the responsibility for ensuring a socially just environment; it is the entire university's responsibility to help students succeed in this everchanging world. Establishing a socially just world where an inclusive culture is more than words or departments should be an embedded goal of the institution (Fusch, 2012). Students will be able to develop their role in a diverse society only if existing hegemonic systems are made obsolete (Ayers, 1998).

Perpetuation of Power

Gina, Mina, Stan, and I all felt the responsibility of being a voice for students facing social injustices on campus. Each of us had different barriers to overcome when we facilitated a social justice event or voiced concerns for students. These challenges were created by the existing power structures on campus.

Stan was let down by the senior administration failing to support a candlelight vigil that he had led to memorialize Matthew Shepard (transcribed interview, August 4, 2011). Gina experienced how the senior administration kept students from saying they were being treated unfairly by tossing financial resources towards two underrepresented student organizations on campus (transcribed interview, September 28, 2011). Mina saw how a department, and the senior administration, minimized a sexist mural found in campus housing by downplaying the importance of inclusion on campus to the students (transcribed interview, August 5, 2011). I personally felt unprepared professionally because the senior administration chose to deviate from the campus nondiscrimination policy in an effort to avoid a lawsuit from a few Christian religious student organizations (transcribed personal recording, August 21, 2011).

The institutional cultures on the university community members' campuses as well as my campus perpetuated the power differential between the upper administration and students, resulting in students' needs not being met (Apple, 2007; Calhoun, 2006; Gildersleeve et al., 2010). The task of breaking down power structures to promote social justice is not an easy one for a student affairs professional (Harrison, 2010). Fried (1997) explained,

> They [student affairs professionals] must identify issues, challenge and help
> students, protect the welfare of individuals and the institution in mind, and

reexamine what good means in the specific situation... Notions of right,

goodness, and justice vary by culture and need to be understood in the context

of campus cultures, national culture, and a variety of other cultures. (p. 21)

The culture of student affairs exists to help the students (American Council on Education, 1937; American Council on Education, Committee on Student Personnel Work, 1949). However, in my case and those of the professionals I interviewed, the profession did not take into account how to navigate the power structures (Harrison, 2010) along with the variety of cultures (Fried, 1997) that are prevalent in our student demographics (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012a, 2012b; Zusman, 2005). The emotional toll that student affairs professionals may encounter when dealing with power structures, student advocacy, and their job responsibilities can be overwhelming. The next section will describe the links found between student affairs, social justice advocacy, and compassion fatigue.

The Connection between Student Affairs, Social Justice and Compassion Fatigue

As the subject and researcher I was able to make a connection between student advocacy (Evans & Reason, 2001) and compassion fatigue (Figley, 1995a, 1995b, 2002) in the lives of student affairs professionals. Student affairs professionals exist to care for college students (American Council on Education, 1937). Because of this caregiving responsibility, student affairs professionals are likely to interact with students experiencing trauma or social injustices on campus. The emotional cost for a caregiver who is indirectly affected by trauma may often be minimal (Figley, 1995a, 1995b, 2002); however, the data analysis in Chapter 4 demonstrated how I found myself vulnerable to compassion fatigue due to enduring vicarious traumatic incidents.

The incidents described in Chapter 4 included how I was emotionally impacted by my professional experiences following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and later by the death of a student. Both of these incidents left me unable to express my emotions and I began to deal with symptoms of compassion fatigue (emptiness, extreme tiredness, and low satisfaction at work (Figley, 1995a, 1995b, 2002; Nagash & Sahin, 2011; Rank et al., 2009)).

My greatest strengths became my downfall because my empathic abilities were out of sorts. I was unable to handle these past traumatic incidents that had happened to the students. My coping mechanisms were in overdrive because I was internalizing everything that was happening to me. As I reflected on my final student affairs experience, I recognized that I was repressing my emotions because of the behavior modeled by my role models.

I was predisposed to empathic distress and compassion fatigue because I was overworked, and unable to process my emotions in a healthy way.   Indicators of compassion fatigue resurfaced while I worked on a student organization registration policy. The registration policy included the campus nondiscrimination policy, and many other elements (e.g., room reservation, advising, training, etc.) to help clarify the relationship between student organizations and the institution. After the policy went to a public forum, a few religious organization student leaders complained that the policy was discriminatory because their membership excluded GLBT students based on their religious tenets. The religious organizations hired lawyers and threatened lawsuits towards the institution. Based upon the senior administrator's recommendations, the policy was rewritten to accommodate the religious student organizations' needs.

I expressed to my role models and senior administrators how the students were treated unfairly throughout the public forum process. Following several conversations with

GLBT student leaders, I was emotionally overwhelmed by what these students were experiencing. My empathic distress was at a pinnacle moment when the student newspaper stated that the policy endorsed discriminatory practices (local student newspaper, 2006). I felt as if I was a failure because I had become a member of the "dominant culture" (Manning and Coleman-Boatwright, 1999, p. 371) by perpetuating discrimination since I was unable to support the GLBT students' rights publicly on campus.

As I explained in the previous chapter, I became a student affairs professional because I thought it was my calling. Within six years I went from being honored with an award celebrating my work as an LGBT ally (personal communication, January, 2000) striving for social justice on campus to a being unable to support that same LGBT student population. I believed that as a profession all student affairs members would collectively respond (Young, 1997) to support all students' needs. I thought the student affairs profession promoted healthy and productive lives (professionally and personally) by helping all students. Instead, I learned that there was a toll for caring too much (Figley, 1995a, 1995b, 2002) about the social injustices facing students on campus. The toll comes from student affairs professionals being caught in the power struggle of their administrative role on campus and responsibility to support their institution while at the same time wanting to do the right thing to advocate for students (Harrison, 2010).

Conclusion

The discovery of themes from my research revealed a better understanding of myself, the tenuous relationship between social justice and the culture of student affairs, and the impact of compassion fatigue and empathic distress. In Chapter 6, I provide a summary of my research and discuss how my data and analysis relate to the research questions I posed. I

consider the implications regarding social justice in higher education and possible ways to help student affairs professionals affected by compassion fatigue and empathic distress. I consider the scope and limitations of this study and the possibilities for future practices and research. Additionally, I explore the implications this work will have on my future in higher education.

In Chapter 6, I provide an elaborate discussion of my research. I consider the implications regarding social justice in higher education and possible ways to help student affairs professionals affected by compassion fatigue and empathic distress. I consider the scope and limitations of this study and the possibilities for future practices and research. Additionally, I explore the implications this work will have on my future in higher education.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the culture of student affairs, as related to students' experiencing social injustices and how these instances affect student affairs professionals. In this chapter, I provide a summary of findings based on my research questions, discuss the results of the study, consider the implications in regard to social justice in higher education, and identify possible ways to support student affairs professionals affected by compassion fatigue and empathic distress. I also consider the scope and limitations of this study, the possibilities for future research, and the implications this work will have on the future of student affairs in higher education.

Summary

Using my story, along with observations shared by three university community members, this autoethnographic study explored the effect of the student affairs culture and interactions with students who faced social injustices on us as student affairs professionals. I used autoethnography to subjectively examine, interpret, and make meaning from my experience (Crotty, 2003) as a student and student affairs professional within the culture of student affairs. I learned about myself and the culture of student affairs by creating meaning (Mautner, 2008) from the university community members' interview responses and my unique story.

Themes

Based upon qualitative data analysis, using the inductive and iterative approach (Lichtman, 2006, p. 161), the primary themes discovered in this study included:

• Role models played an important role, both positively and negatively, in the informal education of a student affairs professional.

- The university community members I interviewed and I believed that the role of the student affairs professional was to create and maintain a socially just environment for our students; however, we each experienced significant barriers when advocating social justice.

- I experienced transformational learning as a result of recognizing connections in my story among identifying as a student affairs professional, believing in social justice, and experiencing compassion fatigue.

Conclusions

While my life experience is unlike others, I was gratified that I found similar themes between my story and the university community members' responses about the culture of student affairs and experiences with students facing social injustices. I discovered these connections using the four research questions to explore my personal analysis of my experiences as a student affairs professional.

<div align="center">Research Questions</div>

Through my research I discovered how professionals, within the culture of student affairs, were affected by the social injustices students experienced on campuses. In my study I explored the following research questions:

- Upon reflection, how did I respond to social injustices and oppression of students on campus?

- What hurdles did I meet while striving to establish a just campus environment?

- What effects did working to address social injustice in higher education have on me, both professionally and holistically?

- What are the implications of my experiences for other student affairs professionals?

In the following sections, I discuss the results of my study.

Question 1: Responding to Social Injustices

The first question was "Upon reflection, how did I respond to social injustices and oppression of students on campus?" To address this question, I share how my reflection on these campus inequities led me to understand the challenge of being an advocate, acknowledging privilege, the impact of empathic distress and compassion fatigue, and the importance of self-understanding.

The challenge of trying to be an advocate. I found that while students remained at the forefront of my mind, I remained an administrator of the "dominant culture" (Coleman-Boatwright, 1999, p. 371) on campus. While I wanted to maintain my working relationships with students, I felt compelled to support the policies the institution was putting in place.

The act of maintaining my role as an administrator was difficult for me because it was contrary to the way I was taught to be as a student affairs professional. As an undergraduate student, I learned from my role models that it was important to share key information regarding administrative policies that would affect students. I would then share that information with key student leaders and we could help take appropriate action to embrace or challenge that change on campus. But later, as a student affairs professional, the challenge was keeping information from students because upper administrators impressed on me the importance of doing so.

My undergraduate advisers and many of my colleagues, including the three university community members in this study, all publicly advocated for underrepresented students on campus. The process of writing this autoethnography gave me the opportunity to reflect critically on why I felt unable to be an advocate for students as these student affairs professionals had done but rather felt compelled to serve as an administrator whose main role

was to uphold existing policies. My lack of ability to be an advocate may have been related to my position on campus as a middle manager in student activities; whereas, my role models and the university community member participants were either working in positions where they were expected to address the needs of a specific underrepresented student population or were upper administrators on their campuses. Perhaps if I had been in one of those roles, I would have felt empowered to voice my opinions openly. Instead, I shared my concerns about the student organization policy only with upper administrators and my colleagues.

Another reason I may have chosen not to advocate was that a supervisor, who was an upper administrator, shared with me that the upper administrators were very displeased by a colleague's action in advocating publicly for underrepresented students on campus. This conversation occurred prior to the social injustices students experienced with the student organization registration policy. Even the most informal interactions with my supervisor stuck with me and affected my response to the needs of students. Therefore, I did not serve the students--I served the administration.

Acknowledging privilege. Being the primary subject of the research into how student affairs professionals respond to students experiencing social injustices, it was necessary for me to acknowledge that my position as a privileged administrator played a part in the existence or nonexistence of social justice on campus. Student affairs professionals must have an understanding of their own privilege before they are able to help their students (Reason & Broido, 2005). My established beliefs (Mezirow, 1990; van Halen-Faber, 1997) were being challenged as I began to question how my actions as a student affairs professional may or may not have promoted privilege and held back social justice to conform to the culture of institutional management (Coleman-Boatright, 1999) on campus.

Because I was a part of the higher administration, I played a role in every decision, policy, practice, and program that affected our underrepresented students. I explained in Chapter 4 that I believed GLBT students had the right to join religious organizations; but with that stance I would have been discriminating against religious Christian organizations because Christian organizations would no longer have had the right to determine who could join their organization if the nondiscrimination policy had forced them to admit GLBT students. Upon further reflection, however, I wondered if the administration sided with the Christian-based organizations because Christianity was the dominant religion on campus (Mezirow, 1990). I also considered whether some of my feelings were affected by my having been raised Christian. Also, the Christian organizations had legal counsel waving a constitutional violation lawsuit at the institution. My thinking led me to consider whether I forfeited GLBT students' rights because I was afraid of the public outcry.

I was privileged as an administrator to look at the issue rather than the students it was detrimentally affecting on campus. The difference between me and the GLBT students in relation to this issue was that I was able to walk away from it. Although I spent over a year behind closed doors making upper administrators aware of the social injustices taking place on campus as a result of the enactment of the new policy, my actions did not matter because in the end I could distance myself from its inequities because I was privileged. I did not have to face the fact that I was being unfairly treated on campus because of my identity. I did not have to admit that because of who I was I would be unable to gain membership in a registered student organization at a public university. I did not have to feel inadequate because I still had my job and I was fulfilling my position as a student affairs professional.

Although my job was defined by the institution as one that helps students, I was not able to alter or argue the institution's hegemonic practices (Osei-Kofi, et al., 2010).

Empathic distress and compassion fatigue. I exhibited empathic distress (Hoffman, 1991) and compassion fatigue (Figley, 1995a, 1995b, 2002) as I dealt with my inner turmoil about not advocating for underrepresented students coping with social injustices on campus. The critical incident (Tripp, 1993) for me was when I saw how the student organization policy that I was working with on campus was discriminating against GLBT students. This emotionally charged incident was a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 1991) for me because I was unable to support the students in the way I had been taught and therefore thought I should as a student affairs professional (American Council on Education, 1937; American Council on Education, Committee on Student Personnel Work, 1949). I believed that I could not advocate for the students because there was a boundary between helping to develop an inclusive campus and being an administrator.

Witnessing students experiencing social inequities triggered empathic distress (Eisenberg, 2000; Hoffman, 1991, 2000) for me. When I reflect back on these experiences I believe that my altruistic nature (Eisenberg, et al., 2006) to help others was stifled because I was unable to publicly support the students experiencing inequitable treatment. I believed that I was not capable of helping the students because I would be unsupported by the upper administrators on campus. I attempted to address this challenge by taking control of and seeking approval for (Stamm, 2010) the work I was able to accomplish outside of the student organization policy.

I started to exhibit characteristics of compassion fatigue (Figley, 1995a, 1995b, 2002) after witnessing the unjust treatment of students. To compensate for my emotional torment, I

worked more hours and took less care of myself (Stamm, 2010). I was unable to stop thinking about work issues, which caused insomnia multiple days in a row (Figley, 1995a, 1995b, 2002). When I was at work, I felt as if my job was critical for the mission of student affairs (Stamm, 2010). I evaded any conflict I could possibly have with my supervisors, colleagues, students, friends, and loved ones (Stamm, 2010) by not sharing my thoughts on critical issues.

The silence wore on me. I was depressed. I avoided being around people--especially those staff and students with whom I worked on a daily basis (Figley, 1995a, 1995b, 2002; Stamm, 2010. I started to believe that I could not complete my job responsibilities because I was no longer the talented administrator who had been honored as a social justice ally (personal communication, January, 2000).

Outside of work, my personal life was failing due to my inability to relate to my partner, friends, and even my family (Stamm, 2010). To cope with the depression, I impulsively spent exorbitant amounts of money on unnecessary things. Both of these issues increased my already existing problems with anxiety and insomnia (Figley, 1995a, 1995b, 2002; Stamm, 2010).

Because I was unable to manage my personal and professional life, I began to verbally react to students with anger (Figley, 1995a, 1995b, 2002; Stamm, 2010). I recall one incident during spring 2006 in which I yelled in frustration at two of my amazing student leaders in my closed office. While I apologized to them multiple times, and made my supervisors aware of my inappropriate reaction, I was unable to forgive myself for my actions. In fact, this incident caused me to perceive all work interactions as a test of whether I was able to do my job (Stamm, 2010).

I was at the pinnacle of compassion fatigue (Figley, 1995a, 1995b, 2002) with burnout and depersonalization (Stamm, 2010). I was unable to recognize who I was either professionally or personally. I was no longer who I thought I was meant to be. Since my job was my identity, I had to leave my job to find my "self" again.

Self-understanding. Student affairs professionals exist to serve as caregivers for students (N. J. Evans & Reason, 2001). One trait expected of student affairs professionals is a compassionate concern for others (R. B. Young, 1997); thus, the self becomes secondary. My graduate education did not encourage me to gain a better understanding of myself (Scott, 1997) and how I was connected to the culture of student affairs. If my education and training had placed importance on understanding myself, I may have been prepared to do my job in student affairs more effectively.

As an inexperienced graduate student, I did not understand how the culture of student affairs professionals would affect me emotionally. I did not know that outside of the daily student programs, activities, and meetings I would need to be there to help guide students facing traumas or social injustices on campus. Why would a student affairs professional have to be there for the students? Altruistically, it is what student affairs professionals do for students. When I was a student affairs professional it was an implicit assumption that I should be able to handle all my duties without emotional distress. I emulated what my role models, supervisors, and role models did in similar situations (Schmidt & Wolfe, 2009).

Perhaps developing a better self-understanding would have taught me how to behave differently when faced with issues and challenges as a professional. I did not know campus incidents could cause intense unmanageable emotion (Goodman, 2000; Hoffman, 1978, 1989, 2001). During my final year in student affairs, I was unable to stay impassive behind

closed doors, or in my personal life. I was coping with symptoms of empathic distress (Hoffman, 2001) and compassion fatigue (Figley, 1995a, 1995b, 2002). While my role models were able to hide their emotions, I was unable to hide my feelings. If I had known then how to manage my empathic distress (Hoffman, 2001) and compassion fatigue (Figley, 1995a, 1995b, 2002) perhaps I would not have believed that I was dehumanizing myself (Goodman, 2000). Instead, I stifled my meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 1995) to stay within the constructs of the institutional culture (Williams et al., 2005) that appeared to be perpetuating inequities. This discrepancy between my meaning schemes (Mezirow, 1995) and my professional career caused me a considerable amount of stress.

A role model, who was a senior level student affairs administrator, once explained, "Your emotions should not affect your decision-making while you are managing people. Consider the problem or position, and not the person(s)." This anecdote was in reference to how the campus was making budgetary decisions involving jobs. This strategy was not easy for me to follow. People are human, and should be treated equally on a campus that places importance on diversity in their strategic plan, mission, and workshops. If we forget we are human, then what good are we? I was unable to separate myself from social injustices on campus because I could see the "common humanity" (Goodman, 2000, p. 1063) between myself and the students experiencing inequities. If we do not have an understanding of our self, we dehumanize society (Goodman, 2000). To have a better understanding of myself I had to admit that I was a privileged member of the institution contributing to the institution's hegemonic culture of management (Coleman-Boatright, 1999).

Question 2: Hurdles

"What hurdles did I face in striving to cultivate an equitable campus environment?" was the next question. I and each of the university community members with whom I spoke faced a different problem as we tried to make a difference on our campuses. While each of the hurdles we faced was different, there were similar effects triggered during those events. The primary challenges we faced were (a) contending with our conflicted roles as administrators versus student advocates and (b) institutional culture.

Administrator vs. advocate. I found that all of us considered it a part of our job to advocate for social justice on campus and that we were each faced with campuses being unsupportive of social justice advocacy. I recall playing the administrator and the advocate as separate roles. A campus embracing social justice, however, would realize that administrators should also be social justice advocates. Mina stated,

> My position is that you do not have a college campus without social justice.
> The history of higher education is steeped in social justice for access to
> education and opportunity and what history, what faculty, were doing to
> provide services and support and mentoring to students and then when the
> profession of student affairs came about what student affairs was about. With
> all of the social changes that happened in the 40s and 50s and 60s and 70s,
> and still today, social justice has to be core. I believe it is core–what is
> happening on college campuses (transcribed interview, August 5, 2011)

Social justice is not just an individual or departmental goal--it is a systematic and societal issue (Harrison, 2010). Social justice values, practices, and policies must be embraced by higher education as a means to help make change happen on a societal level (Aguirre & Martinez, 2007). Change can occur when a campus community emphasizes the importance

of all by challenging and changing the hegemonic structures of the status quo (Allen & Cherrey, 2003; Pope, et al., 2009).

Institutional culture. Institutional culture was another obstacle to social justice on campus. The university community members in my study and I all experienced a campus community that was sometimes unsupportive of an equitable campus. Many institutions advertise diversity as being a part of the overall institutional mission in marketing materials (M. J. Chang, 2002; Lowery, 1998), but because Eurocentricity continues to be the foundation for policies and procedures, social injustices continue on campuses (Osei-Kofi, et al., 2010).

Higher education exists to help shape society (Dewey, 1938). When educators conduct research and work to find the most advantageous way of meeting students' needs (Dewey, 1938), the knowledge and strategies that educators generate improve the lives of students while they are in college but also have longer lasting effects on these individuals throughout their lives (Apple, 2007; Calhoun, 2006; Gildersleeve, et al., 2010). Therefore, by identifying students' needs, we are learning about societal needs. The role of student affairs professionals was developed to support students' needs and prepare them for living in a diverse society (Hurtado, 2005).

Some campuses embrace social justice throughout the academic curriculum and student life, with the staff and faculty promoting a socially just campus environment. However, a number of years ago Stan, one of the participants I interviewed, worked on a campus where he felt unsupported. Stan explained how following a candlelight vigil for Matthew Shepard after Shepard was traumatically killed in a violent hate crime, he felt unsupported and "disillusioned." He explained that after hosting the vigil, "[he] had to worry

so much and be so careful, especially in an environment of free enquiry, especially in an environment where our job is to be social justice educators" (transcribed interview, August 4, 2011). By contrast, Stan described the social justice-infused campus where he currently works: "We've been able to institutionalize it [social justice] in our organizations, and in our curricula, and in our departments and our programs, and I think that is terrific" (transcribed interview, August 4, 2011). He continued, "It's still a very, very long journey, and a very important effort, particularly for student affairs folks, to try to create positive and equitable learning environments" (transcribed interview, August 4, 2011).

I reflected back on my prior learning (Mezirow, 1991) about social justice in student affairs from my graduate programs and professional development. I thought about how the culture of student affairs promotes social justice; yet, my campus had a hard time taking a stand towards institutionalizing it for the betterment of students. The university community members I interviewed had similar experiences where their education and training instilled the importance of social justice and supporting students; yet, the campus's higher administration did not necessarily support students who sought social justice on campus.

Question 3: Effect of Social Injustices on the Professional

The next question I examined was, "What effects did working to address social injustice in higher education have on me, both professionally and holistically?" Each student affairs professional perceives different reactions from institutional upper administrators when witnessing students facing adversity on campus. Their responses vary when their student affairs staff believe their institutions are unsupportive or unresponsive to the needs of underrepresented students. To capture variation in responses, not only did I examine my own

reactions, but also I asked my participants to respond to questions about their reactions to this issue.

It became a challenge for me, as well as the university community members I interviewed, to continue to do our work when each of our institutions appeared to be ignoring the social injustices occurring on campus. The data demonstrated that there was a connection between our perceptions of unjust treatment of students and the emotional stress I and my respondents experienced. We were also able to describe our personal feelings following these experiences and how our feelings had an impact on us professionally.

Feelings. In Chapter 4, I discussed how the university community members and I felt after we tried to help students facing adversity on campus. The descriptions of the incidents of social injustices had one element in common--disappointment. Equitable environments became a mythical goal for us during these challenges.

Mina explained that it "broke [her] heart" when senior administrators did not recognize that a mural was insensitive and demeaning to women (transcribed interview, August 5, 2011). Gina was "disheartened" when the institution chose consciously (or unconsciously) to spend money on an event to avoid a discussion about discrimination on campus (transcribed interview, September 28, 2011). Stan was "disillusioned" by the senior administration's disapproval of a memorial event held on the night Matthew Shepard (a victim of a hate crime) passed (transcribed interview, August 4, 2011).

I learned that working with social injustices facing students, within the culture of student affairs, was not what I had been taught during my graduate coursework. I thought that one of my primary jobs was to support all of the students on campus. I believed that when I was advocating for underrepresented students, administrators would understand and

join in the endeavor. Instead, I felt unsupported by the higher administration. Feeling unsupported, as well as being overworked, increased my susceptibility to empathic distress (Hoffman, 1978, 1989, 2001) and compassion fatigue (Figley, 1995a; 1995b; 2002).

As you read in Chapter 4, I was exhausted from fighting a battle to keep all student organizations open to all students. I had insomnia, lacked focus at work, and still felt as if I had to do all aspects of my job for the students. My sense of responsibility increased because I was unable to advocate from behind closed doors for the GLBT students, who just wanted to have the same rights as all other students on this public institution's campus.

Cost of caring. The cost of caring occurs when caregivers are so engrossed with supporting victims who are facing challenging situations and social injustices that the caregivers become vulnerable to compassion fatigue (Bergel Bourassa, 2009). In this study, I learned that student affairs professionals are susceptible to symptoms similar to those experienced by caregivers (e.g., emergency workers, nurses) when working with victims and survivors. These symptoms are related to compassion fatigue (Figley, 1995a; 1995b; 2004).

Student affairs professionals may be at risk of being exposed to compassion fatigue because of their work with students (Bergel Bourassa, 2009), which requires an extensive amount of time spent working, and leaves less time for taking care of themselves (R. B. Young, 1997), as well as a strong sense of responsibility to care for students (Schmidt & Wolfe, 2009). Overexposure to information about traumatic events (Figley, 1995a; 1995b; 2004) may often occur between student affairs professionals and their students because of the trust built in their working relationships. This overexposure may cause compassion fatigue and ultimately may result in burnout (Bergel Bourassa, 2009).

Mina shared that she "felt just beaten up," "felt defeated," and "didn't feel good" (transcribed interview, August 5, 2011) after she listened to her students' experiences with social injustices on campus. Stan shared that being unsupported was "particularly draining emotionally, or particularly disheartening" (transcribed interview, August 4, 2011). My own experiences with students' social injustices relative to the student organization registration policy, to the death of a student, and following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, were all relative frames of reference (Mezirow, 2000) to the cost of caring for myself.

It is conceivable that because of all of these incidents, along with the number of hours I worked, and my many job responsibilities, I may have been more prone to compassion fatigue than the typical student affairs educator. There was a price for caring too much about the students and my work (Figley, 1995a). However, any student affairs professional, when learning about students' social injustices, may be overwhelmed by similar feelings of loss (Rank, et al., 2009). Those feelings of loss often trigger resistance to the information (Mezirow, 1990) because social injustice does not correlate with the way in which we believe the institution functions. My form of protection was taking on more responsibilities so I could avoid the inequities I saw happening to GLBT students.

Transformational learning. When I reflected on my experience with the GLBT students on campus, I was able to identify this event as a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 1991, 1997, 2000). The incident of being pulled between the roles of administrator and advocate had me reexamining my beliefs (Cranton, 2002). I had to critically assess (Mezirow, 1991, 1997, 2000; Brookfield, 1987) who I was and what I wanted to do with my life. I thought that by writing this autoethnography I would be able to pinpoint who caused this anguish in my life; however, I discovered that I could not assign blame (E. W. Taylor,

1997) to just one person. After interviewing the university community members, I was able to determine that our shared experience (Mezirow, 1991, 1997, 2000; E. W. Taylor, 1997) was believing that social justice was an integral part of the culture of student affairs. Yet, we discovered that the campuses on which we had worked failed the underrepresented students we each were trying to support through our work.

Each of the university community members who participated in this study was able to overcome the challenge of social injustices on his or her campus. They accomplished this goal by finding different work in another position or at another institution of higher education. In contrast, I chose to leave the field because I was unable to differentiate social justice advocacy from my work in student affairs.

It was the institutional culture that disallowed student affairs professionals from supporting underrepresented students. Because we were a part of the institutional culture, it was as if *we* failed our students. Even though we may have voiced our opinions, we were unable to move past the hegemonic policies and practices that have been engrained since the founding of the higher education system in the United States in 1636. This autoethnographic self-reflection helped me to acknowledge that my self-understanding evolved new meaning perspectives (Brookfield, 1987; Cranton, 2002) related to my knowledge of the culture of student affairs.

Question 4: Implications

The final question, "What are the implications of my experiences for other student affairs professionals?" offered me the opportunity to reflect on what the ideal culture of student affairs might be for individuals and institutions. My study has implications for various stakeholders in education: institutions, students, student affairs professionals, senior

administrators, staff development, graduate preparation programs, faculty, and the campus community.

Implications for individuals. I hope my findings strengthen the need for student affairs professionals (along with upper administrators, new professionals, graduates, faculty, and those engaged in social justice work) to become self-aware, live a healthy life (emotionally and physically), and understand the influence of informal learning from each other and role models (Berwick, 1992; Schmidt & Wolfe, 2009).

Professionals can no longer assume that they understand their students' institutional needs (Fried, 1997). Student affairs professionals must learn how to be nimble and adapt to change, which will allow them to support diverse campus communities. As Fried (1997) stated,

Because of different belief systems and different ways of interpreting events, the consequences of a particular choice can easily move in unanticipated directions because different groups interpret the meaning of events [policies, practices] differently and those interpretations may not be known to the decision makers. (p. 19)

When we were creating the registration policy for student organizations we did not take into consideration how the nondiscrimination policy would affect students. However, it opened a dialogue that had not been considered by the upper administration. The challenge to student affairs professionals and higher education administrators is to take into account all of the beliefs, values, and practices that are exhibited by the student subcultures within the campus community (Fried, 1997).

Institutional implications. My hope is that by sharing the perspectives that arose through this study I will inspire others to critically assess (Mezirow, 1991, 1997, 2000) student affairs, and our campuses, from a social justice perspective (L. A. Bell, 1997; Friere, 1970; Foucault, 1980; Grant & Agosto, 2008; Ng, 2003; Reason, et al., 2005; Yosso, 2005). Student affairs associations (national and local), academic preparation programs, divisions of student affairs, and upper administration must become nimble in addressing students' needs, promote a healthy and sustainable life, enhance campus communities, and ultimately promote an open and inviting diverse campus environment. The culture of student affairs is only one of the many subcultures within the overall institutional culture (Fried, 1997). Kuh and Whitt (1988) defined institutional culture in higher education as,

> The collective, mutually shaping patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs,
>
> and assumptions that guide the behavior of individuals and groups in an
>
> institute of higher education and provide a frame of reference within which to
>
> interpret the meaning of events and actions on and off campus. (pp. 12-13)

The definition by Kuh and Whitt (1988) is being challenged because the Eurocentric culture, practices, policies, and values that continue to be dominant on U.S. campuses are no longer as relevant to the campus of today as they were previously (Fried, 1997). Higher education continues to diversify, with students from a broad intersectionality of underrepresented identities (e.g., multiracial, transgender, queer, fluid, learning disabled) (Manning & Muñoz, 2011). Based on this knowledge, institutions must identify ways to adapt their current Eurocentric culture to meet the needs of diverse students by gaining new knowledge and skills to develop and implement plans of action (Mezirow 1991, 1997, 2000).

These necessary skills will be formed by building relationships through intentional and respectful dialogues to learn from all campus community members from all backgrounds (Fried, 1997). The relationship building will provide knowledge for ethical decision-making to create inclusive policies and procedures that meet the needs of students with ever-changing demographics (Fried, 1997). Once institutions choose to break down their current hegemonic barriers; students, staff, and faculty will begin to see a more inclusive campus environment. The challenge for any campus is that the process takes time, and cannot happen while in the midst of a critical incident (Fried, 1997). All viewpoints are relevant to the campus, not just the traditional Eurocentric ones put forth by a campus's founding fathers. As Fried (1997) proclaimed,

> To ignore the different beliefs about goodness and virtue held by different groups of students is to ignore the other regarding virtues of benevolence and integrity and the principles of autonomy, justice, fairness, doing good, and doing no harm. This violates the historical belief system of student affairs and fails to honor the historical mission of providing service to students as individuals and members of groups. (p. 19)

The more we learn from each other, the stronger the campus will become and the more inclusive it will be. Hopefully with these inviting changes, all students will feel at ease within the institutional culture.

This change from a homogeneous to a heterogeneous student population calls for a dramatic alteration to the current traditional hegemonic structures, policies, and practices (Fried, 1997; Manning & Muñoz, 2011; Osei-Kofi, et al., 2010) to become more inclusive and just for all students. For this outcome to occur, student affairs professionals, faculty,

administrators, and the campus community must adapt by deconstructing current practices and reinventing the campus to meet these students' needs (Pope, et al., 2009). This paradigm shift in practices requires all members of the campus community to take time to reflect upon their own value systems and examine how their own beliefs may have contributed to the inequitable treatment of students on campus (Fried, 1997). The campus community should critically examine how people, policies, and procedures may have created an unjust environment (Hurtado, 2005). This evaluation should begin with a transparent analysis in which the entire campus community examines principles, practices, expectations, and standards (Fried, 1997). Methods of accountability should be included in the assessment as a means to evaluate how new policies and procedures are institutionalized. Accountability should be evaluated through shared review of systems by higher education professional associations and accreditation bodies.

Limitations

Because my study was an autoethnography, it may be challenged by the academic community as an egotistical interpretation of the subject I studied (Coffey, 1999). However, I would argue that I was able to scrutinize my story with, as Blumer explained, "firsthand familiarity" (as cited in Adams, 2001, p. 159) because I chose to study my unique life experience in the culture of student affairs. I believe I was able to capture a true story of transformational learning (Kegan, 2000; Mezirow, 2000) because I used autoethnography.

Using only select university community members to interview may be considered an additional limitation. The university community members were selected because of my working relationships with them while I was in the field of student affairs. The university community members' responses helped to solidify themes found throughout their stories as

well as mine. Readers may be more likely to connect with the identified themes from this study since they were based not only on my story but also the stories shared by other student affairs professionals.

How this Study Contributes to the Research Literature

This study provides an intimate exploration of my life as a member of the culture of student affairs. In the study, I examined how my life was affected by students facing social injustices on campus. Currently, the body of student affairs literature is limited regarding how student affairs professionals are affected by social injustices facing students. This study demonstrates how different aspects of a student affairs professional's role may contribute to his or her well-being. For me, aspects of the student affairs profession that affected my well-being included serving as a member of a caring profession, the political challenges of social justice, and how self-reflection promotes transformational learning.

My research findings showed a connection between being a caring professional student affairs staff member and experiencing empathic distress (Eisenberg, 2000; Hoffman, 1991, 2000) and compassion fatigue (Figley, 1995a, 1995b, 2004). This connection affected student affairs professionals personally and professionally. The three interviewed university community members and I witnessed social injustices that led us to reevaluate our roles in student affairs; which resulted in our leaving a campus, position, or the field all together.

The study also demonstrated how student affairs professionals have taken on the role of social justice advocate on campus. My findings support Harrison's (2010) position that student affairs staff members must consider how to develop their coping skills to handle the political challenges of creating and sustaining an equitable campus environment.

The study also contributes to transformative learning theory (Mezirow 1991, 1997,

2000). The act of writing this autoethnography demonstrated how self-reflection leads to

defining new meaning perspectives (Mezirow 1991, 1997, 2000) and contributes to the

healing of one's spirit damaged by compassion fatigue (Figley, 1995a, 1995b, 2004).

Recommendations for Future Research

Through my research I have come to believe that there are opportunities to discover

additional connections between the backgrounds and education of student affairs

professionals and how they handle experiences with students facing traumatic and unjust

environments. Themes from this study can be further investigated to help educators gain a

better understanding of the overall culture of student affairs. Findings from this study may

also lead to greater exploration of how to create and sustain socially just environments in

higher education environments. The following questions may inform future research:

• If we used the Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL; Stamm, 2009) to measure the

   positive and negative aspects of a student affairs professional's job, how would the scores

   compare to those of professionals within other caring professions? I would recommend

   using Stamm's (2010) *The Concise ProQOL Manual* as a guide for analyzing data.

• How do graduate preparation programs and professional development programs present the

   field of student affairs and the role of social justice on campus? This future research

   question is related to Harrison's (2010) recommendation that professional associations and

   graduate programs promoting social justice advocacy should include teaching personal

   coping skills to graduate students.

• How do upper administrators in higher education view their role in supporting and

   implementing social justice efforts on campus? This study would explore whether or not

they consider themselves to be social justice advocates, and how they perceive the practices and social justice values on a campus.

• In addition to the preceding question, how do underrepresented students view social justice on campus? What have their experiences been when faced with adversity? How have student affairs professionals helped or hindered them?

• Why does the culture of student affairs continue to promote social justice; yet, when faced with challenges on many campuses, student affairs professionals side with the current dominant practices, policies, and procedures?

Recommendations for Student Affairs Practice

This study illustrates that higher education perpetuates the cycle of burnout because it is unable to support the creation of boundaries between working and personal life. If higher education does not change, the field of student affairs will continue to lose gifted professionals who are dedicated to students. In the following sections I present my recommendations for preparing professionals. I address the culture of student affairs, the effects of social justice advocacy, self-care of professionals, and the responsibilities of role models as well as how institutional practices should adapt to diverse student populations, practice social justice, and put students first.

Preparing Professionals

Student affairs graduate preparation programs must teach transparently about the culture of student affairs, the effects of social justice advocacy, as well as how to care for oneself as a new professional. Graduate preparation faculty and student affairs educators associated with preparation programs also have a responsibility to be open, caring, and professional role models for students who are entering the student affairs field.

Culture of student affairs. While exploring the culture of student affairs through my research, I was able to verify that the primary responsibility of student affairs professionals on campus is to support students (American Council on Education, 1937; Harrison, 2010; N. J. Evans & Reason, 2001). On top of advocating for students experiencing social injustices, student affairs professionals may have additional responsibilities. Those student affairs professionals who make the effort to provide support for students are still expected to maintain (if not exceed) their other job responsibilities. The tension to uphold the current hegemonic standards of practice while balancing personal values may be a difficult one for student affairs professionals.

In this study, three university community members and I shared how we supported underrepresented students experiencing unjust actions on campus. This study also verified that student affairs professionals' roles of working for all students and being social justice advocates were viewed as integral parts of the culture of student affairs. N. J. Evans and Reason's (2001) review of student affairs association philosophical statements drew a similar conclusion to the question, "Where are advocacy and activism in the list of student affairs functions?" (p. 376). However, the internal challenges exist within the culture of student affairs when supporting students by promoting social justice on campus.

The university community members and I considered ourselves to be advocates of social justice, but when working with students to achieve this goal we received push back from upper administrators and other student affairs professionals (Harrison, 2010). For example, Mina described the negative reaction she received from one of her colleagues after she had helped students navigate bureaucracy on campus:

So that [helping the student with a faculty issue] was a bit of a philosophical difference on how we [another staff member and herself] interpreted our position descriptions, and I got a little bit of heat for taking those actions when they weren't doing it. It wasn't that what I was doing was wrong; it's that it reflected on what they weren't doing. (transcribed interview, August 5, 2011)

Mina's intention was to support the student and the other staff member chose to misinterpret those actions as a threat to their job. Furthermore, a key upper student affairs administrator questioned if Mina was an administrator or an advocate, and she replied "an advocate" (transcribed interview, August 5, 2011).

This tension between supporting students and working for the administration is one that student affairs professionals continue to experience (Edwards, 2006; Harrison, 2010). Yet, many student affairs professionals believe that one of their primary functions is to serve as social justice advocates for students (N. J. Evans & Reason, 2001). Many professional preparation programs teach social justice as a key part of the profession, but higher education (Harrison, 2010) and the student affairs profession (N. J. Evans & Reason, 2001; Harrison, 2010) have not yet operationalized social justice (Edwards, 2006; Harrison, 2010). To operationalize social justice in student affairs, and in higher education generally, would mean all members of the campus community understand, accept, and encourage equity on all systemic, procedural, political, and programmatic levels within the institutional structure (Williams et al., 2005).

The effects of social justice advocacy. Social justice should be an integral part of the professional preparation educational program; however, graduate students should be made aware that social justice is not embraced on every campus. Nor is social justice

completely embraced by the culture of student affairs. The more truthful instructors are about the profession, the better prepared young professionals will be as they enter the student affairs workforce. Graduate students should be taught the realities of being a student affairs professional (Lorden, 1998), including dealing with campus politics, maintaining a healthy professional life, and working with students facing social injustices, traumatic incidents, and even death.

It is imperative to teach new professionals about self-preservation and coping with the barriers faced when working towards social justice on campus (Harrison, 2010). They should be encouraged to evaluate whether or not the challenges of working for social justice will outweigh the emotional distress they may face (Reason & Broido, 2005) as a student affairs professional. Learning how to maintain boundaries and a healthy lifestyle will strengthen the field of student affairs. By better preparing incoming professionals, we will develop a stronger group of student affairs professionals to work for social justice (Reason, et al., 2005).

How can staff members create and maintain equitable environments if they are unable to manage their own lives? Student affairs professionals must determine how their privilege and position as an administrator contributes to social injustices on their campuses, become aware of their own identities, explore how being a social justice advocate will benefit them, and acknowledge that they cannot make a campus equitable by themselves (Reason & Broido, 2005).

Self-care of professionals. As I spoke about this topic to student affairs professionals at a conference in November 2011, I realized how important it will be for administrators to look at the sustainability of the student affairs staff. How can student

affairs members remain healthy if they are working 60 to 80 hours a week? The demands of the profession and limited resources continue to push student affairs staff to their limits.

Student affairs professionals must watch out for each other and help each other to remember to take breaks. They need to learn how caring for students, extensive hours, and lack of support may make them vulnerable to empathic distress and compassion fatigue (Figley, 1995a, 1995b, 2004). Hiding oneself in more work because one does not know how to handle stress does not constitute healthy behavior. Student affairs educators must work to reduce the amount of stress they experience while finding a way to become aware of their own needs by developing a "self-care" plan that will strengthen their ability to do their work in a healthy and balanced way (Gentry, 2002, p. 19).

Sharing with colleagues what is happening to them personally and professionally is not a breach of boundaries (Gentry, 2002). There is a significant chance that other student affairs colleagues are experiencing similar distress and trying to handle the stress on their own. Reaching out to each other is the first step towards a compassionate campus and creating a healthier culture of student affairs at the same time.

Role models. I discovered that role models played a significant part in informally educating professionals to do their jobs in student affairs. Role models contributed to how I worked with policies and procedures on campus. My work ethic and behavior was based upon observing how upper administrators approved or disapproved of my role models' actions. Mina's role model helped her to reflect on the work she did with students who faced oppression from the campus housing department. Each meaningful interaction with role models served as a way to inform how work should be done on campus.

The influence of role models is not always healthy. For years, student affairs professionals have worked endless hours and placed others as a priority before themselves (Schmidt & Wolfe, 2009). Because professionals see their role models working 60-80 hours a week, trying to do it all, the "If you can, I can" mentality (Schmidt & Wolfe, 2009, p. 372) is prevalent in new professionals. However, as professionals become seasoned, they may begin to selectively determine how to achieve goals differently than their role models. The challenge is that many professionals may have already developed their own routines, many of which contribute negatively to their work and personal life (Berwick, 1992). It is imperative that role models recognize that their actions, informal and formal, contribute to how new professionals will work during the rest of their careers (Schmidt & Wolfe, 2009).

Senior and mid-level student affairs administrators and graduate preparation program faculty members should consider how their actions and life choices are informing new professionals on how they should proceed through their careers. The unspoken lesson when graduate students see their supervisors working 60 to 80 hours a week is that they too are required to work as many hours once they are professionals. If they do not see their supervisors or role models taking time for themselves and creating boundaries between work and their personal lives, the unspoken lesson is that one's work is one's identity.

Institutional Practice

Institutions must take the initiative to infuse social justice into the campus environment by understanding and adapting to the needs of their diverse students and creating inclusive and equitable environments. In all instances, students must be the first priority.

Supporting and practicing social justice. Institutions should recognize that it is important to build a collective understanding and be supportive of student affairs professionals who are working towards eradicating oppressive environments. In actuality, all institutional members should be a part of a social justice collective. When a student affairs professional or other university community member advocates for a student or student organization, the staff person should be supported rather than discouraged by the administration.

Student affairs educators should share with other professionals (colleagues and supervisors) information about the work they are doing, how it is affects them, and its relation to the campus mission (Reason & Broido, 2005). The more they talk about everyday social justice occurrences, the more likely that social justice will become a part of the institutional culture rather than an issue that has negative overtones. The more professional support professionals build with one another, the stronger social justice awareness will be on campus. Being an ally for a student should not be considered unique to the profession; it should be commonplace. The stronger the social justice awareness, the more likely that advocacy will be a part of the culture of student affairs and the institution itself.

Understanding diverse student populations. An effort should be made to recognize and acknowledge the needs of the diversifying student populations in higher education. Eliminating or modifying policies created by privileged homogenous administrators for a privileged homogenous student population will help to meet the needs of underrepresented students on campus. Recognizing and acknowledging the importance of a social justice infused, equitable environment will strengthen how our students grow and collaborate together.

Students exhibit a wide variety of needs, backgrounds, and combinations thereof, which differ depending on race, color, age, ethnicity, religion, national origin, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, sex, marital status, disability, status as a veteran, and a range of additional factors. These differences may also encompass the oppression the students have experienced thus far and may continue to face while working towards their educational goals (Reason & Broido, 2005).

Supporting the diverse needs of students may be overwhelming because administrators and faculty may be challenged to build relationships with students who are unlike themselves (Fried, 1997). However, the act of building relationships with students will provide a more inclusive environment to meet and adapt to the needs of diverse students (Fried, 1997; Reason & Broido, 2005). Campuses will have a vested interest in diversity as a part of daily life where all members of the community are engaged in modeling the importance of social justice (Fusch, 2012). On the ideal inclusive campus where there is an "embedded diversity" (Fusch, 2012, para. 9): diversity would not be just a one credit course that students *have* to take to graduate; underrepresented students would feel included and graduate from the college; and because of the inclusive environment, underrepresented faculty and staff members would want to work at and retire from the campus (Fusch, 2012).

Students first. This study demonstrated how student affairs professionals put the needs of students in front of many other factors on campus. Students are concerned with the cost and value of their education and how, once on campus, their basic needs (housing, parking, food, safety, opportunities, etc.) are not being met as the college or university promised to them. As I noted in Ch. 4, Mina stated, "Because we [student affairs professionals] are about students! Not just what students raise their hand and say the need–

what we can recognize. Administratively, we need to be providing. So student affairs professionals will be a voice for students on behalf of students as well as with students" (transcribed interview, August 5, 2011). Institutions will need to find a way to meet and support *all* students' needs. Determining those needs within the current hegemonic structures (Aguirre & Martinez, 2007; Coleman-Boatwright, 1999; Edwards, 2006; Williams, et al., 2005) would be challenging for any student affairs professional.

The reason why putting the needs of students first is difficult for institutions is because of all the "external influences" (Williams, et al., 2005, p. 12) (e.g., endowments, corporate sponsorship, legal issues, research grants, etc.) that provide the public reputation for campuses. Reputation means revenue and access to resources for many institutions (Williams, et al., 2005). The conflicting goals held by various campus community members (i.e., students, student affairs professionals, faculty, and senior administrators) often put those people with the most power at the forefront of the decision-making process that impacts the campus's reputation (Coleman-Boatwright, 1999; Lowery, 1998). Often times, students' needs may be so disconnected from those in power on campus that they are forgotten (Fried, 1997). Student affairs professionals create that connection between upper administrators and students (American Council on Education, 1937; American Council on Education, Committee on Student Personnel Work, 1949).

Every decision, policy, procedure, and corporate partnership should be questioned by all community members. If our institutions had taken the step to ask, "How will or does this action affect our current and future students' needs?," Gina, Mina, Stan, and I would have been sharing stories about how those institutions were effective in helping to meet the students' needs. Instead, campus community members must be willing to challenge the

status quo since the emphasis of higher education leans towards education as a "corporate enterprise" (Harrison, 2010, p. 210) rather than a student-centered endeavor.

Conclusion

Through this study, I intended to explore how working in a campus culture in which students experience social injustices affects student affairs professionals. I believe my story, along with those of the university community members I interviewed, showed how student affairs professionals are affected personally when working with students who experience social injustices.

It is my hope that the study's findings will make new and current student affairs professionals aware of the tribulations that often accompany the responsibility of helping students. I also hope that student affairs professionals and higher education institutions listen to their diverse students' needs. It is imperative that institutions create, implement, and evaluate action plans that support students' lives on campus.

This study helped me to heal. The act of writing this autoethnography allowed me to recognize the importance of reflecting on life events in order to learn how they affected me personally and professionally. I realize now that I was isolating myself from work, family, and friends because I was experiencing compassion fatigue (Figley, 1995a, 1995b, 2002). I was protecting myself (Harrison, 2010) from further emotional trauma. The challenge was that my work was my identity and leaving student affairs left me feeling lost. I was mourning my self (Scott,1997). My 13 years of working in student affairs taught me the realities of social injustices happening on campus, which were different realities than the ones I had learned about during my education and from my role models. Taking the time to reflect on my experience in student affairs helped me to rebuild my self-confidence while

integrating new meaning perspectives into my life (Mezirow, 1991, 1997, 2000). I continue to hope that the people with whom I worked, students and colleagues, can see that I was only doing what I thought was right at the time. I cannot go back and change my actions or inactions, but I can hope that those who are about to enter or are currently in the student affairs field can learn from this study.

Appendix A Institutional Review Board Approval IRB Num #11-

279

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Date: 6/28/2011

To: Laura Bestler
1408 Douglas Ave
Ames, IA 50010

CC: Dr. Nancy J Evans
N247 Lagomarcino Hall

From: Office for Responsible Research

Title: Exploring the Effect of Social Injustices

IRB Num: 11-279

Submission Type: New

Exemption Date: 6/27/2011

The project referenced above has undergone review by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and has been declared exempt from the requirements of the human subject protections regulations as described in 45 CFR 46.101(b). The IRB determination of exemption means that:

- **You do not need to submit an application for annual continuing review.**

- **You must carry out the research as proposed in the IRB application,** including obtaining and documenting informed consent if you have stated in your application that you will do so or if required by the IRB.

- **Any modification of this research should be submitted to the IRB on a Continuing Review and/or Modification form, prior to making any changes,** to determine if the project still meets the federal criteria for exemption. If it is determined that exemption is no longer warranted, then an IRB proposal will need to be submitted and approved before proceeding with data collection.

Please be sure to **use only the approved study materials** in your research, including the **recruitment materials and informed consent documents that have the IRB approval stamp.**

Please note that you must submit all research involving human participants for review by the IRB. **Only the IRB may make the determination of exemption,** even if you conduct a study in the future that is exactly like this study.

Appendix B: Email Letter of Recruitment

Dear <name>,

Hello to you, <name>. I do hope your year is going well. I am in the process of working on my dissertation in Educational Leadership at Iowa State University. My dissertation topic will be an autoethnography titled, "Exploring the effect of social injustices as a student affairs professional." It will be reflecting upon my personal account as a student affairs professional in higher education. Your recollection about working in student affairs will serve as an important information source for my study. Because of our unique relationship, I hope you will be able to take the time to participate in my study.

If you agree to participate in this study your participation will last for up to six months. This is because of two phases: (1) interview, and (2) data analysis. Your participation will include one interview that may take up to 90 minutes each to complete. This interview will be audio recorded, and written transcriptions will be completed by the Primary Investigator (PI). You will receive a copy of the interview transcription and later, the PI data analysis to confirm themes and emerging descriptions of your experiences.

Prior to participating in this study, I will send you the Iowa State University Informed Consent Form. If you choose to not accept, no worries. If you agree to participate as a source for my study, please accept the terms. Once I receive the Informed Consent Form I will arrange a time for us to hold the interview.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent allowed by law, the following measures will be taken: You will be able to select a pseudonym that will be used during data collection, data analysis, and in the dissertation. It may also be used in professional presentations and publications. Data will be destroyed on or before December 31, 2012. If the results are published, the participants' identities will remain confidential.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact me at bestler@iastate.edu or XXX-XXX-XXXX.

Sincerely,
Laura Bestler

Appendix C: Consent Form

Title of Study: An Autoethnography: Exploring the effect of addressing social injustices as a student affairs professional

Investigators: Laura Bestler

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study will be an autoethnography titled, "Exploring the effect of social injustices as a student affairs professional." It will be reflecting upon my personal account as a student affairs professional in higher education. The intention of this dissertation is to inspire a dialogue about how student affairs professionals can cultivate social justice while maintaining a rewarding professional experience, and healthy personal life. My self-study will offer a platform for readers to construct their own knowledge for meaning-making through a reflective process (Belenky & Stanton, 2000). The primary data for the study will be my personal story. Interviews will be used to collect data from former colleagues to inform my self-analysis.

You are being invited to participate in this study because your recollection about working in student affairs will serve as an important information source for my study. Because of our unique relationship, I hope you will be able to agree to take part in a few interviews.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study your participation will last for up to six months. This is because of the two phases: (1) interview, and (2) PI data analysis.

The participation will include one interview that may take up to 90 minutes to complete. This interview will be audio recorded, and a written transcription will be completed by the Primary Investigator (PI). You will receive a copy of the interview transcription and, later, the PI data analysis to confirm themes and emerging descriptions of your experiences.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks at this time from participating in the study.

BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study there may be no direct benefit to you as a participant; however, you may experience a personal satisfaction in contributing to my autoethnographic study. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by inspiring a dialogue about how student affairs professionals can cultivate social justice in higher education while maintaining a rewarding professional experience, and healthy personal life.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent allowed by law, the following measures will be taken. Participants will be able to select their own pseudonym that will be used on data collection and analysis instead of their name. Identifiers will be connected to the Informed Consent document only. The PI will be the only individual with access to the study records that will be kept in a secure, locked filing cabinet, password protected computer files, and password protected mass storage device.

External reviewers and the PI's major professor, Dr. Nancy Evans, will have access to data analysis

with pseudonyms only. These individuals will be utilized to confirm themes and analysis of the data.

In addition, each participant will have the opportunity to review interview transcriptions and data

analysis findings.

The final report will be made available to Laura Bestler's Program of Study committee members. It

may also be used in professional presentations and publications. Data will be destroyed on or before

December 31, 2012. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. For further information about the
study contact:

> Ms. Laura Bestler, Doctoral Candidate
> N229 Lagomarcino Hall,
> Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011
> Phone: 215-272-7993 (Cell)
> email: bestler@iastate.edu
>
> Dr. Nancy J. Evans, Professor
> N247 Lagomarcino,
> Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011
> Phone: 515-294-7113 (Office), 515-231-9612 (Cell); FAX: 515-294-4942.
> email: nevans@iastate.edu

If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please
contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115,
Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

****

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

By clicking the ACCEPT button below indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this
study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the
document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You may print off this informed
consent form for your files.

Appendix D: Participant Interview Questions

To ensure confidentiality to the extent allowed by law, the following measures will be taken. Participants will be able to select a pseudonym instead of their name. This pseudonym will be used on the data collection, data analysis, dissertation, and any research publications. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

Please select your pseudonym: _____

You can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer.

- How do you view the role of social justice on campus?
- How do you view the role of a student affairs professional as a social justice advocate on campus?
- What hurdles do/did you face as a student affairs professional in striving to cultivate an equitable campus environment?
- Do you recall a time when you took a stand towards social justice on campus? If yes, what happened? How did you feel afterwards?
- Have you noticed any effect working to address social injustices in higher education had on yourself, professionally and/or personally?
- Is there anything else you would like to share about your higher education experience and social justice?

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