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Emerging Adults' Perceptions of Learning in an Undergraduate Student Organization for Global Social Justice

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Patty Kean

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Walden University
2010

Abstract

Emerging Adults' Perceptions of Learning in an Undergraduate
Student Organization for Global Social Justice

by

Patricia Marie Kean

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Teacher Leadership

Walden University

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Abstract

Current literature suggests the institution of higher education is exploring its identity and role in society, much like the emerging adults who enroll in their programs as traditional aged undergraduates. Literature also reveals that society is asking undergraduate institutions to meet the diverse needs of its students and prepare them for adulthood and life long learning. However, research also highlights the need for students to be educated for participation within an interconnected and complex global society able to facilitate positive social change. Using a developmental lens, this interpretive case study addressed these current needs through interpreting perceptions of undergraduates and recent graduates about their learning within a student organization focused on global social justice. Data were gathered through 15 survey responses, 8 individual interviews, and a focus group of recent graduates as well as a reflexive journal by the researcher, a former faculty advisor of the student organization. All data were coded for emergent themes and evidence of developmental tasks of emerging adulthood and transformative learning. Findings indicated participants of this study experienced sustained transformative learning as undergraduates as a result of engagement in global social justice activism within a student organization. These findings draw attention to the role played by developmental tasks of identity exploration and commitment in undergraduate learning, the potent contributions of a student organization to academic learning, and the transformative power of undergraduate engagement in global social justice awareness and activism for positive social change.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the former, current, and future students of the organization of ONE Curry whose hope renewed my hope, whose commitment for a socially just world renewed my commitment, and whose transformation renewed my faith in the possibilities of higher education to educate citizens for informed democratic participation, informed empathy, and informed global social justice.

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While a dissertation often feels like a solitary process, all research is social and only possible with generous and intelligent support from one's community of scholars, friends and colleagues, and family.

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I would like to acknowledge the many peers I met in my courses; I grew as they generously shared the diversity of their experiences, contexts, and cultures within the field of education. And as much as our situations differed, our dedication to education for a more socially responsible world united us into effective learning communities.

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the inspiration and friendship I received at the beginning of this journey from Dr. Peter Hoffman-Kilp, whose own research and teaching flows from his commitment to an authentically lived democratic social justice.

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Section 1: Introduction to the Study

Higher education is exploring its identity, much like the emerging adults who enter traditional undergraduate programs. Higher education may primarily be a means of preparation for the professions or a studied exposure to various scholarly discourses about life or a means to facilitate an educated citizenry for the preservation of democracy. Much like emerging adults who are exploring their possible identities (Arnett, 2004; Azmita, Syed, & Radmacher, 2008; Luycks, Goossens, & Soenens, 2006; Park, 2000), higher education is assessing its commitments, evaluating its mission statements, all while diversifying its delivery systems (Dey & Associates, 2008; Smith, 2004; United States Department of Education, 2006).

A variety of purposes are ascribed to higher education. During the student protests of the 1960s, Habermas (1968) noted the university's role as facilitating identity exploration and commitment for its students and society,

In every conceivable case, the enterprise of knowledge at the university level influences the action-orienting self-understanding of students and the public. It cannot define itself with regard to society exclusively in relation to technology, that is, to purposive-rational action. It inevitably relates to practice, that is, it influences communicative action. (p. 4)

Within the call for an experiential and relevant education, Habermas (1968) envisioned democratic responsibilities flowing out of student communicative action for self-understanding. Almost 4 decades after Habermas's essay, Chickering (2003) acknowledged higher education's identity crisis by asserting, "Limited self-understanding

and self-reflection – as well as fears about being left vulnerable in the current competitive and individualistic environment – leave us mired in conflicting impulses and ambivalent about appropriate actions” (p. 44). Lucas (1994) in his comprehensive history of higher education in the United States wrote, “ Overshadowing practically all other issues in American higher education toward the end of the century was the search for an anchor or “center” for undergraduate liberal learning” (pp. 295-296). Boyer (1997) called higher education back to its “historic commitment to service” (p. 11) for the common good. In doing so, he emphasized the need to have students be actively engaged in cross-disciplinary projects focused on social needs in a spirit of reflection and reciprocity. In the next decade, educators such as Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, and Corngold (2007) and those who participated in their Political Engagement Project (PEP) were clear about higher education’s responsibility to “help students become more politically knowledgeable and involved” (p. xvii), able and willing to participate in “deliberative democracy” (p. 7). Cognitive scientist, Lakoff (2008/2009), also made a strong plea for higher education to foster learning, which results in the deeper thinking required to keep democracy functioning for the common good. Integrating social justice into curriculum is an important focus among some faculty who also educate students for professions (McDonald, 2008; Grise-Owens, Cambron, & Valade, 2010).

Meanwhile, in the midst of higher education’s “identity exploration” (if not “crisis” for some institutions), its traditionally-aged students or emerging adults arrive on campus, most leaving home for the first time, exploring their identities, reconsidering their values, entering new relationships, and trying new ways of being in their lives all

while deciphering syllabi, reading textbooks, listening to lectures, taking tests, and writing essays. And, these traditionally aged students come together on campus in a variety of community contexts. Classrooms, learning communities, residence halls, and athletic centers are a few examples of built-in communities within higher education campuses. Some students also take the initiative to form communities within the college or university. Student gatherings as recognized student organizations within the wider campus community provide an important and rich source of engagement, one that is often overlooked by academic administrators and faculty (Keeling, 2004).

Several theorists and researchers suggested that cocurricular activities provide rich opportunities for students to integrate their learning with their lives (Baxter Magolda, 2007; Kuh, 1995; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Because participation in student organizations is voluntary and without high stakes formal assessments, viewing student perceptions of learning through this lens offers an uniquely student-centered learning environment in which to explore the interrelationships between the emerging adults' developmental tasks, academic learning, student organizations, and global social justice activism. Student organizations are a natural fit for "low stakes assessment" (Knight, 2005, p. 99) of "more complex learning" (p. 99). As such, this study was structured to give voice to students' perceptions of their learning as a result of student-initiated collaborative activities of global social justice activism within higher education.

Given the increasingly international character of most social, economic and civic spheres, choosing a student organization with a global focus was important for this study as was choosing one with the moral stance of social justice activism and resonated with

the perspectives as those voiced by Habermas (1968), Chickering (2003), Colby et al. (2007), Lakoff (2008/2009) and others believing higher education has the social responsibility to prepare students for participation in essential democratic processes, which promote the common good. ONE Curry (OC), the student organization of this case study, exists to raise awareness about and perform works of global social justice. Exploring the perceptions of current and former OC members regarding their learning through engagement in OC allowed for an exploration of student perceptions about learning through activities that were student designed and implemented.

Because it was important to understand students' development within a psychosocial context in order to more fully appreciate the meaning they give to their learning experiences, I examined literature on the developmental stages of young adulthood, now more commonly referred to as emerging adulthood (Parks, 2000; Arnett, 2004). Identity exploration and making commitments are two of the major developmental tasks of traditionally aged students in higher education (Arnett, 2004; Azmita, Syed, & Radmacher, 2008; Luycks, Goossens, & Soenens, 2006; Parks, 2000; Schwartz, Zamboanga, Wang, & Olthuis, 2009). Self-authorship or discovering one's voice (Baxter Magolda, 2007) and cognitive and moral development also play a significant role in the lives of emerging adults (King, 2009). And because this research studied learning within a student organization, literature regarding student affairs, including its relationship with academic affairs, was also reviewed in depth. Additionally, as a former faculty advisor to the student organization, I am a "passionate insider" (He & Phillion, 2008), and, so, this

case study is framed within democratic (Howe, 2003) and reflexive (Etherington, 2004) constructivist research.

As stated previously in this introduction, this interpretive case study was shaped by the belief about the ethical import of education, so clearly articulated by Wortham (2006) in the conclusion of his study, in which he investigated the impact of classroom learning on the socially constructed identities of two younger students:

We need to confront that schooling is a moral enterprise...building communities...changing students...this requires us to question: what kind of students, what kind of communities? We need to notice what impact practices are having on the identities of students. (p. 288)

This matters because the identities, values, and voices of the college students higher education graduates will shape the future of the democracy and society.

Problem Statement

The research problem addressed in this study is the identified and urgent need for undergraduate education to also include educational opportunities for informed global citizenship in its curriculum and programming for all undergraduates. In addition, the need for undergraduate faculty, staff, and administration to view how the developmental tasks of emerging adulthood intersect with students' learning was also addressed.

Traditional US undergraduate education values students' learning the lens of their future employers as much as in response to the demands of students and their parents as the marketplace (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2007; Apple & Beane, 2007; United States Department of Education 2006). The market focus seems to be

shaping most aspects of higher education as students are viewed by some as consumers first and learners second, professional disciplines attract the majority of undergraduate students compared to majors in the liberal arts, and the market demands for increased admissions push both faculty and students into public relation roles for the college (Ross, 2009). Given the power of the market to shape societies, including that of undergraduate education, faculty, staff, and administration need to note its critical role in the functioning of democracy and democratic societies for the common good (Edwards, 2006; Habermas, 1968; Lakoff, 2008/2009; Sherraden, 2007) and not just for marketplace profits. Just as professions rely on specific and learned skills, democracy and social justice also require expertise gained through scholarship (Colby et al, 2007; McDonald, 2008, Lakoff, 2008/2009). While many colleges and universities give voice to the long standing mission of higher education for the preservation of democracy and the common good, it appears few hold it as a central and required enterprise for its students (Dey & Associates, 2008).

Several researchers have written about the need for higher education to explicitly engage students in educational activities regarding democracy and global social justice (Knight, 2005; Lakoff 2008/2009; McDonald, 2008; Ross, 2009). In response to this need, I designed this interpretive case study and explored the perceptions of learning of traditionally aged undergraduate students as a result of their engagement in both democratic processes and global social justice activism within a student organization. In doing so, I asked students to explore with me the possible added value of global social justice education and activism in undergraduate education. Understanding student

learning in an undergraduate context also required understandings of the bio/psycho/social tasks of the newly identified developmental stage for those between 18 and 25 years of age or emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2004; Keeling, 2004; Parks, 2000). I, therefore, viewed the learning of these undergraduates and recent graduates through the intersection of the developmental tasks of emerging adults and their undergraduate experiences of global social justice activism. This meant exploring the intersection between the students' search for identity and their social justice activism, and its collective impact on their undergraduate education (Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, & Corngold, 2007; King, 2009; Lakoff, 2008/2009; McDonald, 2008; Reed, 2008; Taylor, 2008).

Another important consideration for this research was the the existing institutional relationship between academic and student affairs, which is becoming increasingly complex and intertwined on today's undergraduate campuses (Ahern, 2008). Researchers have already revealed that faculty members and academic administrators can often overlook the rich resource of student affairs activities and organizations for student academic growth (Ahern, 2008; Keeling, 2004; Knight, 2005). Meanwhile, many within student affairs know well how student engagement within student organizations can be powerful learning experiences for students, especially those that are dispositional in nature (Keeling, 2004; Knight, 2005).

Purpose of the Study

Studying how students viewed their learning as a result of their engagement in global social justice activism within a student organization was a rich opportunity to

examine the diverse and intersecting threads woven together during the undergraduate learning experiences of the students in this study. The purpose of this study was to give voice to a small community of students, as individuals and as community, about their perceptions of learning through global social justice activism. In addition to giving voice to their experiences, I also sought to interpret their learning experiences through the existing literature on emerging adulthood development and transformational learning. I also sought to highlight the relationship between academic affairs and student affairs through the experiences of these students.

The students were the first to suggest that I might want to study the impact of their engagement in the student organization due to its impact on them as individuals and students. As their faculty advisor, I had observed this engagement as they initiated, organized and implemented transformative learning experiences for themselves and others on the campus. It was the high quality and sustainability of their engagement in this particular student organization that prompted me as a faculty member and former advisor for the organization to explore the students' perspectives of their learning. An insider with 25 years experience in education and assessment, I had found the students' motivation, commitment, and changes as a result of their engagement in the student organization to be remarkable. As a result, I began to hypothesize that including global social justice education and activism within core studies would have significant value for both the individual student and society. I also noted the possible added value in academic collaboration with student affairs.

Nature of the Study

A single case design with multiple methods of data collection and mixed methods of coding was used. Yin (2009) recommended mixed methods addressing the same questions for a “richer and stronger” (p.63) study of “more complicated and broad research questions” (p. 64). The participants of the study consisted of current members of the organization and members who were recent graduates. While not a true longitudinal study, it was valuable to compare the learning perceived by the alumni with current undergraduates. Data from the recent graduates provided opportunity to examine for the sustainability of the learning perceived as a result of their engagement in the student organization.

This study required a qualitative conversational approach (Knight, 2005) in order to explore and appreciate the students’ lived experiences and perceptions of learning as a result of their engagement within a student organization focused on issues of global social justice and employed an interpretive case study design (Standing, 2009; Yin, 2009), which included individual interviews, a focus group, and an anonymous survey. Invited participants included all past and current members of the student organization, approximately 25 in total, from its inception 4 academic years before data were collected. The invitational list of possible participants was generated from the minutes of past meetings and membership sites in Blackboard and Wiggio networks. In addition, this study included a reflexive component in section 5, documenting my reflections regarding my role as the previous faculty advisor to the student organization as well as my observations during all phases of the study (Etherington, 2004; Hand, 2003).

Research Questions

In order to explore and learn from the undergraduate students' perceptions of their learning as members in a student organization for global social justice activism, the research questions framing this study were:

1. What are the perceptions of emerging adults as current and former members of the student organization about their learning as a result of their engagement in activities promoting global social justice?
2. What elements of the student organization's activities focused in global social justice are perceived by emerging adults as current or former members to have fostered meaningful learning experiences?
3. Learning involves sustainable change. What changes do emerging adults as current or former members observe in their lives as a result of the learning they perceive as a result of membership in the student organization?
4. Do the students attribute transfer of the learning between their membership in the student organization and learning within their academic study? If so, what type of learning did they perceive as transferring?
5. Based upon their perceptions, is there a transformative quality about their learning experiences through global social justice activism?

Theoretical Base

While its expressions take a variety of shapes and forms, higher education as an institution offers a variety of opportunities for the future of its students. In recent decades, this promise has grown increasingly accessible to a diverse population,

including older adults who earn their degrees while managing the many responsibilities of adulthood (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008). However, the focus of this study centered on more traditional students who enter undergraduate studies immediately after high school.

The Context: Higher Education

Agreeing with findings of Lave and Wenger (1991) and activity theorist Engestrom (2000), which indicated all learning is situated, I treated the context of higher education as one of its conceptual frameworks. Higher education, especially in the United States, has become a cultural promise and a diverse range of sectors within society place an equally diverse range of hopes and expectations within its walls. Employers expect its graduates to work intelligently and embody its values of profit seeking efficiency; civil society hopes graduates will uphold democracy through intelligent and responsible participation; cultural societies hope for skilled creators and appreciative audiences; parents of students hope for independent adult children who function well as contributing members of their communities (Ahern, 2008; Apple & Beane, 2007; Chickering, 2003; Colby et al., 2007). However, in the midst of these hopes and expectations, higher education and its traditionally aged undergraduate students seem to be experiencing similar questions about their identities and commitments (Knight 2005, Lucas, 1994).

Historically, higher education has included civic education in its mission statements (Apple & Beane, 2007; Chickering, 2003; Colby et al., 2007; Habermas, 1968) as well as education for the common good (Freire, 1970; King, 2009; Reed, 2008). Freire (1970) framed authentic education as a democratic process in itself, one that

intentionally explores power dynamics and cocreates knowledge through community reflection and individual self-awareness. When researching student engagement and outcomes, Knight (2005) found overlap among the learning outcomes of students engaged in education for responsible citizenship, self-awareness, and emotional intelligence and the expectations of employers for an intelligent workforce.

Keeling (2004) issued a challenge to personnel in both houses existing today in undergraduate institutions: academic affairs and student affairs. Keeling called upon those employed in these sectors to change their somewhat aloof stances with each other while still retaining their distinct roles in the education of undergraduate students. According to Keeling, “deep” and “transferable” learning within the students’ learning experiences required faculty to be informed about the development, identity, and psychosocial needs of students and student affairs’ personnel to be informed about activities, which intentionally promote students’ cognitive development and academic achievements. This gap or disjuncture and the impact on student learning is explored in section 2 and is referred to in the findings in section 4 and the implications in section 5.

Keeling (2004) also listed the basic goals of student affairs, which are seen to serve the needs of the student and society, as

Engaged citizenship, community service, social justice, participatory involvement, career planning, ethics, practical leadership, emotional intelligence, critical thinking, informed decision making, working in teams groups, conflict resolution, cultural competency, cross cultural understanding and tolerance of ambiguity. (p. 20)

These identified goals correspond significantly with the goals of this study, albeit shaped by my faculty perspective and my review of literature from various academic disciplines.

Peterson (2009) advised those assisting students in the work of social exchange between students and community to be aware, not only of its benefits, such as informed empathy and perspective taking, but also of possible challenges if students are not ethical or skillful in their outreach and activism. For example, Peterson emphasized that students need to be partners in sustainable and reciprocal relationships rather than thrust into a privileged stance of helper. Peterson also spoke to the challenges of global social justice work for students as citizens of the United States in the face of the global suffering caused by specific governmental policies or corporate interests. Peterson's perspective informed this study's purpose, coding and interpretations.

In order to explore students' perceptions of learning within a student organization, a substantial topic in the review in depth was the developmental origins and tasks of emerging adulthood. Literature reviewed on this topic included the neurobiological, cognitive, social, and moral development during the emerging adulthood years between 18 and 27, noting especially how development allows for one's weaving of an authentic identity (Ferarra, 1998) during traditional undergraduate education during the early emerging adulthood.

Developmental Tasks of Emerging Adults

To better understand traditionally aged undergraduate students, a wide array of literature was reviewed on the developmental tasks of emerging adults, finding identity exploration and commitment to be a primary focus of this age group within industrialized

and post industrialized societies (Arnett, 2004). Current researchers with respect to identity and emerging adults agreed that higher education encourages and facilitates identity exploration for emerging adults (Arnett, 2004; Parks, 2001). A review of the literature also revealed that making and identifying with the commitments correlate with student success in higher education and later successes in adulthood (Azmitia, Syed, & Radmacher, 2008; Luyckx, Goossens, & Soenens, 2006; Luyckx, Soenens, & Goossens, 2006; Luyckx, Schwartz, Soenens, & Beyers, 2008; Schwartz, Zamboanga, Wang, & Olthuis, 2009). Researchers reported that making and identifying with one's commitments overlaps with the process and outcomes of moral development and self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001; King, 2009). The positive development of emerging adults and their self-authorship through undergraduate experiences appeared to develop cognitive abilities to navigate ambiguity with informed discernment (Azmitia, Syed & Radmacher, 2008; King, 2009). Lakoff (2008/2009), a cognitive scientist, indicated these same cognitive abilities are the necessary capacities for citizens to intelligently participate in democratic processes.

Ferrara's Concept of Authentic Identity

Having conducted a comprehensive summary of constructivist based identity theories, including psychodynamic, social psychological, symbolic interactional, developmental stage constructivism, and evolutionary theory, Ferrara (1998) summarized literature on identity into four foundational aspects. In doing so, he proposed an approach to identity, which he labeled as authenticity. As such, authenticity in identity referenced

“the strict relationship with the subjective experience of identity fulfillment” (p. 76)

based on a wide range of phenomenological, psychodynamic and sociological theories

Ferrara (1998) distinguished the concepts of identity, self, and personality via guiding questions for each. Identity asks: Who am I and who do I want to be? Self asks: What drives me? What guides me? And, personality (or character) asks: What is particularly distinctive of my way of interacting with others? Ferrara also viewed identity through three different perspectives: phenomenological, psychodynamic, and sociological. Phenomenological theorists organized identity around the created narratives of memories, the needs and drives of the present, and future projections of the ideal; psychodynamic theorists viewed identity through the lens of motivation, idealized goals, and existing talents and abilities; and, the sociological theorists of identity included one’s cultural roots, network of goals, and socially recognized roles. However, regardless of the particular lens, Ferrara found authenticity in identity summarized as: coherence, vitality, depth, and maturity.

According to Ferrara (1998), coherence implied integration, cohesion, continuity and distinctiveness. It is an embodied experience over time that recognizes the self, and as such, identity is a construct of the larger concept, self. Coherence in authentic identity can also be understood as an unbroken narrative of meaning from childhood to present. The frustration of coherence in one’s identity leads to powerful experiences of feeling “overwhelmed, flooded, falling forever, disintegrated” (p.80).

Ferrara (1998) referred to vitality as joyful empowerment, which resulted when one’s central needs of the self were consistently met. Vitality was founded on self-

realization and self-love/esteem with a capacity of genuine, spontaneous appreciation of self, others, and life. Experiences of shame and indignity that became associated with one's self-representation snuffed out vitality with one's identity, resulting in behaviors that appear "apathetic" or "phony" (p. 92).

The authentic identity quality of depth existed on a continuum between absolute shallowness and absolute transparency. For Ferrara (1998), absolutes are useful fictions. Depth of identity described the capacity of self-reflection, which yielded self-awareness and self-knowledge. It fostered autonomy in the broader sense, a type of inner authority.

Maturity in identity was a function of discernment, a "capacity to distinguish one's interpretation" (p.100) from other possible interpretations. As such, it depended upon the "ability and willingness" (p. 100) to apply "rigorous reality testing" (p. 100) to one's assumptions and conclusions. Tolerance for ambiguity, acceptance of limits, the wisdom and belief in the ability to repair wrongs were all facets of a mature authentic identity as opposed to arriving hastily at conclusions and rigidly living into one's predetermined norms and values.

Mezirow (Dirkx, Mezirow, & Cranton, 2006) defined transformative learning, which seemed to overlap with Ferrara's (1998) understanding of authentic identity and with behaviors cited in King's (2009) extensive review on the cognitive and moral development of emerging adults. For example, Mezirow defined transformational learning process and outcomes as "expanding frames of reference to be more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change" (p. 124).

Identity Exploration and Commitment of Emerging Adults

Traditionally aged undergraduate students are in a period of transition from adolescence to adulthood. In the United States and other industrial and postindustrial societies, this transitional period has developed into an approximately 6 to 8 year period with distinct developmental tasks (Arnett, 2004). Parks (2000) referred to tasks in the initial years of young adulthood as a time of exploring commitments in which young adults critically explore the options offered by the adult world through the corresponding exploration of one's self. Parks noted the increased sense of both power and vulnerability within the young adults in this phase, who often oscillated between a sense of invincibility and critical self-consciousness and insecurity. Parks also described young adults' initial entry into college as sparking a commitment in relativism, which occurred because long held assumptions and worldviews were brought into question as students encountered differences in their peers' beliefs and new ways of approaching issues via their courses. According to Parks, young adult movement through uncritical relativism to a "deepened capacity to hear the truth of others while holding one's own" (p. 59) was the task of the later years in the emerging adulthood phase, in which one critically explored, responded, reflected, and composed tentative commitments and possible selves. However, King's (2009) meta-review of the literature on cognitive and moral development in emerging adults suggested that this is not true for most students by the time they are seniors.

Arnett (2004) saw the years between 18 and 26, emerging adulthood, also as a time of identity explorations, which included instability, self-focus, awareness, and

optimism for their future even if they were less optimistic about the overall future of the world. While it was an intensely self-focused time, Arnett's interviews revealed emerging adults were not necessarily selfish. Respect for the rights of others and concern for the well being of others were at the heart of emerging adults' understandings of the up and coming responsibilities of adulthood. Emerging adults also viewed their primary task to become self-sufficient as a necessary precursor to assuming the responsibilities of caretaking in adulthood.

Current researchers in identity studies on emerging adults cited traditional undergraduate education as a natural trigger for identity exploration and commitment (Baxter Magolda, 2007; Luyckx, Goossens, & Soenens, 2006; Luyckx, Schwartz, Soenens, & Beyers, 2008; Luyckx, Soenens, & Goossens, 2006). Azmitia, Syed, and Radmacher (2008) researched how college students understand the various aspects of their multiple identities. Their findings were similar to Luyckx, Schwartz, Soenens, & Beyers (2008): students were continuously negotiating their identities; some more so by seeking out diverse experiences (p. 14). Schwartz, Zamboanga, Wang, & Olthuis (2009) concluded that higher education was a time of continual exploration of one's identity in both breadth and depth, similar to Parks' observation of commitment in relativism. Rather than seeing identity confusion in the midst of tentative commitments as maladjustment, Schwartz et al. (2009) observed that identity synthesis and identity confusion operated as separate variables and were not mutually exclusive. Students' active identity exploration was associated also with identity confusion, internal locus of control, anxiety, and openness. In general, however, research reviewed for this study

indicated on-going identity exploration without eventual commitment correlated with lower self-esteem, higher levels of anxiety, and less successful learning outcomes in higher education and less well being in adulthood.

Moral and Cognitive Development and Self-authorship of Emerging Adults

King (2009) synthesized an extensive review of constructivist research studies connected with the cognitive and moral development of emerging adults. King defined constructivist development in both these areas as fundamentally “increasingly complex and adaptive forms of seeing, knowing, and caring” (p.599). King made the distinction between content of development and the structure of development, between what one comes to know and how one comes to know it. Reed (2008) developed a model of moral stages based on the principle that moral development was “the growth towards coordination of cooperative social action for the common good” (p.374). His model provided a means to hypothesize moral development through observable social interactions.

Baxter Magolda’s (2007) concept of self-authorship seemed to describe the process of exploring as well as giving voice to an identity that is made authentic through transformational learning experiences. According to Baxter Magolda, the fruits of self-authorship formed and strengthened in college included effective citizenship, critical thinking and complex problem posing, mature decision-making, and interdependent relationships. In conjunction with Baxter Magolda’s concept of self-authorship, Baxter Magolda and King (2004) summarized desired college learning outcomes as the

following: cognitive maturity, effective citizenship, integrated identity, and mature relationships (p. 7).

Democracy, Social Justice, and the Education of Emerging Adults

Self-authorship and moral development were seen as intrinsically linked in Zyngier's (2003) call for a generative pedagogy that is socially just. Zyngier noted that social justice learning activities for emerging adults needed to intersect with their construction of identity, moral commitments, and self-authorship. Zyngier advised,

A socially just pedagogy must be inclusive, engaging and enabling students in valued and worthwhile activities, linking learning not just to the community but also empowering students to use their own authentic knowledge, values, and culture to take control over their own lives. (p. 45)

Lakoff (2008/2009) explained democracy as being dependent upon adults who, as educated citizens, purposively embrace behaviors, such as “empathy, connecting viscerally with other” because doing so enabled the brain to “comprehend a common humanity” (p.58). Lakoff explained that democracy needs citizens who can reason from a deep rationality, which is “embodied, emotional, empathetic, metaphorical, and only partly universal” (p. 13). Lakoff cautioned that the deep rationality needed for the preservation of democracy is only partly universal because it is, in fact, an intentionally learned way of thinking, and therefore, required intentional education. Lakoff explained, “Cultural narratives define our possibilities, challenges, and actual lives” (p. 35) as well as provided us with understanding about who we are as a society in terms of our understanding of others (p.34). According to Lakoff, these cultural narratives, which

shaped our identity, are embedded deeply within our brain's synapses and, unless detected, act as pre-conscious or implicit filters of interpretation. Lakoff's application of cognitive science to the capacities of individuals needed for a democratic society provided an important consideration for this study in understanding the critical importance of education for a most socially just society.

Other Considerations

Baxter Magolda (2007) rightly called researchers' attention to the need to avoid making hasty conclusions and generalizations when interpreting the meaning of students' self-statements. For example, she noted that students who seek out the advice of others does not necessarily mean they are really considering multiple perspectives; and when students asserted self-confidence in their decisions, this air of confidence might also suggest a premature commitment on their part.

Seeking to theorize about moral imperatives such as global social justice education can be controversial especially for academics (Frimer & Walker, 2008). Notions of good versus bad are viewed fundamentally as representative of a particular worldview and using first person self reports, such as those in this study by the participants, are considered limiting (Bandura, 1986). Hence, Frimer and Walker asked if there could be an objective means of determining moral personhood in the face of a postmodernist reluctance to identify a self as a unifying process. Frimer and Walker (2008) noted that any concept of an agentive self would necessarily have to be able to include the complexities, contradictions, and inconsistencies of being human (p. 346). However, they also noted that subjective and objective accounts of morality, regardless of

the tensions between them for research studies, overlapped in lived experiences. This overlap is accounted for within the constructivist transformationist paradigm, which departed from postmodernism in that it acknowledged subjective social constructions do have an inherent reality in our day to day lives (Howe, 2003).

Colby et al. (2007) also acknowledged higher education's reluctance to address the moral responsibility of educating for democracy and participation in democratic civic responsibilities. Yet, concern for the common good prompted their research, which explored activities in higher education to best promote political engagement. While political engagement is not the central research question of this research, engagement in global social justice activism is inherently a political act, whether it focuses on building a well in Bor, Sudan or on starting a medical school scholarship fund for female Afghan students, which are a few of the collaborative accomplishments of the participants of this study.

Definitions of Terms

Authenticity in identity: Concept developed by Ferrara (1998) through synthesis of phenomenological, psychodynamic, and sociological perspectives on identity.

Authenticity in identity has four foundational elements: coherence, vitality, depth, and maturity.

Civic engagement: Sense of responsibility to one's communities, including the international community given the increasing presence of a global society. The goal of civic engagement is assumed to be agentic for "positive social change for a more democratic world" (Jacoby, 2004, p. 10).

Coherence in identity: Concept developed by Ferrara (1998) of one of the four foundational aspects of authenticity in identity. Refers to the cohesive, continuous, demarcation of one's narrative of self-understanding.

Complex achievements: Dispositions of the learner involved in the processing of tasks, such as imagination, adaptability, willingness to learn, independence, willingness to work on a team, attention to detail, communication skills, self-management and organization (Knight, 2005).

Constructivism (Interpretivism): Knowledge is constructed by humans for human interests and purposes, using prior constructions of knowledge, and necessarily laden with moral and political values. Contains two main branches: postmodernists and transformationists (Howe, 2003).

Deliberation: According to Howe (2003), critical dialogue shades in to deliberation. Deliberation provides a space in the dialogue for clarification of genuine and authentic concepts that are genuine and authentic to both the participants and the researcher. In doing so, the deliberation clarifies views of the participant and also subjects these views to further inquiry, a "rational" and "cognitive" space for collaboration about the interpretation of the lived experiences of the participants.

Depth: Concept developed by Ferrara (1998) of one of the four foundational aspects of authenticity in identity. Refers to the capacity for self-knowledge and self-reflection, a type of inner-authority that allows one to be autonomous with one's process of discernment.

Emerging adulthood: Recently recognized life phase occurring approximately between 18 and 26 years of age, with the upper limit being more variable and consisting of five main features: identity exploration, instability, self-focus, a sense of being in-between, and a sense of an expansive set of future possibilities. (Arnett, 2004).

Identity exploration: Based in Marcia (1996) exploration in breadth; emerging adults actively seek alternative ways of being before making a commitment; exploration may also include evaluation of one's current identity commitments, which is viewed as exploration in depth (Luyckx, Goossens, & Soenens, 2006; Luyckx, Soenens, & Goossens, 2006).

Identity commitment: Based in Marcia (1966), refers to the stability and sustainability of the choices emerging adults have made with respect to their values, belief systems, life orientations. Included in this concept is the degree of identification emerging adults have with their commitments (Luyckx, Soenens, & Goossens, 2006).

Identity Maturity: Concept developed by Ferrara (1998) as one of the four foundational aspects of authenticity in identity. Refers to the ability and the willingness to come to terms with life's possibilities and limitations known through rigorous discernment, accepting ambiguity as a necessary part of living, and believing in one's ability to revise and reshape one's relationships within life.

Learning: Process that occurs across events over time, allowing people to use cognitive resources in subsequent events as opposed to cognition, which is reasoning about a particular event or idea at a specific moment (Worthington, 2006).

Learning identity: Dialectical relationship between assimilation and accommodation of knowledge over time, the meaning one gives the knowledge, and the understanding of one's self and one's role in the world as a result of being ascribed an identity within a learning community (Wortham, 2006).

Learning re:Academic: Gaining capacity over time in the use of new resources to represent knowledge and/or to respond to ideas, events, problems (Wortham, 2006).

LGBT: Accepted acronym for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgendered identities.

Low-stakes assessment: Conversations with students about process of learning to support, advice and guide the practice of learning; provides feedback and "feed-forward" information, specifically annotating what can be done to improve learning outcomes in the future (Knight, 2005).

Life long learning: Orientation of motivation for continued engagement in learning for personal enjoyment and growth (Mayhew, Wolkiak, & Pascarella, 2007), which depends on metacognitive skills or strategic awareness of how to learn (Knapper, 2006).

Metaphorical conceptual framing: Understanding emerging from interdisciplinary study of linguistics and neural theory, metaphors are grounded in every day experiences, fundamentally conceptual in nature, and as such, provide the foundation for most abstract thought. Metaphorical language is a response to an existing metaphor and abstract concepts cannot be understood without the use of metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003).

Self-authorship: Capacity to internally define a coherent belief system and identity that coordinates engagement in mutual relations with the larger world. This

internal foundation yields the capacity to actively listen to multiple perspectives, critically interpret those perspectives in light of relevant evidence and the internal foundation, and make judgments accordingly (Baxter Magolda, 2004, pp. 303-304).

Student engagement: Refers to the process or activities undertaken by students, requiring time and effortful cognitive investment, for deep and meaningful learning observable through the integration, synthesis, and application of knowledge (Kuh, 2008).

Transformationist constructivism: Maintains that something can be seen as real without seeing it as essential because it is socially created. If real aspects of our social world, such as gender roles, are created, they can be reshaped over time as well. As such, identity formation and/or transformation is seen as a dialogical construction between the individual and society (Howe, 2003).

Transformational learning: Intellectual capacity for self-reflection and critique of the process of one's learning, a meta-cognitive process of making implicit foundational assumptions explicitly known to oneself in the learning process. Allows one to be aware of one's bias, prejudices, and personal concerns and remain open to new meanings and multiple perspectives (Dirkx, Mezirow, & Cranton, 2006; Merriam, 2004).

Vitality in identity: Concept developed by Ferrara (1998) as one of the four foundational aspects of authenticity in identity. Refers to the joyful and empowering sense of congruence and phenomenological self-realization of one's self-love and esteem.

Assumptions

The underlying philosophical framework of this review of the literature was a constructivist one theorized by Howe (2003) as the transformationist branch, which

viewed knowledge as socially constructed and resulting from a combination of “human interests, purposes, and prior conceptions” (p.67) and viewing research as necessarily subjective and “laden with moral and political values” (p.67). The assumptions underlying this study are grounded within transformationist constructivism, which Howe distinguished from postmodernism’s denial of an existing reality outside of subjective knowing. According to Howe, transformationist construction of reality maintained that social constructions may exist objectively in reality with significant impact on individuals, exemplified by the real power of money, a social construction, to shape the existences of many. Even though something is real, transformationist thought does not mean it is essential, and thus transformationist thought can also be hopeful: even if an oppressive system is real, it is also socially created; and, therefore, it can be recreated into a non-oppressive entity.

This study was also grounded in the constructivist assumptions outlined by King (2009) in her developmental framing of cognitive and moral development of college students. These assumptions included: individuals actively construct and organize their interpretations of experience; discernable age-related patterns exist in the ways individuals organize their thinking; and development, while following patterns, occurs in context and varies from individual to individual (p. 599).

I also assumed participants were capable of recognizing and articulating some of their learning experiences as a result of their membership within the student organization. I also assumed that the participants would speak sincerely with me about the perceptions of learning they choose to reveal. In developing this case study, I assumed participants

could benefit from their participation by possibly gaining insights into their experiences as a result of the reflective nature of this study.

In designing this research, I assumed a standard of truthfulness, as opposed to truth, which required above all else transparency of process, accuracy in reporting, and sincerity of interpretation. As such, I assumed that the reflections of the students about their perceptions of learning, while not reproducible, would be truthful, sincere and trustworthy representations of their perceptions of their learning.

Finally, given my pre-existing relationships with many of these students as the initial advisor of the student organization, including an anonymous survey was important for the triangulation of data to reduce the impact my prior relationships with the participants. I also assumed this triangulation of data could help provide for a wider range of responses and allow for perceptions that students might not want to share directly with me.

Limitations

This study was not intended to be generalizable to other student organizations, college settings, or undergraduate students. Rather it hoped to provide insights informed by developmental and educational theory regarding the learning perceptions of a small group of traditionally aged undergraduate students who have collaborated around issues of global social justice within a student organization. Since data were gathered from one student organization existing in a small private college, application to other student organizations, even within the same college, is limited. Many other factors limit the generalizability of this study, such as the small and limited sample and the specific

characteristics of the student organization and the college. It cannot be assumed that the past and current members in this organization are representative of any other group of students in the college. The identities of most of the students in this particular student organization are not diverse with respect to race, class, and sexual orientation; the members are predominantly white, middle to upper middle class, and identified as heterosexual. I also share these identity characteristics, which necessarily limits the study's framing, coding, and interpretations.

The study is also potentially limited by the fact that the research was the faculty advisor for this student organization for the first 3 of its 4 years. This means I have a pre-existing relationships with many of the potential participants. Accepting bias as an unavoidable element in any research, I have included a reflexive component for transparency about my biases. Even so, I acknowledges that biases are often invisible to the individual.

Student biases are another limitation of this study. For example, those participants in the focus groups were influenced by the responses of their peers and my presence. In the individual interviews, students' responses were likely influenced by our pre-existing relationships. For example, students who have a favorable relationship with me and with the other student members in the student organization would be more likely to participate in the study, especially within the individual interviews.

Delimitations

Data collection for this study was from a purposeful sample of current and former members of an institutionally recognized undergraduate student organization, which was

founded by a small group of students early in the academic year 4 years before this research study commenced. The purpose of this founding of this organization was to actively address international issues of social justice such as poverty and AIDS. I was asked by the students to be the faculty advisor and agreed to do so. In light of this research, I have invited a person from the campus office of student affairs to co-advise with me during the previous semester, and she is now the sole advisor of the organization.

Student membership in the organization has varied, with a core group of 4 founding members organizing the initial meetings and main activities. In 2008, the membership grew to about 20 students, 6 of whom are currently on the board of officers. A year before the study commenced, the founding members graduated and were among those solicited for participation in this study.

The student organization chosen for this study exists in a small, private college in New England. Approximately 2000 are enrolled in the traditional day program with approximately 90% of the students living on campus. This particular student organization was chosen because of its remarkable achievements in raising awareness regarding global social justice and funds for its international projects framed by social justice. But, the most powerful draw were the members' repeated informal observations that membership in this organization was transformative for them. As the former faculty advisor, I had also observed the continuing and remarkable positive impact this organization has on its students. I also heard positive feedback from faculty and student affairs professionals about the students in the organization, specifically citing their different perspectives from

other students as enriching the classroom and opening a new space for activism on campus.

Significance of the Study

Giving voice to the perceptions of students about their learning experiences as a result of engagement in global social justice through a student organization, even with its limitations, warrants consideration by undergraduate institutions seeking to understand the quality of student engagement on their campuses. Collaboratively exploring and interpreting with students how they perceive and value the learning through activities of global social justice activism could contribute important insights for designing academic and student affairs programming. Interpreting the students' perceptions of learning through the lens of biopsychosocial developmental tasks of emerging adulthood may be of interest to both faculty and student affairs staff when designing curriculum and programming. I included a reflexive study in the data because I am a former advisor to the student organization. Such data could contribute to the growing discourse on faculty advisement of student organizations as well as offer a small contribution to the current research on collaboration between academic and student affairs. In addition, the student organization's focus on global social justice may provide important commentary on the added value, ethical capacity, and the profound responsibility of higher education to foster a more socially just world.

Summary

As an interpretive study, this case study focused on the perceptions of traditionally aged undergraduate students about their learning, which resulted from their engagement

within a student organization focused on global social justice awareness and activism.

This research study was designed to explore the possible intersections of the biopsychosocial developmental tasks defining emerging adulthood, exposure to global social justice awareness and activism, academic pursuits, and student engagement within student initiated activities in a student organization. In doing so, I hoped to provide diverse insights to faculty, staff, and administrators in traditional undergraduate settings regarding the intersections between students' developmental orientations and their undergraduate education as well as its possible impact on their future as adult citizens in a global world. To do so, I explored current and former members' perceptions of their learning as a result of their participation in global social justice activities within an active student organization.

Section 2 is a review of literature, which formed the conceptual and methodological structures of this study. Section 3 includes an explanation of the methods, which structured this study. Section 4 includes a detailed account of the data collection, transcription, coding and findings. And, section 5 is a summary of the research study followed by the interpretations, implications, and recommendations as a result of the findings. Additionally, section 5 includes reflexive data regarding my bias and major decision-making in connection with this research study.

Section 2: Literature Review

This section describes current literature reviewed to frame and interpret the data of this phenomenologically oriented case study, specifically in the following areas: (a) student engagement and learning within traditional undergraduate education, (b) undergraduate education for democratic civic, political and social responsibilities, (c) biopsychosocial developmental tasks of emerging adulthood, (d) transformational learning, and (e) the intersections of academic affairs with undergraduate student organizations. This section also presents the literature reviewed on hermeneutic phenomenology, transformationist constructivism and democratic research, and reflexivity in qualitative research, all of which guided this study's methodology.

The review of the literature for this study was comprehensive. Search terms and phrases included *higher education, democracy and higher education, life-long learning and higher education, civic education, political education, history of higher education, assessment and higher education, adolescent development, young adult development, decision making in adolescence and young adulthood, emerging adulthood, identity exploration and commitment in emerging adulthood, higher education and emerging adulthood, cognitive and moral development in emerging adulthood, cognitive and moral development in undergraduate higher education, social development, cognitive development and political decision-making, implicit attitudes and identity, explicit attitudes and identity, the neuroscience of cognitive and affective development in adolescence and emerging adulthood, identity and learning, identity and decision-making, identity and transformational learning, transformational learning and emerging*

adulthood, transformational learning and undergraduate education, authentic learning, authenticity, authentic identity, student engagement in undergraduate education, learning outcomes and assessment in undergraduate education, student affairs, student affairs and academic affairs, learning outcomes and student organizations. For the closing methodology section, the search terms and phrases *included phenomenology, grounded theory, method combining, post modernism, constructivism, transformative research, democratic research, reflexivity in qualitative studies ,and qualitative methods.*

The data bases used for these searches included Academic OneFile (Gale), Academic Search Premier (EBSCO), Expanded Academic ASAP (GALE), JSTOR, Lexis-Nexis Academic, Education Research Complete (EBSCO), Educator’s Reference Complete (Gale), ERIC (EBSCO). On-line full text resources included E-library and eBrary.

Undergraduate Education and Its Students

Undergraduate education can be framed as a collective activity with the “generalized” (Engestrom, 2000, p. 964) student as the object of its activity, and as such, it is a system “driven by a deeply communal motive” (p. 964). However, within this collective activity, the individual students can encounter contradictory understandings from course to course causing disconnections. Likewise, experiencing integrated thematic programming, collaborative reflection, and real-life application creates connected and interconnected learning experiences for students as seen in the literature reviewed in this section.

Concern about the quality of student learning has been a consistent theme in US higher education. Postman and Weingartner (1969) highlighted the gap between the rate of change in the external world and the rate of change internal to the world of higher education. “It is the thesis of this book that change – constant, accelerated, ubiquitous – is the most striking feature of the world we live in and that our educational system has not yet recognized that fact” (p.xiii). Some 30 years later, Gaff (2003) estimated as a result of his years of experience teaching undergraduate students that traditional higher education fails to reach 80% of college students. On the other hand, Gaff noted academic discourse can be quite “compatible” (p.9) with students’ lives when connected to their future participation in democracy. He explained, “for the issues and problems addressed by academic research are increasingly indistinguishable from the issues we wrestle with as public citizens” (p. 9). Gaff viewed creating connections between the currently fragmented curricular offerings as the necessary means for engaging undergraduate students in meaningful learning. Gaff emphasized successful connections would integrate and relate the theories and perspectives in the disciplines to each other and to “the wider world” (p.77). Similarly, Smith (2004), a former educator, administrator, and state representative, described higher education as having difficulty keeping up with the changes taking place in today’s students’ lives. Smith emphasized the need to connect the content of education to the lived experiences of its students. Smith wrote, “The less the curriculum engages the learner’s experience and culture, the less likely it is to make the connections” (p.50).

The National Report Card on Higher Education funded by the Bill and Melinda

Gates Foundation and Lumina Foundation for Education, *Measuring Up 2008*, reported on state and national student outcomes with reference to undergraduate higher education world wide and indicated that U.S. undergraduate higher education itself does not seem to be connecting with many of its students. While the United States placed seventh in the world with 34% of young adults, ages 18–24, enrolled in post-secondary settings, in 2008, it was only 15th in the world regarding the actual percentage of degrees and certificates awarded. Likewise, the National Center for Education Statistics (2008) in its Digest of Education Statistics reported a 34% overall rate of completion for students enrolled in bachelor degree programs in 2005 for the United States with 30% of males and 39% of females who enter programs earning degrees (Table 415).

Hurtado and Associates (2007) administered the survey, *Your First College Year* (YFCY), to over 38, 000 first time, full time college students in 144 U.S. colleges and universities in 2005. Their results indicated many students “remain disengaged from their coursework: over half “frequently” or “occasionally” came late to class; almost half turned in course assignments that did not reflect their best work or felt bored in class; and approximately one-third skipped class at least occasionally during their first year” (p.28). They also found that students are drinking more frequently and are feeling “more overwhelmed and depressed” (p.29). Most students reported that their “actual experiences in college fall short of their expectations” (p. 29). and that they have not changed very much, have not improved their skills or their knowledge during their first year in college. While the researchers do not make causal claims, other researchers have emphasized the need for faculty and institutions as a whole to intentionally foster connections and

interconnections for students among their undergraduate disciplines of study and programming.

The National Leadership Council for Liberal Education & America's Promise (LEAP) in its 2008 report emphasized the importance of fostering connections to increase the quality of student learning (p. 5). Through its dialogue with colleges and universities as well the business community, they concluded with specific recommendations for higher education in order to meet its "obligation to prepare their graduates as fully as possible for the real-world demands of work, citizenship, and life in a complex and fast-changing society" (p.5). In addition, LEAP also noted the importance of higher education to assist its students in connecting their learning to their future (p.5). Similarly, Knight (2005) addressed the dispositions and skills required for the successful completion of given tasks in and out of the classroom. The list of dispositions provided by Knight (pp. 97 – 98) has been cited by employers as valuable. Knight noted that these were also common learning goals valued by faculty, specifically mentioning faculty who educate for civic responsibilities (pp. 97-98).

Smith (2004) described an incident illustrating the benefits when higher education connects student learning inside the classroom with their activities outside the classroom. Smith provided readers with the following poignant example. A student of Smith, who participated in the new service-learning program in California State University, Monterey Bay, excitedly reported back to him, "Now I understand that Charles Dickens isn't just an author and *Oliver Twist* is more than another book" (pp. 51-52). The student was emotional about his course reading assignment because of its connection to his personal

experiences with street children, “All these homeless kids...every day...well, you can’t help but care about them” (p. 52). Smith observed, “Learning was happening...good literature became a source of organizing experience into knowledge” (p.52). Reading *Oliver Twist* had become personally meaningful for Smith’s student when undergraduate education facilitated an opportunity for the student to engage in an activity of care within the wider community. Through this opportunity, Smith’s student connected his education with the larger community and his own values.

In response to the low rates of degree completion, Robbins, Allen, Casillas, and Peterson (2006) administered the Student Readiness Inventory to over 14,000 students from 48 institutions of higher education to determine the role of psychosocial factors in predicting student outcomes. They found that students who enrolled in 4 year undergraduate degree programs experienced academic success when they were intrinsically motivated to engage in significant effort to complete course assignments throughout the semester. They also found that retention was predicted by the quality of the social connections students experienced with their institution.

Mayhew, Wokiak, and Pascarella (2008) found that having students act upon scholarship’s connections to the wider world is a reliable element for sustainable learning. They conducted a longitudinal study of 405 students using “need-for-cognition” as the unit of analysis within a learning community at a single institution to identify the curricular conditions and educational practices that promoted life-long learning. The researchers concluded that integrated experiences, which require students to take perspective, take action, and then reflect upon the perspectives and action taken, develop

need-for-cognition, an attribute associated with life-long learning. These researchers also found that this growth happened for students in general across all identities and abilities. In considering the outcomes of this research, the researchers advised educators to develop programming that allows for “student reflection, talking about issues related to social justice, engaging in discussions with each other and faculty, and experiencing some cognitive dissonance” (p. 353) that comes along with having one’s basic frames of reference challenged.

Colby et al. (2007), believing that “multiple experiences during undergraduate programs are even more effective – especially experiences that connect with and build on each other in the curriculum, the co-curriculum, and the campus more broadly” (p. 20), administered a pre and post survey to 680 students involved in their Political Education Project in over 20 institutions. Their study noted student engagement in civic and political activities during undergraduate years fostered “a wide-array of communication, interpersonal, research and other intellectual skills, as well as developing important personal qualities such as persistence, responsibility, and tolerance” (p.53). Colby et al. (2007) found undergraduate students, while admittedly apolitical, are not inherently resistant to participating in the political processes required for democracy. This led the researchers to assert, “We know that well-organized efforts to strengthen political participation among undergraduates and other young Americans can succeed, suggesting that young people will respond favorably to being treated seriously as potentially powerful political agents” (p.43). Colby et al. base their study on the premise that political development of students needs to connect intentionally with “core values of

higher education,” which they define as “intellectual pluralism, rational discourse, intellectual autonomy, open-mindedness, and civility” (p.21).

Measuring postcollege civic and political engagement, Misa, Anderson, and Yamamura (2005) asked, “What pre-college as well as curricular college experiences predict a young adult’s political and civic engagement in the post-college years?” (p.9). Using data collected at three different times by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), the researchers analyzed responses from over 8,000 participants representing 229 institutions of higher education. They focused on two factors, working with communities (civic engagement) and political activism (political engagement). The independent variables of interest were the curricular and cocurricular service during college as seen in volunteering, service-learning and reflection activities defined as journal keeping, conversations with peers, and conversations with professor(s). Misa, Anderson, and Yamamura found the following types of student engagement in undergraduate education correlated with a strong commitment in civic engagement postcollege: leading and organizing extracurricular activities, volunteering and reflecting with a professor, majoring in political science or history, attending a racial or cultural workshop and/or participating in student government.

Undergraduate Engagement in Student Organizations

Learning is a collective activity that is situated within a particular activity system (Engestrom, 2000; McDonald, 2008). To explore and understand the learning of emerging adults as student members of an organization, understanding the positioning of student organizations and student affairs within the system of higher education is critical

to this study. As much of higher education has become more focused on student learning outcomes and student engagement, researchers often site the benefits of student in seamless or connected learning experiences between the classroom and student life (Schuh, 1999). Integrating academic and student affairs remains an important topic for the study of higher education. Banning and Kuk (2009) conducted a meta-study of 32 dissertations focused on student affairs between 2002 and 2008. A main theme of the researchers' findings centered on integrating student affairs' programming with academic affairs curriculum and learning objectives. Seidman and Brown (2006) found that integrated engagement in both academic and student activities results in higher retention for undergraduate institutions.

Collaboration has not been the norm nor easy for either student affairs professionals or faculty, despite their shared focus on students' learning. Jackson and Ebbers (1999) asked 12 members of workshop for faculty and student affairs professionals to list the barriers preventing the two areas from working together. Both faculty and student affairs professionals noted the lack of time, the lack of previous orientation and knowledge base about collaboration, and a need for more respect from the other.

Ahren (2008) found similar obstacles still existing even though the research in higher education grows and continues to find that collaboration between the two areas would be a win-win for the students because faculty and student affairs professionals engaged two different aspects of the students lives, cognitive and social-emotional. Ahren found faculty concerned with student knowledge acquisition and cognitive development

while student affairs professionals were focused on humanitarian, social, and pragmatic competencies. Researchers in a variety of areas have indicated that both aspects of student learning are necessary for transformational learning during their undergraduate years (Knight, 2004). Ahern emphasized that faculty and student affairs needed to understand each other's cultures, yet be able essentially to retain their own foci in the collaborations. According to Ahern, faculty would have much to gain from the interactions with respect to the informed perspectives of student affairs professionals about the psychosocial needs of students. Keeling (2004) stated, "Student affairs, in this conceptualization, is integral to the learning process because of the opportunities it provides students to learn through action, contemplation, reflection, and emotional engagement as well as information acquisition" (p.11).

Developmental Tasks of Emerging Adulthood

The need for undergraduate education courses and programming to intentionally connect with the lives of its students is well documented; the literature reviewed in this section explored the psychosocial development of those aged between 18 and 26 years.

In the 1960s, developmental psychologist Erikson (1968) began to refer to late adolescence to describe the developmental behaviors and concerns of post highschool graduates. Also studying this age group, Keniston (1972) noted, however, that the lifestyles and developmental tasks of people in this age group were significantly different than those in adolescence. Reflecting upon Erikson and Keniston, as well as her own work with students in this age group, Parks (2000) described this phase of life as young adulthood. It was Arnett (2004) who coined the term emerging adulthood as the result of

his research, interviewing 300 “emerging adults” in four U.S. cities. According to Arnett, emerging adulthood is a developmental phase, which has developed itself over the past 5 decades. Dikaiou (2000) noted that prior to this formalized recognition, mental health specialists tended to view the exploratory behaviors characteristic of this age group as “problem behaviors,” which they framed as a lack of adjustment.

Emerging adulthood is now a solidly recognized phase of development in industrial and postindustrial societies, and currently the subject of much research in a wide variety of studies (Arnett, 2004; Dikaiou, 2000; Erikson, 1968; Keniston, 1971; Parks, 2000). According to Kensington (1972), Parks (2000), and Arnett (2004) emerging adulthood is a social consequence of technological and economic developments within industrialized and post-industrialized societies since World War II. Along with the socioeconomic developments of the past 5 decades, the unprecedented constancy and acceleration of technological change has created permeable boundaries across economies and cultures in most spheres of life (Kensington, 1972; Arnett, 2004). All of these changes, taken together, provide significant opportunities and challenges for emerging adults with respect to identity exploration and commitment (Arnett, 2004; Parks, 2000). In addition, these permeable global boundaries present higher education with the logical challenge to prepare its students for likely international engagement of some sort in their lives after graduation.

Researchers focusing on emergent adulthood described the tasks of exploring and committing to an identity, with respect to intimacy, employment, and social responsibilities, as the organizing focus for people in this age group (Arnett, 2004; Parks,

2000). Arnett conducted 300 in depth structured interviews in four U.S. cities of persons aged between 20 and 29, 50% of whom were white and 50% of whom were combined African, Latino/a and Asian American. Arnett's data revealed that life for this age group was characterized by a sense of disequilibrium or "instability" (Arnett, 2004) and understandably, resulted in a concentrated focus on one's self. Importantly, Arnett's research explained that rather being indicative of personal irresponsibility or social maladjustment, these search-for-self behaviors seemed to be the by-products of the real work of living into an authentic identity (Ferrara, 1998) in today's ongoing and accelerating technological development with constant accessibility to vast amounts of information and to each other. Arnett described this period between adolescence and adulthood as "emerging," highlighting the significant perception of his participants that they were in a transition state between adolescence and adulthood, although looking forward to adulthood, solidly embracing the present moment's challenges of exploring one's commitments to values, beliefs, careers, and relationships.

Parks (2000) grounded her observations of people in their twenties and their searches for identity, meaning, and faith within constructivist developmental psychology theory. She described the psychosocial development during this phase as initially ones of "commitment in relativism" which resulted from the dismantling of childhood beliefs as a result of encountering new people, cultures, and lifestyles, primarily via undergraduate education. Parks noted this phase matured into a more discriminating perspective due to education and additional experiences. Parks viewed higher education's role as invaluable for fostering discriminating critical thought, multiple perspectives and ways of

constructing knowledge and making meaning. Higher education assists the young adult with the developmental tasks of this age group, which she describes as moving from dualistic to the more complex non-dualistic framing of knowledge and interpretations. Over time, a more developed process of discernment entered into their acceptance of subjective authority. In doing so, emerging adults critically assessed their own assumptions, old and new, through intentional intellectual reflection, and resulted in tenuously held commitments. Parks (2000) described this time as one of both “potential and vulnerability” whose identity work exists of “probing commitments,” a time of critical exploration of the adult world connected with an equally critical exploration of one’s self and identity (p.65).

Both Parks (2000) and Arnett (2004) found emerging adults saw themselves in an in-between adolescence and adulthood state. However, this was not true for all 18 to 26 year olds in the study conducted by Nelson and McNamara Barry (2005), which investigated the role of self-classification as an adult among emerging adults in college. Among the 232 college students surveyed, three groups emerged: 69% of the respondents indicated they have reached some aspects of adulthood, resonating with Parks and Arnett’s classification; however, 25% indicated they have reached adulthood, and 6% indicated have not reached any aspect of adulthood. Interestingly, all three groups agreed upon the characteristics that qualify one for adulthood, including taking responsibility for one’s actions, financial independence from parents, and independent decision-making. The researchers noted surprise that neither gender, marital status, nor ethnicity were found to be significant in the survey responses.

Nelson and McNamara Barry (2005) also found that college provided the time and encouragement for identity exploration in three areas: career, romantic partner, and social and political morality. And, incidents of depression and risk taking were linked to the instability and identity confusion in this transitional time of life. For those students who identify as adults, Nelson and McNamara Barry (2005) noted that they have a better sense of their identity, are less depressed, and reported fewer risky behaviors than those in the other groups. The researchers also posed an important consideration regarding self-identified adults in this age group suggesting that they may be simply more mature or they may have possibly foreclosed on their identity, living into commitments established by their parents and the culture of their childhood and adolescence.

Rya (2009) investigated personality differences between adolescents and young adults using a 300-item survey given to 200 individuals living in both rural and urban settings in the mideastern United States. Of the 200 participants, 103 were adolescents and 97 were young adults; all were Caucasian, the majority of whom were taking the course in the university for credit. Rya indicated significant differences in constraint, stress, social potency, and achievement, which she hypothesized are the result of the neurological development of the social emotional network (SEN) and the cognitive control network (CCN), whose development occurs independently and at different rates over time during puberty into emerging adulthood (Steinberg, 2007). Steinberg (2007) found the SEN develops more quickly than the CCN and remains stable throughout adolescence into emerging adulthood. As a result, it has precedence in processing

information when engaged until around age 26, when the CCN is fully developed. This interestingly coincides with the transition from emerging adulthood to adulthood.

Rya's (2009) survey results indicated more cognitive control over emotions among emerging adults when compared to adolescents. Ryan found emerging adults were less egocentric and more comfortable taking center stage and leadership roles than were adolescents. They also perceived less stress in their lives than adolescents, hypothesized as a result of also perceiving more control. Emerging adults also perceived themselves to be significantly less aggressive and impulsive than adolescents perceived themselves to be. It is important to note that Rya's research population was primarily white, middle class and living in mid-eastern U.S.

Cognitive and Moral Development of Emerging Adults

King (2009) reviewed constructivist research on the cognitive and moral development of undergraduate college students. Accordingly, constructivists view development as, "increasingly complex and adaptive forms of seeing, knowing, and caring" (p.599). King noted that this requires cognitive skill development in how one processes and constructs knowledge, specifically, expanding and perhaps changing how one forms perceptions and makes decisions. To this end, King advised higher education faculty and staff to explicitly assist students in reflective thinking so they might understand the basis for their decisions, explore alternative means of constructing knowledge for decision-making, and evaluate their knowledge claims and those of others. To do this, King advised undergraduate faculty and programming staff to investigate and understand the cognitive and moral development of college students in order to foster

growth and necessary changes during their undergraduate years. Included in this understanding, faculty and programming staff should seek to understand how student development responds to specific learning contexts, demands, communities, and scholarship activities. King emphasized that assessment sensitive to developmental issues is needed, differentiating what students know and how students know when evaluating outcomes. King also concluded with the observation that cognitive and moral development of college students appeared linked over time.

Self-authorship of Emerging Adults

Baxter Magolda (2001), as a result of 20-year longitudinal research that began in 1986 with 101 college students, described the developmental process of college students as one of “self-authorship” (2001), an internal capacity to define one’s belief systems, identity, and relationships. Baxter Magolda (2007) recently noted that while college mission statements generally include effective citizenship, critical thinking, complex problem posing and solving, mature decision making, and ability to form interdependent relationships with a diverse set of others, most college seniors apparently lacked exposure to these transformative learning experiences and as a result, lacked clarity about their own beliefs and values. Baxter Magolda (2007) noted that members of marginalized groups, such as African Americans or LGBT students, stand out in their capacity for self-authorship; she hypothesized that encountering discrimination functioned as “provocative experiences” (p.72), which prompted transformative reflection for student members of these groups. As a result of her development and advisement of learning partnerships within undergraduate education, Baxter Magolda also noted that co-curricular settings

can be exceptional contexts for encountering provocative experiences, given that student activities are often sensitive to the developmental nature and needs of students.

Identity Exploration and Commitment of Emerging Adults

Lead researcher Luyckx et al. researched identity exploration and commitment among college students in several studies conducted in Belgium (Luyckx, Goossens, & Soenens, 2006; Luyckx, Soenens, & Goossens, 2006; Luyckx, Schwartz, Goossens, Soenens, & Beyers, 2008). These researchers found college to be a rich context for emerging adults to explore their identity and commitments as being in college inherently “triggers identity issues” while offering “alternative resolutions” (Luyckx, Goossens, & Soenens, 2006, p. 366). Luyckx, Goossens, and Soenens (2006) surveyed 565 first year students mostly female (79%) in a large university in Flanders, which has a rolling admissions policy, much like the college in this study. The survey was administered four times over a 2 year period. Data analysis revealed that students who were actively exploring their identities in breadth did not make commitments; however, even students who entered college committed to an identity often explored this commitment in depth within the context of higher education. Similar to the findings of Park (2000) and Arnett (2004), the researchers found college experiences facilitated the progressive development of identity exploration through offering new alternatives and opportunities to reflect with others. The researchers were surprised to find decreases across time for identification with initial commitments and noted an increase/decrease/increase pattern of identity commitment over the 2 years. Those students who enter college with a high level of commitment in an area tended to do less exploration in breadth. However, Luyckx,

Goossens, and Soenens (2006) noted that it is important to investigate how students feel about the commitments they have made. For college students, the researchers found that identity exploration is “ a process that does not stop but fluctuates between breadth and depth” (p. 197), supporting the observations of Park (2000) and Arnett (2004) that emerging adults make provisional commitments during this period of identity exploration.

Luyckx, Schwartz, Goossens, Soenens and Beyers (2008) investigated identity exploration and commitment with psychosocial adjustment in female emerging adults. Their findings indicated a need to track identity development during college years to assist the psychosocial well being of students. The researchers suggested that given the frequency of identity distress and confusion evidenced in their research, students would benefit from explicit assistance with and information about the developmental nature of identity exploration, reflection, and forming commitments. Luyckx et al. found that identification with a commitment separates successful from unsuccessful identity development. As such, making a commitment that one can identify with fosters high self-esteem. However, they also noted that intense identity searching and delaying commitments is a common feature of identity formation in young adults within the context of higher education. Yet, those college students classified as *searchers* (struggling to make commitments) were most at risk for maladjustment and depression. Other typologies noted in this study are: *consolidators* who have a strong commitment, explore this commitment in depth, but are not interested in alternative commitments; *pathmakers* who make a commitment only after thoroughly examining a wide venue of

alternatives, which results in a strong identification with the commitment; *guardians* who make commitments similarly to consolidators but who identify to a lesser extent with the commitment; and the *searchers* who are actively exploring alternatives and struggle to make commitments.

Transformational Learning: Process and Characteristics

While traditionally applied to adult learners, transformational learning theory resonates with many of the developmental tasks associated with emerging adulthood. Dirkx in Dirkx, Mezirow, and Cranton, 2006 viewed transformational learning as soul work, an integrated and holistic approach involving the intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual dimensions of learning as a social being. According to Dirkx, transformational learning is more of an active, self-chosen “stance” in the world as opposed to a static outcome resulting from a set of prescribed activities. This stance is one of deep meaning making involving personal insights and reevaluations of previously held beliefs and understandings.

Dirkx, (Dirkx, Mezirow, & Cranton, 2006) focused more on the essence of the lived experience of transformation of the self, and thus espoused a phenomenological interpretation of learning. On the other hand, Mezirow (Dirkx, Mezirow & Cranton, 2006) defined transformative learning from a more cognitive perspective as a “rational process of learning within awareness...a metacognitive application of critical thinking that transform an acquired *frame of reference* – a mind-set or worldview of orientating assumptions and expectations involving values, beliefs, and concepts – by assessing its epistemic assumptions” (p.124). Mezirow indicated acceptance of Dirkx’s definition of

transformative learning with the caveat that it must include “a rational process of critically assessing one’s epistemic assumptions as a critical dimension of the process” and thus “save transformative learning from becoming reduced to a faith, prejudice, vision, or desire” (p.133). Both views of transformational learning resonate with the research on emerging adults and the tasks they negotiate while in undergraduate study.

While transformational learning studies by Mezirow (2000) have been conducted with adult populations, Keeling (2004) viewed transformative learning experiences to be the heart and soul of undergraduate education. Similar to Lakoff (2008/2009), Keeling viewed society as best served by challenging students to become aware of their previously unexamined frames of reference, and thus, grow beyond them and operate from more complex and nuanced perspectives. The authors stated that knowledge of the identity development of students is key to facilitating transformative learning experience for them. They recommended a “new map” for higher education, one that integrates all aspects of the students’ lives, including academic and student affairs. “Learning development and identity formation can not longer be considered as separate from each other, but rather they are interactive and shape each other as they evolve” (p.10).

Methodological Considerations

This section provides the philosophical considerations used in designing the methods for this single case study. In retrospect, this process was somewhat like creating a new recipe, seeking the advice and considerations of several chefs on spices and process to produce an authentic and integrated flavor. As Yin (2009) noted, mixing methods with intentionality creates a “richer and stronger” case study (p. 63).

Phenomenology and Democratic Deliberation

Merriam (2002) recommended the case study when seeking a rich understanding of a “bounded system,” as is the student organization, OC. The philosophical lens for this study combines two approaches within phenomenology, hermeneutic and reflexive and the constructivist democratic research study orientation described by Howe (2003).

Hatch (2002) explained that phenomenology is the general study of the lived experience while hermeneutics is the more focused study of how one interprets the phenomena of lived experiences. Annells (1996) noted that hermeneutics requires a holistic interpretation of language including the context of the culture, which gives meaning to its utterances and symbols. Annells highlighted the ever-present “*background*” (p.707) to human action and viewed participant and researcher as co-constructors of a “reasonable” interpretation of the lived experiences of the participant, with the researcher employing a “self-reflective” (Annells, 1996, p.707) or reflexive stance. Annells explained, “Hermeneutical phenomenology can be classified as post-modernist because it seeks understanding rather than theory” (p.707).

To view the case study through a phenomenological lens also implies that there is a shared experience between researcher and participant (Merriam, 2002). Consequently, Merriam noted “bracketing” as one strategy used to neutralize the subjective voice of the researcher or to “temporarily put aside, or bracket, personal attitudes or beliefs about the phenomenon” (p.7). However, Howe (2003) critiqued such use of “bracketing” and wrote about the residual impact of positivist research methodology on qualitative studies, calling objectivity into question, “Employing the fact/value distinction to avoid value bias

instead exacerbates the danger of bias by submerging rather than eliminating value commitments” (p.16). Like Howe, I question if the biases and experiences of the researcher *can* really be neutralized? Moreover, I questioned *should* the necessarily biased process of the researcher be put aside in a qualitative study such as mine? To answer these questions, literature on deliberative democracy (Howe, 2003) and reflexivity (Etherington, 2004) in research are considered.

Democratic Educational Research and Reflexivity

Referring to “deliberative democratic theory,” Howe (2003) wrote, “To be democratic, educational researchers should (a) assume a responsive attitude toward stakeholders and (b) seek to mitigate or eliminate obstacles to the free and equal give-and-take among stakeholders necessary for genuine democratic decision making” (p.136). According to Howe, inclusion, dialogue, and deliberation are three strategies required for research to be democratic. Specifically, the researcher seeks “deliberative dialogue”, which does not seek to neutralize the values or biases of the researcher in research studies, in contrast to “elucidating dialogue,” which does. Rather, democratic educational research seeks authentic and transparently communicated deliberation about values and biases underlying the research project and reflexivity within the process.

Reflexivity is required because values and bias are “something to deliberate about” (Howe, 2003, p.136); for Howe, the critical aspect for validity is whose voices are invited into the deliberation. For deliberation to be effectively democratic, discourse space must be “free and equal” (p.136) in terms of access. Deliberative democracy seeks mutual investment of all stakeholders for the sake of arriving at new perspective or

consensus “based on argument and evidence” (Howe, 2003, p.136) rather than strategically informed agendas set by privileged voices, sometimes hidden in the passive voice of the third person. Howe explained democratic deliberation, when applied to research, views the failed hypothesis or surprising emergent themes as evidence of the complexities of authentic and collaborative partnership between the researcher and the participants as well as the dynamic interplay among the historical, cultural, and socioeconomic identities of each. With respect for democratic deliberation, a growing field of research includes the reflexive voice of the researcher as additional data in qualitative and mixed studies.

Reflexive researchers see authentic deliberation and transparency as fundamental to credible and transformative research (Etherington, 2004). Including the reflexive voice of the researcher in research integrates the researcher’s reflections about the influences on her decision making process for and during the study; in addition, recognizing that the researcher can share only influences known to her, the reflexive approach is necessarily deliberative in triangulation, which allows for participant feedback, or member checking, on researcher interpretations.

Etherington (2004) gathered the voices of reflexive researchers to document this current new development in qualitative research. Etherington noted that reflexive researchers seek “open and honest documentation” of their internal deliberations in response to events, theories, and participants. In this perspective, reflexivity is presented as a means of triangulation, presenting researcher bias and rationale for choices made during the research process as data. Included in this new type of data are the complex

interactions of the researcher's perceptions shifting over time during the research process, made transparent via researcher reflexivity. According to Etherington, by including reflections of the researcher on the research process, the reflexive researcher challenges the dualistic framing of subjectivity and objectivity and suggests a more nuanced continuum, requiring the researcher to be consistently aware of the self-awareness required for authentically democratic research.

Etherington (2004) included the following data gathering questions of a reflexive researcher, which will guide the reflexive journaling of the researcher and the reflexive summary in section 5. Etherington (2004) asked,

How has my personal history led to my interest in this topic? What are my presuppositions about knowledge in this field? How am I positioned in relation to this knowledge? How does my gender/ social class/ ethnicity/ culture influence my positioning in relation to this topic / my informants? (p. 11).

Howe (2003) provided five criteria for evaluating educational research (pp. 39-42), which informs the design of this research study. The first criterion is the "fit between research questions and data collection analysis," (Howe, 2003, p. 39), which asks if the questions inform practice and contribute to the understanding of pedagogy, policy, or social theory about learning and education. The second criterion is, "The effective application of specific data collection and analysis techniques" (Howe, 2003, p. 40) judging whether data collection and analysis techniques are complete. The third criterion, "Alertness and coherence of background assumptions" (Howe, 2003, p.40) asks if a sufficient degree of continuity is established by the study with previous studies and

theory. The fourth criterion considers “overall warrant” (Howe, 2003, p.40) and asks if the current study has enough import to the field of study. The fifth criterion involves “value constraints” (Howe, 2003, p.41) asking if the added value of the study is worth the risk taken by the participants.

Howe (2003) also provided a comparative analysis of research approaches. He compared a pragmatic approach to the truth-as-correspondence and coherence-for-truth approaches, and advocated for a pragmatic approach that acknowledges truth as a concept, which cannot be severed from the values, belief systems, and interests of the researcher or the participants. Howe also advocated for paying attention to the accuracy, scope, simplicity, consistency, and comprehensiveness of a study’s process and claims. Howe argued that research is never value-free and to try to make it so often masks to support the existing values or the fact that a less than transparent value agenda exists. On the other hand, a transparent exposition and deliberation about the underlying values and assumptions of a project and decisions allows for a more democratic inclusive process allowing values to emerge through deliberation and consensus. Informed by Howe and Etherington, this study integrates a deliberative and reflexive approach into the research process.

The choice of a qualitative study relying on the personal self-reflections and self-statements of the participants and researcher is not without its limitations or critics. Rest, Navaez, Thoma, and Bebeau (1999) employed a multiple-choice survey to test moral judgment capacities of college students and judged interview data to be unreliable. Rest et al. point to legitimate concerns with interview data such as the circular process of

researchers' hearing what they want to hear and seeing what they expect to see within the words of the participants. This particular concern is a shared concern of mine, which is why the democratic and reflexive processes has been included in addition to having participants provide feedback on my interpretations. Rest et al. also indicated that participants can report well on the observable outcomes or the "products" of their process, but not on the process itself. I agreed and asked participants to report on their perception of learning outcomes, which Rest et al have found to be reliable. However, I am also interested in the underlying processes in connection with the students' engagement and learning outcomes. In response to these concerns, this study references Baxter Magolda and King (2007) who devised a systematic interview approach that incorporates reflective prompts to assist participants in examining their process of self-authorship. I also referred to the reflexive portion of my study, citing my 15 years experience administering process style cognitive and achievement assessments to college age students has a helpful background for guiding students to explore their process of learning.

Finally, the text edited by He and Phillion (2008) affirmed this study's approach as one conducted by an insider in just such a process. What limits the research in terms of subjectivity, bias, and insider status allows at the same time empowers the research in terms of "foster[ing] critical consciousness to comprehend and act upon the often contradictory and contested real life world" (He & Phillion, 2008, p.3).

Section 3: Research Method

This inquiry was designed to learn about the learning processes of undergraduate students engaged in global social justice activism, doing so through the perceptions of the current and former members about their learning. I designed this research as an interpretive case study and collected data on the learning perceptions of current and former members who intentionally and democratically organized their activities within a student organization for the purpose of furthering global social justice.

Triangulating three data collection methods, an anonymous on-line survey, individual interviews and a focus group, I explored the intersections between the developmental tasks of emerging adults, participation in a student organization for activism for global social justice and academic pursuits through the perceived learning experiences of the current and former members of the student organization. The following section describes the study's methodology, including the research design, strategies for inquiry, methods of data collection, and data analysis. The research questions framing this study were:

1. What are the perceptions of emerging adults who are current and former members of the student organization about their learning as a result of their engagement in activities promoting global social justice?
2. What elements of the student organization's activities focused in global social justice are perceived by emerging adults as current or former members to have fostered meaningful learning experiences?

3. Learning involves sustainable change. What changes do emerging adults as current or former members observe in their lives as a result of the learning they perceive as a result of membership in the student organization?
4. Do the students attribute transfer of the learning between their membership in the student organization and learning within their academic study? If so, what type of learning did they perceive as transferring?
5. Based upon their perceptions, is there a transformative quality about their learning experiences through global social justice activism? If so, what aspects of their personal or social sense of identity transformed?

Research Design and Approach

Since this study was designed to give voice to students' lived experiences and perception, I chose a hermeneutical phenomenological approach. I first considered grounded theory due to its strict adherence to participants' experiences and voice in constructing theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). However, I rejected grounded theory since I also wanted to represent voices with distinction rather than to distill voices into a theory common to their learning experiences. Given that phenomenology is the "description of the lived-through quality of lived experience and the description of meaning of the expressions of lived experience" (van Manen, 1990, p.25), I deemed it was a better fit with my purpose for this study.

Using the phenomenological frame, I asked participants to describe their experiences and continued through conversation to "keep the question open" (van Manen, 1990, p.101) for both the participant and the researcher. Reading Merriam (2002) helped

to shape the bounded case study format of this research since it investigated “one particular program selected because it was...highly successful” (p.8).

In combination with the phenomenological bounded case study approach, I also followed Howe’s (2003) guidelines for democratic and deliberative research that is transparent, reflexive, and effective in exploring the research questions. Howe asserted that both education and research are “inherently evaluative” (p. 140) and therefore need to be context based in order to be transparent and inherently truthful. Howe’s principles outlined for democratic educational research guided the methods of this research, which grounded data collection and analysis firmly in three principles: inclusion, dialogue, and critical deliberation (Howe, 2003, pp. 137 – 140). The following sections explain how these critical elements were integrated into the study’s design.

Setting

The student organization of this case study is a recognized student organization in Curry College, a small private college located in Milton, a wealthy neighborhood adjacent to Boston, MA. The college, founded in 1879, currently has 2,000 traditional day students, most of whom live on campus in residence halls. The college offers 20 undergraduate majors, the largest of which are professional majors: Nursing, Management, Criminal Justice, and Communication. Curry College is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges.

The Student Activities division is part of the student experience with 27 currently existing student organizations, including the student government association. The student organization, ONE Curry, finds itself in a list of student organizations focused on

identity, such as Multi-cultural Student Union and Queer Straight Alliance or on activities, such as the Equestrian Club, Rugby Club, and Video Game Society; and on academics, such as the Curry Arts Journal, Management Forum, Philosophy Club, Politics and History Club, and the Pre-law club. Curry Cares is a noted volunteer student organization offering students opportunities to give back to the community in a variety of ways.

One Curry is known as the social justice activist organization on campus. It regularly receives recognition from Student Activities as a successful organization. It has received local press (Matchand, 2008) for its successful fundraising to build a well in Bor, Sudan. One Curry's mission, posted on the college website, reads,

ONE Curry brings together a community of individuals who are committed to spreading human equality. Through a collective voice, ONE Curry will raise awareness through education on the issues of extreme poverty, AIDS, and other human injustices around the world. Additionally, ONE Curry will raise money to directly benefit those who are impoverished throughout the world.

[\(http://www.curry.edu/Student+Life/Clubs+and+Organizations/ONE+Curry/\)](http://www.curry.edu/Student+Life/Clubs+and+Organizations/ONE+Curry/)

Sample and Participants

According to Howe (2003), inclusion of all relevant voices is the means to address bias through transparency since bias cannot be avoided in any research methodology. Hence, all students participated as members of the student organization since its inception in Fall 2006 were invited to participate in any or all aspects of the study. Students eligible for participation were composed of students who have attended

more than one or two meetings and participated in at least one event; the list of eligible participants was gathered from the minutes of the meetings, membership lists on Blackboard and Wiggio and checked through conversations with the current advisor of the organization. The total number of eligible participants for this study was 25.

An invitation with the survey (Appendix A) was out to all current and former members for participation in any one or all of the data gathering strategies rather than having the researcher determine who would be invited to participate in what method, thus eliminating another possible means bias-limitation. Rubin and Rubin (2005) explained that research seeks to explore the “shared meanings” (p. 28) of those belonging to a particular group. Yet within this shared meaning is also the understanding that “each person interprets the events he or she encounters in a somewhat distinct manner” (p.29) and so, as Howe (2003) advised, all voices will be welcome to participate in any or all three methods of data collection. I proposed to conduct seven individual interviews, but actually conducted eight, when a focus group member volunteered to be interviewed. The focus group consisted of three former members, all of whom had graduated in May 2009, offering an opportunity to explore possible sustained learning postgraduation.

Data Collection

Data collection was triangulated through the use of a 16 question anonymous survey, nine individual interviews, and one focus group of three postgraduates. Each data collection method was qualitative and semi-structured in nature. The survey (Appendix A) was anonymous and administered on line using SurveyMonkey. Over the five weeks it was opened, 15 of the 25 eligible participants responded. The interview protocol

(Appendix B) and focus group protocol (Appendix C) was conducted with semistructured responsive interviewing for the goal of developing a “depth of understanding” ((Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 30) through a flexible conversational approach. The focus group and the face to face and Skyped individual interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher within a few days at most of the collection. All data were then summarized and both the transcriptions and summaries were sent to the participants for member-checking.

Survey

The survey consisted of a brief introduction to the research, an invitation to participate in the survey, the interviews and/or the focus group. It also indicated the role of the survey. In keeping with Howe’s (2003) and Rubin and Rubin (2005) approaches to qualitative research as a coconstruction with participants, the introduction to the survey emphasized the value of each voice for the study. The survey was administered through email using Survey Monkey in order to collect data anonymously from all students who attended a meeting from the organizations’ inception; the survey was open for five weeks beginning after the end of the Spring semester.

Focus Group

I conducted one focus group of three volunteer members who all happened to be May 2009 graduates. The focus group allowed for a shared conversation about the learning from their collaborative programming in the student organization as well as a shared conversation about the sustainability of this learning in the year following graduation.

In conducting the focus group, Howe's (2003) notation that dialogue involves "understanding people in their own terms" (p. 137) to allow for "genuine" voices guided the flow of the questioning and responses. In addition I reviewed and grounded my role as facilitator of the focus group in Howe's recommendations. For example, Howe (2003) informed researchers of the choice between facilitating descriptions and elucidating meanings during interviews and/or focus groups. In addition, he cautioned the researcher against taking a too passive stance in conducting interviews or focus groups out of the desire to give "full weight to the subjective voice of the participant" for doing so could "pervert the genuine voice because it does not pay attention to the conditions out of which it can emerge" (Howe, 2003, p. 139). Howe noted that to merely seek to "identify and describe" is "inherently conservative" because it allows for the existing structures and implicit norms to shape the conversations. A case in point could be a focus group where a participant's dominant voice determines the general themes and responses. In both the interview and focus group, Howe advised that researchers "elucidate" or in other words, seek to clarify and negotiate meanings and interpretations through a collaborative and rational activity. In this way, the researcher assumes the role of a collaborator, rather than that of a facilitator or an expert. Rubin and Rubin (2005) also cited the need for careful facilitation. They noted that focus groups are good for raising a general conversation about the topic, which then can be followed up by individual interviews for more depth.

The focus group offered the three participants an opportunity to reflect together and coconstruct the data within a group setting. To facilitate focus groups of 6 or more

persons, I had proposed including a third party to take notes along with me. However, since only three eligible participants could meet during the summer months, I determined that a third party was not necessary.

Each of the questions was posed to each individual within the focus group allowing for individual responses but also allowing for the conversations among all three as they responded to each others reflections. The focus group was audio-recorded and transcribed by me.

Interviews

I had proposed to conduct seven individual interviews; however, eight were conducted after one of the focus group participants volunteered to participate in an interview. The interviews followed the protocol (Appendix B) and were semistructured responsive interviews, which followed the guidelines outlined for constructivist studies that are phenomenological in nature (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The interview questions were topical in nature (Hatch, 2002), in that the questioning focused the responses of the students' on their perceptions of learning as members of the student organization.

Perceptions of learning is both a focused topic and an open-ended and broad topic, which also allows flexibility within the structure (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). During the interviews, I posed questions to elicit rich or "thick" descriptions (Geertz, 1973), which flowed from the participants shared lived experiences. In summary, all the interviews asked the same questions listed in the protocol; however, the probes and follow-up questions, informed by the theoretical concepts of this study, were particular to the individual participant.

As one means to encourage genuine participation, Howe (2003) recommended the researcher interview participants in their own environments. As a result, four face to face interviews took place in the public libraries of the participants' home towns. Those who could not meet face to face agreed to interviews using SKYPE. However, in two of these cases, the SKYPE connection was faulty, so the interviews were conducted using G-mail Chat.

Reflexive Journal

Hatch (2002) noted that the researcher's voice must also be included in this analysis as a reflexive study. Hatch described the activities of a reflexive researcher as to "keep track of one's influence on a setting, to bracket one's biases, and to monitor one's emotional responses" (p.10). Etherington (2004) created a set of questions (Table 1), which organized the reflections within the journal for the researcher.

Validation

Following Creswell (2007), I used the term validation to refer to the trustworthiness of the research process and findings. He referred to validation as "a process" (Creswell, 2007, p. 207) rather than a finding, such as the term accuracy implies. As a means of validation and in keeping with Howe's (2003) guidelines for deliberation democratic dialogue, research participants in the focus groups and interviews were given the chance to read and respond to both the transcriptions and summary interpretations made from the data with revisions, qualifications, and additions; as such, this form of member-checking was an additional means of triangulating the data.

In this light, the validation of the data analysis included my prolonged engagement (Creswell, 2007, p. 207) with the student organization as its initial faculty advisor, the triangulation of qualitative data, the inclusion of as many current and former members voices as possible, and consideration of negative findings. The validation of my interpretations was established through the respondent validation of transcripts and summaries of the data, researcher reflexivity, focus group coconstructions, and application of relevant literature.

The suitability of the approach was evaluated by the participants' reflections during and about the processes of the focus groups and interviews as well as the richness of their descriptions. The research design, questions, and interview guides were open to the scrutiny of the two faculty members of the dissertation committee, the University Research Reviewer (URR) and the IRB boards of both Walden University and Curry College, the site of the student organization.

The usefulness of the findings will be determined by the reception of the data at presentations made to faculty, articles written for submission in journals about higher education, transformational learning, and democratic education and research.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for the focus groups and the interviews began with the transcription of the audio digital. I transcribed the data by listening to the recordings and typing what is said, word for word into a table format; each row indicated a change of speaker. Summaries of main points of all the data, including individual interviews, the focus group and individual questions from the survey were written from the notes taken, memo-

writing (Rubin and Rubin, 2005), during the first phase of open coding. Reflexive notations (Etherington, 2004) were recorded in the journal immediately after, sometimes during, each coding task.

I initially coded for emergent themes followed by a combination of topical analysis and a subsequent interpretive analysis (Hatch, 2002). Data coded for topical analysis included explicit or implicit references to themes suggested by the developmental tasks of emerging adulthood (Parks, 2000; Arnett, 2004; Luyckx, Goossens, and Soenens, 2006), authentic identity (Ferrara, 1998), moral development (Reed, 2008), and transformational learning (Dirkx, Mezirow, & Cranton, (2006).

Following the topical coding, Hatch (2002) recommended interpretive coding to construct a “richer...and more convincing” analysis than just using topical analysis alone. Included in this process is the bracketing of information and recording of my impressions at every step of the research process. It was during this stage of coding that the emergent finding, I first realized the coherence of the data with Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) 7 Vectors of development for undergraduate students, was realized.

The data analysis had a poly-vocal characteristic (Hatch, 2002), introduced by the inclusion of individual interviews. A poly-vocal analysis was also using data provided by focus group participants and the surveys, whose data were recorded by question and by respondent as well.

Protection of Human Participants

The participants well being is a central consideration of this study. Participating in this study poses no risk to them, other than the donation of their time, which was

acknowledged through a \$30 gift certificate to Amazon.com for their participation in the interviews and focus group. Contrary to being problematic for participants, participating in reflective activities such as these interviews and focus groups has been seen to benefit participants (Baxter Magolda, 2007; Dirkx, Mezirow, & Cranton, 2006; King, 2009). Participants' anonymity will be respected in the final reporting such that information that cannot be associated with at least three other eligible participants will not be included in final reporting.

Processes to protect the participants in this study included approval for the study from Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Curry College IRB. . Informed consent was also obtained from each of the participants, whose participation was voluntary. To reduce any possibility of respondent coercion because of my dual role of faculty advisor and researcher, my role of faculty advisor has been and will remain suspended during the entire process of the research.

This research will be guided by ethical guidelines for transparency and care. I was and am available through email and phone contact for any questions participants may have prior to, during, and after the study. Participants were informed that they were free to change their mind about participating at any point during the process. And, in fact, three persons who initially volunteered did change their mind due to scheduling problems during summer vacation. All of the recorded data is being kept confidential, in the security and privacy of my home office. In addition, the guidelines for the focus group participation and confidentiality were established and adhered to during the forum.

The consent form (see Appendix D) was shared with the participants prior to the interview and focus group via email. At the time of their participation, a hard copy was also given to the participants to sign prior to the interview and/or focus group. I gave each participant a hard copy of the signed consent form, and I kept a copy in my office at home with the other data.

Given that I am identified, the student organization and college will be explicitly identified in the research. This was made repeatedly clear to all participants in the invitation letter, the consent form, and verbally at the beginning of the focus groups and interviews. While every consideration is given to keeping the identities of the participants disassociated with exact data, the possibility of data being connected to individual persons, especially by others within the organization, was made clear to all participants. The reaction of all participants was an informed and uniformed shrug of the shoulders and a laughing dismissal of my concerns. None the less, all means was and is being taken to safeguard their confidentiality. Finally, all data collection materials is being kept confidentially at my home office in a locked storage box for the minimum period of five years after the conclusion of the study.

Dissemination of Findings

The findings of this research will be disseminated through presentations made to faculty, student affairs staff, administrators and students. In addition I will submit articles based on this research to various journals concerned with higher education, transformative learning, and emerging adulthood development. I will also be looking for

opportunities so share these findings abroad and possibly conduct a project/case study within a higher education setting.

Role of the Researcher

The positioning of the researcher as collaborator rather than expert is key for deliberative critical dialogue to take place throughout the research process (Howe, 2003). As the researcher, I was not a passive observer but one whose values and pragmatic interests transparently informed the research, and this was made transparently known to the participants as well.

Currently, I am a full time faculty member at the college where the student organization continues to exist. I was the first faculty advisor to the student organization at the request of the founding students. In anticipation of this research study, I am no longer the faculty advisor. Prior to advising this student organization, I advised two other organizations: Queer-Straight Alliance and Uncensored Soul, a creative writing student community. I know many of the eligible participants for this study well. In fact, the students inspired the topic for this research study as they kept insisting that this organization has been their best learning experience with many describing it as life changing.

Advising any student group is a very rewarding experience yet I found it to be a challenging endeavor as a faculty member. It involves different boundaries than the classroom and office hours in connection with a course; and, at times, understanding these boundaries required intense negotiation among the members and myself. Faculty advising to a student organization is also considered a volunteer activity for faculty on

most campuses; as such, is not rewarded with financial compensation or professional recognition. I hope this study may begin a conversation around this current status of faculty advising of student organizations within academic institutions.

Hand (2003) notes the limitations that the researcher's role of an "insider" may present to the case study and these will become the focus of the reflexive journal entries. Hand notes that insiders often have a "taken for granted perspective," which can be limiting. To address this, I asked myself continually, especially during the coding of the data: What assumptions am I making here? What am I expecting to see? How are these expectations shaping what I pay attention to and how I interpret the data?

A difficult challenge, noted by Hand (2003), is that the insider may avoid "asking the tough questions" or be "reluctant to talk about sensitive issues" and likewise, the participants may also hesitate to bring up issues they perceive as controversial or sensitive. In part, the anonymous survey hopes to account for these valid concerns. And, it is important to note that as a faculty member, I do not have direct teaching responsibilities to any of the student members in this organization.

On the other hand, the researcher's "insider's perspective" can contribute to the authenticity and richness of these experiences (He & Phillion, 2008) and in the spirit of democratic research (Etherington, 2004; Howe, 2003) I kept a reflexive journal through the process of this journal. Included in this reflexive journal will also be entries about experiences and learning as the initial faculty advisor of the student organization. A summary of the journal will be made available to the participants of the interviews and focus groups and included in section five. The journal was not used to eliminate bias, as

I, along with Etherington (2004), Howe (2003), and Lakoff (2008/2009) do not believe that is possible. Rather, the reflexive journal was written to clearly identify bias and explain reasons for choices made and interpretations resulting from the intersection of bias and observations.

Conclusion

Van Manen (2006) wrote,

It is in the act of reading and writing that insights emerge...that the data of the research are ...interpreted and that the fundamental nature of the research questions is perceived. In a phenomenological sense, the research produces knowledge in the form of texts that not only describe and analyze the phenomena of the lifeworld but also evoke understandings that otherwise lie beyond their reach. (p.715)

According to phenomenologist, van Manen, the act of research, analysis, synthesis, and then, telling is a both/and process that at the same time is an expression of what exists and a shaper of that expression and perhaps even a shaper of the phenomena itself as it asks the phenomena to reflect upon itself. I must acknowledge here the growing awareness through this research study that what we name is not the phenomena we are naming. "The writer uses words to uncover a truth that seems almost within reach" (van Manen, 2006, p. 717).

In light of this, I acknowledge both the shaping power of framing the perceptions of the students about their learning experiences and acknowledges this framing, in truthfulness, can only be a suggestion of its meaning. I also acknowledge that the process

of intentional witnessing and reflecting upon experience does in some way shape the experience for the participant and sometimes adding a depth and richness that may not have been present without it. Rather than invalidating this type of research study, especially within the context of education, the methodology offers a transformative learning experience for both the researcher and the participants. Van Manen (2006) acknowledged,

qualitative method is often difficult, as it requires sensitive interpretive skills and creative talents from the researcher...its method of inquiry constantly has to be invented anew and cannot be reduced to a general set of strategies or research techniques. Methodologically speaking, every notion has to be examined in terms of its assumptions, even the idea of method itself. (p.720)

My assumption underlying this study is that the role of an authentic teacher is that of a qualitative researcher and vice versa. Both involve the phenomena of “really ‘seeing’ something...experiencing a sensation of something perceived” with the other and as van Manen (2006) describes this in terms of research and writing, I also attribute it to learning with students as a way of teaching, so that “real courage has been ignited...driven by desire” (p. 721). Rather than viewing researching as prescriptive stances of listening and interpreting, I viewed this study as a stance of co-inquiry with the participants: wondering, describing, and deliberating, an active inquiry that both discovers and defines anew through shared meaning making.

Section 4: Results

For this qualitative interpretive case study, section 4 provides evidence of quality, truthfulness of the data collected, and validity of the findings through a summary of the triangulation of methods, the use of member checking and detailed descriptions of the data collection, recording, coding processes, and findings. These are presented within the context of each data collection method: one survey, eight interviews, and one focus group. The summary of this section synthesizes the findings of each method. A summary commentary and excerpts from the reflexive journal, which I kept throughout the data collection, analysis, and interpretation, as an additional data source can be found in section 5.

Data Collection

A rich pool of data for this qualitative interpretive case study was collected on the perceptions of undergraduates of their learning through membership activities in a student organization focused on global social justice awareness and activism. The data were triangulated through an on-line survey, a focus group, and eight interviews. The following provides a description of participants, instruments, and means of actual data collection for each of the three data collection processes.

The 16-question survey (Appendix A), a mix of short answer and forced choice questions, was developed to procure anonymous data and did not ask for demographic data also that the identity of the respondents would not be evident to me. The survey addressed the research questions of the study as well as their descriptions of the

organization and their motivation for joining to provide background regarding the context of the study through the perspectives of the participants.

The participant pool, including names and email addresses, was obtained through the organization's member lists on Blackboard and Wiggio social networking sites set up for the organization. Subsequent conversations with the current advisor helped me to confirm the identity of the current and former members who regularly attended meetings and participated in events since the organization's inception in late fall 2006. During the month after the close of the spring semester, the 25 identified eligible current and former members received the three email reminders regarding the survey through email and Facebook. A total of 15 out of 25 eligible participants had completed the survey during the five weeks it was open.

The interview protocol (Appendix B) was also developed to inquire about individual member's perceptions about learning as a result of engagement in the student organization. The interview protocol provided the list of questions; however, the sequence of the questions in actual interviews was guided by the protocol but determined by the flow of each individual interview. Follow up questions, not specified by the protocol, were also asked in individual interviews.

The participants in the interviews had previously received the email inviting them to participate in the survey and were asked to contact me by email should they be willing to participate in an interview and/or a focus group. While it was proposed that seven individuals would be interviewed, eight individuals were actually interviewed. The additional interview was conducted after the focus group as one of the participants

volunteered, which also allowed me to follow up on specific information mentioned in the focus group.

Email communication between myself and each of the participants determined the time, place, and means of the interviews. Of the eight interviews, four were conducted in the public libraries of their hometowns. Two other interviews were conducted using SKYPE, and two interviews were conducted using Gmail-chat (due to poor SKYPE connections), which used typed responses as the means of interviews. For those interviews conducted through electronic means, the consent forms were sent through email prior to the interview and participants returned them with electronic signatures just prior to the interview.

The interviews were expected to last 45 minutes, and most were conducted within a 35 to 55 minute range with the exception of interview 7, which lasted 90 minutes. All interviews, excluding the two using Gmail-chats, were recorded on a digital recorder and saved to a card and to the digital recorder's hard drive. They were also downloaded on to my computer and stored on an external hard drive. The Gmail-chats were copied and pasted to the same table format.

All interviews began with a brief explanation of the purpose of the interview and an explanation of confidentiality and the consent form. Participants were reminded that the college and the student organization would be identified explicitly in the dissertation and any subsequent articles or presentations. It was explained that specific information, which would possibly identify them as the source of the data, would not be included in the reporting of the study. I used the following guideline: data that can be reasonably be

connected to at least three other known eligible participants, would not be reported. Even so, participants were made aware that it may be likely that some people, especially within the organization, might still be able to identify them as the source of a quote or reference. They were also informed that they would have a chance to see the transcript and summary of the interview and would be able to express any concerns they had about confidentiality or accuracy of the data. All participants indicated being comfortable with this, and all willingly agreed to be interviewed for this case study. After the interviews, each participant was emailed a \$30.00 Amazon gift certificate as an appreciation gift.

I transcribed each interview, within 24 hours, using table format for easy reading and future coding. Each transcription was saved to my personal computer and an external hard drive. Each interview was then analyzed and summarized and sent to each individual as a means of member checking. Each participant read and returned the interview transcripts and the interview summaries through email stating their approval, some with revisions and additional comments.

The focus group was comprised of three former members, all who graduated in May 2009. In addition to the questions in the focus group protocol (Appendix C), which addressed the research questions, they were also asked to define the purpose of higher education, given their experience with OC and their year in the real world. While all eligible participants were invited to participate in the focus group, only three were available during the summer month; hence, a random sampling of the eligible participants, determined by scheduling, produced a focus group of three former members, all of whom were May 2009 graduates. The focus group was held at my house at the

request of the three participants because it was the most central and convenient meeting place for them. The focus group provided a format for the three members to reflect as a community on the community experience of OC.

The focus group was actually the first time since graduation that the three former members had seen each other although they are still in contact through Facebook. The consent forms were explained, read, and signed by all. All three had participated in the survey, and two had been interviewed before the focus group had taken place; the third participant volunteered to be interviewed after taking part in the focus group. Before the focus group began, the participants again were reminded that the name of the student organization and college would be reported in the doctoral study and any subsequent publications. Although steps would be taken to prevent direct identification, as with the interviews, I informed participants that it may be likely that other members would be able to identify them as the source of a quote. They all willingly agreed to participate in the focus group. The focus group lasted 90 minutes, the expected time stated at the outset. The conversation was recorded on a digital audio recorder, and its contents were saved to the card and an independent hard drive. The audio data were transcribed and summarized by me, and both the transcription and the summary were subsequently emailed to all three participants for member checking with the same set of instructions as the interviews, inviting comments and revisions. The focus group transcript and its summary were returned to me by the participants, each stating their approval without revisions or additional comments. I emailed a \$30 thank you gift certificate from Amazon.com. to all the participants.

The Reflexive Journal

Starting upon receiving IRB approval, I kept a reflexive journal, which allowed me to reflect about her prior experiences with OC as an advisor as well as the motivation and process for this research study. The journal also allowed for recorded reflection and personal observations during data collection, analysis, during the study. Within the journal, dated entries labeled “Reflexive Entry” were used to differentiate the entry as an intentional reflexive entry, which used Etherington’s (2004) questions (Appendix F). Etherington emphasized the need to be aware of personal biases, based on the premise that bias is impossible to eliminate no matter what the type of study (Etherington, 2004, Howe, 2005). A summary of my journal entries in response to Etherington’s questions can be found in section 5.

Overview of Data Analysis

The four forms of data were collected over a 6-week period. The data analysis for each, minus the reflexive journal, began as soon as the data were available. The analysis followed the process of reading through initial data after transcription, noting and summarizing the main ideas. These summaries, along with the actual transcripts, were sent to the participants for member checking. The summaries were also the first step in analysis, as a form of open coding for emergent themes not structured by the research questions. Subsequent analysis was then structured by the research questions, followed by themes in the literature, which related to the emergent themes in the previous two codings. A decision to identify all participants in the survey, interviews, and focus group by use of labels instead of by pseudonyms added an additional layer of privacy as well as

a means for easier in-text referencing, intentionally used to help establish the validity and strength of the findings and interpretations.

The following sections describe the data analysis and report the findings for the survey, the interviews, and the focus group. The findings are then synthesized in the summary of this section. The interpretations of the findings can be found in section 5 along with the summary of my reflexive journal on the data collection, analysis, and interpretation processes.

Survey Analysis and Findings

Fifteen out of the 25 eligible participants completed the survey during the 5 weeks it was open. In order to analyze each question noting the frequency of words or phrases used by participants to answer the questions, an excel page was created for each question. At the close of the survey, a frequency count was tallied for all like responses to each question. Each response was recorded for individual respondents with the label *R* plus a number indicating the respondents' place in the sequence of incoming survey responses, such that (R1) indicates responses from the first respondent who completed the survey, (R2) indicates responses from the second respondent who completed the survey.

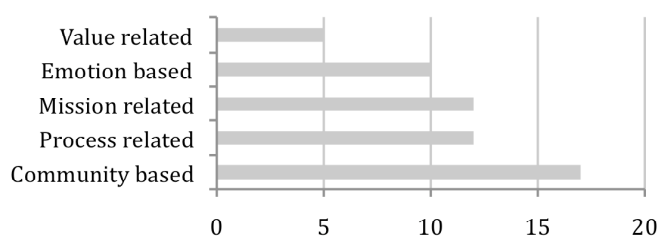
Themes were then formed from the codes developed during the initial analysis, and the frequency for each theme was determined from the responses as a whole. As a result, responses from individual participants may account for more than one theme. Figures in this section show the range of themes for each survey question. Themes with significantly higher numbers of responses were also graphed individually to show the

frequency of the subcategories contributing to the individual themes. Analysis and findings for each survey question follows.

Q1: List 5 words or write a few sentences to describe the student organization ONE Curry

Analyzing the 15 participants' responses describing OC, five types of descriptions emerged, listed in descending order: community based, process related, mission related, emotion based, and value related. (Figure 1). Respondents listed words that related to the type of community they experienced in OC, such as "friendly," "caring," "helpful," "focused," "welcoming." Words like "powerful" "inspirational," "passionate," "enthusiastic," "uplifting," and "free spirited" also describe the community and additionally suggest the participants engaged on a deeper emotional level with OC; these were coded as emotion based descriptors. Respondents also described OC in terms of its process such as these examples, "well-organized," "sustainable," "solution focused," "productive," and "driven." The mission was described as often as the process in terms such as: "the ONE Campaign," "mission focused," "global focused," "human rights," "directly assists," and "aware of social justice." And, some participants used words suggestive of values such as "love", "justice", "truth", "a free space for thought", "a desire to know," and "free spirited." The number of times a theme was mentioned among the respondents as a whole was tallied and charted in Figure 1. Some participants provided data that coded for a theme several times. The decision was made to just count frequency.

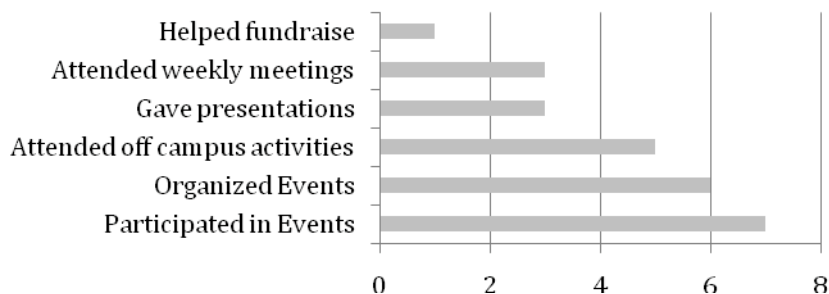
Figure 1. Descriptions of ONE Curry



Q2: List the activities that you participated in as a member of OC

Survey responses indicated members participated in six major activities of OC throughout the semester, listed in descending order: participated in events, organized events, attended off campus events related to the organization, attended weekly meetings, gave participations, and participated in fundraising. Figure 2 indicates the frequency of engagement by type for the 15 respondents. Several participants listed more than one activity. Members could help out the night of the event without being part of the planning process; gave presentations could either refer to presenting during one of the educational events held by the student organization or a presentation given to the organization about an issue of global poverty or injustice. Off campus events may refer to attending a documentary, a conference on the Millennium Development Goals, or representing the organization in the Millennium Campus Network (MCN), a Boston based student initiative to organize and support student organizations, such as ONE Curry.

Figure 2. Participation in Organization

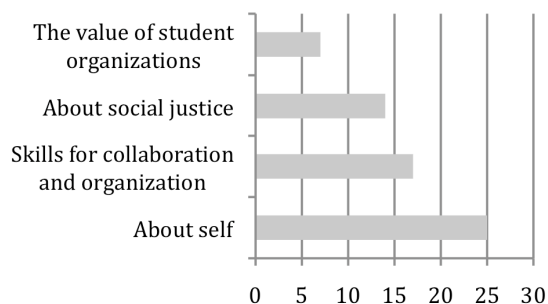


Qs 3, 9, and 10: Perceptions of learning through engagement in OC

Three questions in the survey were dedicated to explore what the students may have learned through engagement in OC, including what they may have learned about themselves as emerging adults. Question 3 was open ended, asking the respondents to describe anything they may have perceived learning through engagement in the student organization. Question 9 offered a simple yes/no response, asking the respondents if they learned anything about themselves? Question 10 asks respondents to describe something they learning about themselves if they answered “yes” to Question 9.

All of the respondents in all the questions indicated learning through engagement with OC. And, all respondents indicated in both Question 3 and Questions 9 and 10 that they had learned about themselves. Twenty-five descriptions of learning coded as learning *about self* in the open ended Question 3.

Other themes to emerge in answer to Question 3 indicated that the respondents also learned about social justice, group processes, the value of a student organization for their undergraduate education, and specific skills related to working in groups to achieve specific objectives. Figure 3 displays the response frequency for each thematic code.

Figure 3. Perceived Learning

One respondent's answer encompassed all the themes,

However, my learning far surpassed facts and an understanding of global issues. I learned a lot about myself and how I work in groups with other people... I learned more about how to lead a movement. ONE Curry presented an area of great growth for me, personally. (R5)

Another respondent's reflection was similar to those of many respondents who indicated learning a new frame of reference through which to view themselves,

Joining this club made me realize how insignificant my, and other people's problems are. We bitch and moan about every little tiny thing that gets under our skin, and half of the time, it's pointless compared to the problems of others. We have it made compared to what the people of the Sudan have. These people wake up to uncertainty every single day. They have to struggle just in order to wake up and do it all over again. Many people [in the US] arrogantly fail to realize this and continue on their every day lives. (R10)

Respondents described learning about specific areas of conflict and global poverty; along with this, they also described a new response+ability for global social injustice as well as the importance of increasing awareness about global social justice issues on the campus. All of these responses were coded as learning “about social justice.” This participant’s response summarized in general the responses coded for this theme, “This club made me pay attention to these things and to do something about it.” (R10). For most of these students, who came to a small private college from mostly middle to upper class neighborhoods in New England, learning about the many instances of global social injustice and suffering through OC was their first real introduction to extreme poverty and injustices abroad, and interestingly, this awareness seemed to create a new realization of the excesses here. The following participant’s response summarizes this general sentiment, “realizing how fortunate my life is and how blessed I am to have the things and opportunities I do.” (R11). Several participants noted learning about specific global injustices,

I learned about a large percent of people in this world who are starving. I learned that women in Afghanistan are given few rights. They are denied an education and are beaten, even killed for attending school. They are harassed and beaten for not wearing traditional dress within their borders. (R14)

Likewise, another participant indicated learning specific injustices suffered by people living in Afghanistan and other injustices addressed specifically by the organization, “I learned about RAWA [The Revolutionary Association of Women in Afghanistan],

Afghanistan pre-Russian occupation, AIDS, STDS, Global Poverty, Rwandan Genocide. And a great deal about the on-going war in the Middle East” (R15).

Ten phrases of participants answers to question 3 coded as “group processes” such as learning the following: the benefits of working towards a goal as a group, collaboration, the importance of group organization, and the challenges of working within a group. Students described their learning in these phrases, “working together and taking a stand with other people,” organization and teamwork,” and “ coming together as a community to help others.” Two respondents described learning primarily about group processes, “I learned that a small group of people can get a lot done and go pretty far, and even be just as, if not more productive than larger groups with more people, resources, et cetera” (R 8) and,

I learned that people mean well. The means of performing something good are not always as easy. But working with a group of people that are so focused on achieving great things, allows possibilities to expand, and more gets accomplished. (R 2)

Several students mentioned learning specific skill sets through engagement in OC, including communication, public relations, leadership, and personal organization. Seven phrases coded as learning about the importance of student organizations to their undergraduate education. Respondents noted that student organizations offered rich the opportunities for experiential learning, preparing for adulthood, applying coursework and learning more about self through the student organization, OC. One respondent wrote,

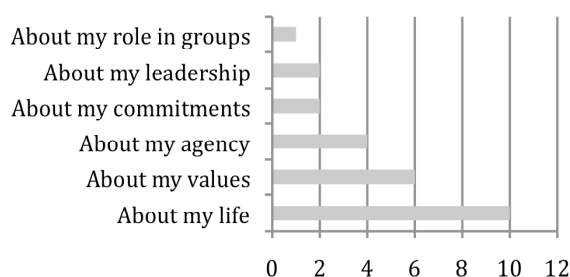
ONE Curry became a true extension of my college experience and was a place where I learned more about myself than I did in any classroom. Further, I believe it was an experience that better prepared me for post-college life, working with others. (R5)

Another explained how the student organization allowed him/her to supplement her educational experience with communication skills and teamwork,

I learned organization and teamwork, and a lot about public relations. Studying English and philosophy, I didn't get to do a lot of "field work" like some students in film, public relations and communications might have been able to, so I was able to learn a lot of the things that they were learning in classes through first-hand experiences. (R2)

Since all participants provided data in Question 3, which coded for learning *about self*, Figure 4 displays the main themes of this learning about self.

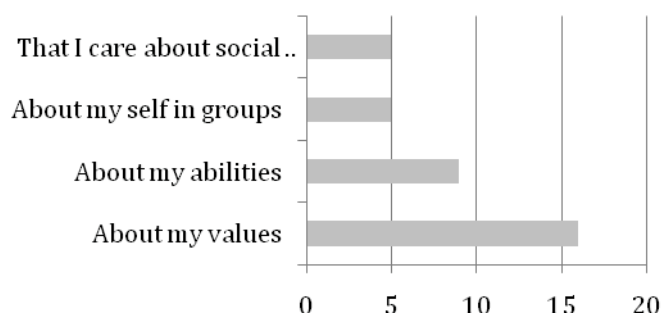
Figure 4. Learned About Self



Questions 9 and 10 specifically asked respondents if they learned about themselves; and, some merely repeated the same answer; however, most added more depth to the answer. In Question 9, 100% of the respondents indicated that they had

learned about themselves through engagement in the student organization. Question 10 followed up, asking respondents to describe what they learned.

Figure 5. Gained Self Awareness



When asked directly about learning about self, analyzing the responses to Question 10 revealed (Figure 5), the respondents indicated becoming aware of their values almost twice as often as anything else. This was also seen in the responses to Question 3, much of their descriptions also implied values. For some, the learning experiences of OC clarified existing values, for others it changed values, and for others, it created a new set of values. For example, one respondent began the response to question 10 with, “I learned that I cared about the world.” Similarly, another respondent noted, “I learned how passionate I am about social justice and about the field of non profits” (R6). And, a third respondent wrote, “I learned that I care immensely about the well being of others. I learned that injustice motivates me to help” (R15).

One respondent noted that he or she knew about global injustices before joining OC, but did not know what to do with this knowledge, such as using it “to educate a mass group.” OC provided a means for this respondent to “find that voice” and educate peers about the existence of global poverty and oppression. (R3). And, one respondent,

engaged emotionally with topics of social justice, but did not just stop there noting, “I learned how my indignation can be funneled into something productive” (R9).

The other significant type of self-awareness gained through OC is connected with learning about oneself through collaboration within a group. One participant realized, “Sometimes you have to take the backseat and help other people find a way. But when they do [find the way for the group], it is possible and rewarding to be supportive and encouraging because you realize that you are all in the same car.” (R2)

Another participant admitted, “I am slowly learning organization and how important communication is” (R4). Some who wrote about their experience of collaboration in OC indicated that it impacted them deeply, such as this respondent,

I learned so much about how a club/organization operates and how I operate within that structure. It allowed me to collaborate with others in a truly profound way; something that even group work in a class cannot come close to. (R5)

A few respondents indicated learning about their individual power as a result of membership within this group as captured in these two responses, “I learned that I have the power, the opportunity, and the ability to make a difference in people’s lives,” (R11) and, “I learned I have a strong voice” (R15).

Qs 4, 5, 6, and 7: The Intersections of Learning between OC and Academic Studies

Analysis of responses indicated learning in both academic courses and OC for most and did so in both directions to varying degrees. Comparing the frequency ratings, it does seem that activities in OC applied slightly more often to coursework than the other

way around. When asked if OC learning applied to academic coursework, seven respondents indicated it did apply to the following courses: psychology, philosophy, social problems, literature, and the Honors Program, which is an interdisciplinary research program at this college. A respondent wrote about OC learning's connection with literature courses,

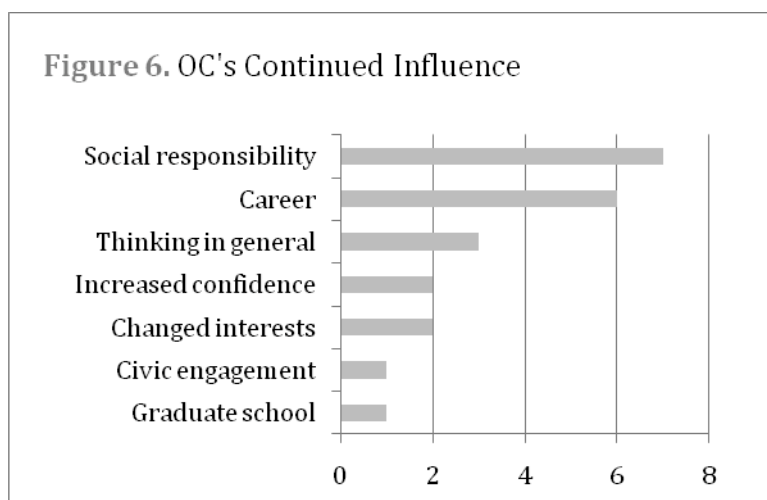
More often than not, I'd be able to identify the problems that we saw in ONE Curry in the texts I read - it's always interesting to discover that the problems that affect a society now affected societies hundreds and even thousands of years ago on some fundamental level. (R3)

Respondents also indicated a significant intersection between communications courses and activities in OC. And, a few respondents noted that OC influenced his or her thinking and therefore influenced learning in all courses, “In general, it just opened my mind to new ideas and think more critically, and to continue to expand my knowledge on subjects” (R4). Another noted applying the following to coursework, “another perspective about life” (R10) and finding encouragement to “be open to all views [in courses] and try to eradicate my original “tunnel vision” (R13). One of the respondents took these questions as an opportunity to write an insightful critique of the lack of inclusion of global issues in the classes she had taken, which she only realized after being in OC.

Q12: OC's Continued Influence after Graduation

All 15 of the survey respondents affirmed that the influence of OC would most likely continue after they graduate (Figure 8). Most noted that they expect to continue to

help others intentionally. Some even noted that they have changed their career path to be able to do so. One respondent indicated a new commitment to civic engagement and one respondent noted that OC gave her the confidence to apply to graduate school. Two additional respondents indicated that the confidence gained through membership in OC would be with them for life. And, three respondents indicated that since OC has changed how they think about things, it would be a life long influence.



Qs 13 and 14: Highlights for Undergraduate Education

Committed to a democratic paradigm in qualitative research, I invited the respondents to suggest areas for me to highlight and perhaps investigate more in depth. However, given that more than half (9) wrote, “no response,” most respondents may have “finished” taking the survey. However, the six who preserved suggested the following areas of OC’s influence to emphasize: learning leadership, goal setting, recognizing the need for time management and personal organization, acquiring persistence in spite of obstacles, understanding the importance of process in spite of its frustrations, the fun and frustrations of working with friends. These respondents also highlighted the following as

important for undergraduate study: current global events, activist clubs on campus, student organizations as an integral part of one's education, empowerment of students through critical thinking, and course projects, which are meaningful and consequential outside the courses as well.

Interview Analysis and Findings

Each interview followed the protocol (Appendix B) but also allowed the participant to take the lead in describing his or her experiences in OC. After receiving feedback from participants, all eight interviews were read through once, noting main ideas and emergent themes. The initial interview transcriptions were then put into a five-column table with the following headings: *speaker*, *data*, *open coding*, *coding for research questions*, and *review of literature*. And, upon realizing a significant correlation with Chickering and Reiser's (1993) 7 Vector model for undergraduate development, a sixth column, *7 Vectors*, was added for an additional coding. Similar to the survey, the coding findings were entered into a spreadsheet and the frequency of participant response was tabulated. As noted before, interview data from each participant were each assigned a number (#) and participants are referred to as P#.

Demographics of Participants

Of the eight interview participants, five were recent graduates and three are currently enrolled in the college. Of the three currently enrolled in the college, two intend to be members of the organization in the fall. As students, including alumni prior to graduation, five were residents on campus, and three were commuters. The following majors were represented: Biology (1), Communications (4), Health (1), Literature (1),

and Politics and History (1). Two minored in Philosophy. Three were in the Honors Scholars Program, and five had been members of the First Year Honors Program. All students, except one who was enrolled as a nontraditional adult student, were traditional undergraduates. The non traditional adult student still qualifies as an emerging adult due to his age. Two students had transferred to the college in their junior year. One student noted that she had been planning on transferring out of the college after her first year until joining the organization. The gender representation was 2 males and 6 females.

In terms of level of engagement in the organization, I coded the interview responses on three levels of engagement: low, medium, and high. Only one participant was rated as low, attending “about one-quarter of the meetings” and involved in organizing one event. One student was rated as medium, coming to “most meetings,” attending “several events” and participating in planning several events. The other six were all highly engaged. The following are summaries of the interview data as a whole regarding the student engagement.

Open Coding Themes

The emergent themes of the first round of coding are organized in the following section by the question they answer or a theme, which appeared repeatedly within the interviews.

Characteristics of OC. During the open coding, data were analyzed for the characteristics described or highlighted by all participants. These codes were then collected into themes when appropriate and the frequency of each code within a theme

was tabulated in an excel spreadsheet. The following are the main themes describing characteristics of OC valued by the interview participants (Table 1).

Table 1

Characteristics of ONE Curry

Characteristics	Participants, n=8
Mission focused	7
Decision by consensus	6
Learn about:	
Myself	6
Global issues	6
Multiple perspective-taking	4
Powerful learning experiences	6
Power to change people	6
Agency of members	5
Academic quality	5
Challenging	5
Countercultural	5
“We are a family.”	5
Safe space to speak	4
Applied to coursework	3
Interdisciplinary format	3

Motivation to join. The majority of the responses for each of the eight participants coded as *motivation* described “the mission ” itself (5) closely followed by “the passion” of existing members for its mission (4). The mission of OC first attracted two members who joined as first year students; however, they were impressed by the passion of the other members upon attending a meeting and became members as a result. Three participants also joined after being invited by friends and two joined after attending a meeting per a faculty recommendation. One participant joined after OC and another

student organization co-planned an event; and one participant reported motivation to join as “exploring life in general.”

i. “Learning from other students” was mentioned by all eight participants as important. Learning from other students was described by seven out of the eight participants in connection with the democratic inclusion of all voices in the organization as a way of reaching consensus for most the decisions.

One participant noted,

Everyone has a voice ~ everyone has their say. Usually this is not true in other groups. Even though it is set up that way, usually there is one person who talks all the time and takes over. In OC, that was not true. (P8)

Learning from other students also occurred through the role modeling of the older members for incoming first year students as reported by this participant,

I mean [names a member] is totally confident, well, he/she appears that way...he/she just has the personality to inspire people and he/she is so smart and knows what he/she was talking about and so eager to get it out all the time. I really look up to him/her. And then, [names another member], when he/she talks, public speaking, I really looked up to him/her for that...I have trouble with communication and public speaking and when I would hear him/her speak ~ I just looked up to him/her. (P1)

Life-changing learning. Seven participants also described OC as facilitating powerful learning experiences capable of transforming not only themselves but others as well. This participant was one of many who OC as “life changing,” “I would say I went

through a huge change in my last year of college during my time as a member...I think I found myself with the help of ONE Curry” (P5).

Coding for Research Questions

As noted in Section 1, this case study is focused on five related, but distinct, research questions. Data chunks were further analyzed and coded again. An excel spreadsheet was created for each research question, listing all relevant codes. All interviews were then coded once more according to this new list of codes. Instances of relevant data were listed in a spreadsheet. Frequency analysis for each code within all eight interviews as a whole was then charted. Codes were then ranked in relationship to each other, determined by the number of participants expressing the theme and then by the frequency of responses in the group as a whole. Descriptions of coding, frequency analysis, and findings for Research Questions 4 and 5 are found in their respective sections.

RQ 1: Learning through Global Social Justice Activism in a Student Organization

Coding participants’ responses about their learning through engagement in global social justice activism revealed participants learned about the following, listed in order of frequency: collaboration, self, perspective taking, metacognition, activism, global social justice, and empathy.

Collaboration had the most references when viewing the eight interviews as a whole as working together towards shared goals with shared values seemed to have a powerful impact on their learning as seen in this statement, “I have learned the value of friends and of working together as a group in a team and how important that is” (P9).

Another participant indicated learning about necessary group dynamics for effective collaboration,

The people - that is what committed me to OC. How passionate the people are and how dedicated the people are... 'cuz without passion and dedication - no work [in groups] can get done. You need those [characteristics] to help you get things accomplished.

This participant described learning about the challenges in collaboration,

The meetings really were such a learning process for me on how to lead and [on] group dynamics. I tried to always be upfront about the fact that I was no expert on running a club or a movement. I tried to be inclusive, but sometimes failed. And I found our group to consistently be ADD [attention deficit disorder] - just all over the place. Throwing out great ideas, being creative, then running with some ideas and not with others...It was really challenging. (P6)

All eight participants noted learning about self through engagement in OC. For some, it was a gradual learning as this participant indicated, "It just made me look at myself differently by learning about other people. Because obviously when you meet people, you learn things about yourself and the way you interact with them" (P2). Others described it as a type of awakening, "I learned how passionate I can be about other people and how much empathy I have for them and learning that has taught me so much about myself" (P5), explaining further,

I went through a huge change. I think I found myself with the help of ONE Curry. I realized I couldn't work in a world where communication was used to

manipulate. I realized I am extremely hard headed, and it would be very difficult for me to work for any company that used communication in a negative way...[as a result] I would really love to study psychology, sociology and the global communications for a grad degree...” (P5)

Table 2

RQ1: Learning through Global Social Justice Activism in a Student Organization

Codes	# Respondents, n=8	Total # Responses
Collaboration	8	29
About self	8	23
Perspective-taking	8	20
Metacognition	8	16
Activism	8	15
Global social justice	8	14
Empathy	8	12
Cultural identity	6	12
Personal agency	4	10
Interpersonal skills	4	8
About one's voice	4	5
Time management skill	4	4
Value of commitment	2	4

One participant initially joined OC as “a way to fill time,” while experiencing some significant personal challenges; however, engagement in OC quickly became much more than a time-filler,

[I]...watch[ed] myself gain strength and empowerment that I did not have before ~ it was an amazing process ~ I was able to create my own identity where as before I was always connected to [boyfriend]. I was now: [her name], a communication major, and [position on board] of OC, or a part of OC or building

a well in Sudan. It was like a whole new me and a whole new identity ... all of a sudden I was **living** my identity separate from [high school boyfriend] ... [and this was] a really an interesting concept for me. (P6)

All eight participants interviewed noted that they had learned the importance of being aware of different perspectives. This participant gave an especially poignant account of this occurring for her within her academic major, history.

Pretty much before OC...when we [classes in history] were talking about the different wars and the tactics used like when the soldiers would go through the different towns and burn everything to the ground, the slash and burn tactic, I would think ~ yeah of course, obviously you don't want the enemy to get it, but I wasn't thinking about the impact of the people who lived there ~ how does this effect the people? Hearing [names peer member] story really impacted me. Here is this kid who had to go through that [fleeing village in Southern Sudan]... the soldiers came through and destroyed everything and the people there were left to survive by themselves. When we are reading this for history, you only hear about the general battle plans and strategies, you don't hear about what happened to the people afterwards...I actually began to use this [perspective] in my history papers. How did these tactics impact the people who lived there? We have to consider this. (P8)

Another participant indicated that the motivation to learn and take on different perspectives was the initial reason for joining OC, "I wanted to broaden my knowledge. Expand my brain a little bit. To get out of tunnel vision" (P3), and what was learned was

a new sense of values involving social responsibility to people who were previously invisible to this participant. Similarly, many participants experienced the student organization as a means to engage in multiple perspectives. This participant's description of new learning emphasized learning to engage in multiple perspectives,

It has been very cool for me to watch how we came together and how differently we all approach a situation ~ we all approach things differently, and it just is so cool to watch people approach statements and issues differently and this year we heard people talk how they've come from one thing from their lives and expecting OC to effect them in one way and then watching it affect them in another way ~ different than they expected. (P4)

Another participant noted learning just how important perspective taking is when one's goal is to help someone, especially someone outside of one's culture,

I think that is so important ~ to understand other cultures and what they do ~ you can't solve a problem if you just go by your own culture. You have to look at theirs and see if you can help them. Like you can hurt their feelings...you should make sure they even want your help. (P1)

Metacognition, or thinking about one's thinking, is an important higher order thinking skill with respect to taking perspective and executive functioning skills such as organization and time management. When coding the participants' perspectives of learning via engagement in OC, many entries indicted this thinking skill. For example, one participant noted this clearly, "I learned different ways to approach a problem, like to divide my time up more effectively. I can't help anyone else in the world if I can't

organize myself.” (P2). Similarly, another participant also noted thinking about thinking, “That is what a club teaches you. It teaches you how to organize things, how to approach people, how to take the facts and figures you learn in the classroom and put them to everyday use” (P4). And, this participant gave a clear example of metacognition as a result of engagement in OC and its impact on her academic study in communications,

It no longer became the study of how I communicate but how humans communicate...when studying, I no longer thought, “How does this work in American society. I was now applying what I learned in class to presidential elections, foreign relations, foreign news.” (P5)

One participant applied metacognition in her reflection about the connection between her involvement in OC in connection with her academic pursuits, “I think the activism wasn’t quite there for me... It was more the ideas that interested me...which ties back to [my major and minor]. I studied ideas and how things worked.” (P2)

On the other hand, several participants noted becoming activists to address issues of global poverty and social injustices was the major learning process for them in OC. In fact, for some, global social justice activism became a passion and possible lifetime goal. One described his approach to activism,

The mission of OC was (and is, I believe) two-fold: to raise awareness on and off campus about extreme poverty and global injustices. And to raise funds in order to take concrete action to help those in need. I always had this underlying goal in mind too though: to change the way people think about global poverty, away from a model of charity and towards a model of justice. (P6)

In fact, for this participant, informed and shaped a new set of values,

I can speak for myself at least and say that I would not be happy in a job that I know exploits people or the environment. And so I do think it's very possible to have the career fall in line with making the world a better place. Indeed, this is my goal! I'm interviewing for a job with [names organization], a job that would specifically focus on my aspirations... (P6)

Another participant noted learning the difference between volunteering and an activism, “I have always been involved with community service and giving back. It’s what I love to do. But OC made me realize how meaningless some community service was...when there were children starving around the world” (P5). This participant also noticed the learning of others in the organization as they became activists for global social justice, “I watched as quiet people joined and became loud outspoken activists. OC gives people the knowledge and courage to have a voice...[and] there is something very intense and motivating about informed desire...helping has many complexities.”

Several participants described the significance of learning about global social justice through group activism on their prior perceptions. One compared it to bursting out of “the Curry bubble” (P4). Another participant similarly described the new learning, “I have learned so [participant emphasis] much ~ not only about global issues but also about myself” (P4). In general, most, if not all, participants were shocked to learn about the extent of global poverty and injustice around the world. Most claimed OC was their first real encounter with this type of learning; and, some registered this as an explicit criticism

of higher education and their education while the responses of others strongly implied it as can be seen in this participant's description,

I never learned anything like that before or heard about stuff like that ... I learned that not everyone has the same rights as we do. I didn't realize that others don't have the same freedoms that we do. I thought everyone has the same freedom. Just being involved in this club opened my eyes to what is going on around the world in other cultures and countries. (P1)

Learning about global poverty and social injustices raised new and important questions for this participant,

Why are certain people treated as less than a person than I am? Why do they not get everything that I get? That is not fair." Prior to this, her educational interests in high school centered on theater, "I never did volunteer work in high school. I was theater. All theater! And, music. And, then I came to college and completely changed when I took First Year Honors [introducing identity and identity perspectives in different cultures] and then...this club [OC]...just continued [this type of learning] for three years... (P2)

Another also noted a similar experience with OC and learning about global social justice, "I was never involved with helping communities or international communities. Really finding an appreciation what I have and what goes on in the world. And, maybe I could help" (P3). And, yet another, who had always been very active in local politics and volunteering, noted that being in OC opened her eyes,

It shifted everything. I am not going to lie. Its one of those things, if you are involved with OC, it opens your eyes to everything. You know for the most part that the kids involved in OC have a sense of the world. They don' t just focus on just their own world. They focused on injustice in all the world. (P8)

Several participants also noted learning through experiencing empathy, which is also evident in some of the previous quotes. One participant, who had noted, “ I never learned anything like that before or heard about stuff like that” later in the interview described what it was like for her to try on a burqa at a OC meeting,

I learned a lot wearing that burqa! I learned about the culture...wearing the burqa - I am speechless - I felt so isolated while I was wearing it; it felt so degrading; my identity was taken from me. I couldn't see that it was me. My voice was gone. Yeah...that taught me a lot because I got to feel how they feel for 10 seconds. I actually felt scared while I was wearing it. (P1)

In this description, the participant learned about women's identity in other cultures by experiencing a powerfully empathetic response. Her fear was a realization of the repression of identity for women her own age currently existing in other parts of the world. She emphasized she had not been exposed to this in any of her previous classes in high school or college.

RQ 2: The Means of Learning in the Student Organization

When coding for elements, which facilitated their learning, I looked at data coded as “learning” and asked of the data, “How was this learned?” And, if there was an explicit reference or a logical implicit answer to that question, it was coded as an element of OC

that facilitated learning for the participant. Upon gathering this data and coding for themes, the following surfaced as the primary means of learning: group process, individual peers, opportunities to apply concepts, democratic dialogue, student control of the process, the safety of the space, the use of their own voices, and faculty support. It is important to note that within learning from individual peers, another theme emerged, coded as “Leek’s Story.”

The means or elements of the learning processes are listed in Table 3, which used the same ranking system as found in Table 2. The group process and learning from peers ranked closely as the top two elements of the learning process. A subgroup exists within learning from peers since six out of eight participants mentioned learning from their peer, Leek, who was also a member of OC. Leek, a former Lost Boy of Sudan, attended the college, and was a member of the class of the founding members. After coming to a meeting, Leek told his story; it was a powerful experience for all present, including Leek. He became a regular member of OC and the organizations first major focus became the poverty, lack of water, and the ongoing ethnic tensions in Sudan, all of which were experienced first hand by Leek. His story was a means of transformation for many of the interviewed participants.

The third ranked element of the learning process was coded experiential learning. All the participants mentioned that learning through experiential engagement had a powerful, possibly transformative, impact. The process of dialogue and conversation, inclusive of all voices, ranked fourth. Seven members mentioned this explicitly in

connection with or explicitly as a means of learning about self, others, global social justice and collaboration.

Table 3

RQ 2: The Means of Learning in OC

Codes	f Respondents	f Responses
Group Process	8	30
Learning from Peers	8	27
Learning from Leek's Story	6	9
Experiential Learning	8	22
Democratic Dialogue	7	17
Student Control of Activities	7	9
Safety of Space	6	10
Faculty Support	6	8
Using One's Voice	4	7

For six participants, the safe space, which allowed for inclusive dialogue, ranked seventh. In this space, which was safe for dialogue, half of the participants noted learning through the use of their own voice. As this participant explains,

I think that is why everyone's perspective in a group is so important...our voices are strong, we get a long, we listen...I just feel like that we can hear everyone's perspective and then it is up to you to decide whether you agree or not....being in a non-judging environment is very helpful too. It helps people get comfortable... I can express how I feel and what I know and what I want to share. But I wouldn't do that in a classroom. (P1)

Later in the interview that this same participant noted she was speaking in classrooms more than before as well.

Student control was a celebrated and sacred feature of OC and a means of learning for the participants. In fact, when looking at the elements of the learning process for students, student control and responsibility seemed to be the implied heart of most of the learning perceived by most students. One participant articulately described this,

[OC] gives students a sense of agency over what they are doing and it isn't somebody telling them what they should do and how they should go about doing it ... in the end, WE had to be satisfied with what we did because it was all our ideas and nobody else told us what to do (Participant was emphatic.). And, if we weren't, then we had learned how to do it differently next time because it was all us. We learned from our mistakes, and we succeeded from our own ideas. (P2)

Finally, qualified faculty support was indicated as another important element of the learning process identified by six of the participants. The qualifications identified for faculty support consist of the following: asking questions to promote group reflections, providing information about resources, providing feedback specific to the stated mission of the organization, being a witness to help ensure a safe space for all members, providing feedback to individuals who request it, and advocating on behalf the student organization.

RQ 3: Perceived Changes in Self

When coding for the changes participants perceived within themselves as a result of the learning experiences in OC, seven themes emerged, which are ranked and listed in Table 4. Particularly noteworthy are the changes in self-awareness and their attitudes towards education.

Table 4

RQ 3: Perceived Changes in Self

Codes	f Respondents	f Responses
Self Awareness	8	19
Attitude towards Academics	7	22
Interest in Global Social Justice	7	9
Activism	7	7
Aspects in Personal Life	4	10
Personal Agency	4	7
Civic Engagement Post-graduation	3	3

Changes in self-awareness refer to new awareness that participants evidenced about their own day-to-day attitudes and/or behaviors. For some, it was a new awareness of the comfort and resources in their own lives, which previously went unnoticed. For example, one participant noted, “I look at my i-phone and air conditioning and think, ‘Wow, I feel really guilty.’ That is education. Learning how privileged we are” (P7).

Another noted a change in attitude towards careers,

[Before OC] I didn't feel the need then to think about how my career would impact the world. I just wanted to make sure I got a good job doing something I wanted to do/enjoyed doing...I can speak for myself at least and say that now I would not be happy in a job that I know exploits people or the environment. (P6)

One participant realized that her learning is a work in progress, “I am still working on is learning how to listen to other people and taking constructive criticism from other people...challenge that I have always had...” (P5).

Another noted paying attention to both local and world news now (P4). And, this awareness has translated to a felt need and ability to respond (*response+ability*) for

participants. This same participant (P4) also described noticing poor people on the streets of Boston and now gives money to them when they ask for it. Another participant, likewise, described noticing a need (the first change) and responding to it (the second change), “I walked into the bookstore at Curry, I had \$20 and thought, what am I going to do with this bill when I saw a thing for Haiti, so I put it in there” (P3). And, this participant grew aware of the privilege of college education, which was previously taken for granted, “I am sitting there getting a college education and learning things that I knew these people [in Leek’s village, Bor, Sudan] would never get a chance [for this type of education] ” (P2).

R4: Intersections of Learning between Student Organizations and Academics

When asked if there was any intersection in learning between OC and their academic courses, seven out of the eight participants interviewed indicated OC provided them with a new awareness regarding their role of student and their undergraduate learning. The data coded for intersections of learning is ranked and listed in Table 5. Frequency counts were not applied to this data for analysis due to the small sample size and therefore limited course representation.

Table 5

RQ 4: Intersections of Learning between OC and Academics

Described Means of Learning

Applied coursework in OC

Applied learning in OC to courses

Increased curiosity

Motivated to learn

Valued education more

Increased voice

This participant's response is particularly powerful to the question following question posed to the participants, "What would you say about the impact of student organizations' on undergraduate education?"

A student run organization like this ~ it gives you agency [participant emphasis] over what you are doing and I think when you gain agency over one point in your life, you gain agency over all the parts of your life. So I was able to really take control of my studies. I took control of what I was learning ~ and it was just a completely different experience when I took control of my education. I think a lot of students who don't participate in a student organization like this still see the faculty and professors still in control, but I started to see them in terms of running the class, but also learning with me...I always thought I would have things that were valuable to say and to contribute ideas, more than just get lectured to. (P2)

For this participant (P2), engagement within OC resulted in a powerful sense of agency for her and this agency came with her into the classroom. And for another (P7), her ability to immediately apply the information she was learning in her Communication major to a cause with which she was highly identified shifted everything for her in the classroom and in the suddenness of this shift, she became aware of the difference between her and her classmates.

One means of shared learning between OC and their academic courses noted by participants was specific knowledge, which transferred between their academic learning and activities in OC. However, several participants indicated that the means of shared learning was actually a significant change in their approach towards education in general;

and, they were able to experience this change in their courses. For example, several participants became more curious about: the world, others, and themselves. And, they noticed this curiosity also increased interest on their part in their courses. Similarly, others experienced more motivation to acquire knowledge for specific purposes, crediting both application of coursework in OC and the interdisciplinary connections due to the interdisciplinary nature of OC. Participants also noted the new awareness of the privilege of a college education increased their motivation. And, mentioned specifically by several participants, the actuality of finding and using one's voice in OC, empowered them to use it within the classroom; participants reported being able to have a voice in the course made a huge significance for their learning.

RQ 5: Transformational Learning for Traditional Undergraduates

Table 6

RQ 5: Transformational Learning for Undergraduates

Codes	p1	p2	p3	p4	p5	p6	p7*	p8	Total (minus p7)
SR	5	5	5	5	7	5	12	4	36
MC	4	6	5	5	7	3	5	5	35
SAB	3	4	2	3	5	7	9	6	40
MPT	5	7	3	5	7	4	7	13	44
AFR	5	5	2	4	5	6	6	7	34

Note. SR = self-reflection. MC = metacognition. SAB = self-awareness of bias. MPT = multiple perspective taking. AFR = awareness of frames of reference. *p7 interview time = 90+min. All other interviews = 45+ min.

Based upon participants' perceptions of learning, question 5 asked of the data: Is there a transformational quality within these learning experiences? The following characteristics defined primarily by Mezirow (2000, 2006) shaped the coding for evidence of transformational learning: self-reflection, metacognition, awareness of one's

bias, perceiving multiple perspectives, and awareness regarding changes in frames of reference. Table 6 lists the frequency of responses for each characteristic of transformational learning code. Examples of data coded for each characteristic are listed in Appendix G.

A comparison between current undergraduates and graduates was made of the frequency of data coded as transformational learning characteristics in order to observe the possible developmental trajectory suggested by the literature in both emerging adult development (Arnett, Parks, 2000; Luyckx, Goossens, & Soenens, 2006) and transformational learning (Meriam, 2004; Mezirow, 2000). As seen in Table 7, the average number of responses coded as evidence of a transformative learning characteristic (P7's interview excluded from this calculation due to the significantly extended time of the interview) for graduates (n=30) was twice as high as for undergraduates (n=20). When comparing both groups by type frequency, no significant differences were found between self-reflection (G=5.25, UG=5.0) and metacognition (G = 5.25, UG = 4.6). However, significant differences exist for self-awareness of bias (G= 5.5, UG=2.6), multiple perspective taking (G=8.25, UG = 4.3), and awareness of different frames of reference (G=5.75, UG =3.6).

This data analysis demonstrates that all participants' perceptions of learning in connection with membership in OC contain responses characteristic of transformative learning. The analysis also shows that the average frequency of such responses is significantly higher for graduates when compared to undergraduates, which is to be expected from the literature on transformative learning. A range of patterns in responses

exists for the individual participants as well; some patterns are more uniform and others have significant outliers.

Table 7

RQ5: Comparison between Undergraduates and Graduates

Codes	UG	G*
SR	5.0	5.25
MC	4.6	5.25
SAB	2.6	5.50
MPT	4.3	8.25
AFR	3.6	5.75
ARSP	20	30

Note. UGA = undergraduate averages. GA = graduate averages. SR = self-reflection. MC = metacognition. SAB = self-awareness of bias. MPT = multiple perspective taking. AFR = awareness of frames of reference. ARSP = average number of coded responses in total. *p7 interview time = excluded from comparison due to extended time.

Patterns of Differences

Patterns of differences within the findings seemed to occur with two considerations: the level of time commitment of the individual to OC and the differences between the current undergraduate members and graduated former members with respect to the frequency coding for three characteristics of transformational learning: multiple perspective taking, awareness of frames of reference and awareness of bias.

Additional Inquiries

Interview participants were asked to give recommendations in the interviews pertaining to the role of faculty advisors and the ultimate purpose of higher education from the perspective a student. These additional inquiries took advantage of the gathering the ideas from emerging adults who together created a successful student organization as undergraduates and who also took their academic studies seriously.

Advice for faculty advisors of student organizations. When participants were asked to make suggestions for faculty advisors, the participants did not hesitate and clear patterns existed among their responses (Table 8). Taken as a whole, the participants clearly see the need for a faculty advisor within student organizations such as OC. However, they are also clear about the role of the advisor. Most significantly, the advisor should “let the students own the club” and “suggest but not insist,” thus “empowering” students to “set the agenda” and to “learn from mistakes.” The need for balance comes as the participants view student organizations somewhat dependent upon the presence of a faculty advisor to help the organization stay focused as an organization on the mission, to be inclusive of all voices, and be a safe space for all members. In addition, participants saw the role of the faculty advisor as one to facilitate reflections within the group about the group process. A few participants also saw faculty input as a valuable source of experience and information as well as a voice or advocate for the organization and its students within the larger college community.

Table 8

Suggestions for Faculty Advisors

Codes	# Respondents
Be regularly involved and accessible	8
Don't insist or dominate	8
Make suggestions	7
Create a safe space	7
Insure inclusivity among members	4
Keep org focused on mission	4
Empower students	3
Invite individual and group reflections	3
Identify with mission	2

The purpose of higher education according to the participants. What were participants' reflections about the purpose of higher education in general? Throughout the interviews, participants offered commentaries about higher education regarding process, challenges, and purpose. These ideas were coded and categorized into themes.

All participants, in some way, indicated a desire to see higher education provide more student controlled experiences in academic courses. The following comments seem to sum up the general thoughts on this topic,

I was able to really take control of my studies. I took control of what I was learning ~ and it was just a completely different experience when I took control of my education and I think a lot of students who don't participate in a student organization like this still see the faculty and professors still in control but I started to see them in terms of running the class, but also learning with me...I always thought I would have things that were valuable to say and to contribute ideas, more than just get lectured to...I learned how good agency feels and I wanted it in every part of my life. (P2)

All participants also indicated the value of learning through both experiences and discussions. However, most indicated the typical college classroom was not conducive for either, especially student discussions. The majority of the participants indicated that the classroom was intimidating due to three main factors: the professor, the grading, and peers. With respect to the role of the professor, most participants found their professors to be "very nice" and "wanting us to talk" but not knowing how to ask questions that can be

answered by students. One participant explained, “Sometimes it is the way that they ask the question. ‘Am I supposed to answer that or is that a rhetorical question?’ ” (P8)

However, another student described some professors as intimidating because they present as the one with all the right answers. This participant, and others, questioned why they or anyone would risk being wrong in front of peers,

When the professors are there, you know you are going to be judged. And, some professors can say, “OK, I do understand how you might think about it this way...” actually the majority of professors at Curry are like this. But you still have the handful, who say in some way, “ What are you talking about? It is not this way!” (P2)

Apparently, fears of being evaluated silences many students in classrooms according to several of the participants interviewed. One participant, who isn’t afraid to speak up in class, observed,

You have the kids when you study with them in study groups outside of class they talk a lot, have great ideas about the topic, “This is how I interpret this and I don’t know if you thought about it this way, but this is how I thought...” [yet] in class, they don’t speak. They don’t want to look wrong. (P8)

However, it is not just the professors and being evaluated by them that keeps students disengaged in college classroom discussions. Peers are also a factor. Several participants noted that they do not experience a sense of community within the classroom, and so it does not feel like a safe enough space to participate in a discussion. A participant explained,

In a classroom I may not know everyone. You don't really get a chance to talk to people in the class. And after class, people really book it! Yeah...in most of the classes I have taken, it is just between you and the professor basically. Unless, the professor assigns group work. But a lot of people don't like group work because they have to work with people they don't know well or at all; and, it would be easier if students could get to know each other first in classrooms before they had to do group work together...it is very hard to pull everyone together when you don't even know their names. (P8)

Another reason peers can be an obstacle to student engagement was attributed to a lack of immediate relevance for these students in what the course is teaching. As a result, the classroom process is just a means to the end for them: getting out of the course with a passing grade. According to participants, when this is the case, the lack of student engagement in the classroom produces a culture that is counter to student participation and limits the possibility of an authentic learning community. One student described this in detail, excruciating details for those who teach undergraduates. She begins by explaining how OC gave her a reason for engagement in her courses, whereas just a few months before she was thinking of transferring because of the lack of intellectual stimulation in the classroom environment due to her peers,

I was able to instantly apply what I was learning in the classroom ~ I remember coming from a [names the class] to OC [meeting] that night, and I brought in all the stuff [names professor of a course] had given me [in class that day] about planning an event ~ we followed the steps [in planning an event for OC]. I

remember that ~ and I could take what I learned from my communication courses and apply it that week or even that evening. Let me back up ~ I would sit in a classroom and I would look around, and this sounds awful, but I would see students texting, talking about the next party, and I thought they don't know when or where they would be applying this stuff. Obviously that is a generalization but I knew I would be taking this material and do something good with it and do something valid. The other students in the class weren't applying themselves in the same fashion...it didn't resonate with them and so they didn't absorb it. [But] I felt like I could apply a lot of what I was learning instantly; I felt like it was valid and important. (P7)

In essence, the recommendations and comments of the participants regarding higher education address both the purpose and the process of education as being necessarily intertwined. One student put it very poignantly,

As students, with the wonderful opportunity of education and all the wealth we have in this country, we really do have an obligation to those who don't have that opportunity in the world. And, I think it is a dangerous model to think that education is simply a means of getting a job. (P6)

The participants interviewed were very thankful that OC pushed them out of their comfort zones, beyond their cultures, and beyond just seeing their undergraduate education as a **just** ticket to a career. As a result, their education had taken on a much deeper meaning for them. As this participant described, "Though I would say that I valued education, I probably did see it as more of a means to an end back then. Whereas

now I see it as important in of itself’ (P6). Another participant (P4) noted that it is counter cultural on most college campuses (she was a transfer student) to want to know about the world beyond the US. She actually wished that there were a classes like OC, where she could approach the topics addressed in OC but with a more academic focus, yet still connected with the activism of the student organization. This participant also suggested that the course be co-developed with faculty and the students using an interdisciplinary lens.

And, finally, all participants referenced the purpose of higher education as educating students to create a more just world. In fact, these participants saw skill development and preparation for a career flowing directly from this purpose, no matter what the course of study.

Focus Group Analysis and Findings

Three former members of OC, all of whom graduated a year before the data were collected, gathered during a weekend evening at my house for the focus group; the three participants requested the date, time, and place since it was a mutually convenient time and central location. The focus group was the first time that the former members had seen each other since graduation, although they keep in occasional contact through Facebook. The purpose of the focus group was to explore their perceptions of learning through OC both as a community. All three focus group participants indicated they were very excited to participate and had much to say about OC as a community experience. The participants responses in the focus group were analyzed by question. Below is a summary of the findings. The individual participants are referred to as F1, F2, and F3.

What motivated you to join OC? F1 recognized with others the need to raise awareness about global poverty on campus. In retrospect, F1 noted that he/she had never intended to join a student organization. At this point, college was just a means to an end for him/her, hopefully allowing for a secure a job and/or an enjoyable career.

F2 indicated he/she joined out of curiosity as a result of being invited by friends whom he/she respected. F2 describes being “hooked” immediately by the conversations and ideas and enthusiasm of the others in the group. The educational or raising awareness aspect of OC interested her/him far more than the activist mission. Once he/she attended her first meeting, her/him commitment to the organization and its mission was solid.

F3 knew about OC on campus but was already a member of other organizations and quite involved in extracurricular activities on campus already. During the fall semester of her/his senior year, one of the organizations he/she belonged to co-sponsored an event with OC. In working with OC members, F3 was impressed by the hospitality and the inclusiveness of the group. Every voice spoke and was expected to speak, which he/she describes as being very unlike some of the other organizations in which he/she had participated. Another attractive feature of OC for F3 was its mission of social justice and helping others. While he/she had done much volunteer work throughout high school, he/she had not participated in this type of activity since joining college. So, F3 joined OC and immediately became a committed and significant contributor.

What is your perception of the community of OC? F1 described the community as a group of people with complementary skills who grew into the roles they chose for themselves. The community was a place “we discovered new things about

ourselves.” F1 described growing into a leadership role, noting that had not been a prior experience. F1 also emphasized that every role was instrumental to the success of OC and every person was needed. In fact, “Each of us felt that if we didn’t show up the whole thing would crumble,” and the other two participants laughed at this very accurate and now humorous insight.

F2 chimed in that it was, in fact, the differences in the personalities that made being in OC so much fun ~ and successful. “We were a very functional group with all of our differences.” F2 described the unofficial but very important role as the organization’s unofficial mediator, helping the other strong personalities to see each other’s point of views.

F3 said it was a community where everyone was needed. Immediately after joining, F3 felt needed and explained,

When people didn’t come, they were missed. It was a community that supported each other outside of OC as well. When a member of the group was in the play, OC went as a group to see it. When members gave presentations open to the public, other members of OC made sure to go.

F1 noted, “We became our mission. We were a family.”

F2 agreed and added, “We were a real learning community. OC meetings and events were never a waste of time, like some classes were. We were very respectful of each others time.”

F3 added, “We looked out for each other, for sure.”

What did you learn through the process of OC? F1 described learning leadership through trial and error, especially learning how to be inclusive of all voices and to not privilege some voices and alienate others. F1 explained that very early on in the organization's existence, there were more members for the first few weeks; however, like most groups, a small vocal minority soon established itself and after a few weeks, the membership was down to four or five regular attending members that first year. But, through intentional reflection about this as a community, F1 and the other board members became focused on being inclusive so that all voices could be heard and so that decisions were reached by consensus. F1 also noted that they all set high expectations for their events and projects, and while they felt that they didn't accomplish nearly what they wanted to, in retrospect F1 asked, "What else could we really have done?"

F2 explained learning how to multi-task due to the complex agendas set by OC. In addition to multi-tasking, learning how to plan over the longer term and break large events into sequenced and timely steps has proved to be a very important skill after college. F2 explained making this type of commitment required constant follow through and consistent attendance. "Many people came to check us out," F2 noted, "But we were too much work for some."

F3 agreed and said learning the importance of being present still informs her behavior, "Even an email summarizing the meeting could not give the whole gist of what went on" due to the incredibly packed agendas for each week.

How much time did you each spend on OC? It is fun to note at this question, all the participants looked at each other and laughed with a sense of knowing solidarity. F1

said that he spent as much or more time on OC than on course work. F2 responded immediately after F1, “Same here. I often had to wake up early to finish stuff for OC.” F3 said that she couldn’t put a time to it as she was thinking about and doing OC tasks and events every day. As a point of reference, all participants in the focus group graduated with honors and are well respected by their former professors.

What type of processes did OC have? F1 laughed at this question and noted that OC “loved to brainstorm,” describing it as an “ADD” [attention deficit disorder] club that was “all over the place” with its ideas for events and projects. “We couldn’t do all of them” and since the group had committed to make decisions by consensus, decisions could take awhile, but “once we did decide, everyone took ownership.”

F2 built on this description. She described the process as “democratic with collaborative decision making...we were not top-down, not a hierarchy.” F2 noted that the eventual age differences within the organization actually allowed for mentoring to take place between the seniors and the first year student members, which added a fun dimension to the organization. F2 noted her role as mediator and synthesizer was very important when the group came to an impasse regarding decisions about events. Recalling the planning of one huge event, F2 noted after five hours of on-going discussion (with pizza ordered in), taking charge (uncharacteristically) and circled three ideas on the board; everyone agreed. The overall event was a huge success due to the ownership of everyone in the organization.

F3 followed up, laughing at the memory of that meeting, and said that the group process allowed for a great deal of creativity. And even though it took “some time and

some frustration” to make decisions, OC “got a lot more done than other organizations due to its democratic process.”

What do you think the impact of having such a democratic “grassroots” process was for you all? F1 emphasized again “We learned so much about ourselves.” And, even though the organization had “incredible outcomes,” F1 realized that the process and learning about ourselves was the important thing.

I learned more in OC than in all my courses overall. College should not be just a means to the end. It should be a transforming process; it really shapes you how you will look at everything as an adult...your job... family...

Another impact of this type of process, according to F1, was “fun! [participant emphasis],” noting they were learning how to interact with each other and different personalities and stating again, “We had a lot of fun!”

F2 agreed, adding “That is what college is really about, not the piece of paper but the experiences of learning.”

F3 noted, “So many students miss out and don’t get that...don’t do anything outside of the classroom but party.”

What did you learn through the events that you sponsored and organized? F1 learned how to hold events that had a sustainable impact. F1 learned that for this to be so, the events themselves have to be “authentic” and “real” and flowing from the mission and process of the organization. According to F2, the time invested in having an authentic democratic process paid off and, “we saw this during our events.” F1 also noted learning how to be a role model for younger students through the events.

F2 noted he/she learned to have pride and confidence in his/her voice. F2 learned about learning ~ that it happens everywhere, not just in a classroom. For example, F2 learned that she/he could learn “from all people.”

F3 said the events taught that it is possible to make a difference for people, and it is possible to “teach people to care about others.” F3 said the events also taught members about agency and effective collaboration through the democratic process of OC.

What gave you all the self-confidence and poise to be so counter-cultural among your peers? F1 explained that being in community fostered an “inner authority and voice” noting, “I wouldn’t have just spoken for myself.” F2 felt “We felt had a secret that we wanted to share,” and so that made her/him stop caring how the other students saw them or thought of them as they gave out flyers, showed videos about extreme poverty in Africa in the student center, spoke up in classes about issues of global social justice. F2 said her world had opened up to “serving a higher purpose outside myself,” and just knowing “we were doing something important and good” gave him/her the confidence to be oneself among peers. F3 also noted the power of community, “The joined voices reinforced our individual voice.”

What obstacles might you have encountered as a student organization? F1 prefaced his/her remarks by first putting them in context: OC demanded much more from Student Activities than most student organizations did by holding more events and larger events that required more planning and support and resources. However, F1 then went on to site Student Activities as perhaps the largest obstacle for the organization due to what seemed to him/her as the “unnecessary procedures that seemed to have no purpose other

than busywork” and which in the participant’s opinion, “stifled creativity in planning.” F2 agreed with F1. “Student Activities policies limited advertising events and even freedom of speech! They even censored our posters!” F3, who was a member in two other student organizations during her senior year said emphatically, “Student Activities policies were our biggest obstacle in OC, and other organizations felt so too.” F1 noted at this point, “The administration used us for good publicity for the college, but didn’t help us when we needed more support for our programming [due to their established policies].” F3 added, “But as far as publicity goes, they sure should have had us on the front page of the website ~ the pictures and films of our events were great!”

What about faculty’s responses to you? FG Participant 1 immediately replied, “Faculty respected us.” F2 added, “We had a following of faculty who came to most of our events.” F3, “Yeah, and they even allowed us to speak about our events in class.”

What were the characteristics of OC and how might these have contributed to your education? F1 first emphasized OC was never [participant emphasis] mandatory. Members could come and go, as they needed to; they were not expected to do certain things, unless they volunteered to do them; and, even then, if they had to back out, they could do so. OC was without a top down structure at all times. F1 noted that I as the faculty advisor “guided us, did some teaching, but always in a collaborative spirit. Mutual.” F1 indicated that OC “changed the learning paradigm totally” from an externally controlled process to an internally motivated process with “real questions and not someone else’s external set of questions.” As a result, F1 stated that education acquired “real meaning.”

F2 said, “Everyone had a voice and used it. Not like in classes where just a few people speak.” F2 noted that not being evaluated for a grade made a huge difference in how willing people were to speak up and contribute their ideas. F2 explained that she began to speak up more in her classes as a result of speaking up in OC meetings. “[In OC meetings] we could be adults and learn from each other and learn from ourselves as well.” F2 emphasized that a real shift is needed in undergraduate education, “It is too much like high school. Too passive and test orientated. And, the interdisciplinary aspect of OC was a great asset to our education.”

F2 concluded by agreeing with FG P1, “OC shifted the learning paradigm.”

F3 observed that members worked much harder in OC than they did in most of her courses. F3 described OC as a “safe learning community,” and “We all felt safe enough to say what we thought. We were engaged, active, and we [her emphasis] made the learning happen.”

Given this experience in OC and having graduated over a year ago, what do you think the purpose of higher education should be? F1 began,

The purpose of higher education in the United States should be to change the students’ idea that the world revolves around him or her. Help students discover we live in an interconnected global society. Let them find their place within it.

Show students the entire world. And, give them confidence to use their own voice and not just spew back out what we hear or read.

F2 said the purpose of higher education should be to “help young people to be able to live with themselves so that they can function independently once out of college.” He/she

added that the way to do this is for students to be able to “find and use one’s voice.” F3 believes the purpose of higher education should be to “teach students how to think on their own. Allow them to learn how to problem solve and create solutions.”

Finally, what advice would you like to give faculty on how to be a faculty advisor for a student organization? F1 suggested that faculty should be “as committed and as passionate as the students are about the mission of the organization.” Faculty must be careful to “guide and not control” yet help keep the process focused on the mission of the student organization. Above all, faculty advisors need to be committed to the students’ ownership of the organization. And, of course, treat all the students with dignity and respect. F2 advised faculty to “allow the student process to happen. Don’t force things. Keep it democratic and inclusive. Let the students make mistakes and learn from them.” F3 agreed and emphasized two fundamental suggestions, “Keep it so everyone speaks and has an equal say. And, guide.”

Summary of Analysis

The research questions for this interpretative and in-depth case study explore the perceptions of learning by current and former members of an undergraduate student organization focused on global social justice awareness and activism. Situated in a small private college with a required liberal arts core of study, this very active student organization raised over \$10,000 to build a well for the village in Bor, Sudan, home to one of its members, a former Lost Boy of Sudan. In addition, the organization began a scholarship fund, which is now a nonprofit corporation to assist female Afghan students attending medical school. Additionally, OC placed in the top 15 in the national ONE

Campus Challenge for two out of the last three years, often competing with much larger colleges and universities. But it was the significant and observable transformation of these students regarding both their attitudes towards academic studies and an empowered sense of self to prompt this case study. As their former faculty advisor, a seasoned teacher of thirty years and a faculty member of the college for the last fifteen years, I observed students transform not only their own academic and social lives but the lives of several students on campus and the general awareness of a student body regarding global poverty, AIDS, and social justice. As previously indicated, I have kept an on going reflexive journal and more observations and reflections about the student organization can be read in Section 5.

Summary of the Findings

The student organization, ONE Curry (OC) was described by the 15 survey respondents in terms of their emotional experiences, values, the mission, and the community. Its members were described by their peers as being dedicated, active, caring and aware of global human rights. As members, respondents noted they engaged in OC through attending weekly meetings, organizing and participating in events, and attending related off-campus events, such as documentaries or human rights conferences.

When asked why they joined OC in the first place, most interview respondents cited their interest in the mission even if first invited by friends or faculty. Only a few indicated that friendships initially motivated them to join OC, although they all described the organization as a very supportive community, most referring to it as another “family.”

By being members of this interdisciplinary community and engaging in its meetings and activities, all participants indicated that they learned many new aspects about themselves and others in the world outside of the US. And, all made the connection between learning with and about others to learning about themselves. In fact, in all forms of data gathering, participants emphasized the importance of learning through relationships with each other and relationships with people outside the United States. All indicated that they learned skills such as collaborating with others, using their voice, and acquiring personal agency. Through learning about global social justice and cultural identities, participants also perceived learning critical thinking skills such as multiple perspective taking, metacognition, and empathy. In terms of specific behavioral skills, participants indicated learning interpersonal skills within a group, time management, and the value of commitments.

Not surprisingly, the group process of OC was named by participants as a primary means of learning. Within this group process, participants in this study noted learning through listening to each other's reasoning, insights, and different perspectives. Several participants noted the value of being in an interdisciplinary membership and problem solving using the perspectives of different disciplines. The democratic and inclusive style of decision-making was specifically cited as a means of learning for the participants as was student control over the agenda planning as well as student responsibility for outcome. Most participants noted explicitly the value of having an involved faculty advisor for the purpose of ensuring a safe space for this type of inclusive deliberation and the authentic expression of one's voice.

Another area of change noted by participants was a new found interest in the world beyond their local and national communities. They started to pay attention to global news and issues. They observed how they viewed cultural differences changed. And, how they thought about “helping” others changed radically. No longer was helping mere charity, another a random act of kindness or a patronizing approach, but seen as an outgrowth of justice for a common humanity and through relationship. The organization had two symbolic themes to express these attitudes: *Ubuntu*, which means “ I am because we are,” and, “It’s not charity; it’s justice.”

Participants perceived changes in themselves as a result engagement in OC activities and community. All noted an observable increase of self-awareness and increased confidence. Many indicated learning new things about themselves such as new values and new abilities. But the change most often mentioned was the change in attitude towards their education in general and the effects it had on their motivation and approach in their majors and individual courses. Two years in a row now, an OC member has held significant honor within their class at graduation; one member was the valedictorian in 2009 and another member was the class orator in 2010. Several members are or have been in the honors scholars program and the Alexander Graham Bell Honors Society. These honors speak of students obviously motivated to do very well in their studies; and, most likely related to this, the participants also noted that faculty were their strongest support group on campus. Obviously, the results of these new attitudes towards their academics did not go unnoticed. And, the large amount of time dedicated to OC activities did not hurt their academic performances.

The intersection of learning between OC and academics occurred in two ways: direct application of course content and knowledge and the increased in the following: skill in problem solving, curiosity, and self-expression. Participants noticed that they began to expect more from themselves, their peers, and their professors as their education and their time became more valued by them. Recognizing the privilege of having access to resources such as an education increased its value for them as well.

The possibility of transformational learning among undergraduates has not been a typical focus for transformational theorists. However, using a definition of transformational learning synthesized from a conversation between Mezirow and Dirkx, mediated by Cranton (2006), data analysis showed that the ideas expressed by all participants did, in fact, code for the aspects of transformational learning as defined for this study: self reflection, metacognition, self awareness of one's bias, multiple perspective taking, and awareness of changes in frames of references (Appendix G). The findings did, however, show a difference in frequency of responses for three out of the five aspects of transformational learning measured in this study between the current undergraduates and those who have graduated. No difference in average frequency of responses was found between the two groups for self -reflection and metacognition. Graduates had significantly more responses coded as self-awareness of bias, multiple perspective taking and changes in frames of reference.

Two other related questions were explored through the interviews and the focus group: advice for faculty advisors and thoughts about the purpose and process of higher education in general. All participants indicated that a committed, accessible, and

motivated faculty advisor was important in order to provide a safe space where all voices could be heard, encourage individual and group reflection about process, provide feedback to encourage a sustained focus on the organization's mission, and to be a voice for the organization with the college. However, participants also noted that it is important for the faculty member to allow the students to own the process, the goals, and the success and mistakes. The students need to set the agendas, plan and hold the events, and take responsibilities for the outcomes. And, they all did admit this was a very challenging role for faculty.

Participants philosophized about the purpose of higher education from the perspective of the undergraduate students, who are currently successful students or recent graduates, many graduating with honors. They emphasized the importance of changing the focus from the ends to the means of learning within the students themselves and the faculty, administration, and staff. After their experiences in OC, all noted that higher education should become a moral enterprise of learning about and caring for others, including others beyond the borders of the United States. And, this same moral enterprise should guide the processes within higher education so that classrooms become learning communities, which are democratic, inclusive, supportive, respectful while also being demanding and experiential. In addition to graduating with knowledge and skills, participants also indicated that undergraduates need to graduate with confidence in their voice, and the ability to problem solve and negotiate collaboratively.

Section 5 provides theoretical interpretations of these findings, specifically looking at the data through developmental lenses for emerging adults and

transformational learning theories. And, section 5 introduces an additional theory, as an emergent finding of this study: Chickering and Reisser's (1993) developmental model for undergraduate students featuring growth in 7 vectors, including developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy towards interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity.

Section 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Section 5 contains a review of the purpose, the methods, research questions and findings of this study to establish the context for the interpretations, implications for social change, and subsequent recommendations of this study. This section closes with a summary statement regarding the purpose and ethical responsibilities of higher education.

Summary of Study

Purpose

The purpose of this interpretive case study was three-fold: to investigate the possible added educational value of social justice awareness and activism within an undergraduate student organization, to analyze undergraduates' perceptions of learning for the possible presence of transformative learning experiences, and to explore the added benefits of a student organization for undergraduate academic experiences. The participants' responses were initially viewed through the lens of the developmental tasks described for emerging adulthood in current literature (Arnett, 2004; King, 2009; Parks, 2000; Steinberg, 2007), the current literature on transformative learning outcomes (Dirkx, Mezirow & Cranton, 2006), and as a result of two emergent findings, Chickering and Reisser's (1993) 7 Vector model of development for traditional aged undergraduate students and additional literature on transformative learning (Taylor, 1998; 2001, 2007).

By exploring current and former members' perceptions of learning as a result of their engagement in a student organization focused on global social justice, I hoped to provide insight into three interrelated aspects of higher education for traditionally aged undergraduates: the impact of the developmental needs of emerging adults on their

attitudes and approaches as undergraduate students, the potential and still under-appreciated role of student organizations in undergraduate curricular academic planning, and the possibility of global social justice awareness and activism as a process of transformative learning and perhaps a moral imperative of higher education. I designed this study to communicate the voices of current and recent graduates on the role of faculty advisors to student organizations and the role of higher education in society.

Method of Research

Implementing this interpretive case study, I used qualitative methods of data collection with qualitative and quantitative analysis, appropriate for multi-faceted and broad research questions (Yin, 2009). The nature of this qualitative study is an interpretive one, using democratic research principles within the transformationist constructivist tradition (Howe, 2003). Data were gathered through a 16-question online survey, one focus group of three former members who have since graduated, and eight individual interviews with current and former members. In addition, I kept a reflexive journal as a former insider (Etherington, 2004; Hu & Phillion, 2008).

I transcribed all data; records of data are kept on an external hard drive in the my office. I also kept a reflexive journal during all phases: data collection, analysis, and interpretation. I summarized interview data for each participant and the focus group data for all three participants. The summaries were sent to each participant and as a means of both member checking and democratic research, participants were invited to revise, add additional comments and provide feedback on the accuracy of the transcriptions and summaries.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study explored the perceptions about learning of traditionally aged undergraduates as a result of engagement in a student organization focused on social justice awareness and activism in a small private college in New England. The first of five research questions guiding this study inquired about the learning, if any, of current and former members of OC as a result of their membership. The second question inquired about specific elements of the student organization to foster meaningful learning experiences as defined by the participants. The third question inquired into the personal changes perceived by the participants as a result of their engagement within the student organization. The fourth question inquired about the possible transfer of knowledge and skill between academics and the student organization for the participants. The fifth question structured the analysis of the quality of participants' learning experiences with respect to transformative learning characteristics outlined by Mezirow (2000, 2006).

Demographic Data of the Participants

The number of eligible participants for this study was 25 and a total of 15 responded to the survey, eight former members and seven current members. Three recent graduates and former members of OC participated in the focus group. Eight eligible participants were interviewed, five former members, who have since graduated, and three current members. The following is a summary of the findings specifically related to the five interrelated research questions.

Brief Summary of Findings

The current and former members of OC who participated in the study perceived learning about themselves in many areas but especially with respect to their values; and, they perceived learning about the world of others beyond themselves, their cultures, and their nation. In addition, they perceived a significant change in their attitudes and behaviors with respect to their college education.

Participants described the primary means of learning to be through forming authentic relationships, founded in collaboration and consensus style decision making; in highlighting this aspect, they emphasized this type of learning community made the knowledge and learning processes meaningful. For example, learning with a community of peers perceived as safe and inclusive was very powerful for all the participants. In addition, forming relationships with people outside of their cultures, for whom they were advocating, created deep and meaningful learning experiences as well as powerful motivation for action.

Participants noted observable changes in their attitudes, interests, behaviors, fundamental beliefs, and assumptions as a result of their engagement in the student organization. Transfer of learning between academics and the student organization occurred at least occasionally for most; and, it occurred in both directions. However, for communication majors, their direct application of their coursework to activities within the student organization created powerful learning opportunities. Participants in other majors, and communication majors as well, indicated learning most often transferred from OC to

their academic courses through their personally changed attitudes, beliefs, and values regarding the purpose of their education and their roles as students.

A significant finding of this case study is the evidence of transformative learning in all five characteristics used in this study, as defined by Mezirow (2000). However, it is important to note, the interview data of former members who had recently graduated coded more frequently for self-awareness of bias, multiple perspective taking, and awareness in frames of reference than did the current undergraduate participants. The frequency of responses indicating increased self-reflection and metacognition were the same for both groups.

Another emergent finding of the analysis of the data as a whole for this study is the coherence of the participants' responses with the 7 Vector model developed by Chickering and Reisser (1993). Substantial evidence of growth in each vector was established through the additional coding of the data for each of the 7 vectors defined by Chickering and Reisser.

As an additional inquiry to the main research questions, faculty advisors were perceived as necessary for student organizations for providing guidance and feedback and assuring a safe and inclusive space. Participants also noted that faculty availability for individual consultation regarding the organization was important to their learning experiences and their individual functioning within the organization. Several participants also saw the role of the faculty advisor as a constant witness to the mission of the organization and therefore, keeping it as a main point of reference for the members. However, within the context of faculty advisors, all participants emphasized the need for

student control and final decision-making within the organization, stating faculty advisors must allow students to own the process and learn from their mistakes.

Another additional inquiry allowed the participants to voice their perspectives on the overall purpose of undergraduate education in the United States. Responses included specific goals for students' individual growth such as growth in self-confidence in one's voice, independent and critical thinking, collaborative and democratic decision making, as well as enlarging the perspectives of students to be inclusive of the global community, the human rights of all people.

Interpretations of Findings

The findings of this case study research indicate that current and former members of the student organization, OC, perceived a wide variety of learning through their engagement in the weekly meetings, event planning and execution, off campus educational events and fundraising for various social justice projects. One of the most significant findings is the probable presence of transformative learning in all the participants, albeit within a range of depth, but still a real presence with respect to the five aspects defined as such for this study. The emergent finding of participant learning coherence with Chickering and Reisser's (1993) 7 Vectors model of development is also significant in terms of undergraduate learning, especially in light of the probable experience of transformative learning by the participants. In reviewing the participants' perceptions of learning, I consulted an older model of undergraduate development, Chickering and Reisser's 7 Vectors. The coherence was striking, and as a result, the data from each interview was additionally coded for each of the 7 vectors. In addition, the

findings demonstrated distinct connections to the neurological, social, and cognitive aspects of development attributed to emerging adulthood.

Transformative Learning Among Undergraduate Students

Participants in all three data collection methods, survey, individual interview, and the focus group, reported meaningful learning experiences through their engagement in OC. Significantly, the learning experiences of all the participants coded, in varying degrees, for all five characteristics of transformative learning: self-reflection, metacognition, self-awareness of assumptions and/or bias, awareness of multiple-perspectives, and awareness of changes in one's frame of reference. Mezirow identified these characteristics as essential characteristics of transformational learning (2000).

This finding is a significant one as Mezirow and other theorists in transformational learning and emerging adult development (King, 2009) viewed transformational learning as a capacity of nontraditional or older undergraduates. Findings of this interpretive case study indicate the presence of transformational learning in the learning perceived by traditionally-aged undergraduates as a result of their participation in OC. Solid evidence of transformational learning is found in the perceptions of learning of all students who made a significant time commitment to the organization.

Since the findings of this case study are being interpreted as evidence of transformational learning among traditionally aged undergraduates, the developmental context of emerging adults is important to reconsider in light of this claim. The following is a brief review and its connections to the findings.

Industrial and postindustrial advancements in developed countries since the end of World War II have led to a significant shift in cultural expectations, opportunities, and lifestyles for many emerging adults after high school graduation. The ability to delay parenthood, the increasing access of higher education to young men and women within a wider range of social economic classes, and the exponential rate of change in technology with its increased and immediate access to information have all contributed to the materialization of an additional social psychological developmental phase (Arnett, 2004; Parks, 2000). Coined emerging adulthood by Arnett, this phase describes young adults, aged approximately 17 through 27, who are typically and intensely focused on self identity and commitments. However, Arnett and Parks also indicated this was not necessarily a narcissistic result of overindulged childhoods, but a developmental task of exploration regarding many aspects of one's identity in light of the many options currently brought into their lives. For this generation, technology has allowed social, class, cultural, and national boundaries to become more permeable and perhaps even somewhat artificial due to the globalization of culture and global expanse of social networking.

Complimenting the qualitative psychosocial research (Parks, 2000; Arnett, 2004, Luyckx, Goossens, & Soenens, 2006), current research in the behavioral neurosciences (Steinberg, 2007) on the brain development of emerging adults, emphasized the roles of two distinct pathways for processing different types of information and different thinking tasks for learning and decision-making. The social-emotional network (SEN), fully mature at the beginning of this stage, connects the ventral striatum with the orbital frontal

cortex and the medial prefrontal cortex (Steinberg, 2007). The SEN processes emotional activation, especially for immediate rewards, and is activated just by the mere presence of peers. Alternatively, located in the prefrontal cortex regions, the cognitive control network (CCN) develops more gradually over time and fully matures in the mid-twenties (Steinberg, 2007), the approximate time of transition to adulthood. The CCN directs the executive functioning networks of the prefrontal cortex, such as planning, goal setting, and self-inhibition. Interestingly, according to Steinberg, when the SEN is activated, one's attention to the possible benefits of situations is enhanced; and, when the CCN is activated, one's attention to the possible costs of situations is enhanced. Social decisions, which are intuitive or "gut decisions" (Steinberg, 2007), are the result of the SEN while planning and self-regulation are processed through the CCN. These two powerful influences on learning, decisions, and behaviors do integrate with each other throughout emerging adulthood; however, until the CCN reaches maturity around 25 years, the SEN has dominance and can override the CCN when activated, increasing the salience of peers, benefits, and the immediate context (Steinberg, 2007) for emerging adults, especially in the beginning years when they are typically undergraduate students. Framing the on going discussion regarding transformative learning with an understanding of the two networks identified as basic to decision-making (Steinberg, 2007; Taylor, 2001) is an important consideration when reflecting upon the perceptions of emerging adults regarding their learning experiences.

Also considering the significance of this finding, additional theorists regarding transformational learning have been subsequently reviewed in more depth, specifically

theory put forth by Dirkx (Dirkx, Mezirow & Cranton, 2006) and research conducted by Taylor (1998, 2001, 2007). In a discussion about transformative learning between Mezirow and Dirkx, facilitated by Cranton, (Dirkx, Mezirow, & Cranton, 2006), Dirkx emphasized the role of affect and the “self” or the “I” as mediator and on-going reference point for all transformational learning. According to Dirkx, the self facilitates the integration of implicit, preconscious attitudes and beliefs with the explicitly conscious awareness of external events and text. Interestingly for this study, Dirkx’s emphasis on affect correlates with the characteristics of the SEN. And, significantly, the transformational learning characteristics described by Dirkx resonate with the data and findings of this study. For example, Dirkx considered the advent of self-awareness as realizing one is living “within a larger script” as a “key player but not the whole play” as evidence of transformational learning. Taylor (2001) noted that traditional theories of transformative learning neglected to consider other ways of knowing such as intuiting, affective responses, and collaborative inquiry. Interestingly, these also are aspects mediated by the SEN (Steinberg, 2007). In fact, Taylor (2001) acknowledged that in transformative learning, conceptualization (mediate by the CCN) often follows the understanding of one’s feelings, stating that feelings (mediated by the SEN) may be the window into implicit attitudes and assumptions (Taylor, 2007).

The findings of this study do reflect participants engaged in social-emotional processing first, which then initiated critical and conceptual processing. That this may well be the sequence of the transformational learning process for emerging adults, especially given SEN activation and dominance when in the presence of peers, is an area

ripe for interdisciplinary study. Taylor (2007) also noted collaborative inquiry and deliberation among equals are considered essential for sustainable transformative learning. This resonates with the findings of this study in which collaboration and learning from and with peers were the top ranked codes for perceptions of what was learned and the means of learning. Within the context of this student organization, the aspects of transformative learning described by Dirkx, Mezirow, and Taylor were described by all participants as learning outcomes: self-awareness, perspective taking, metacognition, empathy, and activism.

The concept of empathy warrants further research in undergraduate and transformative learning scholarship, especially with respect to emerging adults, as the participants described it being both an emotional response but one that was informed, and in turn, shaped a new critically informed stance for them. For example, several participants commented on their initial emotional responses after learning about widespread extreme poverty and severe oppression of women outside the U.S. in places such as the Congo and Afghanistan; while this alone does not constitute transformative learning, this informed empathetic connection fostered subsequent reflections about their previous perspectives on life as limited, self-centered, and ill-informed. From the learning process described by the participants, perhaps the SEN mediated emotional responses when first learning about these conditions for others, which then initiated a process, facilitated by the CCN, which analyzed their current frames of reference in light of this new learning. This process resulted in concrete action for these undergraduates, a necessary outcome of transformative learning according to Mezirow (2001).

According to Dirkx (2006), another characteristic of transformative learning occurs when the process itself becomes valued for facilitating deeper meanings. The student engaged in transformative learning no longer learns just for a particular desired outcome, such as a degree or certificate. Rather, the learner becomes absorbed into the meaning and relevance of the process. Significantly, many participants explicitly expressed this very change in their attitudes and expectations towards their education in general as a result of engagement in OC.

Dirkx (2006) also framed transformational learning in terms of a deepening understanding of one's connection to the whole of humankind, which causes one to take oneself more seriously. Participants reported doing just this, in terms of increased confidence and participation in discussions, instituting better time management because their time became more valuable as it was now meaningfully used to improve the lives of others, and experiencing a new frustration with activities without meaning. In fact, all participants in the study noted becoming more aware of self within the context of expanded awareness about others in the world. When asked for specific examples regarding this learning, the following themes emerged: new understandings about life, new awareness about their role in the world and their role in groups, and most significantly, new understandings about their values. Further analysis of values, reveals the following as new values for participants: supporting nonprofits for social justice, awareness of global events, valuing social justice, new perspective on their personal circumstances, and most often mentioned, valuing others through informed empathy.

According to Dirkx (2006), this deeper meaning resulting from transformative learning experiences will take on a symbolic import. And, in fact, the mission of OC did take on a symbolic importance for their organization, expressed through the South African term, *ibuntu*, meaning, *I am because we are*. This phrase was referenced frequently by participants; and, according to participants, it also served as the reference point for both their mission and processes within the organization. Another phrase became symbolic for the organization as well, “It is not charity; it is justice.” This phrase was posted at all of their events.

While Dirkx (2006) framed transformational learning primarily in reference to the subjective self, he also emphasized that the “path of understanding inner worlds leads through the outer world.” Hence, the context of the participants’ transformational learning is essential for its occurrence, which is defined by the participants as the mission of OC: global social justice awareness and activism. In this case the “what” of OC also became the “why,” motivating their participation; and, it became the “how” as well, by shaping their group deliberation for consensus. One participant actually described it as saying her lifestyle eventually “embodied the mission.”

Participants described the mission of global social justice awareness and activism as essential to their learning. And, while group processes and learning about self were described as primary means and outcomes, it is the mission of OC to which the participants’ credit their commitment, transformative self-awareness, and inclusive democratic processes. Dirkx (2006) referencing subjectivity as the place of transformation did not, however, diminish the importance of the text being learned, in

this case, global social justice awareness and activism. Rather, Dirkx respected text as objects worthy of authentic engagement for the individual student, who engages the text with his or her whole self: intellect, emotions, conscious awareness and preconscious or implicit assumptions and beliefs about life. In fact, Dirkx emphasized that this dynamic between text and the whole student is essential for transformational learning to happen. The findings of this case study highlight OC as fostering this engagement for the members who participated in the study. The mission of OC established a clear text, and it also became the foundation underlying everything the participants described doing in their weekly meetings, planning events, executing events, learning through mistakes, and persisting through frustrations and challenges. Participants frequently noted how this mission continues to influence all aspects of their lives, including classroom behaviors, attitudes towards their majors and potential careers, activities during free time, shopping decisions, civic engagement, etc.

Taylor (2007) in his review of empirical studies on transformational literature summarized the study by Scott (2003) on the impact of context for transformational learning. According to Taylor, Scott emphasized the importance of context to foster a dialectical process among individuals and the collective regarding identity. This correlates well with the findings of studies (Parks, 2000; Arnett, 2004; Luyckx, Goossens, & Soenens, 2006) regarding the identity exploration of emerging adults within undergraduate education. These researchers noted that it is through the interaction with a new diverse group of peers in the college environment that initiates and facilitates this self-exploration. Scott also noted that this dialectical means of transformation facilitates

students' considerations of the multiple perspectives held by peers, feedback on their perspectives, and opportunities to critique the culture of the larger community. The findings of this study also emphasize this. Many students described discovering new aspects of themselves through OC; they noted the real frustrations and difficulties of decision-making through consensus as opposed to a more efficient hierarchical process; however, they also noted that within this dialectical process, they discovered not only the power of multiple-perspective taking, but also the strength within themselves to take counter-cultural stances in many different contexts of the campus, including the classroom. For example, one participant specifically noted how OC transformed her perspective of herself and her actual sense of power within the classroom; she was no longer a passive recipient but the agent of her education. And, as such, she no longer viewed faculty as experts to be feared or revered, but as learners, albeit with more expertise, still on the journey.

Participants emphasized the context of OC as a necessary aspect of their learning, such as being able to connect emotionally with the community and the mission and the activities. Comparing OC to their classroom experiences, they described the differences as ones of trust, safety, lack of intimidation, lack of personal evaluation, voluntary, shared goals, and explicit caring, which are the same qualities described by Eisen in Taylor (2007). Most participants spoke about finding and using their voice in OC; some noted this subsequently transferred to the classroom. They valued the passion and dedication present in the organization and noted that some students who came to one or two meetings found the unstated but self-imposed expectations of the group too

demanding. At the same time, participants noted feeling free to draw boundaries and decline responsibilities when necessary. The culture established by the community allowed for the characteristics outlined by Taylor (1998) as ones of transformative relationships: trust, inquiry, discussions, transparency, and consensually reached understandings.

The Developmental Tasks of Emerging Adults Intersect with the Transformative Education of Undergraduates

Taylor (2007) emphasized need for educators to recognize pedagogical entry points for transformative learning, suggesting timing may be a critical and often overlooked aspect of transformational learning in higher education. Taylor noted entry points such as: crisis engaged as opportunities for new growth and learning, disequilibrium caused by new learning that significantly challenges existing schema, and students on “the edge of learning” who may view new learning as a risky proposition. The participants interviewed for this case study often described moments such as these. Some participants referred to “identity crisis” and personal searching as initiating their interest in and commitment to OC. Some were brought to the organization through external circumstances, which caused crisis in their personal lives; all noted that the activities of OC challenged and expanded their worldviews, especially challenging their sense of self and prior understandings about the world. Findings such as these strongly suggest the developing tasks associated with emerging adulthood may actually provide “pedagogical entries points” for transformative learning experiences. For example, Parks’ (2000) investigation of young adults found that higher education, when it engages its

students on a personally meaningful level, often fosters discriminating critical thought, multiple perspectives, and intentional knowledge construction. Nelson and McNamara Barry (2005)'s findings also indicate the college context is ripe for the identity exploration of emerging adults regarding careers, intimate relationships, and morality or values. Arnett's (2004) research found that life for this age group was often characterized by a sense of disequilibrium and a sense of preparing for the anticipated responsibilities for adulthood, all resonating with Taylor's pedagogical entry points for transformative learning experiences.

Specific findings of this case study suggest undergraduate education is actually a ripe time for pedagogical openings for transformative learning *when* students are given opportunities to engage in the following: social justice awareness and activism, student organized and controlled educational activities with faculty support, safe and trusting peer communities allowing inclusive deliberation and exploration of issues, learning environments with low stakes assessments that allow earning through mistakes (rather than punish mistakes through high stakes evaluation methods), collaboration fostering authentically meaningful outcomes, defined by the participants in this study as those making a real difference in the lives of others.

Conditions fostering transformative learning experiences may also assist students in making healthy commitments, ones they can identify with for integrity of self. Luyckx, Goossens, and Soenens (2006) noted that it is important to investigate if the students actually identify with the commitments they have made, such a choices of majors, careers, activities, and relationships. These researchers found that identity exploration is

“a process that does not stop but fluctuates between breadth and depth” (Luyckx, Goossens, and Soenens , 2006, p. 197), supporting the observations of Park (2000) and Arnett (2004) that emerging adults make provisional commitments. However, Luyckx et al also found that those students who were able to fully clarify *and* identify with commitments at some point during undergraduate education, as it seems that the participants’ in OC have done, are more successful and better adjusted as adults.

Data from the eight individual interviews regarding the participants’ perceptions of learning through the student organization revealed several themes, but “collaboration” ranked first and “learning about self in life” ranked second. When viewed through both the psychosocial and behavioral neuroscience literature about emerging adulthood, these rankings are not surprising since the social-emotional network (SEN) is activated and dominant whenever undergraduate students are in the presence of peers (Steinberg, 2007). In keeping with the findings in Parks (2000) and recommendations of Gaff (2003), the participants in OC were also expanding their worldview through holistic experiences and constructing new identities for themselves in the process. Learning about collaboration and self-in-the-world through global social justice activism perhaps gives an indication of what Parks (2000) describes as the “emerging integration” in the lives of emerging adults as they begin to operate from expanding perspectives and developing inner authority (p. 82).

Parks (2000) noted that emerging adults develop confidence in their voice over time through “critical reflection and integration of inner authority with new knowledge and expanding authoritative resources” (p. 84). In this way, they can “discover the leader

within” (Quinn in Parks, 2000, p.84) through discursive acts with others and within themselves. Parks note that this ability to reflect is “a way of holding competing claims of various authorities and voices together with the perceptions of the inner self.”

Importantly, OC seemed to provide the participants the means to do just this without fear of externally imposed high stakes evaluation, within the safety of an established peer group, and with the presence of a trusted advisor(s), available as an on-going resource given the complexity of some of these issues. Interestingly, all participants noted the learning as a result of perspective taking and metacognition was valued and transferred to their academics. As such, OC seemed to tap deeply into the developmental challenges of emerging adults and also seemed to provide the intrinsic energy to resolve them through new ways of learning.

The Roles of Faculty, Student Activities Staff, and Institutional Support For Sustainable Transformative Learning

Taylor (2007) also found in his review of empirical studies on transformational learning that on going support from individual educators as well as the educational institution is necessary for sustainable learning transformation. In a similar vein, participants in this study indicated their desire for support from faculty, student affairs, and the wider institution. Some voiced disappointment in the lack of institutional support they initially perceived from the college for their efforts. However, these participants also acknowledged that as they “proved themselves” and “earned the respect of many faculty as a result of their programming,” and faculty support and institutional support became more substantial.

Participants were quite clear and in agreement when asked in the survey about the type of support they desired from faculty advisors. While some acknowledged that this might be a “tricky” role for faculty to fill, all participants viewed the faculty advisor as essential to their student organization. Yet, they emphasized faculty advisors should assume a background role of support and guidance as opposed to the more powerfully shaping role, typical for faculty in the classroom. In student organizations, participants indicated faculty’s main responsibility is to keep the space safe and inclusive of all voices, perhaps just through a witnessing presence. They desired corrective feedback from faculty only when the organization was seen to be straying from the mission; and, even with this, participants desired feedback to be framed as an “inquiry” for the group to consider. Participants desired to be free to make and learn from mistakes without interference or too critical of an evaluation by the faculty advisor. At the same time, they valued faculty advisors as having equal voice in sharing ideas and opinions regarding group projects, but still preferred these to be posed as inquiries, “Have you considered this? What about this possible challenge? How does this fit in with your mission statement?” are a few examples mentioned in the interviews. Interestingly, the participants thought it important for the faculty be as committed to the mission of the student organization as the students. And, not surprisingly, given the research findings, which indicate that transformative learning experiences, as well as identity exploration, can at times cause personal distress, participants viewed faculty advisors as a trusted and safe person for confidential conversations about their personal experiences within the organization or even within the larger college environment.

Student Organizations as the Possible Bridge Between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs

The findings of this study indicate that student organizations have potential to support the academic mission of the college in ways that are transformative for students in personal and academic aspects of their undergraduate years. Experiences within student organizations like OC matter for its traditional aged undergraduates. The potential gains are worth the costs of time, effort, and funding.

Hurtado and Associates (2007) surveyed over 38,000 first time, full time college students in 2005 and found many students, “remain disengaged from their coursework” and that “actual college experiences fall short of their expectations.” Likewise, five of the eight participants interviewed described their initial college experiences resembling these findings. Two of the participants had transferred to Curry College as a result disengagement with their first college/university, and one participant described being disconnected from her peers and her major as a first year student; in fact, she had plans to transfer to a larger college at the end of her second year. However, becoming involved with OC during her first semester, second year changed this for her by providing her an intellectually stimulating community of peers and direct and meaningful application of her major to OC. Importantly, all participants indicated that OC added significant meaning to their education, prompting them to discover a new sense of ownership over their own educational experiences.

Robbins, Allen, Casillas, and Peterson (2006) found that students were more likely to experience academic success when they were intrinsically motivated to engage

in activities with significant effort. The 2006 study also found retention could be predicted by the quality of social connections students experienced within the institution. Similarly, the findings of this case study indicated perceived changes in participants' attitudes, beliefs, and even their values about their education as a result of engagement in OC. For example, many noted their courses "coming alive" for them, holding new meaning as aspects of courses related to various issues of global social justice, raising awareness on campus, and fundraising to make a difference in specific situations. The work ethic, confidence, and voice developed for most participants as a result of OC membership was described by participants as often transferring to their courses as well. In fact, some participants explained the changes in their attitudes and expectations towards their education caused them to resent the "easier" professors and "disengaged peers" within a course for wasting their time. Some now viewed professors as facilitators and co-learners, having experienced as equality of voice within OC meetings and events. Very interestingly, participants reported that being engaged in OC transformed their perspective about their own time; their time had become a valuable means of making a positive difference for the lives of persons oppressed by poverty, hunger, war, illness, or a combination of these. And, so, it also became valued as a precious resource to avoid wasting.

When writing about higher education, Gaff (2003), professor of English and education and the University of Illinois, estimated that traditional higher education fails to reach 80% of college students even though academic discourse can be quite "compatible" with students lives when connected to their future participation in

democracy (p.9). Gaff emphasized that courses need to make connections with the students' interests and concerns, with other disciplines, and with the "wider world" (p.77). This study's findings supports Gaff's insights and might also add that higher education has an ethical responsibility to nurture the expansion of students' interests and concerns; for the participants in this study, the student organization, OC, did just that. The transformative impact of OC on many of the participants as a result of the conditions outlined by Gaff is evident in the findings; and, the powerful transformation described by the participant who was a history major deserves repeating in connection with Gaff's (2003) insights,

Pretty much before OC, when we were going over topics like civil justice ~ I was a history major...we would be talking about the depressions and people were literally eating stuff off the ground to survive. Or when we were talking about the different wars and the tactics used like when the soldiers would go through the different towns and burn every thing to the ground, the slash and burn tactic, I would think, "Yeah of course, obviously you don't want the enemy to get it," but I wasn't thinking about the impact of the people who lived there. How does this effect the people? Hearing Leek's story [another member of OC] really impacted me. Here is this kid who had to go through that [Lost Boy of Sudan]~ the soldiers came through and destroyed everything and the people there were left to survive by themselves. When we are reading this for history, you only hear about the general battle plans and strategies, you don't hear about what happened to the people afterwards, not in the history books...I actually began to use this in my

history papers. How did these tactics impact the people who lived there? We have to consider this. (P8)

According to the participants in this study, OC seemed to provide the need-for-cognition described by Mayhew, Wokiak, & Pascarella (2008) through application of academic course content to “something external,” allowing for “student reflection, talking about issues related to social justice, engaging in discussions with each other and faculty, and experiencing some cognitive dissonance” (p. 353). The combination of community reflection, social justice activism, and the occasional but acute presence of cognitive dissonance appear to have been experienced by many students in OC, which perhaps created the need-for-cognition. As a result of engaging in these situations, participants reported experiencing deep connection to OC and its mission, which in turn ignited their passion for their studies. Students reported feeling more engaged, curious, and motivated once they had a larger purpose for their education, beyond earning a degree or just preparing for a career. Participation in social justice education and activism within the student organization actually changed the approaches and increased the seriousness of engagement of many students with respect to their academic majors. For example, one communication major realized why she was so drawn to communication from the start, and another communication major shifted her focus from using her knowledge to manipulate others or create specific responses in people to using it to empower the voices of others.

Taken as a whole, the interview, focus group, and survey data indicate all but one participant were highly motivated to engage in the weekly meetings and the activities

within the student organization, OC. All participants described the student organization, OC, as a trusted social community within the larger college community; several participants referred to the organization as “family.” In general, participants credited the organization’s mission of global social justice, student control of the organization, and the inclusivity of all voices for their high levels of commitment.

Collectively, the current and former members who participated in this case study research on the student organization they initiated and continue to shape, reported their experiences with an enthusiasm and spontaneity that tempted me to describe their manner as that of being “born again,” a well worn phrase in some Christian circles. But, other connotations aside, the phrase fits. These students described giving birth to new purpose, new focus, new voices, new awareness ~ and not just for themselves. They felt the desire, some the need, to evangelize to their peers and the community. Their events were charged with a welcoming spirit and a joy that was contagious. They were changed and they created a space for social change on their campus.

Implications for Social Change

Habermans (1968) commented on the purpose of higher education for the preservation of democracy,

In every conceivable case, the enterprise of knowledge at the university level influences the action-orienting self-understanding of students and the public. It cannot define itself with regard to society exclusively in relation to technology, that is, to purposive-rational action. It inevitably relates to practice, that is, it influences communicative action. (p.4)

Over four decades ago, Habermas advised against the growing trend in higher education to focus just on purposive-rational action, technology, or in other words, the means to prepare students for their functional place in the marketplace, now a global phenomenon. Habermas articulated the need for higher education to also include communicative action as a central purpose, a rational discourse in the public sphere that is non-coercive, self-reflexive, and collaborative in exploring, questioning, deconstructing and critiquing personal, cultural, and institutional assumptions.

Lakoff (2008/2009) published a somewhat similar call for educated citizens who can engage in “deep rationality necessary for democracy.” Lakoff emphasized deep rationality is a learned rationality, one that requires citizens to be educated in order to become aware of their implicit and unexamined assumptions based in childhood experiences and cultural assumptions. Research in neuroscience (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek; 2008; Greenwald & Banaji, 2003; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995) describes how these implicit assumptions operate as pre-conscious filters, which actually determine what information we actually pay attention to and how we will interpret or categorize it. Likewise, Lakoff explained reactive and nonreflective citizens are especially vulnerable to media manipulation, propaganda, and non-critical acceptance of appeals. Lakoff emphasized the role of marketing in all aspects of society as employed media as means of manipulation of the public sphere. As such, it intentionally taps into implicitly based and unexamined emotions, such as fear, anger, and anxiety. The current psychological science research done on the power of implicit and unexamined attitudes along with

views expressed by thinkers such as Habermas and Lakoff form a serious argument to foster this deep rationality among undergraduate students in our colleges and universities.

The social change advocated by this study, fostering transformative learning or “deep rationality” through social justice awareness and activism in undergraduate education, speaks to all constituencies in higher education: administration, student affairs staff, faculty and students. The findings and interpretation of this study recommend social change within higher education, change which is critical for democratic functioning and a more inclusive and just society, here and abroad. The students in OC, with support and guidance from faculty, staff, and administration, have structured a sustainable program fostering transformational learning or deep rationality not only for themselves, but also for the larger college community. And, the impact of this student organization has shown itself to be sustainable. All five post-graduates interviewed indicated a sustained commitment in civic engagement and global social justice. In fact, three are seeking careers in these areas. And, two have already volunteered in connection with local politics. Survey question 11 asked the 15 participants if they thought OC would continue to influence them after graduation; 100% responded yes: six out of the eight interviewed indicated that social justice awareness and activism will influence their career choices; all indicated self-expectations of helping others and thinking differently about their responsibilities as citizens. And, another significant testimony to the sustainability of the personal and social transformation through OC, three of the alumni interviewed voiced a desire to return to the college and remain involved with the student organization in an advising capacity.

Recommendations for Action

The findings and interpretations of this study inform the following findings for all stakeholders in higher education, faculty, staff, and administration to consider when crafting mission statements and curriculum, and designing courses and programs for undergraduate students:

1. This study highlights the central role of global social justice awareness and activism in the transformative learning of participants and recommends it for serious consideration in undergraduate mission statements and reflected through curriculum and programming.
2. Social justice awareness and activism is an effective means of engaging undergraduates in global current events, cross cultural dialogues, responsible contributions to society, and opportunities to apply course perspectives and skills to international contexts; because of this, it is recommended as a rich theme for interdisciplinary programming and studies.
3. This study documents the powerful learning outcomes when students take ownership of their education and participate in student initiated, directed, collaborative projects of learning, especially in connection with their academic areas of interest. This study recommends faculty collaboration and development to explore a variety of means to provide students with more ownership in course design, process, outcome, and evaluation.
4. This study highlights the power of democratic deliberation and consensus as means for transformative learning experiences for undergraduate students,

while noting that this is only possible when students are not feeling intimidated or reluctant to participate due to fear of evaluation or the lack of an established community of trust among peers. Professional development for faculty as well as exploring these issues with students is recommended.

5. This study highlights successful student learning as occurring within student centered learning communities engaged in democratic deliberation. This requires specific skill development for students, such as discussion literacy, specifically how to deliberate for respectful and informed exploration of ideas rather than the more traditional and cultural style of debate. As a result, this study recommends explicit skill development in discussion literacy for undergraduate students through their courses.
6. The participants in this study emphasized the educational benefit of relationships with faculty in student organizations as a mentor or guide, modeling authentic scholarship, collaborating with students in authentic projects, and providing authentic feedback and low stakes assessments on the learning process itself. This study recommends professional development exploring ways to foster a more collaborative approach in the classroom, including more frequent use of low stakes assessment. And, this study recommends professional development for faculty as advisors to student organizations, perhaps structured as a community of practice for those who are advisors and those who are interested in doing so.

7. This study highlights the intersection of the developmental tasks of emerging adults and undergraduate learning capacities, processes, and interests. This study recommends educational forums on the neurological, social, psychological and cognitive development of emerging adults for all stakeholders in undergraduate education, including students, for important understandings of these intersections.
8. This study highlights the powerful learning experiences for undergraduate students as a result of their engagement in a student organization. It recommends increasing opportunities for communication and collaboration in programming among faculty and student affairs and activities staff. This study strongly suggests that student organizations may be an effective opportunity for faculty/staff partnership for student engagement in transformative and academic learning experiences.
9. The emergent finding observed in this study highlights the resonance of the Chickering and Reisser's (1993) model of development with the perceptions of learning of the participants in this study. These same perceptions also coded as elements of transformative learning (Dirkx, 2006; Taylor, 2007). This study recommends Chickering and Reisser's 7 Vector Model as a solid guide for curricular planning, programmatic development and low stakes assessment to foster transformative learning processes and outcomes for undergraduate students.

Recommendations for Further Research

The resonance of the findings with existing literature presents a valid case for continuing to explore transformative learning experiences in undergraduate education. In particular, continued and extended research on the added value of global social justice education and student activism in higher education may reveal a rich source of transformative learning for undergraduate students in particular.

Another area recommended for further research in higher education by this study was the added value of faculty advising of student organizations related to students' academic engagement, academic success, and institutional retention. Currently, most faculty advising is viewed more as a volunteer activity and does not receive social or monetary capital in most institutions of higher education. By researching the added value of faculty advising, as well as the responsibilities and time commitments required, perhaps advising student organizations will be a more utilized means of student-faculty relationships.

Given the traditional and on-going divide between academic and student affairs, research exploring faculty-staff partnerships with respect to student organizations may reveal important insights and means for bridging this divide.

Finally, research on using Chickering and Reisser's (1993) 7 Vector Model as a guide for low stakes assessment may provide faculty and student affairs with a developmentally sensitive tool for low stakes assessment and a means for improving course instruction, with the goal of facilitating meaningful and transformative learning experiences among undergraduate students.

Researcher's Reflections

Etherington (2004) advises qualitative researchers to reflect on one's personal history in connection with the topic being researched. A reflexive journal was begun the day IRB approval was granted from Walden University and continued through all phases of conducting this interpretive case study. Following are summaries of topics from the journal suggested by the findings and interpretations of the research.

Motivation for Research

After thorough consideration of three topics in higher education for this dissertation, communities of practice for faculty professional development, first year learning communities and identity, and the perceptions of undergraduate learning as a result of engagement within a particular student organization, I now realize choosing to explore student learning perceptions within a student organization inherently contained all three topics. The student organization OC functioned as communities of practice for social justice awareness and activism. However, my choice for this interpretive case study flowed from the significant transformation I had observed in the students and myself as a result of engagement in this student organization.

Engagement with the student organization, OC, as its initial faculty advisor did not significantly change my worldview, which continues to be informed by catholic liberation theology, critical theorists, social justice movements and nonviolence programs, alternative progressive media, and current literature related to behavioral neuroscience and sociopsychological development of emerging adults. However, advising OC has significantly changed how I view my stance within the world from that

of an informed educator committed to social justice to an informed *activist* educator committed to social justice. Along with the students, I found my own voice expanded beyond the classroom and my immediate circumstances and social connections to people and their circumstances outside of the United States. Gradually, participation and programming in OC, led to becoming aware of and establishing relationships with individuals caught in social injustices such as poverty, war, and oppression of liberty. Like the students, I gained experiential knowledge that my witness and voice mattered to people who are living in tragic and oppressive circumstances.

The activities and energy of the students in this organization resonated with texts read throughout my own professional development as a new teacher, ones written by Dewey, Holt, Postman, Weingartner, Apple, hooks, Greene, Brookfield, Colby, King, Lakoff, and Parks. Advising OC, I experienced first hand the educational power that student defined moral purpose gave to these emerging adults as undergraduate students. I do realize in these post-modern (possibly now post-post-modern) times indicating a moral purpose in undergraduate education, especially one that takes on a spiritual-like zeal, is likely to be met with skepticism. I intentionally steered away from search terms associated with spirituality during the literature review out of my own ingrained bias opposed to integrating spiritual or religious dimensions into secular and academic programming. Yet, the mission of ONE Curry evolved into a symbolic, some might say spiritual, identity: Ubuntu, meaning “I am because we are.” Ubuntu refers to an inclusive identity, one that permeates traditional personal boundaries of Western culture. This fascinated me as an educator and a researcher while being the faculty advisor. On my

commutes home after one of their meetings or events, questions, hazy at first, began to surface such as: What impact does this student organization, with its evolving sense of communal identity among emerging adults, whose own identity is evolving, have on the life experiences of these students and, on the academic experiences of these students? Over time, I began to question the impact it was having on my own teaching and educational engagement in the doctoral program at Walden University.

Background Experience with Social Justice

At first, OC members learned about fundamental access or lack of access of basic resources, such as water, food, education, and healthcare in Africa. We learned about different social customs and means of social capital, such as cows for dowries in Bor, Sudan. We learned this through our friendship with Leek, a student from Bor, Sudan. Leek helped us to understand Africa as a diverse continent of many cultures and nations as opposed to the common and limited view among many undergraduates of Africa, often stereotyped as being one country and having just one culture. Importantly, we also became aware of the similarities of the heart, the importance of family, of social approval, of values and personal integrity. Becoming aware of our differences and similarities resulted in an embodied empathy, which transformed our response+ability within the world.

Students Becoming the Teachers

The hand full of students initially organizing OC had been my students in the First Year Honors Program, a two semester program designed to focus on identity through an interdisciplinary lens in the first semester and identity in multicultural contexts through

the presentations immigrants living in the United States for the second semester of the program. I had the sole responsibility in determining the curriculum's objectives and goals, the assessment tools (with some input from the students on topics and process), and the final evaluations. This assumed role as professor came with me into the role of advisor, albeit modified to the obvious characteristics of a student organization, that is, until a critical incident occurred within the organization: again through Leek. A local woman had adopted Leek from Sudan when he was a young teenager; and he went to an excellent high school, which prepared him to enter college. Leek came to one of the first ONE Curry meetings and told his story, accompanying it with images of his region, thanks to Google images. We sat spell bound and deeply moved by Leek's descriptive telling of his flight as a 3 year-old with thousands of other boys from their homes in Southern Sudan to Ethiopia and then to Kenya. He told us how he only knew a few English phrases when he first arrived to Massachusetts. And, he told us how he had been reunited with his family the previous summer; their living conditions weighted heavily on his heart. The members in OC began brainstorming about what educational project might be best to make a difference in Leek's village when he interrupted abruptly asking, "Why are you talking about building schools in my village when my village does not have clean water?" Leek then described how his family and villagers walk for many miles to bring water to the village, water that is substandard by US health standards. It was at this point, roles reversed for me, and I realized the student became the teacher; the other students listened, learned, and after awhile, they, too, took on this role of teacher. They began to organize small lessons at the beginning of each meeting to learn more about different

countries and conditions of poverty in Africa. They initiated programs to raise awareness on campus about the conditions in Leek's village and introduced the campus to Leek's local Sudanese community of men relocated with him in the Boston area. And, they organized a fundraising campaign to build a well in Leek's village. These students taught me the power of community activism as a reasonable response to conditions of poverty and oppression. Leek taught us all the importance of always engaging with others through an informed stance of respect and collaboration.

The founding students had formed the organization ONE Curry around the ONE Campaign's mission to "make poverty history" through the Millennium Development Goals sponsored by the United Nations. One of the students, recognized as the founder, had made a film about poverty in Africa as an assignment in class. Doing so changed him from student into teacher as he showed the film to his peers, many of whom were inspired, some enough to join him in the organization to "be the generation to end extreme poverty."

As the members worked through OC's agendas and decisions using democratic deliberation, my role shaped into that of co-teacher and co-student. My role was distinct; I was a witness for the process and mission of the organization; and, part of that witnessing was providing questions for reflection as well as context regarding higher education's policies. It was a bumpy learning process for all of us at times ~ as being in either the role of a teacher and student can be. At moments, I confess, this role felt so unfamiliar and uncomfortable and demanding, I twice seriously considered resigning. But, the students and the mission of the organization had my heart.

My Initial Assumptions as a Faculty Member about Student Activities

Presuppositions are most likely informed by implicit attitudes and assumptions, operating as a preconscious filter, shaping perceptions and expectations (Lakoff 2008/2009). Etherington (2004) advises qualitative researchers to reflect upon one's presuppositions about knowledge in the field of research. I now realize I had several presuppositions about student activities personnel and organizations as a faculty member in higher education while advising OC. I do not assume these are the presuppositions of other faculty members, although informal conversations at national conferences and reading literature in the student services domain suggest that they might be shared by some.

I have been advising student organizations for several years, and ONE Curry was the third student organization I advised. Until being an advisor to a student organization, I really didn't pay attention to the student affairs division or events or interact with student affairs personnel. Becoming a faculty advisor to the first student organization facilitated my growing awareness of the important role of student affairs and student activities on campus. For example, I attended a few student government meetings and was impressed with the agency and responsibility of the students; I noted the enthusiasm of the students regarding their individual organizations. But even so, when agreeing to be the faculty advisor of OC, I still had the assumption that these student activities were in addition to, perhaps even peripheral to, the real (read: only) mission of the college: academic learning.

Another assumption I held, one more quickly dispelled, was that student activities staff and faculty shared similar goals and outcomes for the students; and, an even more problematic assumption, I assumed both student affairs and academic affairs personnel operated within similar campus cultures. This caused much difficulty for me in my working relationships with student activities staff; I am sure at times I was quite offensive to student activities staff by virtue of my assumptions, including my assumed privilege as faculty. The culture of independence enjoyed by most faculty in making decisions about curriculum and programming is very different than the hierarchical and managerial culture of student affairs. In the managerial world, decisions and policies are top-down and adherence is mandated for specific administrative procedures, including the multiple forms student affairs required student organizations to submit for their events. So, due to my faculty assumption of entitled independence from externally imposed processes, students would plan events, I would schedule the room for them, students would make posters, and we assumed were good to go, only to find out the necessary request forms for the event wasn't filled out two weeks prior to the event and permission to hold the event was denied. Another policy I (and the students) had much difficulty with (and still do) is the one requiring their event posters to be preapproved by student activities staff and stamped before they could be hung around campus; and, much to our dismay, the OC students' posters were often censored for content, usually the ones I really liked. I, like the students, pushed back against these policies, most likely adding to the existing prejudices of student affairs staff towards faculty and resulting in a few of my own new prejudices towards student activities mandates. I confess, I knowingly undermined the

authority of some student activities procedures, such as the postering ones, and allowed students to use my privileged faculty status for by-passing those regulations I judged to be officious or too restrictive of free expression.

It was not until I read Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) about the different cultures in the academy that I gained some needed insight into the different cultures existing within the campus community. In reading this valuable text, I began to understand the explicit and implicit tensions between faculty advisors and student activities staff. Additionally, as I read literature in student affairs for this case study, I realized my lack of understanding about the education and training required for student affairs personnel in student activities, which provides them with a deeper appreciation of the students' developmental needs than most faculty receive in their graduate education. I learned that student activities personnel are educators and not just recreational directors. I have to admit, I now realize I had considered student activities staff somewhat like babysitters who were charged with "taking care of the kids" when the faculty went home at night. I always respected how difficult this babysitting job was and often wondered why anyone would want to take it on. Yet, I now see these attitudes as uninformed, patronizing, and condescending.

On the other hand, I also experienced first hand the negative bias many student affairs staff has regarding faculty. Insinuations were often communicated at meetings or during asides about faculty having an "easy work load" and "all that vacation." And, paradoxically, I couldn't understand why student affairs personnel, whose days have distinct and designated hours, would not attend many of our evening meetings and

events. Given my recent experiences, the social class differences and distinctions between faculty and student affairs staff are very present in higher education. And, due to this, implicit and explicit resentment, or at the very least misunderstandings, among faculty and student affairs staff can easily become the norm for interactions.

As a result of my experiences advising ONE Curry, and even more so as a result of this case study, I now recognize the untapped potential of student organizations to supplement, promote, and in the case of OC for many of its members, significantly contribute to the academic development and accomplishments of its students. Importantly, I also view authentic collaboration and co-teaching for faculty and student affairs staff to be a potentially rich resource. Structured and on going communication and collaboration among faculty advisors, student activities personnel and administrators from both areas will be necessary to mine and benefit from the riches of this possible alliance.

My Initial Assumptions about Faculty Advising in Student Organizations

Faculty advising of student organizations is often seen as a generous gesture on the part of the faculty member. In most institutions, it does not promote faculty careers to advise student organizations, nor does it count as part of one's official teaching workload or pay overload compensation for hours spent in this role. Because of this, advising a student organization is truly a volunteer activity for faculty on most campuses. Yet, as the participants' recommendations for faculty advisors clearly show, the consistent presence and accessibility of a faculty member can make a significant qualitative difference in the student organization.

Being the advisor in ONE Curry was challenging for many reasons. Given the scope of their projects, OC went beyond the usual boundaries for student organizations. One of the boundaries was the amount of time I “volunteered” because the projects were significant (such as building a well in Bor, Sudan) and meaningful. It also required a definite shift in boundaries regarding power and status and roles among the students and myself. While still being responsible in an authoritative role with respect to the institution, I constantly had to question my role within the student organization processes. The students’ recommendations for faculty advisors confirmed for me why I found advising OC challenging, more so at times than others. And, as a result of this study, I now have a much clearer sense of the boundaries for the role of faculty advisor in order to support and guide the students and be responsible for specific aspects of the organization.

The Role of the Researcher as a Personal and Passionate Insider

In framing this study, I hesitated to allow myself to be personal, passionate, and transparently biased, as I am also a product of post-positivist attitudes even within qualitative research guidelines and wary of narcissistic accounts passing as scholarship, common in popular culture and media reporting. Hence, the philosophy guiding He and Phillion’s (2008) recent edition resonated deeply with my experiences as a faculty member, a faculty advisor, and a human being committed to social justice and democratic process. He and Phillion have edited a collection of 14 programs of research for social justice whose researchers’ are researching experiences of social justice from the inside, from a participatory stance of passion and inquiry. Clearly, He and Phillion are pushing

against traditional boundaries of objective and neutral, and dispassionate research studies. Yet, they are pushing these boundaries with clarity and an attitude of scholarship, albeit unabashedly personal and passionate scholarship. I reflected on the question posed by William Ayers,

If we want to live in a fully human world, a world of mutual recognition, if we want to develop a richer and deeper vision of justice, and a pedagogy and inquiry of justice as well – a pedagogy and research of activism perhaps – something that tries to tell the truth, tries to stand against violence and war and exploitation and oppression, tries to act for love and fairness and balance and peace, how will we proceed? (He & Phillion, 2008, p.xi)

Ayers also described the researchers whose work is represented in He and Phillion's (2008) volume as researchers who

are proudly partisan – not neutral...in solidarity with – not in service to – [their participants]...[they allow participants] to name their own predicaments, to tell their own stories, to ask questions of the universe, fighting to make sense of it all as they construct their own lives..." (p.xi)

I framed this study as a personal, passionate inquiry for both the participants and myself. I kept a journal throughout the research process, noting my thoughts and my feelings, especially my feelings, as they are the experience of our assumptions (Taylor, 2007). I conversed with participants in interviews, allowing them (most of the time; not always) to take lead, yet sharing honestly with them when my experiences resonated with theirs and then asking them to clarify their feelings further, "What did this feel like to

you?” Or “What does this feeling you just expressed mean to you now, later” On June 14, 2010, I noted the following in this excerpt from my journal,

I am actually asking the participants and seeking to know the essence of their social justice awareness and activism through their internal pathways of the self, which is also what I am doing via my own social justice awareness and activism AND this research process ~ a type of meta-meta cognition. I ask the students to think about their thinking and then, we both look at the frame we used to do that ~ what did we keep in the frame and very importantly, what have we left out?

The internal pathways of the self are only known to us through our conscious awareness, pathways framing what we pay attention to and what we don't notice, pre-conscious, implicit, and powerful neural pathways. In other words, we will see what we expect to see. And, nowhere am I experiencing this so clearly as in coding the information. I have not firmed up codes and definitions as of yet; I am reading through and coding spontaneously. I will become more systematic about it soon. But, it is clearly amazing how influential are the priming of the days events, my mood, or what I have just read or thought about prior to the coding process.

I am also wondering if the existence of “an essence” is a valid one to try to capture through a code ~ a post-modern wondering. I guess I might view this (research and coding data) as the process of deconstructed construction ~ so that

the essence is the deconstructed experience ~ exposed after peeling off the layers, the cultural and social tints within the definitions.

Yet, I identify as a transformationist, which means (to me at this point) that I recognize the social construction of ideas and norms and expectations but also hold them as meaningful and somewhat essential in the context in which they exist. So, even with the stated limitations, I do believe that we can come to an understanding, the participants and myself, of some of the “essences” of their experiences as members of OC.

Final Reflections

Lakoff (2009), linguist and cognitive scientist, wrote that democracy needs educated citizens who can “reason from a deep rationality,” which includes the ability to take perspective from an emotional, empathetic, and critically informed stance to counter the prevalence of unexamined norms and assumptions in US society and education. Similar to Lakoff’s concerns, one respondent in this study specifically noted learning about the world through a countercultural perspective of caring rather than capitalism (P5). Participants repeatedly indicated their growth in empathy, now feeling responsible for the well being of others; they described their commitment using emotive descriptors such as: passionate, driven, caring, powerful, dedicated.

Arnett’s (2004) research indicated that emerging adults are conscious of gaining a respect for the rights and concerns of others, which is at the heart of their idea of adulthood. He emphasized being self-focused as emerging adults did not necessarily equate to being selfish. In fact, being able to provide for others is the concern that

motivates many to look inward and then outward towards their self-sufficiency. Arnett found that emerging adults interviewed seem to be holding a great personal hope while they also hold immense cynicism about the world at large.

The participants of this study, now aware of some of the global injustices and suffering, seem to have tremendous hope and motivation for personal activism to increase social justice in this world. Importantly, their hope and motivation has been embodied and shapes their roles as students as well. And, their hope and motivation shaped my desire to understand their perceptions on what and how they learned as a result.

Conclusion

This case study explored how undergraduate students viewed and valued learning through their engagement within a student organization focused on global social justice awareness and activism. The findings of this interpretive case study on the student organizations seem to indicate global social justice awareness and activism does contribute richly to student personal, social, and academic growth. The findings also indicate that faculty advising is a critical element for student organizations such as OC; and, authentic collaboration in educational activities and student organizations between faculty and student affairs staff is a rich resource, yet to be mined. Another finding indicates the sustained benefit for increasing students control in shaping their educational experiences as well as participating meaningfully in democratic processes such as inclusive deliberation to explore issues or to reach consensus within peer organizations and learning communities.

Much like the emerging adults who live on its campuses, sit in its classrooms, lounge in its student centers, higher education today is seeking its identity and questioning its commitments. Educator and researcher, Chickering (2003) indicated, “Higher education has lost its way.” If faculty, staff, and administration in higher education would learn from students like the participants in this study, perhaps we could regain some hope and passion to steer our individual institutions towards a more encompassing purpose than just that of the marketplace. All stakeholders in higher education would do well by students to implement inclusive democratic practices among ourselves and within our courses, facilitate social justice projects at home and abroad, and fostering authentic learning processes, ones by which students discover themselves through the transformative learning actions of reflection, metacognition, multiple perspective taking, identifying bias, and choosing informed empathy as the operative frame of reference.

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Appendix A: Survey and Invitation Letter

Your participation in ONE Curry and Perceptions of Learning

This survey is part of a case study about current and former ONE Curry members' perceptions of learning as a result of their engagement in the activities of ONE Curry, the student organization focused on issues and activities concerning issues of global social justice.

The purpose of this case study is to examine the influence and any possible benefits for undergraduate students belonging to student organizations focused on global social justice. In addition, this study seeks to explore the possible interrelationships between the personal growth of emerging adults (ages 18 – 26) and membership in undergraduate student organizations focused on global social justice.

As a current or former member, your participation is very important for this study to accurately represent the experiences and learning through membership in ONE Curry. Your participation in the survey will be anonymous and all answers will be kept separate from any possible identifying data.

Should you decide to participate in the survey, you may choose to skip any question you do not want to answer. You may change your mind about participating in the survey at any time.

Should you have any questions or comments about the survey, you are most welcome to contact me, Patty Kean, by email, pkean@curry.edu, and we can set up a mutually convenient time to have a conversation.

1. List 5 words or write a few sentences to describe the student organization ONE Curry.
2. List the activities that you participated as a member of ONE Curry.
3. This case study is interested in what you may have learned as result of being a member of ONE Curry. If you do not think that you learned anything by being a member of ONE Curry, just write n/a in the space provided below. If you do think you learned something as a result of being a member, list what you learned.
4. Rate the degree of influence being a member of ONE Curry had on your academic course work: 1 – 7. If you would like to, write a few sentences about this.
5. Rate the degree of influence being a member of ONE Curry had on your academic goals? 1 – 7 If you would like to, write a few sentences about this.
6. Rate the degree you were able to apply ideas and skills learned in your academic courses in ONE Curry Activities. 1-7. If you would like to, write a few sentences about this.
7. Rate the overall importance being a member of ONE Curry has for you in the quality of your undergraduate education. 1-7

8. Did you learn anything new about yourself as a result of being a member in ONE Curry? If no, write N/A. If yes, what did you learn?
9. Do you think that being a member of ONE Curry will continue to influence you after graduation? If so, how?
10. Is there anything else you would like to add about either the challenges or the benefits of being a member in ONE Curry.
11. What was an important aspect for you about being a member of ONE Curry that you would like me to include in this case study?
12. Why did you become a member of One Curry?
13. If you are no longer a member, why not?

In closing, if you would like to participate in a focus group discussing these questions with other members and/or former members of ONE Curry, please send me an email by _____.

If you would like to participate in an individual interview to discuss these questions in depth, please send me an email by _____.

You may also participate in both the focus group and interview. If you are interested in doing so, indicate that in your email as well.

Thanks so much for your participation and consideration. I am hopeful that your individual and collective learning experiences as members in a student organization focused on global social justice will provide insight and inspiration to faculty, staff, and administration who design programs and curriculum in higher education.

Patty

Appendix B: Interview Questions Protocol

1. What stands out for you about ONE Curry?
2. What word or thought sums up your ONE Curry experience?
3. What did you learn through the activities of being a member?
4. What did you learn about yourself through membership in ONE Curry?
5. Why did you join ONE Curry to start with?
6. Follow up questions (if not addressed in previous questions):
 - a. What was your role in the organization?
 - b. How often did you attend the weekly meetings?
 - c. What is your major?
 - d. What year are you in your studies?
7. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences?

Appendix C: Focus Group Protocol

Introductions, explanation of the process, signing of the consent forms.

Thank you for participating in yet another conversation about ONE Curry. Most of you have either taken the survey or interviewed with me about your experiences in ONE Curry and the focus has been primarily on your learning experiences as individuals. I am hoping to have a conversation about the learning that occurred for you as a collaborative student organization ~ if this did exist in your opinions.

My first question for you all is to write on the index card that you all have five words that best describe the student organization ONE Curry. After you are finished we will go around the room and share them. Please don't put your name on the card. I will want to collect them when we are finished.

(Invited assistant will write the words on a board so that they can be present to all of us during the focus group). Look for themes among the words together.

Have a conversation about the community itself.

My second question to you is what role did global social justice play in this experience of ONE Curry? In other words, do you think it mattered that you focused on global social justice in shaping the community experience? Why or why not?

My third question is for you to write on the other side of the index card 5 things that you learned through ONE Curry that you think just might stay with you beyond graduation. After you are finished we will go around the room and share them. Please don't put your name on the card. I will want to collect them when we are finished.

(Have someone write the words on a board so that they can be present to all of us during the focus group). Look for themes among the words together.

Have a conversation about the quality of this learning.

My fourth question to you is what role did the community of the student organization play in your learning? In other words, was this a different learning community than learning communities in your classes? If so, how? Is there any relationship to the structure and community of learning and the quality of learning that you experienced in the student organization?

Finally, you all know I am a faculty member and you all realize I value the learning that I observed happen in this student organization, so much so that I am conducting this research. What would you like me to pass on to faculty and

academic administrators about the learning in ONE Curry? What might you like us to think about as we design programs and curriculum and courses? Please write your response on the second index card. Do not put your names on this response. Thank you.

Thank you very much for your participation. After I transcribe, code, and summarize this discussion, you will be invited to participate in a short feedback session on the summary interpretation as part of this process. Doing so is voluntary and is not a part of this initial participation.

Appendix D: Interview Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research interview as part of a case study on students' perceptions of learning as a member of the student organization, ONE Curry.

You were chosen for the interview because you are a current or former member of ONE Curry. Please read this form and ask any questions you have before agreeing to be part of the interview.

This interview is being conducted by a researcher named Patty Kean, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. Patty Kean is also an Associate Professor at Curry College in the Program for the Advancement of Learning (PAL) and was the former advisor to the student organization, ONE Curry.

Background Information:

The purpose of this interview is to learn about the participant's experiences and perceptions of learning as a result of membership within ONE Curry, a student organization focused on global social justice.

Procedures:

If you agree, you will be asked to participate in an audio-recorded interview, lasting approximately 60 minutes.

Voluntary Nature of the Interview:

Your participation in this interview is voluntary. This means that everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you want to be in the interview. No one at Curry College will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the interview. If you decide to join the interview now, you can still change your mind later. If you feel stressed during the interview, you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Interview:

There is the minimal risk of psychological stress during this interview. If you feel stressed during the interview, you may stop at any time. There are no benefits to you from participating in this interview.

Compensation:

There is no compensation for participating in this interview.

Confidentiality:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research study. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the interview.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher's name is Patty Kean. The researcher's advisors are Dr. James Keen and Dr. Cheryl Keen. You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via 781-641-2987 or pkean@curry.edu or the advisor at 937-477-2126 or cheryl.keen@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Director of the Research Center at Walden University. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 1210.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have received answers to any questions I have at this time. I am 18 years of age or older, and I consent to participate in the interview.

Printed Name of

Participant

Participant's Written or

Electronic* Signature

Researcher's Written or

Electronic* Signature

pratschlerm@centenarycollege.edu

Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Legally, an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically.

Appendix E: Focus Group Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research focus group as part of a case study on students' perceptions of learning as a member of the student organization, ONE Curry.

You were chosen for the interview because you are a current or former member of ONE Curry. Please read this form and ask any questions you have before agreeing to be part of the interview.

This interview is being conducted by a researcher named Patty Kean, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. Patty Kean is also an Associate Professor at Curry College in the Program for the Advancement of Learning (PAL) and was the former advisor to the student organization, ONE Curry.

Background Information:

The purpose of this interview is to learn about the participant's experiences and perceptions of learning as a result of membership within ONE Curry, a student organization focused on global social justice.

Procedures:

If you agree, you will be asked to participate in an audio-recorded focus group, lasting approximately 90 minutes.

Voluntary Nature of the Interview:

Your participation in this interview is voluntary. This means that everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you want to be in the interview. No one at Curry College will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the interview. If you decide to join the interview now, you can still change your mind later. If you feel stressed during the interview, you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Interview:

There is the minimal risk of psychological stress during this interview. If you feel stressed during the interview, you may stop at any time. There are no benefits to you from participating in this interview.

Compensation:

There is no compensation for participating in this interview.

Confidentiality:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research study. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the interview.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher's name is Patty Kean. The researcher's advisors are Dr. James Keen and Dr. Cheryl Keen. You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via 781-641-2987 or pkean@curry.edu or the advisor at 937-477-2126 or cheryl.keen@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Director of the Research Center at Walden University. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 1210.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have received answers to any questions I have at this time. I am 18 years of age or older, and I consent to participate in the interview.

Printed Name of

Participant

Participant's Written or

Electronic* Signature

Researcher's Written or

Electronic* Signature

pratschlerm@centenarycollege.edu

Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Legally, an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically.

Appendix F: Guiding Questions for Reflexive Journal

Etherington (2004)

1. How has my personal history led to my interest in this topic?
2. What are my presuppositions about knowledge in this field?
3. How am I positioned in relation to this knowledge?
4. How does my gender/social class/ ethnicity/culture influence my positioning in relation to this topic and the participants?
5. How did I change as a result of this process?
6. How did the methodology influence me?
7. How do my everyday experiences during the research shape the research?

Appendix G: Examples of Data Coded as Transformational Learning

Self Reflection (SR)

I guess opening up and trusting people and knowing I actually do have a voice. Because before coming to college, I was actually quiet.

I think the activism wasn't quite there for me ~ It was more the ideas that interested me... which ties back to me being a literature major and I minored in philosophy too so I studied ideas and how things worked

My sophomore year was a **huge** year of transformation for me.

I have learned **so** much ~ not only about global issues but also about myself. As a member I have learned so much outside of my Curry College bubble.

Well, I never thought I would be interested in stuff like this ~ I always thought it would be boring and political and I never wanted to get involved in it ~ but by learning about it I learned how passionate I can be about other people and how much empathy I have for them and learning that has taught me so much about myself ~ how much I care about people, how I interact and how I communicate with people ~ it is because I have a lot of **empathy** for them.

I went through a huge change in my last year of college during my time as a member. I think I found myself with the help of ONE Curry.

I became thankful for everything I had. I began to constantly think how unappreciative people are and then I began to find myself.

Being a young college student just didn't really care... or i was not motivated enough.

Well, I would say that I felt this inescapable feeling of wanting to help. And from that, a sense of deep injustice - that I had so much wealth and that people are dying for lack of such basic things. I felt both sad and angry.

Metacognition (MC)

I think every time you read a book you interact with all the characters in the book and you learn things about yourself.

That [the mediator role] was obviously a challenge for me in and of itself. I loved doing everything, but I loved thinking about the effects of what were doing more.

I learned different ways to approach a problem, like to divide my time up more effectively. I can't help anyone else in the world if I can't organize myself.

Planning this thing [the yoga fest event] was getting in the way in my life...I had to figure this out. In the midst of the chaos in my own brain, learning who I am and how I function, what I am supposed to do and what I can't do...what I am not good at doing ~ came out during this type of planning.

It explains **why** I am good at communicating with people and it explains my approach at communicating with people. Because I feel that every person has a different approach, and my approach is getting to know the person before I react.

I like to think of it this way: with many issues of social justice there is a spectrum that goes from ignorance to overload that leaves you incapacitated. In either case we find ourselves not being able to take action.

I can speak for myself at least and say that I would not be happy in a job that I know exploits people or the environment.

Self-Awareness of Bias (SAB)

And, it is good to connect with people you are helping on a personal level ...instead of just handing out something to them. It is really good to get their history and their culture and story...just so it is more on a personal level. Rather than, Oh here, take this. I am done now. I've done my good deed for the day.

I would definitely say so. I was not as passionate as they were. I was passionate about something else.

In my own little self-ish way, I felt important; I felt that I was an important part of the club. And, I felt that I brought a lot to the club.

I realized I couldn't work in a world where communication was used to manipulate. I realized I am extremely hard headed and it would be very difficult for me to work for any company that used communication in a negative way.

What made it even more difficult was this feeling of being "let down". I wanted members to be as excited, energized and especially committed as I was. I had these expectations, that I finally came to realize were not fair at all.

Multiple-Perspective Taking (MPT)

We all had something that motivated us to become activists. Actually I recall going around the room and saying what our main focus in human rights was, I was interested in violence against women and children. We always were able to speak our mind because if we didn't even if we all agreed on a topic... our advisor would always present the opposing side. I learned from one curry the importance of truly looking at things from every point of view.

Yea, I would say I am categorized very often but that's the thing my oppression is nothing like what others face...so I have blonde hair... if I don't like this [the stereotype about women with blonde hair], can you image how much I would dislike more severe oppression?

Quite simply, we all have different perspectives and levels of commitment. It took me some time to realize this though. It was hard to see that not everyone was "with me" or on the same level as me.

Everyone has opinions and should be able to voice them. When you are collaborating and only one person's opinion counts, then the other people in the group don't get their say, then there will be friction. If everyone gets to have a voice, it is going to be a lot easier~ that is one thing I really liked about OC.

And, by listening to the disagreements, you got to hear different perspectives even if you are so strong willed and know you are right, listen to the other person's side of the story because all right, that is how they interpreted it.

It is one of those things, when you are observing, you can see it from both sides. You can see how one person is strong willed and arguing how it should work and the other party has their opinions and normally when you are involved, you are listening just to your own ideas

Awareness of Frames of Reference (AFR)

I learned about the culture...wearing the burqa ~ I am speechless ~ I felt so isolated while I was wearing it; it felt so degrading; my identity was taken from me. I couldn't see that it was me. My voice was gone. Yeah...that taught me a lot

because I got to feel how they feel for 10 seconds. I actually felt scared while I was wearing it...

I learned that not everyone has the same rights as we do. I didn't realize that others don't have the same freedoms that we do. I thought everyone has the same freedom. Just being involved in this club opened my eyes to what is going on around the world in other cultures and countries.

OC raised the question, why are certain people treated as less than a person than I am? Why do they not get everything that I get? That is not fair. I would feel guilty because I am sitting there getting a college education and learning things that I knew these people would never get a chance to learn...

I have learned so much about all different types of issues and all different people and I think the biggest thing is learning about the people and not just the issues. You can talk about issues until you are blue in the face but you have to actually learn about the people before others will connect to it.

Though I would say that I valued education, I probably did see it as more of a means to an end back then. Whereas now I see it as important in of itself. And I didn't feel the need then to think about how my career would impact the world. I just wanted to make sure I got a good job doing something I wanted to do/enjoyed doing.

Pretty much before OC, when we were going over topics like civil justice ~ I was a history major and we heard about this perhaps more ~ and we would be talking about the depressions and people were literally eating stuff off the ground to survive or when we were talking about the different wars and the tactics used like when the soldiers would go through the different towns and burn every thing to the ground, the slash and burn tactic, I would think ~ yeah of course, obviously you don't want the enemy to get it, but I wasn't thinking about the impact of the people who lived there ~ how does this effect the people? Hearing Leek's story really impacted me. Here is this kid who had to go through that ~ the soldiers came through and destroyed everything and the people there were left to survive I actually began to use this in my history papers. How did these tactics impact the people who lived there? We have to consider this.

CURRICULUM VITAE

PATRICIA M. KEAN

pkean@curry.edu

Qualifications

Skilled and dedicated educator with experience teaching in middle school, high school, and undergraduate settings.

- Educational therapist, coach, and mentor for adolescent and emerging adults with language based learning disabilities, attention deficit disorders, executive functioning challenges, and histories with addiction, trauma, and/or co-morbid mood disorders.
- Administrator of process diagnostic assessments, including achievement and educational psychological testing with neuropsychological screening.
- Professor of writing and research process at the undergraduate and graduate level.
- Language arts educator with experience teaching language arts at middle, secondary, and post-secondary levels.
- Human rights activist and educator for emerging adults with experience as educational consultant to UNESCO Chair of Comparative Human Rights in the United States, organizer of faculty human rights committee, faculty advisor to a human rights undergraduate student organization, and president and co-founder of a nonprofit advocating for women's rights to education in Afghanistan.

Education

EdD/ Education in Teacher Leadership
Summa Cum Laude

December 2010
Walden University

Researched undergraduate learning as a result of social justice education and programming within an undergraduate student organization. Analysis grounded in transformative learning and bio/psycho/social tasks of emerging adulthood. Applications of findings include: bridging academic and student affairs, fostering transformative learning and civic engagement in undergraduates, low stakes assessment for undergraduate courses and programs, education for skillful participation in democratic processes, and interdisciplinary programming regarding global social justice.

Post-Masters / Behavioral Neuroscience

2001-2003
Boston University

Neuropsychology I
Neuropsychology II
Child Neuropsychology
Neuropsychological Assessment

**Masters in Education
Summa Cum Laude**

May 1998
Curry College

Developed and implemented a program of decision-making using metacognition and narrative for adolescents and emerging adults

**Bachelors of Science/Secondary Education
Major: English**

May 1976
New York State College
Buffalo, NY

Higher Education Employment

Curry College
Milton, MA 02186

Fall 1995 – Present
Associate Professor

Department: Program for the Advancement of Learning

Mentor and instruct college-able students with learning disabilities in metacognition and academic skills acquisition and development.

Educational Diagnostic Center

Administer Educational Testing with Neuropsychological Screenings.
Diagnostic tutoring for adolescents and emerging adults

Honors Program

Developed and implemented two-semester interdisciplinary First Year Honors Program, worked closely with Admissions in outreach and publications. Research mentor in program; instructed research courses.

Composition Courses

English 1280: linked writing courses with CJ and SOC courses
ES 1060: basic skills course for first year students

Residence Life Educational Program

The Choices Program: developed and implemented a decision-making program for residence life educational sanctions programming. Taught and revised program for 4 semesters.

Committee Work

Student Services in the Program for the Advancement of Learning (chair).

Piloted programs such as study groups, linked courses, alumni evening, mini-courses.

Diversity Committee (co-chair). Obtained a budget for committee, facilitated the proposal and eventual development of African American Studies Minor.

Institutional Student Affairs Committee (co-chair). Facilitated interdisciplinary and cross-institutional dialogues with faculty, staff, and students.

Communities of Inquiry Pilot through Excellence in Teaching. Developed and implemented pilot for professors who chose to gather in communities of inquiry for professional development. Fall 2008- Spring 2009

Human Rights Committee (co-founder, co-chair). Faculty and staff programming for human rights awareness. Recent programming included: Zoya, Revolutionary Association of Women in Afghanistan; Physicians for National Health Program; Rwanda and the Minister of Gender Equity; the Aftermath of Genocide: Rwanda today. Current

Undergraduate Curriculum Committee. Current.

Student Activities

Faculty Advisor Uncensored Soul, Spring 2001 – Spring 2002

Faculty Advisor: Queer Straight Alliance, Spring 1998 - Spring 2007

Faculty Advisor: ONE Curry, Fall 2006 – Spring 2010

Professional Development

American Association of Colleges & University Conferences:

- Demanding Excellence, Washington DC, January 2005
- US Diversity and Global Education, Denver, October 2007
- Shaping Faculty Roles, San Diego, April 2009

New England Educational Institute Summer Courses

- Affective Neuroscience, Summer 2006
- Oppositional Behavior in Adolescents, Summer 2007

Learning and the Brain Conferences

- Fall 2007, Boston, MA
- Fall 2005, Boston, MA

Association for the Study of Higher Education Conference:
Bridging Theory and Practice, November 2008, Jacksonville

Cambridge Family Institute in Watertown, MA

- The Power of Narrative
- Doing Hope
- Problem Posing: Using Freire's Methods

Monthly Supervision Group

Supervisor Kaethe Weingarten, Harvard University

- *Common Shock: Witnessing Violence Every Day, How We are Harmed, How We Can Heal.*
- *Founder and Director: The Witnessing Project*

Consultation

UNESCO Chair of Comparative Human Rights in the United States and South Africa

Dr. Amii Omara-Otunnu, University of Storrs, CT.

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| August 2009 | Chief Rapporteur for International Leadership Forum for Young Adult Human Rights Leaders; Group Facilitator |
| Fall 2009 | Educational Consultant to Leadership Team charged with developing International Forum for Rwandan Human Rights Commission |
| January 2010 | Member of leadership team, chief rapporteur, and group coordinator and member of media team for International Forum in Rwanda. |

Help Women Heal, Incorporated (www.helpwomenheal.org)

January 2010

- Co-founder of nonprofit organization to raise awareness about healthcare in Afghanistan and build a scholarship fund for Afghan women to attend medical school.
- Board Member
- President
- Acting Treasurer
- Oversees college student outreach, internships, and programming.

Awards

Scholarship for Social Change Walden University
May 2007

Human Rights Award Curry College
May 2004

Publications

Kean, P. *Free Speech Zones*. Academe. Sept – Oct., 2005, 30-31.

Kean, P. (2010) Meta-metacognition: A Wave Unfurled. In Fox, L. & Ijiri, L. (Eds.) *Changing Lives Through Metacognitive Relationships: LD/ADHD and College Success*. Milton, MA: Curry College.